

Pragmatic Functions of English/Setswana Code-Switching in WhatsApp Groups of a Communication Class

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Abstract—WhatsApp is a widely used technological and social platform. It is officially recognized as a channel of communication between lecturers and students at some public tertiary institutions in Botswana. As a multilingual digital space, WhatsApp enables users to alternate between languages within a single interaction, making it a fertile environment for code-switched communication. The features and purposes of code-switched communication therefore deserve scholarly attention because they provide a rich linguistic resource for pragmatic analysis. Thus, this study aimed to identify various situational uses of code-switching in the WhatsApp group of Communication Skills classes, analyze the pragmatic functions of code-switched messages, and relate these functions to students' learning needs. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach involving content analysis and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Drawing from the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), data was collected from WhatsApp groups of two classes for content analysis and from discussions with twenty (20) students. The findings reveal that except for subtle rebukes and requests, the pragmatic analysis of extracted WhatsApp data aligned with the Focus Group Discussion findings. The main convergent pragmatic functions were clarification, emphasis, humour, and cultural identity, and the only divergent pragmatic function was exclusion. The research concludes that code-switching is influenced by socio-cultural factors, particularly culture and language, as students strive to provide detailed information and seek clarification concerning their academic studies. The research recommends that students should be encouraged to communicate in English, which is understandable to lecturers and students, as code-switching often leads to linguistic marginalization and dominance.

Index Terms—communication, translation, technologies, speech acts, code-switching

I. INTRODUCTION

People are constantly changing to meet their dynamic needs (Hamdan, 2021), especially in the education sector. In recent times, there have been concerns about the pedagogical and non-pedagogical uses of indigenous languages in Botswana (Mokibelo et al., 2025; Akinkurolere et al., 2025), despite the policy statement on the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education. An everyday use of English and Setswana (the indigenous language) was observed in class WhatsApp interactions. Notably, students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and the only indigenous language for codeswitching is Setswana. This highlights the sociolinguistic issues of English linguistic dominance and Setswana's marginalisation, as well as the marginalisation of non-Setswana speakers due to English's global status (Ntombela, 2023).

In language teaching, pragmatics enables students to explore both the communicative and practical uses of language as they gain insights into utterance production and interpretation (Farinde & Oyedokun-Alli, 2020). As such, social interactions serve pragmatic functions (Al-rojaie, 2012; Cohn et al., 2023), because pragmatics is a sub-linguistic field that focuses on the contextual meaning of language among interactants (Al-Saidat et al., 2024; Yule, 2020). In teaching communication courses, language use is a pedagogical method that helps learners to retain the knowledge of the language used. It is this focus on language use in real situations that makes pragmatics a relevant linguistic approach for students' communication and teachers' guidance (Farinde & Oyedokun-Alli, 2020).

In essence, pragmatics reveals a speaker's or writer's hidden meanings while Semantics focuses on words' meanings (Siddiqui, 2018). Niu (2023) also opines that pragmatics explores the meaning-relationship between language and context. Based on these pronouncements, language, meaning, and context are key elements in pragmatics because this sub-linguistic field allows for the exploration of language use and its meaning in context (Dey, 2023). Pragmatic functions of linguistic concepts such as borrowing, hedges, politeness principles, honorifics, and speech acts within and outside education, among others, have been critically studied and reviewed (Tang, 2013; Jia, 2022; Almossa, 2023;

Wibowo et al., 2023). Borrowing is related to codeswitching because it cuts across language use, even though the structural integration of borrowing suggests that these are two linguistic concepts with various levels of integration (Jia, 2022).

Intrasentential and intersentential switching are types of code-switching which manifest in communication for varied reasons (Khalil & Firdaus, 2018). Intersentential code-switching is influenced by social factors such as mood, limited vocabulary, clarification, and emphasis (Jia, 2022). In contrast, intrasentential code-switching is characterised by discourse markers, nouns, and verbs, as observed in the case study of parliamentary debates among Malaysian bilinguals. Moreover, codeswitching is motivated by the presence of bilinguals who share similar languages, necessitating the establishment of a sense of identity or belonging across them. It suffices to say that efforts are made to provide a dominant view of both intrasentential and intersentential codeswitching, along with other types, even though Yusuf et al. (2018) identify four types of code-switching: inter-sentential code-switching, intra-sentential code-switching, tag switching, and continuity in code-switching. The first two are the most common types.

