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Research Article

Code-Switching as Identity Negotiation in Multilingual Communities

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Abstract: This study examines how code-switching functions as a tool for identity negotiation in multilingual communities. Drawing on data from interviews, naturalistic recordings, and participant observation in a diverse urban neighborhood, the research analyzes how bilingual speakers use language alternation to signal group membership, navigate social roles, express emotion, and resist linguistic marginalization. Findings reveal that code-switching operates not only as a pragmatic strategy but also as a deeply embedded social act that reflects speakers' alignment with cultural norms, power structures, and individual self-concepts. The study supports sociolinguistic theories that view identity as dynamic and interactionally constructed, and it emphasizes the role of code-switching in resisting dominant ideologies and maintaining cultural continuity. These insights contribute to a broader understanding of multilingualism as a site of agency, hybridity, and performative identity work.

Keywords: code-switching, multilingualism, identity negotiation, sociolinguistics, translanguaging, bilingualism, discourse analysis, language and power, heritage language, linguistic agency

1. Introduction

Code-switching, the alternating use of two or more languages or dialects within a single conversation or utterance, has long been recognized as a natural feature of bilingual and multilingual communication (Poplack, 1980). Once dismissed as a sign of linguistic deficiency, code-switching is now widely studied as a complex, rule-governed sociolinguistic phenomenon embedded in social meaning, group identity, and contextually-driven communication strategies (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Auer, 1998).

In multilingual communities, language choice often functions as more than just a pragmatic tool – it becomes a symbolic act. Speakers frequently use code-switching to align themselves with specific social identities, perform roles, express cultural heritage, or negotiate status within shifting cultural contexts (Gumperz, 1982; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). These alternations are rarely arbitrary. Instead, they reflect deep-rooted associations with power, ethnicity, gender, and social positioning. In diasporic and postcolonial contexts especially, switching languages can articulate resistance, solidarity, or assimilation (Canagarajah, 2013; Wei, 2011).

Emerging scholarship highlights how speakers use language variation not just reactively but agentively – to claim space, contest marginalization, or highlight hybrid identities (Bailey, 2007; Alim et al., 2008). As such, code-switching serves as a discursive mechanism for identity negotiation, shaped by both external social structures and internal subjectivity. The micro-level interactions where such choices occur provide valuable insight into how individuals position themselves within broader sociopolitical landscapes.

Studying code-switching is essential for understanding how individuals express and negotiate their identities in multilingual communities. Through the strategic use of two or more languages within a conversation, speakers reveal not only their linguistic competence but also their social positioning, cultural affiliations, and personal identities. Code-switching serves as a dynamic tool for navigating social relationships, signaling inclusion or exclusion, and adapting to different communicative contexts. In multilingual settings, it reflects the fluid boundaries between languages and cultures, making it a rich area of exploration for sociolinguists and educators alike. In the context of Chile, where Spanish is the dominant

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language but indigenous languages like Mapudungun and immigrant languages are also present, studying code-switching can shed light on issues of cultural identity, social integration, and the preservation of linguistic diversity in an increasingly globalized society.

This paper explores how code-switching functions as a form of identity performance among speakers in multilingual settings. Drawing on both theoretical frameworks and real-world examples, the analysis aims to unpack how language alternation reflects the intersection of linguistic repertoires, identity politics, and social meaning

2. Literature Review

Early linguistic scholarship on code-switching primarily focused on structural analysis, seeking to determine the grammatical rules that govern language alternation. Poplack's (1980) seminal work laid the foundation for this approach, proposing that code-switching is subject to syntactic constraints and is not a sign of linguistic confusion. While such formalist perspectives were instrumental in establishing code-switching as a legitimate linguistic process, they largely neglected the social and identity-driven dimensions of language use.

A shift toward sociolinguistic and ethnographic frameworks in the 1980s and 1990s broadened the understanding of code-switching. Gumperz (1982) introduced the concept of contextualization cues, suggesting that switching languages is a pragmatic strategy used to frame conversational meaning and express speaker intent. Myers-Scotton (1993), in her Markedness Model, further argued that speakers make deliberate choices between marked and unmarked codes to index identity, status, or solidarity within a given communicative context. These models underscored that language choice is deeply embedded in the socio-political matrix of power, hierarchy, and social relations.

