

# Tourism Talk on Wheels: Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy in Jinrikisha-Based Tourist Communication

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## Abstract

Communication between the *shafu* (rickshaw pullers) and tourists riding the *jinrikisha* often involves the occurrence of code-mixing. This study investigates code-mixing as an integral component of jinrikisha-based tourist communication, with a particular focus on the informal yet impactful role of the *shafu* as linguistic and cultural mediators. Situated within the sociolinguistic framework of tourism discourse, this research adopts a qualitative-descriptive methodology to explore the communication strategies employed by the *shafu* in the *jinrikisha* tourism industry. Special attention is given to recorded instances of code-mixing in order to analyze the multilingual strategies used to negotiate meaning, build rapport, and enhance the overall tourist experience. The findings reveal that the linguistic adaptability demonstrated by the *shafu* reflects a form of localized communicative competence shaped by the demands of global tourism and context-specific language ideologies. The utterances produced by the *shafu* are not random or incidental; rather, they are shaped by repeated interactions with tourists, the desire to be understood, and the necessity to appear competent and welcoming within a competitive tourism market.

**Keywords:** code-mixing; *jinrikisha*; intercultural communication; sociolinguistics

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## 1. Introduction

In the age of global mobility, tourism serves as a space where diverse linguistic and cultural encounters occur with increasing frequency. Nowhere is this more evident than in heritage tourism sites where local guides and service providers engage directly with international visitors. Arashiyama, located in Kyoto, Japan, is renowned for its historic temples and cultural atmosphere. Among its iconic features is the *jinrikisha* (rickshaw) tour, a popular

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activity where tourists are guided through the area by *the shafu* (車夫), trained rickshaw pullers who act not only as physical drivers but also as cultural narrators and informal tour guides. The *jinrikisha* (人力車), or hand-pulled rickshaw, represents both a nostalgic mode of transport and a modern-day cultural performance in Japanese heritage tourism. In Arashiyama, a scenic district located in the western outskirts of Kyoto, *Jinrikisha* tours have become a highly sought-after attraction, blending physical mobility with personalized storytelling and local hospitality. Central to this experience is the role of the *shafu*, who primarily function as linguistic mediators, facilitating communication through code-mixing between tourists and local culture.

Arashiyama a renowned tourist destination, famous for its bamboo groves, temples such as Tenryū-ji, the picturesque Togetsukyō Bridge, and seasonal landscapes that attract both domestic and international tourists year-round (Kyoto City Tourism Association, 2024). Within this setting, the *shafu* operate in a fluid communicative space where interaction with tourists requires a blend of cultural competence, performance, and multilingual flexibility. They play a key communicative role in shaping the tourist experience. Their interactions are characterized by high linguistic adaptability, as they regularly engage with tourists from across the world. This multilingual engagement necessitates a pragmatic approach to communication, wherein code-mixing, language switching, and simplified register adaptation become essential tools. the *shafu* often mix Japanese with English, Mandarin, Korean, or other languages based on the perceived linguistic backgrounds of their passengers. These interactions often include spontaneous lexical borrowing, humorous language play, and the strategic use of body language to supplement verbal communication.

Companies in Arashiyama are recognized for their structured training of rickshaw operators. the *shafu* are typically young men or often university students and recent graduates who receive instruction not only in physical conditioning and safety protocols, but also in interpersonal communication, historical knowledge, and foreign language basics (Ebisuya, 2023). Their job demands a high degree of emotional intelligence and performative flair, especially when dealing with international visitors who may have limited understanding of Japanese language and culture. While the physical labor and traditional attire of the the *shafu* suggest a nostalgic form of tourism, their communicative behavior is highly contemporary, reflecting broader trends of translanguaging and multilingual accommodation in global tourism contexts (García & Wei, 2014). What distinguishes the *shafu* in Arashiyama from standard tour guides is the embodied, informal, and spontaneous nature of their communication. In contrast to scripted museum guides or institutional tourism staff, the *shafu* adapt dynamically, crafting interactive and affective narratives in response to tourists. Clarke (2013) famously described the role of *jinrikisha* pullers as “*cultural mediation on wheels*”, where the vehicle itself becomes a mobile stage for personalized cultural storytelling. This metaphor remains highly relevant, as more recent studies demonstrate how such mediation is enacted in practice. Hashimoto (2021) shows how rickshaw pullers strategically employ multilingual repertoires to enhance cultural appeal, while Matsumoto and Kato (2022) highlight politeness variation and pragmatic adaptation as central to tourist interactions. Brumann (2023) further situates these practices within Kyoto’s heritage tourism, emphasizing how local actors perform authenticity in response to global tourist expectations. Similarly, the Kyoto City Tourism Association (2024) underscores the institutional recognition of cultural mediation, framing visitor hosts as facilitators of meaningful cross-cultural encounters. Taken together, these findings extend Clarke’s metaphor into contemporary contexts, illustrating how *jinrikisha* pullers continue to

function as cultural mediators who negotiate authenticity, affect, and accessibility in a globalized tourism economy. The *shafu*'s interactions are marked by notable linguistic creativity and flexibility. Many *shafus* engage in code-mixing, blending Japanese with English, Mandarin, or Korean depending on the linguistic background of the tourist. A typical utterance might include phrases such as "Hello! *Konnichiwa!* This is samurai road. very famous in Japan!" or "Photo spot! *Sugoi* view, right?" These interactions rely on pragmatic communication strategies, rather than formal grammar, in order to convey meaning effectively and build rapport. This type of code-mixed discourse aligns with the growing literature on translanguaging, where speakers draw from their entire linguistic repertoires to communicate fluidly and meaningfully in multilingual environments. In tourism contexts, such practices are often employed to foster familiarity, humor, and emotional engagement (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011). The *shafu*'s spontaneous blending of languages, often accompanied by gestures, sound effects, and pop cultural references, reflects a high level of socio-pragmatic awareness.

