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Code-Switching in the Conversations Between the Turkish-English Bilingual Children in the Midlands in the UK

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Abstract: This study investigates the phenomenon of code-switching (CS) among Turkish-English bilingual children in the Midlands, UK, analysing its pragmatic functions, social implications, and the underlying factors shaping language choices. Situated within theoretical frameworks of bilingualism, code-switching and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the research explores how young bilinguals employ CS as a communicative strategy in daily interactions and challenges deficit-based perspectives that frame CS as a sign of linguistic incompetence.

Adopting a qualitative, pragmatic analytical approach, the study examines approximately ten hours of naturally occurring dialogues recorded over three months. Participants include 8 children (6 UK-born and 2 recent migrant) from Turkish-speaking households who attend English-dominant schools, all aged 11 and in the same grade. These children also attend the same Turkish supplementary school every weekend. The analysis focuses on intra- and inter-sentential CS, identifying key functional roles such as topic management, identity negotiation, and lexical gap-filling.

Findings reveal that CS serves as a strategic tool for enhancing conversational coherence, navigating social dynamics, and expressing cultural identity. Children adeptly alternate between languages to align with interlocutors, signal group membership, or compensate for lexical limitations, demonstrating metalinguistic awareness and communicative flexibility. These results counter prevailing negative stereotypes and positions CS as an indicator of linguistic sophistication rather than deficiency.

This study contributes to the field by integrating bilingual pragmatics with social identity theory, offering a nuanced, context-sensitive analysis of CS within a migrant community. The findings highlight the importance of recognizing CS as a valuable communicative resource in bilingual development, with implications for educational practices and language policy.

Keywords: code-switching, bilingualism, Turkish-English bilingual children, social identity

1. Introduction

Bilingualism is a globally pervasive and complex phenomenon that has long intrigued researchers due to its implications for language acquisition, cognitive development, and social identity. It is not a uniform experience but exists on a continuum of linguistic proficiency, as individuals navigate varying degrees of fluency and use across their languages. Definitions of bilingualism range from

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Edwards' (2004) inclusive perspective, which acknowledges that almost everyone possesses some bilingual ability, to Thiery's (1976) more stringent criteria of a "true bilingual," requiring native-like proficiency in both languages. This diversity in definitions highlights the dynamic and relative nature of bilingualism, challenging traditional notions of linguistic competence and monolingual norms.

Code-switching (CS) -the alternation between languages within a single conversation or utterance- stands out as one of the most visible manifestations of bilingualism. Far from being a sign of confusion or linguistic deficiency, research increasingly recognizes CS as a sophisticated communicative strategy. For instance, both previous and contemporary studies (Grosjean, 1982; Milroy and Muysken, 1995; Yow et al., 2018; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022) emphasise the creative and functional aspects of CS, highlighting its role in expressing identity, achieving clarity, and fostering group cohesion. It enables bilingual speakers to navigate their linguistic repertoires flexibly, adapting to social, cultural, and situational contexts. While often stigmatized in educational or monolingual settings, CS reflects advanced linguistic and pragmatic competence, as bilinguals leverage their dual-language skills to achieve a range of functions, from emphasizing key points to navigating interpersonal dynamics.

This paper explores CS practices among Turkish-English bilingual children in the Midlands, UK, focusing on how they employ CS for pragmatic and identity-related purposes. Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) provides the lens through which these language choices are interpreted, as CS often functions as a marker of in-group belonging and identity negotiation.

The participants represent a linguistically rich yet often under-researched community where Turkish is predominantly spoken at home, while English dominates their educational and social settings. These bilingual children engage in CS to manage linguistic gaps, express cultural identity, and respond to contextual demands, reflecting the dynamic interplay between their two linguistic systems.

The study begins with a review of key literature on bilingualism and CS, highlighting debates surrounding the cognitive and social implications of early bilingual development. The methodological framework then outlines the naturalistic data collection process, including participant profiles and settings, before delving into a detailed analysis of the children's conversations. Through this analysis, the research investigates not only the structural aspects of CS but also its pragmatic and sociolinguistic functions, illustrating how these bilingual children use language as a tool for communication, negotiation, and self-expression.