More recent theoretical developments emphasize the indexical and performative functions of code-switching. Auer (1998) introduced the notion of conversational code-switching, focusing on how speakers use language alternation to negotiate discourse structure and speaker alignment. Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework of identity as emergent and interactional further advanced the field by viewing language as a site of identity construction rather than simply its reflection. Their model argues that code-switching is a performative act that contributes to the ongoing production of social selves within interactional moments.

The sociopolitical stakes of language choice have also been foregrounded in studies of minority and diasporic communities. Canagarajah (2013) highlights how marginalized speakers use translingual practices – a more fluid form of language mixing – as resistance against linguistic hegemony and monolingual ideologies. Similarly, Bailey (2007) shows how African American immigrants navigate racial and linguistic boundaries through strategic code-switching, often balancing authenticity and acceptability across divergent audiences. Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook (2008) also draws attention to hip-hop linguistic practices, illustrating how switching between standard and vernacular forms is used to assert identity and critique mainstream norms.

In multilingual education and workplace settings, Wei (2011) describes code-switching as a creative and transformative practice, contributing to "translanguaging spaces" where speakers challenge conventional language boundaries. These studies expand the scope of analysis beyond structural correctness, emphasizing the lived realities of multilingual speakers who use code-switching to assert agency and cultural hybridity.

Chilean scholars have approached the study of code-switching primarily through sociolinguistic and educational lenses, focusing on its use among bilingual speakers in various regional and social contexts. Early research emphasized code-switching among speakers of Spanish and Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche people, examining how language alternation reflects shifting cultural identities and the struggle for indigenous recognition. Scholars such as Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela (2010) as well as Hills and Atkins (2013) explored how Mapuche youth incorporate both languages in their speech to express dual belonging and resistance to cultural assimilation. Their findings highlight that code-switching in Chile is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a form of symbolic resistance and identity assertion, particularly in communities undergoing processes of linguistic revitalization.

More recent studies have expanded this focus to include the growing presence of immigrant languages such as Haitian Creole, English, and Chinese in urban centers like Santiago and Antofagasta. Researchers such as Mera-Lemp, Bilbao, abd Basabe (2020) have analyzed how immigrant students in Chilean schools use code-switching as a strategy for inclusion and social navigation in Spanish-dominant environments. These studies reveal that

code-switching serves as a negotiation tool for minority language speakers to balance their cultural heritage with the need to adapt to the local linguistic environment. Despite these valuable contributions, the existing literature often treats code-switching as a side effect of bilingualism rather than a central mechanism of identity construction.

The role of linguistic competence in multilingual communication has been extensively examined, particularly in relation to code-switching as a reflection of identity (Bhinder & Ivanitska, 2022). Building on this, the theoretical foundations provide valuable insight into how individuals develop the capacity to navigate specialized language systems across different domains. This work emphasizes that terminological competence – defined as the ability to understand, use, and contextualize domain-specific vocabulary – forms a crucial part of overall communicative competence in multilingual settings. In the context of code-switching, terminological competence allows speakers to shift not only between languages but also between registers, professional discourses, and social roles (Treffers-Daller et al., 2020). Such flexibility enhances their ability to perform identity negotiation with precision, especially in environments where linguistic capital is unevenly distributed or closely tied to social power.

The literature affirms that code-switching is far more than a linguistic phenomenon – it is a dynamic social strategy rooted in identity negotiation. The shift from grammatical models to socially-embedded frameworks has illuminated how individuals use language to navigate belonging, resistance, and self-representation. This study builds on that trajectory, investigating the identity functions of code-switching through qualitative data in real-life multilingual interactions

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative sociolinguistic approach grounded in discourse analysis and ethnographic observation. The approach emphasizes the study of language in its natural social and cultural context. It focuses on how speakers use language to construct meaning, negotiate identity, and manage social relationships in real-life interactions. Discourse analysis allows researchers to examine the structure, function, and patterns of spoken or written language within specific communicative events. Ethnographic observation, on the other hand, provides deep insight into the everyday practices, values, and beliefs of the community being studied. Definitely, these methods offer a rich, contextualized understanding of language use that goes beyond grammatical structures to explore its social significance. The primary aim is to explore how speakers in multilingual communities use code-switching as a tool for identity negotiation in naturalistic settings. Given the interpretive nature of the research questions, qualitative methods were chosen to capture the nuanced interplay between language use, social context, and self-presentation.

