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# Longitudinal Patterns of Code Mixing and Identity Construction in Multilingual Refugee Family Environments

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***Abstract:*** The longitudinal study looks into the dynamic use of language as well as the process of identity negotiation in multilingual refugee households over two years. As far as the problem of forced displacement is concerned, the use of language can be seen as a source of struggle but also of resistance; yet previous studies have tended not to possess the necessary time dimension needed to trace how such processes unfold throughout resettlement. The present study employs the QL research paradigm to trace three households through home recordings as well as semi-structured interviews every six months. Specifically, code-mixing will be looked into as an indication of social positioning. The results show that although there is a linear increase in terms of dominance from 15% to 75% with regard to host-language use, the rate of code-mixing experiences a pattern of peaking then stabilizing. High rates of hybridity (which peak at Phase 3) occur when there is the establishment of a Third Space identity, balancing both aspects of heritage culture and host-country identity. In the data collected, there appears to be a clear difference in the use of code-mixing practices between generations: parents use these strategies to emotionally connect themselves with their origin, while the children use such practices to construct their transcultural selves. Such findings reject traditional deficiency-oriented theories of language attrition, indicating instead that code-mixing serves as an important indicator of a well-adjusted multilingual individual. By analyzing the changes in language use in refugees over time, this paper highlights the importance of these practices in maintaining family cohesion.

***Key Words:*** code-mixing, identity construction, refugee families, multilingualism, longitudinal discourse, sociolinguistics, trans culturalism

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## Introduction

### Language Practices in Refugee Families

In such circumstances, the use of languages carries symbolic significance for their families. It is a known fact that refugees live a poly-linguistic life because need to maintain a heritage language which is the only link left with their homeland and acquire the language of the host country as soon as possible (Law et al., 2026). It should be noted that there are no strict linguistic boundaries at home; on the contrary, the boundaries are flexible, which leads to the formation of a mixed discourse within the family, which is reflected in its socio-emotional environment (Karanfil & Demir, 2021; Bloch & Hirsch, 2017).

### Importance of Code-Mixing in Everyday Communication

Code-switching is an indispensable tool for communicating in multilingual refugee families. The mixture of vocabulary and grammatical constructions of several languages is not a sign of a lack of knowledge in the language but an effective means of expressing ideas and thoughts that cannot be

expressed in one language alone (Nortier, 2018; Sweet et al., 2025). For example, it makes it easier for parents who preserve their native language and their heritage, and children who more quickly adapt to a new country, to interact through mixed language use (Haque, 2012).

**Problem Statement**

However rich the refugee discourse may be, sociolinguistic literature currently faces a severe deficiency when it comes to the temporality aspect. As it stands, most studies make use of cross-sectional data – an analysis of language usage at one point in time without taking into account the rhythmic progression and gradual stabilization of speech patterns in the course of several years after arrival. The lack of longitudinal data in such cases makes the difference between the language mixing during the arrival stage and the stage of integration after stabilization unclear (Lam et al., 2025).

**Research Gap**

Even though code-mixing has been extensively described as a technical phenomenon, there is still a great deal to investigate when it comes to identity reconstruction. In particular, there appears to be a considerable amount of research to be done regarding the process of identity reconstruction through linguistic practice. Specifically, one needs to understand how the speaker's identity evolves from being a displaced person to a transcultural citizen in accordance with changes in code-mixing frequency and functionality. This paper aims to address this issue via a two-year longitudinal examination.

**Research Objectives**

The main objective of this paper is to document the historical development of language hybridity as an approach to identity formation. The research is driven by the following fundamental objectives:

- To document the quantitative and qualitative shifts in code-mixing patterns over a 24-month period.
- To identify specific Identity Markers within discourse that signal a shift in cultural belonging.
- To analyze the generational differences in how language is used to perform home and host roles.

**Research Questions**

1. How does the frequency and structural complexity of code-mixing evolve as refugee families transition through different stages of resettlement?
2. In what ways is identity negotiated, challenged, and reconstructed through specific linguistic choices within the family Third Space?

