

Code-Switching Patterns in Bilingual Youth Literature of Central Europe

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Abstract — Contemporary youth literature produced in multilingual Central European contexts increasingly incorporates code-switching as a stylistic device reflecting the everyday linguistic experience of bilingual young readers, yet the narrative functions of such switching remain underexamined relative to code-switching research in spoken discourse. This study analyzes code-switching patterns across a corpus of recently published bilingual youth novels, examining where in narrative structure code-switching occurs and what discourse functions it serves, including character voice differentiation, emotional emphasis, and marking of culturally specific concepts without translation. Close textual analysis is combined with reader response data gathered from focus groups of bilingual adolescent readers, allowing comparison between authorial intent inferred from textual patterns and actual reader interpretation of switching instances. Findings indicate that code-switching most frequently occurs at moments of heightened emotional intensity or peer dialogue, functioning less as translation avoidance than as an authenticity marker recognized and valued by bilingual readers themselves. Readers reported stronger character identification with passages containing naturalistic switching compared to fully monolingual equivalents. These findings contribute to understanding how literary code-switching operates as a deliberate narrative resource in multilingual youth publishing markets.

Index Terms — code-switching, bilingual literature, youth literature, sociolinguistics, Central Europe

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary youth literature produced in multilingual Central European contexts increasingly incorporates code-switching as a stylistic device, reflecting the everyday linguistic experience of bilingual young readers [1]. While code-switching in spoken discourse has attracted extensive sociolinguistic attention, its narrative functions within written fiction remain comparatively underexamined [2].

Literary code-switching may serve functions distinct from conversational switching, including character voice differentiation and the marking of culturally specific concepts that resist straightforward translation [3]. Whether authorial intent inferred from textual patterns aligns with actual reader interpretation is a further open question with implications for multilingual publishing practice [4].

This study analyzes code-switching patterns across a corpus of recently published bilingual youth novels, combining close textual analysis with reader response data from bilingual adolescent focus groups.

Table 1. Code-switching instances by function and narrative position

Function Category	Dialogue Instances	Narration Instances	Ratio
Emotional emphasis	142	38	3.74
Character voice	118	27	4.37
Cultural reference	64	71	0.90
Peer dialogue marking	96	12	8.00

II. RELATED WORK

Sociolinguistic research on code-switching has traditionally centered on conversational data, establishing functional categories such as emphasis, quotation, and addressee specification that have been productively extended to literary contexts. Literary code-switching scholarship has examined adult multilingual fiction more extensively than youth literature, leaving open questions about how switching functions are adapted for younger bilingual readerships specifically. Complementary evidence from adjacent literature further situates these dynamics within the broader field [5]. Related methodological precedents also inform the analytical choices adopted here [6].

III. METHODOLOGY

A corpus of recently published bilingual Central European youth novels was assembled and annotated for code-switching instances by narrative location and apparent discourse function, followed by focus group sessions with bilingual adolescent readers responding to selected passages.

A. Narrative Function Coding Framework

Each code-switching instance was coded according to a functional taxonomy distinguishing character voice differentiation, emotional emphasis, and untranslated culturally specific reference, allowing comparison of function frequency across narrative positions such as dialogue versus narration.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes code-switching instance frequency by function category and narrative position across the corpus.

Emotional emphasis and peer dialogue marking occurred predominantly within dialogue and received the highest reader-rated authenticity scores in focus group discussion.

V. DISCUSSION

The concentration of high-authenticity switching functions within dialogue rather than narration suggests that authors deploy code-switching most deliberately at moments of heightened interpersonal or emotional stakes, aligning with readers' own recognition of switching as an authenticity marker rather than a translation avoidance strategy. Readers reported stronger character identification with passages containing naturalistic switching compared to monolingual equivalents, indicating that literary code-switching carries interpretive value beyond stylistic decoration. The moderate authenticity rating for cultural reference switching suggests this function may require more careful contextual framing to register as authentic rather than performative.

VI. CONCLUSION

Literary code-switching functions as a deliberate narrative resource in multilingual youth publishing, particularly effective when concentrated in dialogue at moments of emotional or social significance. These findings inform editorial and authorial practice in multilingual youth literature markets seeking to authentically represent bilingual readers' linguistic experience.

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