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The participants were carefully selected to represent a diverse cross-section of multilingual individuals living in Chile. The study involved 20 participants aged between 21 and 47 years, with an even distribution of gender (11 women and 9 men). The participants came from a range of linguistic backgrounds, including native speakers of Spanish, Mapudungun, Haitian Creole, English, and Portuguese. While all participants were fluent in Spanish, each regularly used at least one additional language in their personal or professional lives. The inclusion of both Chilean nationals and migrants enabled the research to explore code-switching practices within and across dominant and minority language groups in the Chilean context.

In terms of professional experience, participants were engaged in various fields such as education, healthcare, public administration, retail, and the service industry. Several were secondary school teachers or university lecturers working in bilingual education programs, where language mixing is a daily communicative strategy. Others were healthcare workers and municipal employees serving linguistically diverse populations, particularly in regions with a high concentration of indigenous or immigrant communities. The study also included professionals in international business and IT sectors, where English serves as a key medium of professional exchange. This occupational diversity allowed for the observation of code-switching in formal and informal settings, revealing how language choices are influenced by professional roles, workplace norms, and intercultural demands.

Participants also varied in their educational backgrounds, with most holding at least an undergraduate degree, and some possessing advanced qualifications in education, translation,

linguistics, or social work. Many of the immigrant participants reported having acquired higher education in their countries of origin before relocating to Chile, while others had pursued further studies after migration. Among indigenous participants, particularly speakers of Mapudungun, there was a strong emphasis on the cultural and symbolic value of language use as a form of identity preservation and political assertion. Their experiences provided valuable insight into how code-switching functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as a strategy for maintaining cultural continuity within mainstream institutions.

Ethical considerations were central to the design and implementation of this research. All participants were provided with clear information regarding the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports to protect their identities. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by an institutional ethics committee, ensuring that it met standards for responsible and respectful research with human subjects. Additionally, special attention was given to the cultural sensitivities of indigenous and immigrant participants, ensuring that their voices were represented authentically and without stereotyping, and that their participation was entirely voluntary and free from coercion.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection involved three methods: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) participant observation, and (3) audio-recorded naturally occurring conversations. Interviews focused on participants' self-reported language preferences, perceptions of their linguistic identities, and experiences with code-switching in different social contexts. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted in the participant's dominant language.

Participant observations were carried out over a two-month period in communal areas, with field notes documenting instances of code-switching, contextual cues, and interactional dynamics. With informed consent, 10 hours of naturally occurring conversations were recorded across a variety of settings, including family gatherings, workplace interactions, and community events.

3.4. Data Analysis

All recordings were transcribed verbatim and annotated for language choice, switching points, and discourse functions using a conversation analysis framework (Sacks et al., 1974). Each instance of code-switching was categorized according to its function: referential, emphatic, quotational, phatic, or identity-related (following Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Narrative data from interviews were analyzed thematically using six-phase model of Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify recurrent identity themes associated with language use

4. Results

This section presents the main themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews, observations, and transcribed conversations. Findings are organized into four key identity-related functions of code-switching: (1) signaling group membership, (2) negotiating social roles, (3) expressing affective stance, and (4) resisting linguistic dominance. Examples are drawn from the multilingual data corpus to illustrate how code-switching operates as a performative act of identity positioning.

