

# Structural, Semantic, and Pragmatic of Code-Switching in the Speech of Secondary School and University Students – A Secondary Publication

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**Abstract:** Code-switching is a complex phenomenon that varies in structure, semantics, and pragmatics in different communicative situations. The study aims to identify structural, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of code-switching in the speech of Russian schoolchildren and University students learning English and German as foreign languages. The data are 157 utterances containing 165 code switches extracted from the oral spontaneous speech of 16 schoolchildren and 16 University students. Their bilingual speech samples were collected by means of non-participant observation and fixed with the help of a voice recorder for 32 hours (16 for schoolchildren and 16 for University students) from October to December 2021. Comparative analysis was used as the main method to interpret the features of schoolchildren' and University students' code-switching. The results of the research demonstrated that the most productive for schoolchildren were insertions proper and bare forms performing message-oriented pragmatic functions and intended to denote school objects associated with English classes. For University students most frequent structures were classical switches in the form of insertions properly performing message-oriented pragmatic functions. Semantically, code-switches among University students were more complicated since they were intended not only to denote specific University objects but also to express stylistically relevant shades of meaning. Though code-switching has already been studied within various frameworks, the correlation between structural, pragmatic, and semantic characteristics of code-switching in the speech of Russian-speaking school and University students has been under-researched, which provides originality of the present work.

**Keywords:** Code-switching; Russian; English; Bilingual speech of schoolchildren; Bilingual speech of university students

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## 1. Introduction

For individuals who speak two or more languages, code-switching is a characteristic feature, i.e., the transition from one language to another in bilingual communication. The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that code-switching in the speech of individuals who master one or several foreign languages has been

insufficiently explored on diverse material and in all possible aspects. Thus, code-switching in the speech of Russian-speaking schoolchildren and students studying English and German as foreign languages has not yet been subjected to specialized in-depth analysis.

Code-switching has been studied by domestic and foreign researchers based on various theoretical and methodological approaches and language combinations<sup>[1-7]</sup>. Studies by scholars on the structural features of code-switching, highlighting different units of analysis and contextual conditions of their implementation, have been conducted on the speech of children and adults<sup>[8-14]</sup>.

Pragmatic features of code-switching are described as the most significant component of their content plan, partly related to semantics and stylistics<sup>[15-19]</sup>. Structural and pragmatic characteristics of code-switching are interconnected, as indicated by studies of several domestic linguists<sup>[20-22]</sup>.

Code-switching by students majoring in philology is of particular interest for study. It is noted that at the initial stage of education, the mechanism of code-switching is activated in relation to the artificially acquired language, while at the advanced stage, it increases its activity in relation to the naturally acquired language<sup>[23]</sup>.

The least studied aspect of code-switching remains its semantics. Bilingual and trilingual combinations of language units in the speech of schoolchildren and students have not yet been subjected to semasiological analysis.

The study aims to identify the structure, semantics, and pragmatics of code-switching in the speech of Russian-speaking schoolchildren and students studying English and German. To achieve this goal, the following tasks need to be addressed:

- (1) Record statements with code-switching in the speech of schoolchildren and students;
- (2) Describe the structural characteristics and pragmatic functions of code-switching;
- (3) Identify denotative and connotative components of code-switching within thematic groups;
- (4) Determine the frequency of structural, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of code-switching;
- (5) Establish correlations between the structure, semantics, and pragmatics of code-switching in the speech of schoolchildren and students;
- (6) Compare code-switching in the speech of schoolchildren and students across all aspects considered.

A comprehensive analysis of oral code-switching with a combination of three languages in the speech of two age groups has not yet been conducted in either domestic or foreign linguistics. The novelty also lies in the speech material collected by the authors of the study based on non-participant observation.