In consonance with previous studies, reasons for code switching include limited terminology, social acceptance, confirmation, personalization, clarification, emphasis, linguistic prowess, exclusion, and sense of belonging (Jia, 2016; Halim & Maros, 2014; Mabule, 2017). Indeed, the body of evidence in intercultural pragmatics research indicates that cultural concepts in one language may pose challenges in other languages (Guo & Dong, 2025). Therefore, a lack of appropriate English terms could lead to code-switching to Setswana without due regard for non-Setswana speakers.

Larsson (2023) argues that the environment influences learning processes beyond the recognition of learning as a purposeful process. This highlights the fact that a linguistic environment, as exhibited by students within and outside the classroom, has implications for students' learning. In classroom interactions, Kemaloğlu-Er and Özata (2020) identify meaning clarification, task procedures, equivalence, and emotional expression as significant purposes of code-switching. Codeswitched utterances have pragmatic implications and purposes that serve functions (Barredo, 1997), which can be better understood through pragmatic skills. For instance, interpreting playful conversations and jokes, and Facebook likes on status updates requires pragmatic skills (Bischetti et al., 2019; Hamdan, 2021), and pragmatic functions have been studied. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships and social cohesion could be established through implied or indirect politeness (Yang, 2023), while code-switching that is learner-directed enhances clarification in the classroom interaction (Zhu & Vanek, 2015).

Teachers of English as a foreign language code-switch due to the low proficiency in the language, its skills, and beliefs, while simultaneously trying to guide students in understanding vocabulary, grammar, and cultural concepts (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022). However, substantial evidence indicates that international students disapprove of the code-switching practice by local teachers in English-medium instruction universities (Zhang & Lütge, 2022). Nevertheless, there are some learning process techniques, such as humour, which could be achieved through codeswitching (Akinkulore et al., 2017). Also, cultural concepts could trigger codeswitching because students learn within specific contexts. No wonder, Ghabisha (2019) emphasizes the challenges and complexities of translating Arabic cultural words into English, with meaning preservation as the most challenging aspect.

However, there is limited data on the application of CAT to code switching in WhatsApp groups. Therefore, there is a need to fill the identified gap in students' codeswitching practices between English and Setswana. Moreover, there are instances where a lecturer and the students do not understand Setswana. Thus, the extent to which such functions meet their needs warrants scholarly attention. The results provide further insights into the rules or policymaking for class WhatsApp communication, because despite continual warnings from lecturers and other students, cases of code-switching persist. This study, therefore, considered the need to explore the pragmatic functions of code-switching among Setswana-English bilinguals by answering the following three research questions: What are the situational uses of English/Setswana code-switching in the WhatsApp group of communication skills classes in Botswana? What are the pragmatic functions of code-switched messages? How do the functions relate to students' learning needs?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Communication Accommodation Theor, previously known as the Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT), was initially developed in the 1970s by Howard Giles (Shu, 2021). As a sociolinguistic theory, it applies to both verbal and non-verbal communication of digital discourse in education. The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) explains how people adjust their linguistic behaviours through different strategies to create divergence and convergence (Rahadigama, 2023). The theory is relevant to the exploration of pragmatic functions of code switching, premised on its concepts of convergence, divergence, maintenance, and influencing factors.

Even though pragmatics has main frameworks such as deixis, speech acts, politeness, maxims, and implicatures that are relevant to the investigation of the relationship between language and context (Siddiqui, 2018; Niu, 2023), broadly speaking, pragmatics keeps expanding its analytical frames across all kinds of communication of discourse, including images (Schlöder & Altshuler, 2023).