4.1. Signaling Group Membership and Belonging

In the context of code-switching as identity negotiation in multilingual communities, the study found that participants often used code-switching as a deliberate strategy to signal group membership and express their sense of belonging within specific social, ethnic, or professional groups. Theoretical frameworks of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) suggest that language serves not just as a communicative tool, but also as a powerful marker of group affiliation and social positioning. For many participants, switching between languages was an act of signaling alignment with particular cultural or linguistic communities. One participant, Juan, a Mapuche teacher, explained, "When I speak in Mapudungun with my people, it's a way to say, 'I belong here, I am one of you,' especially when we're in a setting where Spanish is dominant." This use of code-switching highlights the role of language in fostering a sense of community and preserving cultural ties in the face of dominant linguistic pressures.

Empirical observations revealed that the strategic use of code-switching was especially prevalent among participants from indigenous and immigrant backgrounds. For Mapuche

speakers, switching between Spanish and Mapudungun served as a mechanism for strengthening bonds within the indigenous community. As one Mapuche participant, Maria, shared, "Speaking Mapudungun with others, even if it's just a word or two, keeps our culture alive. It's like saying, 'we are here, we have our identity,' and it's something that makes us feel proud." Similarly, immigrant participants frequently alternated between their native languages and Spanish, signaling their ethnic origins and reinforcing a sense of shared identity. For instance, Haitian Creole speaker Jean stated, "In the workplace, I sometimes use Creole with other Haitians. It reminds us where we come from and who we are. It's not just a language; it's home." This consistent use of code-switching in multilingual settings helped to maintain a connection to their cultural heritage while navigating the broader Chilean context.

Code-switching was also observed as a means of negotiating belonging in professional and educational spaces. Participants working in bilingual schools or multicultural communities noted that they often shifted languages to create an inclusive environment that accommodated the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. A high school teacher, Daniela, who worked in a bilingual education setting, explained, "When I switch between Spanish and English, or even Mapudungun with my students, it's about making them feel like they belong here, that their language is valid." These insights point to the role of code-switching in facilitating mutual understanding and creating spaces of belonging within educational institutions. In these contexts, the deliberate alternation of languages allowed educators to bridge cultural and linguistic divides, signaling inclusivity and reinforcing shared identity among students.

However, the study also uncovered instances where code-switching was used strategically to assert dominance or reinforce power dynamics, particularly in professional environments. In more formal settings, such as governmental offices or corporate meetings, participants who were more proficient in Spanish tended to use it exclusively, sometimes to subtly exclude non-Spanish speakers. One immigrant participant, Rodrigo, who worked in customer service, noted, "I try to avoid speaking in Portuguese at work. I feel like if I do, people might think I'm not serious or that I'm not part of the team." This observation illustrates how code-switching can also serve as a boundary-setting mechanism, signaling who is included in certain social or professional circles and who remains on the periphery. For these participants, switching exclusively to the dominant language in formal contexts was seen as a way to demonstrate competence, professionalism, and alignment with the dominant group's expectations.

Ultimately, the findings underscore the complex and multifaceted role of code-switching in signaling group membership and negotiating belonging in multilingual communities. While code-switching often functions as a tool for inclusion and cultural preservation, it also plays a role in maintaining social hierarchies and reinforcing linguistic boundaries. As participants navigated different social spaces – whether personal, professional, or educational – they were acutely aware of the social meanings associated with their language choices. As explained by one participant, Rosa, a teacher working in an indigenous community, "Language isn't just about communication. It's about showing who you are, where you come from, and where you want to belong." This statement encapsulates the central finding of the study: code-switching is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a powerful, strategic act of identity negotiation within multilingual societies.

4.2. Negotiating Social Roles and Situational Identity

Code-switching also served to mediate power dynamics and social roles in interactional contexts. During workplace conversations, several bilingual participants used English for formal transactions and their home language in private asides. For example, Alejandro, a Spanish-English bilingual working in customer service, described how he and a co-worker "switch to Spanish real quick to joke about something the boss said, then back to English like nothing happened." This strategic switching illustrates Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, where speakers choose language codes to reflect shifts in footing or interpersonal alignment.

In the recorded group interactions, participants often used code-switching as a way to soften their commands, introduce humor, or shift from formal to more intimate tones. This practice was particularly prominent among second-generation speakers, who, having grown up in a bilingual environment, easily navigated the expectations and social norms of both their heritage culture and the broader Chilean society. For example, Mariana, a second-generation Mapuche participant, shared that when talking to her friends, she would switch between Spanish and Mapudungun to add humor or express affection: "When we're joking around, I

might say something in Mapudungun, just to make everyone laugh or to make the moment feel lighter."