## 2. Research methodology of code-switching

The research material consists of 157 utterances containing 165 instances of code-switching (79 from schoolchildren, 86 from students). All schoolchildren whose speech was observed had been studying English for six years and German for three years. Students had studied English at school and continued to do so at university, and they had studied German for three years. The material was collected through observation in two stages: (1) in September–October 2021: for the speech of schoolchildren (16 hours); (2) in November–December 2021: for the speech of students (16 hours). Fixation was carried out using audio and written recordings both during classes and breaks.

Code-switching from the collected utterances was identified using the method of interlingual comparison, during which it was important to establish the matrix and guest languages. The matrix language determines word and morpheme order, as well as regulates the morphosyntactic structure of all speech units. In most examples, Russian (the native language of schoolchildren and students) served as the matrix language,

occasionally English. Guest languages included English, Russian, and German. German as a guest language appeared relatively infrequently in the collected material (10 examples).

The procedure for analyzing code-switching included the following steps.

- (1) Analysis of the structure of code-switching in the speech of schoolchildren, followed by students, based on the classification of code-switching by location in speech <sup>[20]</sup>; it is partially based on K. Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model <sup>[8]</sup>: matrix and guest languages are identified, their role in the structure of the utterance is established, and types of morphemes are determined as the primary unit of code-switching analysis.
- (2) Description of the pragmatic features of code-switching by schoolchildren and students based on the classification of pragmatic functions of code-switching <sup>[24]</sup>.
- (3) Distribution of code-switching by schoolchildren and students into thematic groups according to their denotative meaning. Then, connotative meanings are identified within the established groups.
- (4) Determination of the interdependence of structural, pragmatic, and semantic characteristics of code-switching in the speech of schoolchildren and students using the method of correlative analysis.
- (5) Comparison of all considered characteristics of code-switching in the speech of the two observed groups - schoolchildren and students.

### 3. Research findings

#### 3.1. Structure of code-switching

Code-switching in the collected materials consists of various structural elements (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Structural composition of code-switching

Structural element	Students		Schoolchildren		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Word	66	76.7%	53	67.1%	119	72.1%
Phrase	16	18.6%	12	15.2%	28	17%
Sentence	4	4.7%	14	17.7%	18	10.9%
Total	86	100%	79	100%	165	100%

The most frequent structural element of code-switching for both schoolchildren and students is the word since incorporating a single lexeme in the native language with a foreign language does not pose difficulties for them. The phrase as a structural element is less common. Sentences are more characteristic of schoolchildren's speech, especially in educational situations.

According to the classification of code-switching based on the place of occurrence in speech, all identified examples can be divided into three types: (1) choice of language code; (2) inter-phrase; (3) intra-phrase switches (see **Table 2** and examples below).

**Table 2.** Code-switching by place of occurrence in speech

Type	Students		Schoolchildren		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Choice of language code	4	4.7%	11	13.9%	15	9.1%
Inter-phrase switches	3	3.5%	8	10.2%	11	6.7%
Intra-phrase switches	79	91.8%	60	75.9%	139	84.2%
Total	86	100%	79	100%	165	100%

The least frequent type of code-switching in the collected data is inter-phrase switches (6.7%), which are more characteristic of schoolchildren (10.1%) than students (3.5%). In schoolchildren's speech, they appear as duplication of sentences in two languages, language role distribution, for example: "That's all I wanted to tell you. *Seems like everything* (Вроде все)." In students' speech, inter-phrase switches are incorporated into a single utterance from sentences in two languages, for example: "Happy birthday! *Let everything come true!* (Пусть все сбудется!)"

Language code choice accounts for 9.1% of the total number of code-switches and is more prevalent among schoolchildren (13.9%) than students (4.7%). When choosing a language code, the language of communication changes, for example, in a question-answer dialogue:

Schoolchild: "Why do people learn English? (Почему люди учат английский?) – Because it is the language of computers."

Student: "How's the play? (Как спектакль?) – Perfect."

The most frequent are intra-phrase switches (84.2%), predominantly represented in students' speech (see **Table 3**).