Prominent among scholars who have applied the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to discourse are Rahadigama (2023), on political speeches, and Cohn et al. (2023), on human-computer interactions. The tenets of divergence and convergence of CAT are critically explored in Joe Biden's election acceptance and victory speech. In response to the fact that primary theories of pragmatics may not adequately capture contextual goals of specific digital

discourse, CAT was considered a suitable framework because of the pre-communication rule in the digital context, WhatsApp group, and the statement that students should only communicate in English as the official medium of instruction in the University, and the only language understood by all students. Also, why learners code-switch between dialects to portray cultural identities and create inclusion and exclusion is explainable through CAT.

III. METHODS

The study relied on a mixed methods approach using a public university in Botswana as a case study. The content analysis involved data derived from WhatsApp group communication from the Academic Literacy classes for the Sciences, focusing on examples for each of the identified functions, in line with the basic tenets of the Speech Accommodation Theory. The classes' WhatsApp groups were purposively sampled from 27 groups comprising 12 lecturers, because one of the classes was taught by an international lecturer who does not speak Setswana. This was to ensure that the analysed interactions were never meant for the lecturer. Even though the data were derived from a social media platform, the group was also restricted to the lecturer and students as an academic group. The FGD involved 20 students, purposively selected from 40 students who communicated in the class WhatsApp group through code-switching. All the 40 selected students were invited to participate in an FGD, but only 20 showed up, and they were divided into two sessions. Students participated in a two-and-a-half-hour discussion anchored by two of the researchers. The students were compensated with pens for their time, while ethical considerations of informed consent, anonymity, disclosure, and confidentiality were strictly adhered to. The FGD was recorded, transcribed, and arranged into themes. One response was chosen in cases of repetition and similar responses. Hence, ethical considerations were considered, with informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. The interactions were translated using the Setswana Translation App, while two Botswana (Botswana Nationals) lecturers cross-checked the translation for reliability and validity. The WhatsApp interactions that featured codeswitching over one semester, from January to May 2025, were analysed thematically for pragmatic functions. For the analysis, English was considered the primary language because it is the officially recognised and approved medium of instruction in Botswana's higher education.

IV. RESULTS

Based on the content analysis, about 20% of the WhatsApp communications contained code switched messages. This figure is justified because the students knew that their lecturer neither spoke nor understood Setswana. Even though the primary language was English students code-switched intentionally to achieve pragmatic functions, revealed in this section. The primary purpose of FGD was to corroborate the pragmatic functions of extracted data in the class WhatsApp groups as analyzed through the Communication Accommodation Theory.

1 Function of Emphasis

Some sentences show that students code-switch to highlight a point, as shown in 'ii' and 'iii' below.

- i. '@Ma'am, mine has not yet been graded, and it does not allow editing.'
- ii. Bagaetsho ako le mpheyeng email ya ga mam gongwe o ta responde.' (Inter-sentential)
(*Friends, please give me ma'am's email, maybe she will respond.*)
- iii. 'Le nna ntsenyeng guys. Ke hardworker ya nfana 🙏' (*Me too, please add me, guys. I am a hard worker, I swear 🙏*). (Intrasentential)

Sentence 'ii' above implies that students preferred to mention or discuss the lecturer, who was a member of the group, by relying more on Setswana than English. Only two words, 'guys' and 'email', are English words. The previous message was included to indicate that the student's earlier message had not yet been responded to by the female lecturer. Therefore, the student relied on other students, albeit Setswana speakers, to reiterate and emphasize her request, which was no longer intended for the lecturer but rather a means of contacting the lecturer by email. Consequently, it would be herculean, if not impossible, for the lecturer to interpret the message. Pragmatics is about the implied meaning meant by the speaker and interpreted by the hearer, as highlighted and defined in Al-Saidat et al. (2024). The students emphasized their need for abilities in Sentence 'iii' during the grading and project work processes. These are essential and relevant to their learning needs and experiences.