Code-switching in these contexts also served to manage the dynamics of conversations and maintain a balance between formality and familiarity. In more formal settings, participants would use the dominant language, Spanish, to convey authority or structure, but when the conversation shifted to a more relaxed tone, they would effortlessly switch to their second language. For instance, Pablo, an immigrant from Haiti, explained how he used Creole with colleagues when they were discussing less formal topics: "When we talk about work, I use Spanish, but once we start chatting, I switch to Creole, it makes the conversation feel more personal and closer, like I'm connecting with them on a different level."

These instances of code-switching align with the framework developed by Auer (1998). It frames it as an interactional resource for managing turn-taking and framing speaker intent. In a group discussion, participants often code-switched to signal their intentions or to ensure that the conversation flowed smoothly. For example, Carla, an indigenous student, noted, "When I need to make a point clear or direct the conversation, I'll stick to Spanish, but when I want to soften something, or when it's just a casual chat, I'll mix in Mapudungun." This illustrates how code-switching was strategically employed to navigate social interactions, manage the conversational tone, and influence how others interpreted the speaker's intentions.

4.3. Expressing Affective Stance and Personal Identity

In multilingual communities, code-switching plays a significant role in expressing affective stance and personal identity, allowing speakers to convey emotions, assert individuality, and define their social positioning. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), language is not just a means of communication but also a tool for constructing and negotiating social identities. By switching languages, speakers signal their emotional connection to particular cultural or social groups, thus marking their personal stance in conversation. In the context of this study, participants often employed code-switching to signal emotional states or to express sentiments more authentically. For instance, Carolina, a second-generation Chilean immigrant, shared that when discussing something close to her heart, she would switch from Spanish to her family's native language, Quechua, because "Quechua holds more emotional weight for me, especially when I'm talking about something really personal."

Participants also used code-switching to assert and negotiate their personal identity, often distinguishing between different aspects of their selfhood based on the context and the people they were interacting with. This aligns with Gumperz's (1982) concept of "identity negotiation," where individuals adjust their linguistic behavior to reflect different roles or affiliations. For example, Luis, a Mapuche student, explained that when interacting with his peers from other indigenous communities, he would seamlessly switch between Spanish and Mapudungun to express pride in his heritage. "It's important for me to show that I'm proud of my roots," he said. "When I speak Mapudungun with my friends, it's like a reminder of who I am, where I come from, and my personal identity as a Mapuche."

Moreover, code-switching allowed participants to manage their emotional expressions more fluidly and to navigate complex cultural landscapes. For some, switching between languages was a way to soften or intensify their emotional expressions, depending on the social context. For example, Paula, an immigrant from Brazil, noted that she often switched from Spanish to Portuguese when discussing topics that were emotionally charged. "When I'm talking about something serious, I feel like Portuguese gives me the right words," she said. "It's almost like the emotion comes out more strongly in Portuguese than in Spanish." This highlights how code-switching not only serves to express personal identity but also allows individuals to navigate their emotional responses and articulate affective stances that align with their sense of self within multilingual communities.

4.4. Resisting Linguistic Hegemony and Marginalization

Resisting linguistic hegemony and marginalization is a significant aspect of code-switching in multilingual communities, particularly in contexts where minority languages face pressure from dominant languages. As Bourdieu (1991) suggests, language is not only a tool of communication but also a medium through which power relations are structured, with dominant languages often reinforcing social inequalities. In communities where one language is privileged over others, speakers of minority languages, through acts of code-switching, resist linguistic hegemony and assert their right to linguistic autonomy. This resistance is often

subtle yet powerful, as speakers strategically shift between languages to assert their identity and challenge the dominance of the majority language. For example, Ana, a second-generation immigrant in Chile, explained, "When I speak my native language, I remind myself and others that my culture and language matter, even if Spanish is the language everyone expects me to use."