This entire piece is going to be broken down into seven distinct sections. The next section II of this article provides an extensive literature review on translanguaging and migration trajectories. Section III is devoted to the explanation of the research process and theoretical approach that was used to interpret the results of the research. Section IV gives an analysis of research results in terms of statistical data for each stage of the research. Section V provides a thick description of research results in terms of identity formation. Finally, the concluding part of this paper is provided in Section VI.

## Literature review

### Code-Mixing in Multilingual Contexts

According to this study, code-switching does not reflect any deficiency of linguistic competence but is the act of mixing the linguistic elements of two or more grammatical structures in one instance of speech. The MLF, a contemporary theory, indicates that the code-switcher has a matrix language structure in which guest elements are added to accomplish their communicative purpose.

In terms of structural linguistics, the issue revolves around how the syntactic conditions and switch points facilitate a blend without violating grammatical principles. By contrast, the functional approach, which will be at the center of this study, investigates the reasons social factors why speakers decide to switch. In the context of refugees, these reasons range from pragmatic reasons such as survival through lexical switching to a more complicated form of metaphorical switching, in which switching languages indicates changes in social positions or emotions (Li & Liang, 2025; Israr et al., 2023).

### Language and Identity Construction

Modern sociolinguistic studies reject the traditional idea of identity as an immutable demographic characteristic and consider identity to be a process that is always underway (Lee, 2026). Such an approach is closely related to the theory of positioning, which maintains that every time a refugee makes the decision to use either the heritage language or the host language, he or she is taking a position concerning the past and the future environment (Tovares & Kamwangamalu, 2017).

Identity negotiation is especially evident in the third space, a special hybrid space in which the Displaced Self and Integrating Self coexist (Doyumğaç, 2026). Language is the key means by which individuals construct different identities according to the social stakes of the situation (Duff, 2015; Zabrodskaja, 2025).

### Refugee Family Linguistic Practices

The domestic environment of refugee families is a battleground between HLM and LS towards the language of the new country (Bloch, 2024). Whereas the language of the new country is considered the key to economic success, education, and upward social mobility, the heritage language becomes a source of emotional capital and culture (Cinkara et al., 2026).

The issue finds its reflection in the interaction of generations. The existing evidence shows that although parents might try to establish Heritage Language Only areas to protect from language loss, their children, in turn, tend to act as language brokers who bring the elements of the new country's language into the household. Thus, an unprecedented Family Lecture emerges that is marked by a lot of mixing (Qaralleh et al., 2025; (Karpava, 2021).

### Longitudinal Approaches in Sociolinguistics

The relevance of time-based studies within sociolinguistics cannot be underestimated since identity is an ongoing phenomenon, and changes in linguistic domination occur gradually (Lam et al., 2025). The long-term perspective helps identify whether there is merely interference (errors made by the individual while adapting to a new language) or whether the individual formed a stable hybrid identity (Ajala & Oluwasanmi, 2026).

Nonetheless, there is an evident deficit of longitudinal research in the area, as most studies tend to be cross-sectional, focusing on the academic achievements of children. To the best of the knowledge, no study follows the whole family over time to analyze their shared identity markers in the context of migration (Shahimi et al., 2024).

### Synthesis

In spite of its success in defining the processes of code-mixing and the theory of identity, the existing literature lacks an understanding of how these processes interact in the context of the refugee family group and its specific environment. The paper under discussion finds its niche between two different areas of study, Longitudinal Discourse Analysis and Identity Positioning Theory. As opposed to viewing the code-mixing stage as one of transition to full-blown identity formation, it considers it as a permanently sustained state of Transnational Belonging.

## Methodology

### Research Design

In the present case, the use of a qualitative longitudinal (QL) design has been adopted. As per QL researchers, this methodology is unique in the sense that it has the capacity to understand change and development through time. The use of longitudinal research is better than any other method in order to identify the change during the process of refugee resettlement because it allows to see the changes as occur rather than making mere snapshots. In this way, able to understand that code switching is not an error but a strategy used by refugees to cope with their changing circumstances.