**Table 3.** Types of intra-phrase code-switches

Type	Students		Schoolchildren		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Insertion	29	36.7%	18	30%	47	33.8%
Island	13	16.5%	14	23.3%	27	19.4%
Bare form	8	10.1%	18	30%	26	18.7%
Parenthetical switch	10	12.7%	9	15%	19	13.7%
Pidginized switches	16	20.3%	0	0%	16	11.5%
Pidginized switch + island + morphological duplication	2	2.5%	0	0%	2	1.4%
Parenthetical switch + island	0	0%	1	1.7%	1	0.7%
Island + bare form	1	1.3%	0	0%	1	0.7%
Total	79	100%	60	100%	139	100%

The most common type became proper insertions (33.8%). Such code-switching occurs without affixes of the matrix language because the morphosyntactic frame of the sentence does not require them (for example, for nouns of any language in the subject function or Russian nouns of masculine and neuter genders in the



accusative case in the direct object function), making them the most accessible for both schoolchildren and students to include in the speech, for example:

Schoolchild: “I find *noun* (существительное).”

Student: “*We need the entire* (Нам нужен весь клоунский) equipment.”

Island switches, within which units are combined and/or the rules of grammar of the guest language are applied (for example, indicators of morphological categories of the guest language are used), are more characteristic of schoolchildren than students (23.3% and 16.5%, respectively), for example:

Schoolchild: “Give back *is to return something to someone* (это кому-то вернуть), and (a) take back – *is for oneself* (себе).”

Student: “*I understood that this is not my* (Я поняла, что это не мой) cup of tea.”

“Bare forms” account for 18.7% of the total number of all code-switches; among students, they are one of the least common structures (10.1%), while among schoolchildren, they constitute almost a third of all switches (30%). They are partly similar to proper insertions because both do not come with grammatical indicators of the matrix language. However, while this is not required for proper insertions in the morphosyntactic frame in which they are used, for “bare forms,” this need is determined by their position in the sentence, but for some reason, these indicators necessary for the morphosyntactic frame of the matrix language are not added to them. For example: “*Let’s do history for forty. But has everything already been covered in history?* (Давайте history за сорок. А в history уже всё было?)” For students, the appearance of “bare forms” of nouns is less characteristic, but they occur among adjectives and adverbs, for example: “*Is this not colloquial style? That’s exactly when we’ll learn background information about it.* (Это не colloquial стиль? Как раз и узнаем background информацию о нем).”

Parenthetical switches, which are not grammatically linked to the sentence and therefore easily inserted at the beginning or end of sentences, account for 13.7% of the total number of code-switches (15% among schoolchildren, 12.7% among students):

Schoolchild: “*Oops* (Ой), is everything ready?”

Student: “*Could you give me a brake* (Можешь на brake дать), please?”

Pidginized switches, which are grammatically seamlessly integrated into the morphosyntactic frame of the matrix language, are only found among students and constitute 20.3% of their code-switches. Such foreign words are introduced into the Russian speech of students by adding to the content (usually root) morphemes of the guest language systemic (inflectional and derivational) morphemes of the matrix language, for example, *It’s possible to be-friend. Kamerad-s, what was our presentation about last time?* (За-friend-иться можно же. Kamerad-ы, какой у нас был доклад на прошлую пару?)

In some intra-phrasal code-switches, several structures are combined. For example, parenthetical switch + island in schoolchild: “I’d like to know, *so, the twelfth question* (так, двенадцатый вопрос).”

In the speech of students, the combinations were more complex, for example, pidginized switch + island + duplicated morphology in student: “*I don’t know any grammatical terms* (Я не знаю никаких грамматических terms-ов),” where the island has the ending -s to form the plural according to the rules of the guest language, the pidginized switch is manifested by adding the Russian ending -ов and duplicated morphology is characterized by the presence of indicators of plural from both guest and matrix languages.

Thus, schoolchildren more often use switches without grammatical modifications (proper insertions and “bare forms”), while students switch to other languages more grammatically and creatively.