Furthermore, Sentence 'iii' indicates that the student desperately needed a group with which to work on a group-based project. The extent of swearing to attest to one's academic ability as a hard worker is an emphasis to convince group members with a small number of students. Both 'ii' and 'iii' demonstrate the lecturer and non-Setswana speakers' exclusion, which connects with the notion of divergence in the Communication Accommodation Theory.

It was also noted that the examples illustrating emphasis are also good examples of the pragmatic function of request. Therefore, it could be argued that an instance of code switching could serve more than one pragmatic function.

Emphasis is a primary pragmatic function that kept recurring, just as clarification did, in the discussion with the students. This highlights the significance of emphasis in the class WhatsApp group through code-switching. The findings from the students' discussion underscore the pragmatic function of emphasis in classroom code-switching. The emphasis, is intended to highlight and draw attention to key concepts and ideas that were notable in the FGD. This is not far-fetched, given that students always yearn for clarity in messages, leading to emphasis. Therefore, emphasis is a

response to a request for clarification. Students were eager to reiterate the emphasis on code-switching as a pragmatic function as illustrated in the verbatim extracts below:

- i. *Emphasis...when trying to imply more on something that I feel is important to be understood by all.*
- ii. *Emphasis (expressing points in both Setswana and English).*
- iii. *Emphasis: My native language has available options to highlight a point.*
- iv. *Adding emphasis.*
- v. *For emphasis or clarification—for example, explaining certain concepts to a native Setswana speaker helps them better understand them.*
- vi. *Emphasis, so that they fully understand what I am saying. I would say a word in English, then say it in Setswana.*

Both emphasis and clarification are intricately woven around the understanding and dissemination of information. Through these, the students found English-Setswana code-switching to be a social act with pedagogical implications for learners. The pedagogical functions identified earlier by Jia (2016) are justified by further empirical investigations in another context, which add to their credibility. No doubt, the pragmatic function of emphasis plays a converging role in communication accommodation.

2 Pragmatic Function of Request

Copious examples indicate that students seek information through code-switching, as shown under the pragmatic function of emphasis and below.

- i. 'For those of you doing PHY122... Ke kopa drive ya experiment 12... Inbox please' (Intra-sentential)
(*For those of you doing PHY122... Please send me the drive for Experiment 12... Inbox me, please.*)
- ii. Student A: Ke yeo cv. Looking for a group! (*Here is my CV*) (Inter-sentential)

Student B: Le nna 🙋 (Me too)

Student C: Le nna (Me too)

The above is a conversation between three students. The first is codeswitched between English and Setswana, while the other two students responded in Setswana. The example of 'i' is not just a request, but a polite one using 'please.' Even though the student addressed other students, the nature of the request and the cultural underpinning politeness play out in the utterance. This implies that politeness relates to the culture of request in the Botswana context, which is also identified as an element of culture by Widianti (2021) in Japanese work culture. It is worth noting that students did not explicitly state that they code-switch when making requests. This is understandable because, at their level, they perceive a request as a form of clarification. Further probing into the use of code-switching for specific requests, as Example 2, was intended to elicit a negative response; hence, students perform certain pragmatic acts, such as making a request, without realizing it.

3 Pragmatic Function of Humour

When students joke or adopt a playful tone, they often code-switch. This aligns with Kemaloğlu-Er and Özata's (2020) submission that students code-switch for emotional expressions in groups. The following expressions are humorous.

- i. 'It's obviously ko Biac Mme kana bagolwane bame 🙄' (Intra-sentential)
(*It is obviously at BIAC, but seriously, my elders 🙄*)
- ii. 'Dumelang Botsadi ke kopa go addiwa mo di Groupon tsa class cause ke mosha and ga ke na Group so ke kopa go addiwa 🙏🙏🙏😞😞' (Intra-sentential)
(*Greetings parents, I am requesting to be added to the class WhatsApp groups because I am new and I do not have a group, so please add me 🙏🙏🙏😞😞*)

Students attempted to create a humorous atmosphere by referring to more knowledgeable students as 'elders' and 'parents'. These humorous messages are intended for fellow Setswana-speaking students to convey politeness, thereby, making a fun joke of politeness. The only person who deserved some degree of respect in the group was the lecturer, but ironically, she did not understand Setswana. Instead, the students were directing their humorous politeness to fellow students. By implication, Yang's (2023) observation that indirectness in politeness helps establish pragmatic functions in euphemism applies to codeswitching in this context, as the students attempted to strengthen interpersonal relationships.