By exploring the CS patterns of Turkish-English bilingual children, this study contributes to a broader understanding of bilingualism as a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon. It seeks to challenge monolingual biases in linguistic research and promote a more nuanced appreciation of the linguistic creativity and adaptability exhibited by bilingual speakers, particularly children navigating complex sociolinguistic landscapes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Early Bilingualism

Early bilingualism, defined as the acquisition of two languages before puberty, has been explored by various scholars, each emphasizing distinct aspects of its development. Baetens Beardsmore (1986) broadly defines it as "the acquisition of more than one language in the pre-adolescent phase of life", while Swain (1972) describes it as "infant bilingualism" and "bilingualism as a first

language" respectively, highlighting its early onset. Grosjean (1982) distinguishes between *simultaneous bilingualism*, where children acquire two languages before age three (McLaughlin, 1978), and *successive bilingualism*, where a second language is learned after age three. Kessler (1984) further refines these categories by identifying simultaneous bilingualism in infants, sequential bilingualism in preschool children, and sequential bilingualism in school-age children before puberty. These distinctions highlight the varying cognitive, social, and environmental factors that influence early bilingual development, offering valuable insights into how timing and context shape bilingual competencies.

A significant debate within bilingualism literature revolves around whether infant bilinguals initially possess a mixed language system that incorporates elements of both languages and if they can distinguish between the two languages from the onset of language development. Swain (1972) contends in their doctoral thesis, "Bilingualism as a First Language," that acquiring two languages simultaneously mirrors the acquisition of a single language. They argue that all children utilize a single language store, with bilingual children differentiating between the two languages as they develop. Proponents of this theory (e.g., Swain and Wesche, 1975; Volterra and Taeschner, 1978; Kessler, 1984) support their stance with evidence of early-stage mixing and its gradual reduction over time. Grosjean (1982) references Volterra and Taeschner's (1978) three-stage model for bilingual language development: a single lexical system in the first stage, distinct lexicons with a single grammar in the second stage, and separate lexicons and grammars in the third stage, resulting in the child achieving fluency comparable to monolingual peers. Conversely, an alternative theory posits that bilingual children develop separate linguistic systems from the onset (e.g., Padilla and Liebman, 1975; Meisel, 1989; Genesee, 1989), viewing mixing as a form of borrowing due to incompetency in one language. Lyon (1996) differentiates within this theory, suggesting that in its strongest form, all language systems are distinct from the beginning, while a weaker version allows for a shared lexicon with separate syntactic systems developing independently. More recent perspectives, however, emphasize the dynamic and integrative nature of bilingual practices. For example, García (2009) introduces the concept of 'translanguaging,' which views bilinguals not as juggling separate language systems but as drawing on a single, integrated linguistic repertoire to make meaning.

Dominance in one language is another critical aspect of bilingualism, as bilinguals typically do not use both languages equally. Grosjean (1982) identifies two primary reasons for this dominance: certain linguistic constructs may be harder to internalize and produce in one language, and the child may be more exposed to and require one language over the other. Achieving balanced exposure to both languages is challenging, leading to unequal proficiency (Grosjean, 1982; Kessler, 1984). Meisel (2004) suggests that this balance may shift throughout an individual's life based on communicative needs, noting that minimal social need for a language lead to its reduced use (Kessler, 1984). Successive or sequential acquisition, differing from simultaneous acquisition, involves learning one language after another in a natural sequence. Kessler (1984) posits that successive acquisition begins with the first language (L1) as its foundation, with L1 influence on the second language (L2) diminishing over time as proficiency in L2 increases. The concept of a 'critical period' for becoming bilingual has been debated extensively (Chomsky, 1965; Lenneberg, 1967), but Grosjean (1982) argues that children can attain bilingualism at any age, emphasizing the significant role of psychosocial factors—such as willingness, motivation, and the need to communicate in L2—over the critical period, aptitude, or intelligence. This view is supported by Romaine (1989), who contends that the circumstances of language acquisition are more critical than age.