### 3.2. Pragmatics of code-switching

The most common pragmatic function of code-switching is the subject-thematic one (38.8%) both for students and schoolchildren, which is explained by the educational situation and the narrow thematic focus of their studies. During breaks, the themes of switches were more varied. Examples:

Schoolchild: “*Why do I log in on Facebook?* (Почему я на Facebook захожу?)”

Student: “*We just need to give some feedback, right?* (Надо же просто feedback дать, да?).”

The emotional function was more frequently observed among schoolchildren (11.4%) than among students (8.1%). For example:

Schoolchild: “*It’s easy, easy! And very much so!* (Это easy, easy! Причем даже очень!)”

Student: “*Is it test time now? Now?* (Сейчас тест? Jetzt?)”

The metalinguistic function of switches is more typical for students (10.5%) than for schoolchildren (7.6%), for example:

Schoolchild: “I find *noun* (существительное).”

Student: “*Are you sure this is polysyndeton?* (Вы уверены, что здесь polysyndeton?)”

The persuasive function was observed more frequently among schoolchildren than among students (12.7% and 5.8%, respectively). Schoolchildren, through code-switching, more often tried to draw attention to themselves from both teachers and classmates, attempting to influence the interlocutor. For example:

Schoolchild: “*Max, sit next to me, come here. Disappoint, come on!* (Макс, садись ко мне, come here. Disappoint, ну же!).”

Student: “*Help me, where should I go* (куда заходить?)”

The humorous function is more characteristic of students’ speech (14%) than schoolchildren’s (2.5%), for example, in student: *The mouse sneaks, that’s what mousy-ing is about. Do you even know who?* (Мышь крадется, вот это по-mousy-ить. Вы вообще who?).

The self-identification function of code-switching helps the speaker emphasize that they are proficient in a foreign language, which is more typical for students (10.5%) than for schoolchildren (5.1%), for example:

Schoolchild: “*Why do people learn English?* (Почему люди учат английский?) Because it is the language of computers.”

Student: “*She’ll remind you* (Она напомнит тебе), I bet you.”

The phatic function of switches was realized in the form of etiquettes of greeting and farewell, for example:

Schoolchild: “*Goodbye* (До свидания). Thank you for sweets!”

Student: “*I said that I know everything, and they let me go* (сказала, что я все знаю, и меня отпустили), goodbye.”

The function of speech effort economy in the collected material is more characteristic for code-switching among schoolchildren than among students (10.1% and 2.3%, respectively), for example:

Schoolchild: “*Do we need Eleven too?* (Eleven тоже надо?)”

Student: “*That would also not be very good* (Это будет тоже не sehr gut).”

Addressing and quoting functions are realized in isolated cases (**Table 4**).

**Table 4.** Pragmatic functions of code-switching

Function	Students		Schoolchildren		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Subject-thematic	34	39.5%	30	38%	64	38.8%
Emotional	7	8.1%	9	11.4%	16	9.7%
Metalinguistic	9	10.5%	6	7.6%	15	9.1%
Persuasive	5	5.8%	10	12.7%	15	9.1%
Humorous	12	14%	2	2.5%	14	7.5%
Self-identification	9	10.5%	4	5.1%	13	7.9%
Phatic	7	8.1%	4	5.1%	11	6.7%
Speech effort economy	2	2.3%	8	10.1%	10	6.1%
Addressing	0	0%	6	7.6%	6	3.6%
Quoting	1	1.2%	0	0%	1	0.6%
Total	86	100%	79	100%	165	100%

### 3.3. Semantics of code-switching

All code-switches were distributed into thematic groups formed based on extralinguistic factors: education, lifestyle, emotions, speech behavior, qualities, and people (see **Table 5**).

