

Code-Mixing and Code-Switching in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh: A Convergence Approach for Multilingual and Multicultural Students

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ABSTRACT

India is a multilingual and multicultural country. Many Indian writers have made attempts to depict India and its culture through Indian Writings in English. English has become the most important language of wider communication. The Indian English speech community consists of those bilinguals who use English as a second language. The bilingual competence of the speaker helps him to mix or switch to another language very easily. The present study is an attempt to understand code-mixing and code-switching in the novels, *The Hungry Tide* (2005), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008) by Amitav Ghosh. The present study is a convergence study of code-mixed and code-switched language used in four Indian novels. The study also focuses on various dimensions of socio-cultural aspects and their effects on society. As the selected novels have the multicultural and multilingual background, the focus is on the multilingual society in which mixing and switching of codes are common. The characters depicted in the novels use Bengali, Hindi Bhojpuri, Arabic and Burmese expressions in their conversations. In the novels, *The Hungry Tide* (2005), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), we come across Bengali, Hindi, Bhojpuri, Arabic and Burmese expressions and a mixed-variety of language in their conversations.

KEYWORDS

Convergence; Code-mixing; Code-switching; Sociolinguistics.

Introduction

Language convergence is a type of linguistic change in which languages come to structurally resemble one another as a result of prolonged language contact and mutual interference. According to Crystal (1985:74) defines convergence as:

A term used in sociolinguistics to refer to a process of dialect change in which the dialects become more like each other (or 'Converge'). This usually happens when a non-standard dialect

falls under the influence of the standard, but it may happen the other way round- as in the current development of modified forms of received pronunciation in English. Geographically adjacent speech communities are sometimes referred to as 'convergence'. The opposite effect is known as divergence. 'Convergence' also has a currency in historical linguistic studies, referring to the merging of forms which at an earlier

stage of language were contrastive. (Small caps taken out).

Language contact occurs in a variety of phenomena, including language convergence, borrowing, code-switching and code-mixing. The convergence approach is extremely useful in the interpretation of Indian novels in English because code-mixing and code-switching is the result of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Code-mixing, code-switching and convergence are the three linguistic phenomena claimed to be the most prevalent and common modes of interaction among bilingual and multilingual speaker in the multicultural society. Khubchandani (1986) views "... the multiplicity of language use in Indian society as a necessary outcome of the way languages is used in everyday life of an Indian. In his words,

The verbal repertoire of an individual or a group in a Plural society is often characterized by a creative use of speech variation in diverse combination through linguistic stratification (such as diagglossic Complementation, code-switching, code-mixing, bilingualism) in everyday life. In other words, diversity of speech on a societal level is not merely a convenience or an 'aesthetic' choice (a luxury that can be dispensed with) but it signifies subtlety of purpose in an interaction, it is highly functional. The human quality of communication in a plural society is bound to suffer when we discard such an asset through the steamroller effects of standardization. (As quoted in Mohanty 1994: 109).

From a global perspective, code-mixing and code-switching is a worldwide phenomenon. They are the traits commonly observed linguistic behaviour in the speech of bilingual or multilingual speakers. It is a cross-cultural phenomenon This phenomenon of

code-mixing and code-switching have been studied with increased interest in the recent years in the field of sociolinguistics and several insightful studies have been published to find answers to issues such as the functional motivations for their use, the formal devices used in mixing languages or dialects, the attitudes towards various types of mixing, the social constraints and the implications of such mixing and switching on language change in a diachronic sense.

Amitav Ghosh's novels focus on multiracial and multi-ethnic issues. As a wandering cosmopolitan he roves around and weaves them with his narrative beauty. Being a postmodernist, he makes use of very simple language to give clarity to the readers. Many Indian English writers experiment with the language to suit their stories.

Amitav Ghosh practices this technique in *The Hungry Tide* (2005) using Bangla words, For example:

"And to the inhabitants of the islands this land is known as **bhatirdesh**-the tide country-except that **bhati** is not just the "tide" but one tide, in particular, the ebb-tide, the **bhata**." (2004:8)

In the above expression, we can understand how the speaker uses code-mixing, although there is an appropriate word in that language in which he can express instead of that he finds this Bengali word '**bhatir-desh**' more appropriate and appealing.

"On the main deck, Mr Doughty's hands were on the wheel as he shouted: 'Heave, you dogs, heave!'"

Habes- habeskutte, habes! Habes! (2008: 371)

In *Sea of Poppies*, here the word that '**habes**' is used to give reassurance to the addressee. "People looked around in bewilderment: What is it? **Ba le?**" (2005:29).

In the novel *The Glass Palace*, the speaker uses code-switching because he finds

the Burmese switching *Ba le more* appropriate here in this sentence. In this above example, 'Ba le' is Burmese switching means what can it be?

For example in the novel, *The Circle of Reason*, "The startled *pandit* stopped in mid-*mantra*, his mouth open." (1986:33). Here 'pandit' and 'mantra' clearly indicates that a person's profession and in which society or class he belongs to.

Conclusion

The present study is a convergence study of code-mixed and code-switched language used in four Indian novels. The study

also focuses on various dimensions of socio-cultural aspects and their effects on society. As the novels are based on multicultural and multilingual background, the focus is on the society which is multilingual where mixing and switching of codes are common. The characters depicted in the novels use Bengali, Hindi, Bhojpuri, Arabic and Burmese expressions in their conversations. In the novels, *The Hungry Tide* (2005), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Circle of Reasons* (1986) and *The Sea of Poppies* (2008), we come across Bengali, Hindi, Bhojpuri, Arabic and Burmese expressions and a mixed-variety of language in their conversations.

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