Another contentious issue in bilingualism research is whether similar linguistic and cognitive strategies are employed in acquiring L1 and L2. Some argue that L1 might interfere with and cause confusion during L2 acquisition, potentially leading to errors or language mixing. However, McLaughlin (1978) maintains that children learning an L2 progress through the same developmental stages as those acquiring their native language, with transfer (or interference) being of minor consequence. Wong-Fillmore (1976) outlines three stages in the natural acquisition of L2 by children: establishing social connections through interactional activities and prefabricated chunks or formulaic expressions, focusing on meaningful interactions with L2 speakers, and gaining confidence in the accuracy of their language use, thus solidifying their proficiency in L2.

Contemporary frameworks, on the other hand, assume that bilingual development is influenced by social context, identity and language use and is therefore considered to be more dynamic and adaptable process. For example, Garcia's (2009) concept of translanguaging challenges previous frameworks and claims that bilinguals use more integrated language systems to make sense and communicate. This view sees bilingual practices as complex and context-dependent strategies, rather than interference or mixing, that show cognitive and cultural adaptability (Wei, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015).

There has been criticism on the view that children must maintain the separation of their languages to reach "balanced bilingualism". Indeed, multilingual children naturally use flexible language techniques for social, educational, and identity-related purposes (Creese and Blackledge, 2010). Translanguaging is thus viewed not just as a cognitive activity but also as a social and political action, especially important in multicultural educational settings.

Language dominance, which was earlier seen as an indication of imbalance, is now understood to fall within language ecology. Rather than being a limitation, dominance is a reflection of societal and institutional forces on language usage (Busch, 2012). Factors like exposure, perceived usefulness, and emotional ties to a language give shape to the patterns of dominance and change. According to Li (2018), monolingual learning settings and multilingual domestic contexts have an influence on the choices children make.

2.2. Code-switching

CS is perhaps one of the most scrutinized phenomena in bilingualism studies. Despite extensive research, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on a definitive definition and explanation. Moreover, there is considerable debate regarding the reasons for its occurrence and whether it constitutes a negative aspect of bilingualism. The plethora of perspectives—ranging from positive to neutral to negative—leads to various overlapping terms such as code-mixing, CS, interference, transfer, and borrowing. To mitigate this confusion, most studies begin by clarifying their specific definitions of CS. Therefore, it is beneficial to discuss the relevant terminology before delving into CS itself.

Interference in bilingual speech typically involves the transfer of elements from one language to another. Weinreich (1968) defines interference as deviations from the norms of either language in bilingual speech due to language contact. Mackey (1970) offers a neutral definition, describing interference as the use of features from one language while speaking or writing another. Grosjean (1982) similarly defines interference neutrally as the involuntary influence of one language on another, distinguishing it from the voluntary nature of CS. Older literature often lumped together instances of CS, borrowing, and other phenomena under the broad term 'interference,' often with a

negative connotation (Hoffman, 1991; Milroy and Muysken, 1995). Recent studies, however, tend to categorize these phenomena separately.

Borrowing involves incorporating a word or short expression from one language into another, usually adapting it phonologically or morphologically (Milroy and Muysken, 1995). Gumperz (1982) describes it as the introduction of single words or short, frozen idiomatic phrases from one variety into another. Borrowed items can be adapted either phonetically or both phonetically and morphologically (Hoffman, 1991). Grosjean (1982) further differentiates borrowing from CS, explaining that a code-switch can involve any length of text and constitutes a complete shift to another language, whereas borrowing is limited to short expressions adapted to the base language. Borrowing seems to occur due to laziness, fatigue, or stress, but it can also be a deliberate choice when the borrowed term is deemed more appropriate or precise (Fantini, 1985). However, Grosjean (1982) lists similar motivations for both borrowing and CS, including the inability to find a particular word in one language or familiarity with a term in the other language.

Mixing, defined by Redlinger and Park (1980) as the combination of elements from two languages in a single utterance, is sometimes viewed differently. Schlyter (1987) considers it the use of words or sentences in the 'wrong' language in a monolingual context. Goodz (1994), however, argues that mixing should not be seen as confusion but rather as a strong communicative strategy. Milroy and Muysken (1995) suggest that mixing encompasses both CS and borrowing, and Pfaff (1979) uses 'mixing' as a neutral term for these phenomena. Several reasons have been identified for mixing, such as the lack of an equivalent term in one language or exposure to mixed inputs (Hoffman, 1991).