**Table 5.** Thematic groups of code-switching

Thematic group	Students		Schoolchildren		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Education	26	30.2%	41	51.9%	67	40.6%
Lifestyle	22	25.6%	5	6.3%	27	16.4%
Emotions	16	18.6%	10	12.7%	26	15.8%
Speech behavior	9	10.5%	13	16.5%	22	13.3%
Qualities	10	11.6%	8	10.1%	18	10.9%
People	3	3.5%	2	2.5%	5	3%
Total	86	100%	79	100%	165	100%

The most frequent thematic group for both schoolchildren and students is “Education” (40.6%), which is determined by the specificity of their communication and the surrounding environment. For example:

Schoolchild: “*We will need to retell the homework text now* (Нам сейчас надо будет retell домашний текст.)”

Student: “*Is this not a colloquial style* (Это не colloquial стиль)?”

The theme “Lifestyle” is represented by code-switching more frequently among students (25.6%) than among schoolchildren (6.3%), for example:

Schoolchild: “*Hobby won't help here* (тут не поможет).”

Student: “*Do you run* (Бегаешь) every day?”

The thematic group “Emotions” is characteristic for both schoolchildren (12.7%) and students (18.6%).

For example:

Schoolchild: “*It’s your turn* (Твоя очередь)! – No, no, God, please!”

Student: “*There is ‘fear,’ and there is a synonym?* (Есть «боязнь», а есть синоним?) – ... fear.”

The thematic group “Speech behavior” (13.3%) includes code-switching that reflects forms of politeness, etiquette, “filler words,” and other discursive phrases, for example:

Schoolchild: “*I would say ‘Auf Wiedersehen,’ but I’ll say goodbye* (Я бы сказала auf Wiedersehen, но скажу до свидания).”

Student: “*Tell me* (Скажите), please.”

The thematic group “Qualities,” which includes switches to describe the characteristics of objects, is almost equally represented among schoolchildren and students (10.1% and 11.6%, respectively). For example:

Schoolchild: “I am *beautiful* (красивая).”

Student: “But her faith is *sad* (Traurig).”

The least common thematic group is “People” (3%), which includes code-switching indicating roles of people, for example:

Schoolchild: “*I’ll mark you down as bro today* (Я тебя сегодня как bro запишу).”

Student: “*Kamerad-s, what presentation did we have last time?* (Камерад-ы, какой у нас был доклад на прошлую пару?)”

When considering intra-sentential code-switching consisting of one word (47 in schoolchildren and 60 in students), the structure of their lexical meaning was established. It turned out that the majority of code-switching (56.1%) has only a denotative component. Code-switching with connotations (47) included evaluative, emotional, and functional-stylistic components (see **Table 6**).

**Table 6.** Connotation components

Connotation component	Students		Schoolchildren		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Functional-stylistic	20	62.4%	5	33.3%	25	53.2%
Evaluative	6	18.8%	6	40%	12	25.5%
Emotional	6	18.8%	4	26.7%	10	21.3%
Total	32	100%	15	100%	47	100%

The functional-stylistic component regulates the choice and use of words whose semantics correspond to a specific communication situation. For example:

Schoolchild: “*I’ll note you as bro today* (Я тебя сегодня как bro запишу).”

Student: “*Check it, please* (Check-ни, пожалуйста).”

In both examples, there is a stylistic informality, which is characteristic of communication among teenagers and young people.

The evaluative component becomes much more expressive through code-switching. For example:

Schoolchild: “*It’s unreal for a pumpkin to grow so big. I think* (Нереально, чтобы тыква выросла такой большой. Я думаю), false.”

Student: “*Wrong choice it is* (выбор это).”

The emotional component accompanies the denotative meaning and conveys an emotional attitude. For example:

Schoolchild: “*Oh* (Ой), is everything ready?”