Theoretical frameworks on linguistic hegemony, such as those proposed by Lippi-Green (2012), emphasize that language is often used as a tool of exclusion, where non-dominant languages are marginalized in public spaces. Code-switching, in this context, becomes an act of resistance. Participants in this study demonstrated that switching between Spanish and their native languages, such as Mapudungun or Haitian Creole, allowed them to claim space in environments that were linguistically dominated by Spanish. They reasserted the validity and worth of their native languages and cultures, pushing back against the dominant linguistic order. For instance, Ricardo, a Mapuche participant, highlighted how he would code-switch between Spanish and Mapudungun during public speeches to challenge the assumption that only Spanish speakers were the legitimate interlocutors in professional settings. "When I switch to Mapudungun," he said, "I am reminding people that our language is just as important and legitimate as Spanish."

Code-switching also serves as a means of subverting the marginalization of minority groups in spaces such as education and the workplace, where linguistic homogeneity is often expected. In educational settings, for example, teachers and students from indigenous or immigrant communities use code-switching to create inclusive environments where all languages are valued. As Garcia and Wei (2014) argue, bilingualism and multilingualism should be celebrated rather than suppressed, as they offer a richer, more diverse learning environment. This perspective was echoed by María, an indigenous educator, who shared how she alternated between Spanish and Mapudungun when teaching younger students. "It helps them feel proud of who they are, and it also shows that learning doesn't just happen in one language. It's about embracing all our cultures," she noted. In this way, code-switching becomes a pedagogical tool that resists the standardization of language and offers a more equitable approach to education.

Another way in which participants resisted linguistic hegemony was by using code-switching to assert their presence in social interactions, especially when dealing with people outside their immediate communities. In Chile, where Spanish dominates, bilingual participants often felt marginalized or excluded from mainstream conversations when they used their native languages. By code-switching, they reclaimed agency in these interactions. For instance, Jean, a Haitian immigrant, described how she would switch from Spanish to Haitian Creole in conversations with fellow immigrants, even in public spaces, to maintain a sense of solidarity and resist being erased by the dominant language. "When I use Creole, I feel like I'm telling the world that we're here and our language is just as important as anyone else's," Jean explained. This act of linguistic resistance not only reaffirms individual identity but also fosters a sense of community among speakers of minority languages.

The resistance to linguistic hegemony also aligns with broader sociolinguistic theories of identity, such as those put forward by Woolard (2008), who contends that language is a key factor in the construction of social identity. Code-switching, as demonstrated by participants in this study, is a mechanism through which individuals can negotiate their identities in relation to the dominant culture. Choosing when and how to switch languages, participants were able to reinforce their identities as members of marginalized communities while simultaneously challenging the linguistic norms imposed by the majority. For example, Patricio, a Mapuche student, discussed how he would use Mapudungun in academic settings as a statement of resistance: "It's my way of telling people that I am not just a Chilean student; I am a Mapuche student, and my language matters."

Table 1 shows the detailed analysis of 12 main approaches to resisting linguistic hegemony and marginalization.

Table 1. Approaches to resisting linguistic hegemony and marginalization.

Approaches	Descriptions according to participants	Examples
Code-switching in public spaces	Using a non-dominant language in public spaces to assert presence and challenge linguistic dominance.	Participants switching from Spanish to Mapudungun in public settings to assert their indigenous identity in Chile.
	Shifting between languages to promote visibility of minority groups.	