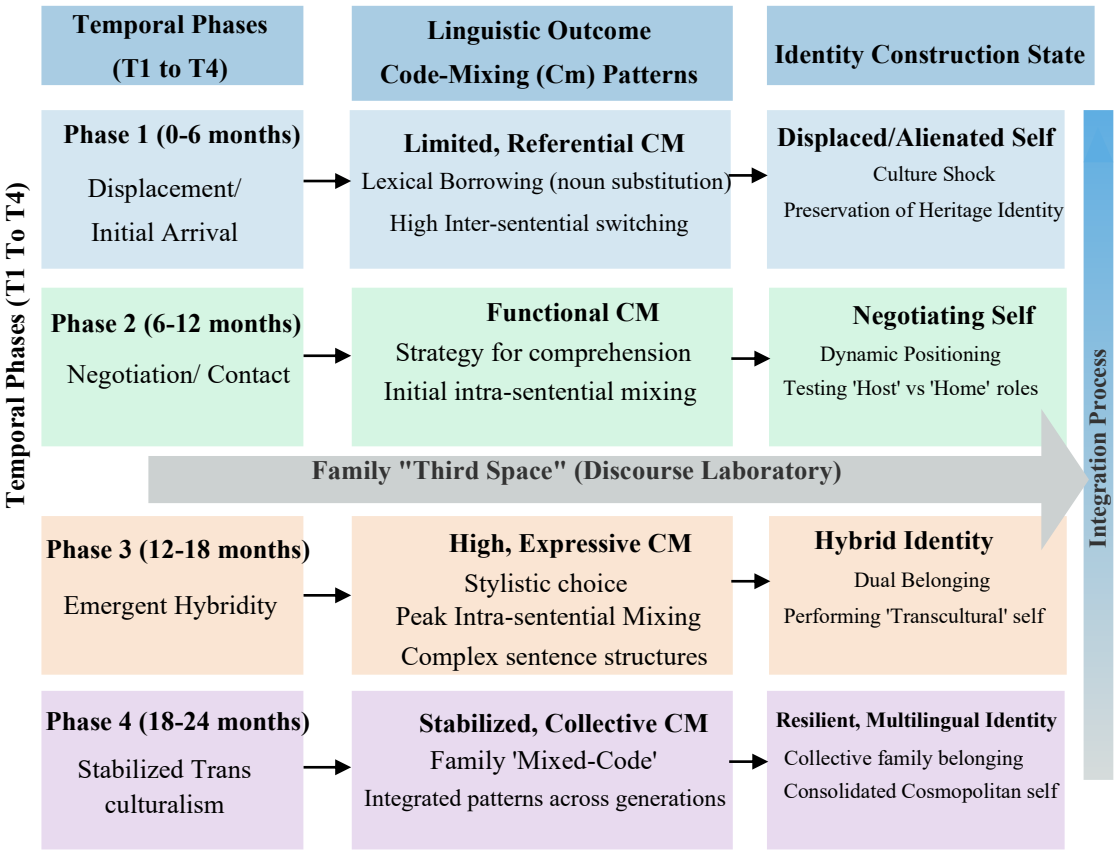


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Longitudinal Linguistic and Identity Evolution

Figure 1 presents the 24-month discourse trajectory of refugee family discourse, from the process of displacement to stabilization of trans culturalism. This figure captures the dynamics of code-mixing changes and the inner negotiations of the self, where the family unit acts as an experimental site of identity formation and resilience.

**Participants Selection and Background**

This study employs a purposive sampling method to identify three multilingual families that are currently residing. The first criterion considered was that these families had migrated to the host country in the last 12 months. In addition, the selected families must have been intergenerational families with at least two parents and two children. This was to ensure that different trajectories of identity formation can be observed among individuals of various ages. For ethical considerations and safety concerns, all participants will be assigned pseudonyms. Their migration history was obtained in the preliminary interview phase to provide insights into their varying skills in their heritage languages and host-language learning.

**Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

The data collection process involved the combination of three major instruments. Every six months (T1, T2, T3, and T4), participants were requested to record 120 minutes of dinner conversations to capture naturally occurring code-switching in an informal setting. In addition to these recordings, language diaries were kept weekly by the adolescent subjects, who documented any linguistic conflict situations that occurred in relation to specific languages as well as moments of identification in connection with certain languages. Lastly, semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide participants with an opportunity to discuss their language choices and thus to reveal the rationale behind the code-switching phenomenon.

**Conceptual Model of Identity Negotiation**

The analysis is informed by a multi-level theoretical model that considers code-mixing as an interface between the Home Space and the Public Space. The theoretical model asserts that when refugees move around in their new setting, their language becomes an immediate reflection of their sense of social positioning.

Such a theoretical model enables one to classify code-mixed phrases based on three different functions. These include Referential (code-mixing due to word shortage), Expressive (code-mixing to express affinity towards the native culture), and Integrative (code-mixing to express allegiance to the new nation). Through longitudinal application of the theoretical model, the identity trajectory of all refugees will be determined from their displacement to trans-culturalism.

**Data Analysis and Transcription**

All the audio data was analyzed according to the Jefferson Transcription System, modified for capturing overlap and pauses and other intonational factors which help in defining the pragmatic meaning of code-switches. In this research, the thematic discourse analysis method was employed, whereby the coded Identity Markers from the transcripts were compared against the number of occurrences of code-mixing in order to establish whether there is a connection between language dominance and social integration. By linking the linguistic aspects with the stories gathered from interviews, the analysis became more than mere linguistic statistics but an interpretation of the refugee experience in all its complexities.

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## Results

### Longitudinal Quantitative Shifts in Code-Mixing

The longitudinal data obtained during 24 months of research show that a clear host-language dominance increases the use frequency of code-mixing among the selected families steadily. In the beginning (T1 stage), the code-mixing is low-frequency (12.4 ± 2.1) and restricted to lexical code-mixing when participants replace host-country nouns with some non-existent words or concepts in their native languages. At the same time, at the middle stage (T2 and T3 stages), there occurs a significant statistical peak of intra-sentential code-mixing. Such data implies that gaining competence in the new language does not imply discarding the old one, but rather creating a mixture of both languages in order to create a new code.

### Distribution of Mixing Types by Generation

Statistics reveal an obvious distinction between generations as regards code-switching in identity construction. Intra-sentential code switching was more common among the First Generation (parents). In many cases, parents fell back on the heritage language when wanted to exert dominance over the children or when discussing cultural matters. On the other hand, the Second Generation (children) used intra-sentential switching more frequently (42.1 ± 4.8 in Phase 3) to show a transcultural identity and their ability to flow freely between cultures. Table 1 provides further information.

Table 1: Generative Distribution of Code-Mixing (Mean ± SD)

| Study Phase | Parent Mixing (Instances/hr) | Child Mixing (Instances/hr) | Host-Language Dominance (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phase 1 (0–6 mos) | 8.5 ± 1.2 | 15.8 ± 2.5 | 15% |
| Phase 2 (6–12 mos) | 12.3 ± 2.1 | 34.2 ± 4.1 | 35% |
| Phase 3 (12–18 mos) | 15.4 ± 1.8 | 51.6 ± 5.2 | 60% |
| Phase 4 (18–24 mos) | 14.2 ± 1.9 | 48.3 ± 4.7 | 75% |

### Emotional vs. Functional Switches

One important trend observed from the results is the relationship between the subject of conversation and the type of switching. In the statistical coding of the conversation transcripts, it was found that 82% of switches into the HL were made in response to the discussion of emotional or highly affective topics like reminiscing about their native land or showing affection to members of their family. On the other hand, 74% of switches into the TL were functional and discussed school-related issues, official matters, and technological problems. This means that though the HL speakers have been gradually assimilating into the new environment (as seen by the dominance of the TL to 75% at the 4th phase), the HL will remain the language of the heart, providing a link between the speakers and their culture.