Definitions of CS vary widely, reflecting the complexity of the phenomenon. Milroy and Muysken (1995) define CS as the alternate use of two or more languages in a single conversation, while Grosjean (1982) narrows this definition to the alternate use of languages within the same utterance or conversation. Similarly, Scotton and Ury (1977) describe CS as employing multiple linguistic varieties within the same interaction. Gumperz (1982) highlights the juxtaposition of speech passages from different grammatical systems within a single exchange. Adding further nuance, Meisel (1994) emphasizes the role of pragmatic and grammatical competence, focusing on the ability to switch languages contextually and socio-linguistically without violating grammatical rules. Hoffman (1991) offers a broader description, defining CS as the alternate use of two languages or linguistic varieties within an utterance or conversation.

Baetens Beardsmore (1986) observes that CS is more noticeable when bilinguals address other bilinguals, whereas it is less common in bilingual-monolingual interactions. Hoffman (1991) concurs, noting that CS occurs frequently in informal conversations among individuals with shared backgrounds. Grosjean (1982) adds that bilinguals tend to avoid CS and borrowing when addressing monolinguals to prevent communication breakdowns, a point Hoffman (1991) disputes, arguing that speakers do not always consciously control their speech to avoid these phenomena. Situational and emotional factors can influence interference, and distinctions between various phenomena are less clear-cut in young bilinguals.

CS has often been misinterpreted as a sign of linguistic incompetence or semi-lingualism, suggesting a deficiency in one or both languages. However, despite concerns from multilingual families, teachers, and policymakers, substantial research on multilingual children's language development shows that CS *actually* reflects advanced proficiency in both languages (e.g., Meisel, 1994; Yow et al., 2018). Hoffman (1991) supports this by proposing that CS is a creative aspect of bilingual speech, indicative of linguistic proficiency rather than decay. Similarly, Milroy and Muysken (1995) note

that CS is characteristic of fluent and competent bilinguals. Poplack (1980) further found that only proficient bilinguals are able to code-switch effectively. From a sociolinguistic perspective, CS is seen as a strategy for establishing social relationships and enriching discourse (Scotton and Ury, 1977). Contemporary studies (e.g., Yow et al., 2018; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022) also highlight CS as a marker of high linguistic competence, particularly among children who use switching as a tool for effective communication, identity expression, and social alignment.

Code-switching (CS) can occur at various levels of linguistic expression, including words, phrases, sentences, or even spanning multiple sentences. Poplack (1980) identifies three types of CS: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching. Romaine (1989) explains that tag-switching involves inserting a tag from one language into an utterance in another language, inter-sentential switching occurs at clause or sentence boundaries, and intra-sentential switching happens within a clause or sentence boundary. Researchers further differentiate between intra-sentential switches (code-mixing) and inter-sentential switches (CS proper). Intra-sentential switches involve the integration of syntactic rules from both languages, requiring a higher degree of linguistic proficiency (Poplack, 1980; McLaughlin, 1984). Milroy and Muysken (1995) further highlight that CS can take place between speaker turns, within a single turn, or even within a single utterance.

Recent research on CS primarily focuses on two key dimensions: grammatical/syntactic/structural aspects and discourse/pragmatic/sociolinguistic aspects. The syntactic approach investigates linguistic constraints governing CS, while the pragmatic approach explores how CS contributes to social meaning and serves various communicative functions. These perspectives are not conflicting but rather complementary, offering a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Studies have shown that bilingual children frequently engage in CS during their conversations. Saunders (1988) notes that young children quickly develop the ability to switch languages seamlessly. According to McClure (1977), the use of CS in children evolves through stages, beginning with single-item switches and advancing to more complex forms. Grosjean (1982) adds that CS emerges early in childhood, initially to express inaccessible words or expressions and later as a communicative strategy and a marker of group identity. Despite concerns about potential confusion in early bilingual development (Meisel, 2004), no evidence supports this claim. Instead, Treffers-Daller (2022) emphasizes that intra-sentential CS does not reflect deficiencies in grammar or pragmatics. Rather, it illustrates multilinguals' ability to creatively and effectively draw on their diverse linguistic resources.