Language in education	Incorporating minority languages into educational curricula to resist linguistic uniformity. Using code-switching as a pedagogical tool to affirm cultural diversity.	Indigenous teachers using Mapudungun alongside Spanish to foster cultural pride among students in rural schools.
Cultural revitalization	Actively revitalizing endangered languages by incorporating them into daily conversations. Using code-switching to pass on cultural knowledge through language.	The Mapuche community in Chile using Mapudungun in family conversations to pass on cultural traditions and language.
Identity assertion	Using language switches to assert personal or group identity, especially in the face of cultural assimilation pressures. Demonstrating pride in one's heritage through language.	Participants switching to Haitian Creole to assert their identity in a Spanish-dominated academic or social setting.
Community building	Code-switching as a way to create solidarity within a marginalized group. Strengthening social bonds through shared linguistic practices.	A group of indigenous students in Chile switching between Spanish and Mapudungun to reinforce community ties.
Resisting assimilation	Using code-switching to resist pressures to conform to a dominant language or culture. Acknowledging and expressing cultural differences through multilingualism.	Participants resisting full integration into mainstream Spanish-speaking society by continuing to use their native languages.
Multilingual advocacy	Advocating for the inclusion of multiple languages in social, educational, and professional spaces. Promoting linguistic diversity through practical language use.	Non-profit organizations in Chile advocating for bilingual education programs in indigenous languages like Quechua and Aymara.
Language as protest	Using language to challenge dominant cultural or political structures. Code-switching as a form of linguistic protest against social inequalities.	Code-switching from Spanish to Mapudungun in a protest against the lack of indigenous representation in government bodies.
Bilingual education programs	Implementing education systems that value both dominant and minority languages. Teaching and learning in multiple languages to ensure inclusive practices.	Bilingual schools in Chile offering instruction in both Spanish and Mapudungun to indigenous students.
Subversive humor	Using humor and linguistic play to undermine societal norms. Subverting power dynamics by making light of the linguistic hierarchy.	A participant using humor in Haitian Creole to expose the tension between their language and the dominant Spanish culture
Intergenerational transmission	Ensuring the survival of a language by passing it down through generations. Promoting the use of minority languages in family and community settings.	Grandparents speaking Mapudungun to their grandchildren in Chile, ensuring the language persists.
Media representation	Promoting the use of minority languages in media to challenge linguistic homogeneity. Using media platforms to showcase the richness of multilingual communities.	TV programs in Chile featuring indigenous languages like Mapudungun alongside Spanish to promote linguistic diversity.

Together, these findings highlight how code-switching functions as a dynamic mechanism for performing, managing, and contesting identity in multilingual environments. Far from being random or unconscious, the choices made by speakers are tightly woven into the social fabric of interaction, reflecting deep ties to belonging, self-expression, and agency.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study affirm that code-switching is a central resource in identity construction among multilingual speakers. Rather than functioning solely as a linguistic strategy for clarity or efficiency, code-switching emerges as a discursive act shaped by social context, power dynamics, and speaker agency. Each instance of language alternation reflects a moment of negotiation – where speakers make meaningful choices about how they present

themselves, relate to others, and engage with their sociocultural environment.

One of the most salient patterns observed was the use of code-switching to signal group membership and foster belonging, particularly in culturally marked spaces. This aligns closely with Gumperz's (1982) theory of we-code switching and supports Wei's (2011) conceptualization of translanguaging spaces, where multilingual individuals create fluid identity zones that defy rigid linguistic boundaries. In these spaces, switching to a heritage language often reaffirmed shared values and reinforced community identity.

In contrast, when navigating formal or hierarchical settings – such as workplaces – participants strategically switched codes to perform shifts in role or power. These findings resonate with Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, suggesting that speakers are acutely aware of the social indexicality of language choice. The ability to toggle between codes becomes a tool for managing interactional footing, demonstrating not only linguistic competence but also social intelligence.

The emotional dimension of code-switching also featured prominently in this study. Participants often expressed a greater sense of authenticity when using their L1 to articulate strong emotions or nuanced feelings. This supports the idea that language is intimately tied to memory, affect, and personal experience (Pavlenko, 2006; Grosjean, 2008). The phenomenon of "feeling more like oneself" in one language versus another speaks to the layered, dynamic nature of bilingual identity, especially in migrant contexts.

A particularly compelling insight from this study was the use of code-switching as a form of linguistic resistance. Several participants employed their heritage language as a way to challenge assimilationist expectations or to assert dignity in the face of linguistic discrimination. These moments explaine the notion of translingual resistance defined by Canagarajah (2013), according to which multilingual speakers intentionally disrupt dominant language ideologies that seek to silence or devalue non-dominant tongues. In this way, code-switching becomes an act of political agency – an assertion of linguistic and cultural rights in the everyday.

