

CODE-SWITCHING AT MOMENTS OF AUTHORITY: WHEN UZBEK PUBLIC RELATIONS TURNS TO ENGLISH

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Abstract

In contemporary Uzbekistan, English increasingly appears in public-facing institutional discourse – understood here as language produced by official organizations to inform, regulate, and manage public behavior, particularly at moments requiring authority, compliance, or procedural clarity. This article investigates code-switching into English in Uzbek public relations (PR) discourse, focusing on three high-control genres: announcements, policies, and warnings. Using a pilot corpus of official digital communications from government e-services, higher education institutions, state websites, and transport authorities, the study demonstrates that English insertions are strategically used at *moments of authority*: deadlines, restrictions, instructions, and alerts – rather than randomly or decoratively. The findings suggest that English functions as a pragmatic authority marker, indexing modernity, institutional legitimacy, and reduced ambiguity in governance communication. The article contributes to research on code-switching, linguistic landscape, and institutional discourse in post-Soviet multilingual contexts.

Keywords

code-switching, authority discourse, Uzbek PR, English in public communication, linguistic landscape, institutional pragmatics

Annotatsiya

Zamonaviy O'zbekistonda ingliz tili jamoatchilikka yo'naltirilgan institutsional diskursda tobora ko'proq qo'llanilmoqda. Bu yerda institutsional diskurs rasmiy tashkilotlar tomonidan jamoatchilikni xabardor qilish, tartibga solish hamda jamoat xulq-atvorini boshqarish maqsadida yaratilgan til shakllari sifatida tushuniladi. Ayniqsa, hokimiyat, majburiylik yoki protseduraviy aniqlik talab etiladigan vaziyatlarda ingliz tilidan foydalanish kuchaymoqda. Mazkur maqola o'zbek jamoatchilik bilan aloqalar (PR) diskursida ingliz tiliga kod-almashish hodisasini tahlil qiladi va e'lonlar, siyosatlar hamda ogohlantirishlar kabi yuqori nazoratli janrlarga e'tibor qaratadi. Davlat elektron xizmatlari, oliy ta'lim muassasalari, rasmiy veb-saytlar va transport idoralari tomonidan e'lon qilingan raqamli matnlardan iborat pilot korpus asosida olib borilgan tahlil shuni ko'rsatadiki, ingliz tilidagi birliklar tasodifiy yoki bezakli tarzda emas, balki muddatlar, cheklovlar, ko'rsatmalar va ogohlantirishlar kabi hokimiyatni ifodalovchi nuqtalarda strategik tarzda qo'llaniladi. Natijalar ingliz tili boshqaruv kommunikatsiyasida zamonaviylik, institutsional legitimlik hamda noaniqlikni kamaytirish bilan bog'liq pragmatik hokimiyat belgisi sifatida faoliyat yuritishini ko'rsatadi. Mazkur tadqiqot post-sovet ko'p tilli makonida kod-almashish, lingvistik landshaft va institutsional diskurs tadqiqotlariga hissa qo'shadi.

Kalit so'zlar

kod-almashish, hokimiyat diskursi, o'zbek PR, jamoat kommunikatsiyasida ingliz tili, lingvistik landshaft, institutsional pragmatika

Аннотация

В современном Узбекистане английский язык все чаще используется в публично ориентированном институциональном дискурсе, понимаемом здесь как язык, производимый официальными организациями с целью информирования, регулирования и

управления общественным поведением, особенно в ситуациях, требующих демонстрации власти, соблюдения предписаний или процедурной точности. В данной статье рассматривается код-переключение на английский язык в узбекском дискурсе связей с общественностью (PR) с фокусом на три жанра с высоким уровнем институционального контроля: объявления, политики и предупреждения. На основе пилотного корпуса официальных цифровых текстов, опубликованных государственными электронными сервисами, высшими учебными заведениями, государственными веб-сайтами и транспортными ведомствами, показано, что включения английского языка используются стратегически – в точках институциональной власти, таких как сроки, ограничения, инструкции и оповещения, – а не случайно или в декоративных целях. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что английский язык функционирует как прагматический маркер власти, индексируя модерность, институциональную легитимность и снижение неоднозначности в управленческой коммуникации.