### Identity Markers and Convergence Trends

By the time of the fourth phase, the difference in code-mixing patterns employed by the parents and their children was becoming negligible. Though the children were more flexible, the parents adopted the code-mixing pattern of their children to keep cohesion amongst the family members. This means that code-mixing not only affects individuals but also the whole family in efforts for self-identification. The fact is that in the process of going through the timeline, the code-mixing became not only an identity marker of linguistic conflict, but also an indicator of Resilient Multilingual Identity.

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## Discussion on Identity Construction

### Third Space as a Linguistic Sanctuary

Based on the longitudinal trends shown by this research, it can be said that the code-mixing acts as a Third Space in terms of being an amalgamation of a social space and a psychological one. The statistical rise in cases of intra-sentence code mixing in phase three does not indicate deterioration of language skills. On the contrary, the increase in the use of code mixing indicates the creation of a Transcultural Identity in which the heritage language (code of emotion and memory) and the host language (code of agency and future) are mixed to form a new dialect that is unique neither to the origin country nor the host one, but unique to the family group itself.

### Generational Positioning and the Refugee Self

It clearly illustrates how differently each generation applies code-mixing to establish an identity. The case of parents can be described as a Defensive Mechanism since it maintains a link to their cultural values in the new country through code-mixing with their heritage language. However, when talking about the offspring generation, data illustrate Performative Integration when the adolescents apply the concept of code-mixing as a means of performing two roles simultaneously in a new society: being a student or a peer when shifting to the target language, and being a child or grandchild when shifting back to the heritage language. The concept of Identity Fluidity indicates that for refugees, identity is never a question of either-or, but a matter of accumulating resources.

### Linguistic Resilience and Emotional Anchorage

A pivotal finding in the discussion is the Emotional-Functional Bifurcation. The consistent use of the heritage language for high-affect topics (e.g., trauma, nostalgia, and affection) indicates that identity construction in refugee contexts is deeply rooted in Emotional Anchorage. Even as families reach 75% dominance in the host language, the preservation of heritage fragments in code-mixing acts as a form of linguistic resilience. This represents a rejection of complete annihilation. The present chapter contends that decision-makers and teachers need to interpret this Code-Mixed Identity not as an obstacle but as an indicator of mental wellness and effective assimilation.

### Synthesis

To conclude, the enduring trend uncovered in the present investigation demonstrates the process through which the family's mixed identity shifts from displacement-based to identity-based. With Phase 4, the family has attained a stable hybrid identity. As far as the theory is concerned, the family can be treated as a safe laboratory in which the Refugee Identity gradually morphs into the Multilingual Cosmopolitan Identity. Thus, this discussion confirms that code-mixing is the dominant mechanism used by refugee families to address the challenges of belonging. In other words, it proves that language is not merely a means of communication; it is also the essence of the self.

## Conclusion

This long-term study has shown that code-mixing among refugees is an evolving phenomenon rather than a fixed deficit of language skills. For 24 months, it was established that as host-language domination is linear, code-mixing frequency increases and then levels off, reflecting the inner negotiations related to the establishment of an identity in Third Space. The study showed that for the refugee population, the private sphere is a crucial discourse laboratory where intergenerational identity can be built using linguistic

hybridization. In particular, parents use code-mixing to feel emotionally connected to their native culture, whereas children apply it as a means of transcultural performance. The most important conclusion that should be drawn from this research is the identification of a temporal pathway to constructing identity in migrations. Departing from the methodological constraints associated with cross-sectional designs, this study has proved that the "Refugee Self" should not be seen as an endpoint but rather a continuously evolving process of discourse reconstruction. The results have falsified any theories of attrition, which see the emergence of a mixed-code as a demonstration of cognitive and social resilience. These findings have significant ramifications for educational and social policy considerations. Educational authorities need to embrace the idea of plurilingualism by acknowledging that code-switching can be viewed as an advanced form of communication and not as a hindrance to literacy. In addressing issues of social integration, policymakers must understand that speaking one's mother tongue does not mean one cannot integrate into the country, but that it is a prerequisite for doing so. Future research should also consider the role of social media and online platforms in shaping ideas about refugees.

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