In WhatsApp communication, students tend to crack jokes with one another, as evidenced by hypothetical examples extracted from their chats. In these extracts, the humorous statements are not meant for the lecturer and international students. The use of humor in the class WhatsApp group is not only intentional but it also indirectly excludes non-Setswana speakers. For example, some perspectives extracted from students' FGD are stated below.

- i. *I think humor because Setswana has a way of bringing life to conversations and is very funny.*
- ii. *Humour- Some puns and some words are best said in Setswana for better understanding and for the pun to come through among learners.*
- iii. *Other times, I use it for humour, even though it may make international students feel left out.*
- iv. *Humor, mostly comments, not a lot.*

The mention of international students' exclusion in humorous messages suggests that they did not mind their presence. This indicates that they were insensitive to the plight of such international students as they are totally excluded from

humorous conversations. Research has shown that incorporating humour into the learning process improves knowledge retention (Akinkulore et al., 2017). Therefore, facts, information, and concepts joked about may not be forgotten by the students.

4 Pragmatic Function of Subtle Rebuke

In any group, conflict is likely to arise when students have diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Widianti (2021) identifies a lack of understanding and misperceptions as the causes of misunderstanding. It was noted that some students could be rude in requesting information and addressing the lecturer, while others softly criticized by relying on codeswitching and leveraging their shared native language. Ironically, most of the insulting words were never used in English to exclude the lecturer. In the course of rebuking such misconduct, fellow students also leveraged codeswitching to correct others or react to a rebuke, without involving the lecturer. In essence, both the lecturer and non-Setswana speakers were excluded from such interactions.

i. 'My bruh u are talking to maam kana do u know that?' (*My bruh, you are talking to ma'am, do you know that?*) (Intra-sentential)

ii. 'Ron's re kwala ka di 11 ke bona gotwe 4-11. Leska nkgolegaa, maybe I was dreaming.' (*We were told to write at 11, but I saw it says 4-11. Please do not judge me—maybe I was dreaming.*) (Intra/inter-sentential)

At the time of data retrieval, the initial message addressed to the lecturer had already been deleted. Evidently, the pragmatic function of rebuke yielded the intended result, even though the accused gave a defence with an implied apology by saying, 'I was dreaming.' Therefore, a fellow student was rebuked without exposing the student to the lecturer through code-switching.

5 Pragmatic Function of Clarification

Students leveraged code switching to seek or provide clarification. Learning is about assimilating information. Even when information is shared, clarification is still required most of the time. Students tended to code-switch when seeking clarification.

i. 'Any group dah.' (*Any group available?*)

ii. 'Kana ba re senang re similoleng ya rona.' (*They said those of us without a group should start our own.*)

iii. 'Ok dira group ya WhatsApp o re tsenye.' (*Okay, create a WhatsApp group and add us.*)

The above shows how students code-switched when their course mates responded to their enquiries. 'They' in Sentence ii is a honorific pronoun for the lecturer. This proves Zhu and Vanek (2015) right in their assertion that codeswitching aids clarification in the classroom, as the WhatsApp platform serves as an informal digital classroom. Moreover, some students could miss vital information when they missed lessons.

In the FGD, the students highlighted clarification as a key function and purpose of their code-switching practices in the class WhatsApp group.