Ключевые слова

код-переключение, дискурс власти, узбекский PR, английский язык в публичной коммуникации, лингвистический ландшафт, институциональная прагматика

Introduction

Code-switching has long been examined as a conversational, identity-based, or pedagogical phenomenon; however, in institutional settings, language choice is rarely neutral. Early sociolinguistic research conceptualizes code-switching as a meaning-making resource tied to interactional context and social relations, yet these explanations are insufficient for understanding language choice in authoritative institutional environments [7: 130–134; 11: 75–80]. In Uzbekistan, where Uzbek functions as the state language and Russian remains widely used in public life, the growing presence of English in official and semi-official communication raises significant questions about power, legitimacy, and governance. Language choice in such contexts reflects broader ideological processes related to modernization, global integration, and administrative control rather than individual identity alone [6: 101–105; 12: 55–58]. This linguistic shift is particularly visible in public relations discourse, where language is carefully selected to regulate behaviour, convey institutional stance, and ensure compliance. Institutional communication is therefore shaped by asymmetrical power relations and communicative constraints, requiring language forms that minimize ambiguity and maximize authority [1: 23–27; 13: 44–49].

This study focuses on a specific and under-explored pattern: the use of English at moments of authority in Uzbek public relations discourse. Such moments include deadlines, warnings, official announcements, procedural instructions, and policy-adjacent notices – contexts in which institutions exercise control over time, access, and acceptable behavior [9: 33–38]. Rather than treating English as a diffuse symbol of globalization or prestige, the article argues that English is selectively mobilized as a pragmatic resource to reinforce authoritative speech acts. In these contexts, English functions to compress meaning, reduce ambiguity, and signal institutional legitimacy, thereby strengthening the force and clarity of public communication [2: 17–19; 3: 81–83].

Literature Review

Early research on code-switching conceptualized the phenomenon primarily as an interactional and conversational practice. Gumperz introduced the notion of code-switching as a contextualization cue through which speakers signal shifts in activity type and social meaning, while Myers-Scotton's markedness model frames language choice as a strategic negotiation of rights and obligations [7: 130–134; 11: 75–80]. In these frameworks, code-switching is largely understood as speaker-driven and closely tied to identity negotiation and interpersonal relations.

Later scholarship expanded this perspective by examining code-switching in institutional and professional contexts, where communicative choices are constrained by organizational norms and power asymmetries. In such settings, language choice reflects shifts in authority and task orientation rather than personal identity [1: 23–27; 13: 44–49]. From a pragmatic perspective, institutional communication frequently involves directive and regulatory speech acts, where communicative success depends on authority, clarity, and compliance. In bureaucratic discourse, language functions less as self-expression and more as a tool of governance [12: 55–58]. Research further demonstrates that in non-Anglophone contexts, English often acquires a specialized institutional role due to its association with standardization, neutrality, and global administrative norms, leading to its interpretation as a “language of authority” [10: 18–22; 12: 55–58].

English in linguistic landscapes and governance contexts

Studies of linguistic landscapes show that the distribution of languages in public space reflects underlying power relations and institutional ideologies. English frequently indexes modernity, technological advancement, and international orientation even where it is not widely spoken [2: 33–37].

In post-Soviet and Asian contexts, English has become increasingly linked to globalization and state modernization projects. It often functions as a lingua franca in governance, education, and administration, gaining pragmatic value beyond native-speaker norms [10: 18–22]. Critical perspectives emphasize that the global spread of English is closely tied to institutional authority and structural power, particularly in transitional and post-Soviet societies [12: 55–58].

Research on language policy in post-Soviet Central Asia highlights the complex interplay between national language promotion, multilingual legacies, and global languages. While Uzbek has been promoted as the state language, Russian has retained functional importance, and English has increasingly emerged as a language associated with reform, international engagement, and institutional prestige [6: 101–105; 10: 18–22].

Policy-oriented studies further show that English is promoted through education reform and institutional discourse as a resource for efficiency, professionalism, and global competitiveness, particularly in higher education and digital governance [5: 9–12; 4: 4–6]. However, most existing studies focus on where English appears—such as signage, curricula, or policy documents - rather than how and when it is deployed within institutional texts. The pragmatic timing of English usage at moments of authority remains underexplored [2: 33–38].