2.3. Functions of Code-Switching

CS arises from various factors and serves multiple functions during bilingual interactions. Ludi (2003) states that CS is used to perform pragmatic functions, find the right word, or fill lexical gaps. Grosjean (1982) notes that topic changes, the approach of a third person, or situational changes can trigger CS. It can also raise status or convey authority (Grosjean, 1982). Saunders (1988) adds that trigger words, such as lexical transfers, proper nouns, and loanwords, can prompt CS.

CS is also used for quoting utterances in their original language (Romaine, 1989). Saunders (1998) lists motivations for quotation switching, including capturing the flavor of the original utterance and avoiding vocabulary difficulties. CS can specify addressees, mark interjections, serve as sentence fillers, reiterate messages for clarity or emphasis, and qualify messages by introducing topics in one language and commenting on them in another (Romaine, 1989). Gumperz (1982) outlines six major

functions of conversational CS: quotation, addressee specification, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization vs. objectivization.

McClure (1977) illustrates that CS can attract or retain attention, similar to raising one's voice or making eye contact. It can also facilitate mode shifts and be used for elaboration or amplification. Grosjean (1982) emphasizes that CS can amplify or emphasize a point. The setting and situation significantly influence language choice, with factors such as the topic, age, status, and occupation of the interlocutor becoming important over time. While it is anticipated that children's CS patterns might mirror those of adults as they adapt to their community's practices, some evidence suggests that early CS in children differs from that observed in adults (Treffers-Daller et al., 2022).

CS is viewed now as an intentional action taken for a specific purpose, particularly one that shows congruence, indicates a stance, and expresses identity (Auer, 2007; Li, 2018). As noted, CS in children's interactions seem to demonstrate cultural association, peer alignment, and defiance toward a linguistic hierarchy. Within UK multilingual communities, CS is not only a linguistic resource, but also a response to broader sociopolitical issues. Blackledge and Creese's (2017) work on complementary schools demonstrates how CS and translanguaging are used to construct identity and resist the dominant monolingual ideologies.

In addition, the integration of languages used at home and at school marks a blend of adaptive competence rather than confusion. Treffers-Daller (2022) and Yow et al. (2018) demonstrate that bilingual children who can code-switch exhibit greater metalinguistic and cognitive flexibility. These children do not simply switch codes; rather, they negotiate meaning in and through cultures and languages, often doing so in ways that monolinguals cannot employ.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Sources and Collection Methods

This study draws on data collected from bilingual children in the Turkish migrant community in the Midlands, UK. Over a three-month period, their naturally occurring conversations were digitally recorded during breaks and unstructured intervals during weekend supplementary classes at a Turkish Cultural Centre, resulting in approximately ten hours of spontaneous dialogue (23 conversations in total).

Ethical approval for the study was initially granted by the ethical committee of Leicester University. Additionally, the researcher underwent a CRB check, now known as a DBS check, as required at the time in the UK, to conduct research involving children. Informed consent for data collection and use was obtained from both the children participating in the study and their parents.

3.2. Setting and Participant Profiles

Data were collected from 8 Turkish-English bilingual children (5 female and 3 male), all aged 11 and attending the same grade in local English-dominant schools. Six of the children were born in the UK, while two migrated to the UK at different times in their life. Therefore, those children exhibit diverse backgrounds in language acquisition. Some have been exposed to both Turkish and English simultaneously from birth, while others have acquired the languages sequentially at varying ages. The majority of their parents are monolingual, with Turkish being the primary language spoken at home. All participating children attend state schools, where English is predominantly used. Additionally, they attend a weekend supplementary school at a Turkish cultural centre, which serves to supplement their school education and reinforce their cultural and linguistic heritage.

This study focuses primarily on the conversations between two children (both female) with differing linguistic backgrounds. Child B has been exposed to both Turkish and English simultaneously since birth, while Child M has been exposed to English for three years and nine months. Both children are eleven years old. B's parents, who have been living in the UK for sixteen years, speak English fluently albeit with a Turkish accent. They consistently speak Turkish at home to ensure their children become proficient in it. In contrast, M's parents, who have resided in the UK for three years and nine months, can understand English well but have limited speaking proficiency. While the primary focus is on B and M, other children also participate in their conversations.