Specific verbatim extracts from the students are as follows:

i. *I code-switch when there is a task to do and instructions to follow.*

ii. *Because I am not fluent in English, it will be hard to clarify.*

iii. *I use Setswana in instances where it is not easy to articulate a concept in English. In that scenario, we use Setswana to clarify amongst ourselves before we switch code back to English after coining a meaningful translation without deviating from the context for the benefit of everyone involved.*

iv. *When asking for some information e.g., deadline ya assignment ke leng? (What is the deadline for the assignment?)*

v. *I use Setswana with English when I want to clarify something that others may not understand well in English.*

The above provides compelling evidence that code-switching to clarify instructions, complex concepts, tasks, and information is a key pragmatic implication recognized by students. The application of this function aligns with the learning objective. Thus, students must find code-switching beneficial to their academic success. No wonder students were able to note the advantages of code switching between English and Setswana.

The discussed advantages are embedded in the use of clarification, as students gained a better understanding, participated in discussions, and engaged more in class group communication. By saying "*The understanding becomes more easier, and more understanding means more participation in class*", "*It encourages participation without limiting students*" and "*It enhances student's understanding and participation as they will be able to be more engaged in the discussions since their home language is used*", indicate that the use of code switching to achieve clarification, which is sacrosanct as a convergent purpose in the Communication Accommodation Theory.

6 Pragmatic Function of Exclusion

All the code-switched messages demonstrate a deliberate attempt to exclude the lecturer, and non-Setswana Speakers. This serves as a point of divergence in thoughts and interpretations according to the Communication Accommodation Theory (Rahadigama, 2023).

i. 'Ke ko Biac' (*I am at BIAC*)

ii. 'Are you sure Biac O kgakala kana ake batle go boa Kwa ke timetse lesson tla tloga E fela' (*Are you sure it is BIAC? It is far, and I do not want to go there and miss the lesson for nothing.*)

The interaction above is between two students and was about the location of the lesson. The choice of the general group necessitates code switching to exclude the lecturer and non-Setswana speakers. Aside from the above example, which outrightly demonstrates exclusion, their expressions also serve as primary functions alongside exclusion.

In the FGD, exclusion was noted as both a pragmatic act and a disadvantage. From their responses, it is apparent that it could be performed deliberately and unintentionally, and they both put international students at a disadvantage. Some of the students highlighted points include the following:

- i. *Code-switching excludes Setswana-speaking students.*
- ii. *Code-switching is disadvantageous for international students.*
- iii. *Some students feel left out when we communicate in a language they do not understand, e.g., Setswana.*
- iv. *Code-switching makes some students feel excluded.*
- v. *Exclusion- not everyone speaks Setswana.*

Students' discussion provides in-depth insights into the exclusionary act of English-Setswana code-switching in class WhatsApp communication. Even though codeswitching facilitates engagement and interaction, its role in a diverse class is acknowledged as hindering an inclusive learning environment. This is consistent with previous research (Jia, 2016; Halim & Maros, 2014; Mabule, 2017) that shows that code-switching can lead to exclusion by non-speakers of other languages.

It is notable that the revelation that 'code switching makes some students feel excluded' in example 'iv' places the act of exclusion as a generated reaction on the part of non-speakers than an admission of the act committed by the speaker. This implies that such an act of codeswitching was meant for English-Setswana speakers. Therefore, the benefits of code-switching could only be maximized by Setswana-English bilingual students.

7 Pragmatic Function of Belongingness/ Cultural Identity

The deployment of Setswana in code-switching implies an attempt to connect only with its speakers. This is the underlying force of convergence in the Communication Accommodation Theory. In situations where students' identities are challenged, codeswitching can help navigate this complexity, achieve acceptance, and make a positive impact (Wright et al., 2022).

- i. 'Dumelang, ke kopa group hleng 🙏' (*Hello, I am requesting to join a group please 🙏*) (Intersentential)

'Dumelang' is the main traditional greeting in Botswana. This creates a cultural and linguistic bond in the learning process. Since it is a form of greeting, the use of 'Dumelang' here is not limited to establishing a cultural bond but also serves as a polite function only to Setswana speakers. It is noteworthy that the sentence 'i', above, acts as a polite request too. There are other traditional instances of using Setswana words such as 'friends', 'parents', and 'elders' for course mates in code-switched messages, which signify politeness. The use of emoticons and emojis demonstrates politeness, courtesy, or loyalty, but this falls outside the purview of the foci of this study, even though Zheng (2023) argues that emojis are standard features of online communication and serve as substitutes for non-verbal behaviours (Li & Yang, 2018).