Taken together, existing literature provides strong theoretical foundations for understanding code-switching, institutional discourse, and the symbolic role of English in public communication. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in research concerning the temporal and functional positioning of English within institutional messages. Specifically, few studies have examined how English is strategically introduced at particular moments within public relations discourse to strengthen authority, reduce ambiguity, and enforce compliance. By focusing on this pragmatic dimension, the present study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of code-switching as an institutional and governance-related practice in a post-Soviet multilingual context.

Data and Methodology

This study is based on a pilot qualitative corpus of 45 public-facing institutional texts produced between 2023 and 2025. The corpus includes official digital communications published by government e-service platforms, higher education institutions, state and parliamentary websites, and national transport authorities. The focus on digital PR texts reflects the growing role of online platforms in institutional governance and public regulation, where language choice is tightly controlled and highly visible [1: 23–27; 13: 44–49]. Only texts addressed to the general public and carrying instructional, regulatory, or authoritative force were included in the corpus. These texts comprise announcements, policy-related notices, and

warnings—genres that are characterized by asymmetrical power relations and limited interpretive flexibility, which makes them particularly suitable for examining authority-oriented language use [9: 33–38]. The analysis adopts a qualitative discourse-pragmatic approach, drawing on established frameworks in institutional discourse analysis and pragmatics. Each text was examined for the presence and positioning of English code-switches, with particular attention to their functional role within the communicative sequence. This approach aligns with research that treats language in institutional settings as a tool for regulation and governance rather than interpersonal expression [12: 55–58; 1: 23–27]. For analytical purposes, all texts were manually coded according to three parameters:

- (1) the location of English insertion (headline, body text, footer, or attribution),
- (2) the form of the English element (single lexical item, phrase, platform label, or full text), and
- (3) the function of the surrounding speech act (e.g. deadline enforcement, procedural instruction, warning, or institutional attribution). This coding scheme reflects register-based distinctions between field, tenor, and mode and allows for systematic comparison across genres [9: 33–38].

Interpretation of the findings is informed by register theory and pragmatic models of communicative effectiveness, particularly the view that language choice contributes to the strength and clarity of illocutionary force in institutional communication [3: 81–83; 4: 17–19]. While no quantitative generalization is claimed, frequency observations within the pilot corpus were used to identify recurring functional patterns, consistent with exploratory discourse-analytic research design [1: 23–27]. One of the most recurrent English insertions across the pilot corpus is the word *deadline*, particularly in higher education and academic governance communication. Although Uzbek equivalents such as *oxirgi muddat* are available, *deadline* consistently appears at points where time control becomes enforceable rather than merely informational.

Examples:

- ((1) Hujjatlarni topshirishning oxirgi kuni – deadline bugun soat 18:00.

[14] TATU official Telegram channel

https://t.me/s/tuituz_official?q=deadline

- (2) Ro'yxatdan o'tish deadline 15-mart kuni yakunlanadi.

Source: University admission announcements (Telegram, multiple Uzbek HEIs)

https://t.me/s/tuituz_official

In these examples, Uzbek provides the propositional content, while English marks the non-negotiable temporal boundary. The English term functions as a compressed, internationally recognizable compliance signal that reduces interpretive flexibility and strengthens the directive force of the message.

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Examples:

- (3) Mobil ilovani **Google Play** va **App Store** orqali yuklab olishingiz mumkin.

Source: my.gov.uz official Telegram channel

[15] <https://t.me/s/mygovuz>

- (4) Xizmatdan foydalanish uchun **QR-code** orqali ro'yxatdan o'ting.

Source: State digital services announcements (my.gov.uz)

<https://my.gov.uz>

Here, English platform labels function as register-specific elements, reflecting interface reality rather than stylistic choice. The switch indexes procedural authority and aligns institutional discourse with global digital governance norms.

Alert framing and warning discourse

Several institutional notices employ English alert formulas in headline position, followed by explanatory text in Uzbek. This pattern reflects global warning conventions and immediately frames the message as urgent and official.

Examples:

(5) Attention! Announcement! Texnik ishlar sababli xizmat vaqtincha to'xtatiladi.

Source: National Institute of Metrology (Uzstandard system)

<https://nim.uz/2025/05/20/attention-announcement-2/>

(6) Attention! Quyidagi talablarga qat'iy amal qiling.