4. Analysis

In the analysis, CS is examined as 'the alternate use of two languages or linguistic varieties within the same utterance or conversation' (Hoffman, 1991, p.110). The data reveal that children use CS strategically, switching for reasons such as lexical gap-filling, emphasis, and identity negotiation. For reference, the transcription code used in this study is provided at the end.

Example 1(a) contains the term 'skives school,' which is a distinctly British English expression, highlighting the local linguistic context of the data. The examples below (1–6) demonstrate how CS is employed to express cultural references, emphasize group membership, and negotiate social dynamics.

Example 1: Playground Conversation

During a break, two children, B and M, are walking around the playground near the supplementary school, sharing their school experiences.

(a) B: Do you know one of my friends here. Adı (0.1) şey (.) 'H'. She skives school. I saw her out of the gate. (Do you know one of my friends here... His name (0.1) well (.) 'H'. She skives school. I saw her out of the gate.)

(b) M: She was walking?

(c) B: Yeah. ...

(d) M: And, Erm (0.1) This, this boy (.) adı (0.2) oradan, kaçıyordu okuldan. And then, the head teacher came. And, they tried to run, sonra yakaladılar. (And, Erm (0.1) This, this boy (.) his name (0.2) from there, running away from school. And then, the head teacher came. And, they tried to run, they caught him then.)

In this example, B switches to Turkish momentarily because she cannot recall the name of the person she is talking about. Upon remembering, she reverts to English. M experiences a similar lapse in line (d), continuing in Turkish until the end of the sentence due to memory lapse and switching back to English likely triggered by the term "head teacher", which is closely associated with the school environment. M concludes the story in Turkish, possibly to emphasize the dramatic ending.

Example 2: Transition to Class

This conversation takes place as the break ends and the children head to class.

(a) B: Do you like the ders English? (Do you like the lesson English?)

(b) M: Yeah. I love it!

(c) B: E, tenefüs is over! ((Addressing another classmate who is unaware that the break is over.)) (E, break is over!)

In this instance, the children exhibit one-word switches. Despite their frequent use of English at school, they code-switch to Turkish for certain terms. For B, the word "ders" might be specifically associated with the supplementary school, distinguishing it from regular school lessons. In line (c), the switch to Turkish adds emphasis to the announcement.

Example 3: Snack Discussion

The children discuss a cheese-flavoured cornmeal snack popular in Turkey.

(a) M: Did you ever eat Cheetos in Turkey?

(b) B: Chee (.) Yes!

(c) M: Those are really [nice].

(d) B: [Cheetos].

(e) M: Yea…Yeah.

(f) B: Cheetos. Erm (.) Like, do you know these little packets?

(g) M: Mmm. [Yeah].

(h) B: [Hani], (.) hani içinde minik minik var. And, you do that. Erm (0.2) It's mısır çerezi. (Hani, hani inside it there is little, little things. And, you do that. Erm (0.2) It's corn chips.)

(i) M: I know. They're really nice (0.2) I miss it.

In this conversation, "Cheetos," although not a Turkish word, is treated as such due to its association with experiences in Turkey. B's use of the tag "hani" signifies group identity. The switch at the end of line (h) likely results from the phrase "mısır çerezi" being part of the snack's advertising slogan in Turkey, indicating familiarity and possibly a lack of English equivalent.

Example 4: Joke Telling

The children exchange jokes.

(a) B: Çocuk öğretmene demiş ki… Erm (0.2) Ay! ((Laughter)) Bir çocuk biology'de çok kötüymüş. He was really bad. And [then]… (Child said to teacher that… Erm (0.2) Ay!(an expression in Turkish) ((Laughter)) A child was really bad at biology. He was really bad.)

(b) M: [(?) biology.]