During FGD sessions, the students discussed codeswitching as a way to express their identity and create a sense of belonging. This is deeply rooted in the convergence principle of the Communication Accommodation Theory. This underscores the pivotal role of codeswitching in fostering cultural bonds among Setswana speakers, thereby corroborating the pragmatic analysis of the communication extracted from the class WhatsApp group.

- i. *Identity, for example, if someone asks me about my origin, I will speak Setswana to prove my identity.*
- ii. *I codeswitch to portray my identity as a Motswana (Botswana citizen).*
- iii. *I codeswitch when talking about Batswana culture, which is advisable, as it would be better to use Setswana to describe the words, so they do not lose their meaning.*
- iv. *It makes me feel at ease and gives me a sense of belonging.*
- v. *Using Setswana in the class WhatsApp group helps me feel connected to my cultural identity and builds a sense of belonging"*
- vi. *English/Setswana codeswitching is good when talking about the Batswana culture, as it is advisable to use Setswana to describe the words, so they do not lose their meaning.*

Emerging subthemes in the students' discussion include cultural preservation and meaning preservation, aligning with Ghabisha's (2019) assertions on the importance of preserving the meaning of cultural concepts. Indeed, code-switching is one of the solutions to the problems of translating cultural concepts. This pragmatic function reveals that students used their native language (Setswana) as a valuable tool for convergence, in line with the Communication Accommodation theoretical principles.

Furthermore, permitting students to code-switch when discussing cultural concepts could help non-speakers understand the meanings of these concepts and ideas, as well as help establish rapport among Setswana speakers. This does not undermine the possibility of cultivating divergence among learners, as understanding Setswana depends on the interests of international students.

V. DISCUSSION

The results from the classes' WhatsApp communication and FGD sessions have proved that code-switching is deployed to perform pragmatic functions in class communication. These functions have direct learning implications

because learning is intentional and purposeful (Larsson, 2023). Functions of clarification, request, and emphasis relate to information sharing, hence, exclusion robs non-speakers of vital information that facilitates learning.

However, humour, subtle rebuke, and connections between cultural identity/sense of belonging have cultural underpinnings, enabling intercultural integration through borrowing (Jia, 2022) and codeswitching. Code-switching in WhatsApp communication falls under the Media (M) category in Akinkurolere et al.'s (2025) BATOME model of formal uses of indigenous languages in higher education. This usage in media can be achieved through intra-sentential code-switching; whereby non-Setswana Speakers could easily guess or decode the meaning of one or two words based on context. This is both a pragmatic act and skill as implied in the work of Farinde and Oyedokun-Alli (2020).

Furthermore, some participants were not English-Setswana bilinguals but Setswana semilinguals, who code-switched with minimal words for emphasis, sense of belonging, and clarity, among others, such as using 'Kana' (I think). 'I think' and 'I do not think' in interactions are examples of stance markers, which function pragmatically (Sabet & Zhang, 2018). This is an example of attempt by non-speakers to integrate linguistically and culturally.

Also, given Jia's (2022) position on pragmatic functions of borrowing, it is challenging to differentiate intrasentential code-switching from borrowing, especially when it involves only one word and serves an emphatic function. Users' perspectives could help unravel whether they borrow or code-switch in unique situations involving a single word, whether in English or Setswana. At times, codeswitching is used through divergence strategies to defend one's identity (Jazeri & Nurhayati, 2019), as students find their true identity in their native language.

There is no doubt that accommodation strategies could be linguistically and culturally challenging when group members have different first languages (Rogerson-Revell, 2010). In fact, the more group members have different first languages, the more challenges arise in interactions. However, since no other indigenous language was employed in codeswitching aside from Setswana, this implies minimal challenges for non-speakers and it establishes Setswana as an indigenous language of dominance, and code-switchers' deliberate refusal to adjust their interactions for an international audience, thereby decolonising class WhatsApp interactions.