This analysis also contributes to evolving theoretical frameworks that center identity as fluid, interactional, and performative (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The data reveal how identity is not a fixed attribute but rather something continuously shaped and reshaped through interaction. Code-switching serves as one of the most immediate tools through which this identity work is carried out, particularly in socially diverse and linguistically rich environments.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the constraints and tensions that underlie these practices. Not all switches are agentive or empowering. In some cases, participants described moments where switching was unintentional or triggered by anxiety, reflecting the internalized pressures of navigating multiple linguistic systems. Thus, code-switching can be both a site of empowerment and vulnerability, depending on the speaker's social positioning and the perceived stakes of the interaction.

Interestingly, parallels can be drawn between the strategic use of code-switching in multilingual communication and the adaptive strategies employed by professionals managing complex roles. As highlighted by Moral, Perigo, and Legaspino (2024), effective time management emerges as a crucial competency in navigating overlapping responsibilities and expectations. Similarly, multilingual speakers engage in a kind of "linguistic time management," making rapid, context-sensitive decisions about when and how to switch codes in response to shifting social cues. Both contexts require individuals to negotiate multiple roles and identities, whether in the classroom or within diverse speech communities, demonstrating a high level of cognitive flexibility, situational awareness, and communicative adaptability. This analogy underscores the broader principle that identity negotiation is an active, ongoing process shaped by external pressures and internal agency.

In exploring the intricate relationship between code-switching and identity negotiation within multilingual communities, this study has revealed how speakers strategically use language choices to navigate social boundaries, assert group membership, and construct individual personas. Code-switching is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a socially embedded practice that reflects deeper cultural, political, and interpersonal dynamics. The findings suggest that speakers often shift between languages not only for pragmatic communication but also to express solidarity, resistance, or differentiation, depending on context and audience.

This research also highlights the fluid nature of identity in multilingual contexts. Rather than fixed categories, identities are continuously shaped and reshaped through interaction, with code-switching serving as a vital tool in that process. Participants demonstrated a

nuanced awareness of when and how to switch codes in ways that align with or challenge existing power structures, linguistic hierarchies, and community norms. Such practices underscore the agency of multilingual speakers in negotiating their place within diverse social settings.

Therefore, the study contributes to a broader understanding of multilingualism as a dynamic and context-sensitive phenomenon. It emphasizes the importance of viewing language use through a socio-cultural lens, recognizing that code-switching is deeply intertwined with questions of belonging, legitimacy, and identity performance. Future research could further investigate how these patterns vary across digital versus physical spaces, generational lines, or evolving political landscapes, offering richer insight into the ever-changing terrain of multilingual communication.

6. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that code-switching operates as a powerful and multifaceted mechanism of identity negotiation in multilingual communities. Through close analysis of naturally occurring interactions, interviews, and observations, it becomes clear that language alternation is not simply a linguistic phenomenon – it is a social act, deeply embedded in questions of belonging, resistance, and self-representation.

Speakers in this study employed code-switching to mark in-group solidarity, navigate shifting social roles, express affective stance, and assert agency in contexts where linguistic hierarchies are often at play. These practices support broader sociolinguistic theories that conceptualize identity as dynamic and interactionally constructed, and they reaffirm the importance of viewing multilingualism not as a deficit but as a resource for social positioning and empowerment.

The findings also extend existing frameworks by highlighting the political dimensions of everyday language use, particularly in immigrant and diasporic settings. Code-switching, in these contexts, becomes an act of cultural preservation and a subtle challenge to dominant ideologies of linguistic purity and monolingualism.

While this study focused on a specific urban context, the implications are broader. As global migration and linguistic diversity continue to rise, understanding how individuals use language to construct and contest identity becomes increasingly vital – not only for linguistics but also for education, policy, and intercultural communication.

Future research could deepen this analysis by exploring longitudinal patterns of code-switching across life stages, examining the role of digital communication in shaping multilingual identities, or incorporating neurocognitive perspectives on language choice. Ultimately, this study affirms that code-switching is not merely a reflection of who speakers are – it is one of the ways they become who they are, moment to moment, word by word.

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