(c) B: Me, neither. But, this is a joke, yeah? And then, he said to his dad one day he... they went in a test. They did a test. And then, he got very less points. And then, he said to his dad, 'Dad! What would you have done if I had passed the biology test? And, his baba said 'Sevinçten ölürdüm (0.2) sevinçten deli olurdum.' Sonra, the child said 'O zaman hiç merak etme baba, geçemedim testi. ((Laughters)) O zaman hiç merak etme baba, deli olmayacaksın. Çünkü (0.1)Erm(0.1)geçemedim testi.' (Me, neither. But, this is a joke, yeah? And then, he said to his dad one day he... they went in a test. They did a test. And then, he got very less points. And then, he said to his dad, 'Dad! What would you have done if I had passed the biology test? And, his father said 'I'd die of happiness (0.2) I'd go insane because of happiness.' Then, the child said

'OK then dad! You don't need to worry because I couldn't pass the test. ((Laughters)) OK then dad! You will not be insane. Because (0.1) Erm (0.1) I couldn't pass.')

B initiates the joke in Turkish, the base language, switching to English for terms like "biology," which might be more accessible in English. The term "baba" is used for its cultural significance and familiarity, triggering a switch when quoting the father's response.

Example 5: Inquiry About a Friend

A child approaches B and M to ask about a friend.

(a) E: Where's G?

(b) B: Why? (0.2) Oh, she was with S. They were talking about some secrets.

(c) E: Ha?

(d) B: They were talking about some secrets. They went like that.

(e) E: Where are they?

(f) B: I don't know.

(g) M: Buralarda [yürüyordu]. (She was walking around here.)

(h) B: [Ah!] There they are! There they are! ((E goes to the other two children (G and S), who are talking about secrets.))

((B and M continue to talk, and after a few minutes, G and S approach B and M.))

(i) B: G! What did you say to E?

(j) G: 'I love your shoes' dedim. Bir şey demedim ki! ('I love your shoes' I said. I said nothing!)

(k) B: Shoe (.) I think [shoes]

(l) G: [I love her shoes]. Nereden aldı? ([I love her shoes]. Where did she buy them?)

(m) B: Next.

(n) G: Nereden? (Where?)

(o) B: Next… She came to us…She came to us and said…erm…'Where's G' I said 'She was with S. Ohh! Look they're there'. And then, she…she went after you. I think she saw you. And, she was really angry, she ran upstairs.

(p) G: Tamam! O benim yanıma geldi. I was talking to S. She said 'you two are so boring!' And I said 'No, it was really fun', dedim. Sonra gitti. Ben ona hiç bir şey demedim! (OK! She came near me. I was talking to S. She said 'you two are so boring!' And I said 'No, it was really fun', I said. Then, she went away. I said nothing to her!)

(r) S: Yeah. She got it all wrong. Anyway. Gel gel! (Yeah. She got it all wrong. Anyway. Come, come!)

M joins the conversation in Turkish, likely to assert her presence. G switches to Turkish in line (j) to distance herself from the topic and assert control, while also quoting in English to accurately

represent her interaction with E. The switches indicate strategic use of language to manage social dynamics and clarify misunderstandings.

Example 6: Discussion About Lunch-Pack

(a) M: You know when my Mum makes köfte and sarma (.) Erm (.) when I bring it to pack-lunch, you know, we have lunch at school… (passer-by interrupts) You know, we have lunch at school (.) Erm (.) my friends always said, 'Ooo, bu ne be!' ((Laughter)) (You know when my Mum makes meatballs and sarma (special Turkish food) (.) Erm (.) when I bring it to pack-lunch, you know, we have lunch at school… (passer-by interrupts) You know, we have lunch at school (.) Erm (.) my friends always said, 'Yuck, what the hell is that!' ((Laughter))

M uses Turkish terms "köfte" and "sarma" because they are culturally specific foods with no direct English equivalents. The switch to Turkish at the end of her story could be for emphasis or to capture the original sentiment.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the pragmatic and social dimensions of CS in the conversations of Turkish-English bilingual children in the Midlands, UK. Through the analysis of naturally occurring conversations, it becomes evident that CS serves a range of functions beyond filling lexical gaps, including topic management, identity expression, and socio-cultural negotiation. These findings challenge traditional views of CS as indicative of linguistic deficiency, reframing it as a deliberate and sophisticated strategy employed by bilingual speakers.