However, the lecturer-students WhatsApp group communication was rich in linguistic resources beyond code-switching. Codeswitched messages produced are relevant for expanding, elaborating, explaining, introducing a new topic, and sustaining the platform, just like interactions in one language (Almosa, 2023). Others include borrowing, emoticons, abbreviations, and speech acts. Exclusion and subtle rebuke are the pragmatic functions of divergence. At the same time, emphasis, request, clarification, belonging, and humour constitute the pragmatic functions of convergence in students' codeswitched messages during their class WhatsApp communication.

Regarding how code-switching meets students' learning needs, students posited that '*code-switching can help them understand topics better*' and '*it helps local students comprehend the message effectively*'. Another significant response is '*it encourages students to participate in discussion*'. By implication, codeswitching has pedagogical benefits for users of the languages. It is clear that codeswitching patterns and discussions are intricately woven around Shu's (2021) submission that new media platforms are mostly convergent, and that readers' habits and language patterns influence this. In addition, Shetewi (2023) asserts that issues of identity and language prestige influence interactions in group communication. These, indeed, contribute towards the accommodation patterns in the class WhatsApp group. Hence, group or intergroup communication can be interpreted through the communication accommodation theory (Cohn et al., 2023).

VI. CONCLUSION

Codeswitching among Setswana-English bilinguals in a Communication Skills class WhatsApp group is a deliberate exclusion of lecturers to achieve certain pragmatic functions among learners. Also, this exclusion affects non-Setswana speakers, indicating Setswana's dominance. Indeed, the prohibition of Setswana in the WhatsApp group has failed because students are motivated to perform certain pragmatic functions. Hence, it is obvious that they prioritise pragmatic functions over WhatsApp communication rules.

The pragmatic functions of clarification, emphasis, and request are significant for students' cognition and overall learning experiences, and both the extracted data and the FGD have established this. The study recommends a further qualitative study on use of code-switching in class group discussions in higher institutions of learning to elicit other pragmatic functions and students' insights into face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, lecturers should encourage students to communicate in English, but Setswana use should include translation in WhatsApp groups to promote inclusion of international students, non-Setswana speakers, and lecturers.

Non-speakers, such as international lecturers and students, should explore Setswana translation software or applications to understand Setswana utterances, as this contributes to cross-cultural understanding. For equity, lecturers, whether Motswana or not, should never communicate in Setswana, as WhatsApp communication contributes to the overall teaching and learning processes, as established through communication extracts and focus group discussions.

APPENDIX

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

TITLE: THE USE OF ENGLISH-SETSWANA CODESWITCHING IN WHATSAPP GROUPS OF COMMUNICATION CLASS

Purpose of the Focus Group: This purpose of the group is to gather views and practical experiences on the use of English-Setswana codeswitching in WhatsApp group in a communication class. This discussion will help to identify the pragmatic functions of English-Setswana codeswitching.

1. Discuss the language use in the class WhatsApp group.

How often is English-Setswana used in WhatsApp group communication in your class?

2. Explain the pragmatic functions of English-Setswana codeswitching.

In what situations or for what purposes do you codeswitch in class WhatsApp group (e.g., clarification, emphasis, examples, humor, etc.)

3. Discuss your perceptions on codeswitching as a motivating factor in class WhatsApp group.

How does the use of English-Setswana codeswitching influence students' understanding and participation in class despite having non-Setswana speakers in the group?

4. Discuss the pedagogical Implications of English-Setswana codeswitching.

How does English-Setswana codeswitching influence your general learning experience? Can you share specific examples?

5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Codeswitching in a Learning Context

What are the merits and demerits of English-Setswana codeswitching in the class WhatsApp group?

6. Recommendations

What recommendations would you give regarding the future use of English-Setswana codeswitching in university class WhatsApp discussion?

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