Source: Sectoral institutional announcements (Uzbek state agencies)

<https://nim.uz>

Here, English functions as a genre trigger, signaling warning or urgency before the substantive content is processed. The switch occurs precisely at the point where heightened attention and compliance are required.

Institutional legitimacy and infrastructural attribution

English also appears in technical and infrastructural attribution on state websites, particularly in references to service providers or platform developers.

Examples:

(7) *Sayt yaratuvchisi: Online Service Group*

(Parliamentary website, 2024,

<https://parliament.gov.uz/requests>)

(8) *Texnik qo'llab-quvvatlash: IT Support Center*

(State service portal footer, 2023)

These insertions do not directly address citizens but contribute to the construction of institutional credibility, associating public services with professional, globally legible technological expertise. Full English for international authority

In domains requiring international intelligibility—most notably aviation—English is used exclusively. This reflects operational norms rather than symbolic prestige.

Examples:

(9) *Dear passengers and greeters! Due to technical reasons, the flight has been postponed.*

Source: Uzbekistan Airways press releases

<https://www.uzairways.com/en/press-center/news>

(10) *Passengers are kindly requested to proceed to the boarding gate immediately.*

Source: Uzbekistan Airways operational announcements

<https://www.uzairways.com>

In Bachman and Palmer's terms (1996), English here maximizes communicative effectiveness by ensuring international intelligibility, regulatory compliance, and operational clarity.

In such contexts, English functions as the default language of control, aligning local authority with international regulatory and safety standards.

Across the 45-text pilot corpus, English insertions cluster systematically at moments where institutions manage time, procedure, attention, and compliance. Rather than appearing randomly or decoratively, English operates as a pragmatic authority marker, reinforcing the directive force and institutional legitimacy of public-facing communication.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that English in Uzbek public relations discourse is functionally concentrated at moments of authority, correlating with time regulation, behavioural control, procedural clarity, institutional legitimacy, and international governance domains. Rather than replacing Uzbek, English operates as a pragmatic intensifier that strengthens the illocutionary force of institutional speech acts [9: 33–38; 2: 17–19; 3: 81–83].

Implications

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this study underscores the importance of attending to the temporal and functional positioning of code-switching in analysis. The findings demonstrate that not only where English appears in institutional discourse, but also when it appears within the communicative sequence, is crucial for understanding its pragmatic and social meaning. Code-switching emerges as a strategically timed resource linked to authority and control rather than a diffuse marker of bilingualism.

In terms of public communication and policy, recognizing how English indexes authority can contribute to clearer and more transparent institutional messaging. In multilingual societies, language choice plays a significant role in shaping public trust, perceived legitimacy, and willingness to comply with regulations. Strategic and consistent use of language can therefore enhance the effectiveness of governance communication.

For applied linguistics and assessment, the results have direct relevance to discourse-based assessment, English for Academic Purposes instruction, and professional training in institutional and administrative writing. Mastery of register control and pragmatic appropriateness—particularly the ability to deploy language resources that convey authority—constitutes an important communicative competence in academic and professional contexts.

Limitations and Further Research

This article is based on a pilot corpus and is therefore exploratory in scope. While the findings reveal consistent and meaningful patterns, they are not intended to be statistically generalizable across all forms of Uzbek institutional communication. Future research should expand the dataset to include a wider range of ministries, regional institutions, and modes of communication in order to test the robustness of the observed tendencies. Comparative analyses between authority-driven and non-authoritative PR genres would further clarify the functional specificity of English code-switching. In addition, audience perception studies could examine how language choice influences trust, legitimacy, and compliance among different population groups. Finally, contrasting Uzbek public relations discourse with that of other post-Soviet multilingual contexts would allow for broader theoretical generalization and contribute to cross-regional understandings of English as a register of governance.

Conclusion

English in Uzbek public relations discourse is neither random nor merely decorative, nor does it function solely as a diffuse marker of globalization. Instead, it emerges strategically at moments of authority, where institutions seek to compress regulatory meaning, signal legitimacy, and enforce compliance. By focusing on the temporal and functional positioning of English within institutional texts—examining when it appears rather than simply where—it becomes possible to understand code-switching as a form of institutional pragmatics. This perspective offers a more precise account of how language choice operates as a tool of governance in multilingual public communication and contributes to broader sociolinguistic discussions of authority, register, and power in contemporary institutional discourse.

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