Student: “*What do you mean by (В смысле) the younger, if both are fifteen (если обоим по пятнадцать)?*”

### 3.4. The relationship between the structure, pragmatics, and semantics of code-switching

For schoolchildren, intra-sentential code-switching in the form of inserts and “bare forms” is more characteristic (60%). Most often, they possess only a denotative component, but some inserts also have an evaluative connotation component, while “bare forms” have a functional-stylistic component. Code-switches performing a subject-thematic function mostly have only a denotative component, which is associated with the thematic direction and specificity of the lesson. In the most productive thematic group “Education,” schoolchildren’s code-switches have only a denotative component since during lessons, students tried to use mainly neutral vocabulary. For example: “*Because it turns out to be the library. What is an excuse? (Потому что library получается. Что такое excuse?)*”

For students, intra-sentential code-switching in the form of inserts and pidginized switches is characteristic (36.7% and 20.3%, respectively). Most inserts have only a denotative meaning, but sometimes connotation components are encountered: evaluative (4 examples), emotional (3 examples), and functional-stylistic (1 example). In most cases (13), pidginized switches have a functional-stylistic component. Code-switches by students performing a subject-thematic function usually have only a denotative meaning, although often (10 examples), it is accompanied by a functional-stylistic connotative component, which is due to diverse thematic lessons and practice in different speech styles. In the most productive thematic groups of students, “Education” and “Lifestyle,” only a denotative meaning is most often presented, but occasionally a functional-stylistic connotative component is present. For example: “*Some people think that some idea can be a good justification (оправдание) excuse for the crime. Are we also getting caught, or do we have skills higher up? (Мы также палимся или мы со skill-ами повыше?)*”

## 4. Conclusion

Thus, the conducted research has enabled the following conclusions to be drawn:

- (1) The most frequent type of code-switching is insertions, among which “bare forms” are more characteristic for schoolchildren, while pidginized switches are more common for students, which can be explained by the peculiarities of their proficiency in the guest languages. “Bare forms” reflect uncertainty in how to structure foreign words in speech in their native language and combine grammatical characteristics of two or more languages. Pidginized switches indicate that individuals demonstrate a creative approach to foreign language units and actively apply native language word formation and inflection patterns to their formatting.
- (2) In most cases, code-switches serve a subject-thematic function, which is related to the thematic content of the speech for both students and schoolchildren: they usually use English and German units to denote phenomena related to foreign languages and objects present in communication in these languages.
- (3) In terms of content, the most noticeable phenomenon for most code-switches, both for students and schoolchildren, was their belonging to the thematic group “Education,” which is reflected in the denotative meaning of these foreign language units associated with educational activities. Students’ code-switches are more semantically rich, with connotative meaning in the form of a functional-stylistic component. Emotional and evaluative connotation components are manifested to a lesser extent in both schoolchildren and students.
- (4) The typical code-switch for schoolchildren is an insertion or “bare form” with a denotative component (thematic group “Education”), performing a subject-thematic pragmatic function; for students, it is

an insertion and a pidginized switch with a denotative component (thematic groups “Education” or “Lifestyle”) and/or a functional-stylistic component, also performing a subject-thematic pragmatic function.

The results obtained in the course of the research can be used in the study of code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon within courses on bilingualism and bilingual speech – to illustrate theoretical positions regarding the structure, pragmatics, and semantics of code-switching. Specific cases of code-switching structure (e.g., pidginized switch + island + duplicated morphology combinations) can serve as a basis for discussions.

Based on the research materials, practical tasks can be developed to determine the structural type and type of code-switching, the main and accompanying pragmatic functions, and the distribution of code-switching by thematic groups. The task can be based on comparing the structural, pragmatic, and semantic features of code-switching extracted from the speech of people of different ages, professions, and levels of competence, among others. The results of the conducted research can also be used in the analysis of the translation of oral spontaneous speech when there is a question of whether to translate code-switching and if so, how. Further research on the issue of code-switching involves its analysis and comparison in written speech among learners with different levels of language competence and at various stages of foreign language learning. It is also promising to expand the age groups observed (teachers from schools, colleges, and universities).

## Disclosure statement

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