One of the most significant observations is the strategic use of CS to navigate social dynamics and reinforce cultural identity. For instance, children switched languages to emphasize specific points, align with their interlocutors, or mark transitions between formal and informal settings. This supports previous arguments (e.g. Grosjean, 1982; Saunders, 1988; Auer, 2007) that recognize CS as a marker of bilinguals' adaptability and linguistic competence. The children's ability to employ intra-sentential and inter-sentential switches indicates not only advanced grammatical proficiency but also a nuanced understanding of social cues and contextual appropriateness.

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) posits that individuals construct their identities based on membership in social groups, emphasizing the role of language as a marker of group belonging. In bilingual communities, CS serves as a powerful tool for constructing and negotiating identities. For example, the use of 'hani' in Example 3 signals shared cultural understanding, reinforcing in-group solidarity among Turkish-English bilingual children. Similarly, references to culturally specific foods such as 'köfte' and 'sarma' (Example 6) affirm Turkish heritage and create a sense of shared identity that is distinct from the English-dominant school environment. These language choices align with García's (2009) notion of translanguaging as a practice that both reflects and constructs cultural identities, allowing children to navigate their multiple worlds seamlessly. Such practices also align with Hoffman's (1991), García's (2009) and Otheguy et al.'s (2015) arguments that CS fosters group cohesion and reflects an awareness of shared cultural norms; in other words, bilingual people exploit their full linguistic repertoires to make meaning and have shared understanding.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of context in influencing language choice. Settings such as the playground, classroom, and supplementary school created distinct linguistic environments that shaped the children's CS patterns. For instance, English predominated in

discussions about school-related topics, whereas Turkish was often used for familial or cultural references. This situational sensitivity aligns with Grosjean's (1982) findings on the contextual functions of CS.

The results further affirm Blackledge and Creese's (2017) insight that complementary schools provide secure environments for bilingual youth to challenge prevailing monolingual beliefs and express cultural identity. In this study, the extra Turkish school offered children opportunities to engage with Turkish confidently and creatively, in contrast to conventional educational environments where English dominates and monolingual biases often devalue home languages (Blackledge and Creese, 2017). Such biases in British schools can lead children to compartmentalize their language use; however, the supplementary school context empowered them to use Turkish in ways that reinforced their bicultural identity. The observed interaction patterns illustrate how institutional and spatial contexts shape language usage, highlighting the need for educational policies that view bilingualism as an asset rather than a barrier.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, some limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size and focus on a single migrant community may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore CS patterns across diverse bilingual populations and examine longitudinal changes in CS practices. Additionally, incorporating the perspectives of participants, parents and teachers could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing bilingual language use.

6. Conclusion

This study reframes CS as a positive and dynamic aspect of bilingual communication among Turkish-English children in the Midlands. By integrating social identity theory with pragmatic analysis, it demonstrates how CS is used not only for communication but also for identity negotiation and cultural expression. The children's seamless language alternation underscores their advanced bilingual competencies and ability to navigate complex socio-cultural landscapes.

The findings carry important implications for educators and policymakers. Reframing CS as a natural and beneficial aspect of bilingualism can help combat negative stereotypes and support inclusive educational practices. Schools and community organizations should recognize and celebrate the linguistic resources that bilingual children bring, fostering environments where their bilingualism is viewed as an asset rather than a challenge.

Ultimately, this study highlights the need for continued research into the nuanced and context-dependent nature of bilingual communication. By exploring how bilinguals use their linguistic repertoires creatively and effectively, we can gain a deeper appreciation of the cognitive and social complexities of bilingualism.

The findings also call for greater recognition of bilingual practices in UK schools, challenging deficit-based views and fostering inclusive language policies that celebrate the linguistic repertoires of bilingual children.

Transcription code:

[ ]	Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech.
(0.4)	Numbers in round brackets measure pauses in seconds
(.)	A micropause, hearable but too short to measure.
()	Translation
(( ))	Additional comments from the transcriber, e.g. about features of context or delivery.
she wa::nted	Colons show degrees of elongation of the prior sound; the more colons, the more elongation.
(?)	unintelligible word or expression

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