Underlying the *shafu*'s communicative style is the Japanese ethos of *omotenashi* (おもてなし), which manifests through code-mixing as a strategy to accommodate diverse tourist linguistic repertoires, is a form of hospitality rooted in sincerity, anticipation of needs, and non-verbal attentiveness (Kato & Proglar, 2011). This foundational perspective continues to resonate in more recent scholarship and industry reports. Morishita (2021) expands on this ethos by emphasizing *thoughtfulness* and the implicit understanding of guest needs as central to Japanese lodging practices. At the institutional level, the Japan Tourism Agency (2024) highlights *omotenashi* as a guiding principle for service innovation, framing it as a national standard for accommodating international visitors. From an industry perspective, Colliers Japan (2025) situates *omotenashi* within contemporary hospitality trends, noting its performative dimension and its adaptation to multilingual and globalized service environments. Taken together, these sources demonstrate that *omotenashi* is not merely a cultural ideal but a dynamic communicative practice that continues to shape tourism interactions in Japan. Rather than delivering a transactional service, the *shafu* are trained to offer a personalized and emotionally resonant experience, whether by adjusting the tour pace for elderly tourists, crafting stories for children, or offering complimentary photo services in ideal scenic locations. This hospitality is often expressed linguistically, through the use of polite registers (*keigo*), casual humor, or culturally resonant metaphors. According to Ishikawa (2017), tourism workers in Kyoto who engage in such linguistically responsive practices are often perceived more favorably by international visitors. The *shafu*'s ability to move between registers and languages, while maintaining a warm and enthusiastic demeanour, exemplifies the fusion of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and linguistic accommodation (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009) that defines successful intercultural service communication.

The *shafu* of Arashiyama hold a unique cultural status as linguistic mediators, shaping tourist experiences through code-mixing. In the other hand, they act as cosmopolitan hosts who adapt to global tourist sensibilities. Their visual presentation such as traditional attire, *tabi* shoes, and *happi* coats offers a nostalgic aesthetic that aligns with tourists' expectations of "authentic Japan." Simultaneously, their communicative flexibility and pop culture references anchor them in the present, making them cultural interlocutors bridging past and present, local and global. In sum, the the *shafu* of Arashiyama exemplify how tourism workers in informal settings can use code-mixing, language adaptability, and performative hospitality to create inclusive and memorable experiences. Their role is not only physical but profoundly linguistic

and symbolic serving as mobile agents of Japan's cultural narrative, shaped through multilingual, and embodied communication. Unlike scripted tour guides or institutional service workers, the *shafu* operate in a semi-informal, performative space where speech is improvised and personalized. This makes their code-mixing practices particularly rich sites for exploring language contact and intercultural communication. Despite increasing interest in tourism discourse, the communicative dynamics of mobile guides like the *shafu* remain underexplored in the literature (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). Previous research has tended to focus on institutional language policies or formalized service communication, with less attention given to grassroots, embodied, and mobile linguistic practices in outdoor, one-on-one tourism contexts. Nonetheless, a growing body of interdisciplinary work spanning sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and tourism ethnography has begun to examine the communicative practices of the *shafu*, particularly in heritage tourism zones such as Kyoto, Asakusa, and Kamakura. Yamamoto (2017) conducted a discourse analysis of the *shafu* tours in Arashiyama and Asakusa, showing how the *shafu* adapt their language use to the perceived nationality and language proficiency of tourists. Yamamoto identifies a pattern of "strategic simplification," where English is used as a base language, supplemented with Japanese honorifics, body language, and localized references. This multilingual and multimodal approach fosters comprehension while projecting authenticity. Another researcher, Sone (2019) focuses on the *jinrikisha* not just as a vehicle, but as a semiotic space, a moving platform where cultural meanings are performed and negotiated. Through video ethnography, Sone illustrates how the *jinrikisha* ride becomes a narrative stage: The *shafu* direct attention to particular views, provides historical or romanticized backstories, and engages in light banter. These interactions are often shaped by what calls the "tourist gaze", which the *shafu* actively manage and manipulate through their verbal cues and pacing.

In a comparative study of guided tours in Kyoto and Nara, Nakagawa (2020) emphasizes that the *shafu*, unlike official guides, are able to offer a more flexible and improvisational form of communication. She finds that tourists often report the *shafu* tours as more "authentic" or "personal," in part because of their unscripted, dialogic nature. In the other hand, Hashimoto (2021) examines the use of English loanwords, simplified Japanese, and culturally resonant metaphors in the *shafu* discourse. Phrases like "Samurai Road," "Bamboo Forest, good for Instagram," or "Lucky spot for love" function as cultural hooks that resonate across language barriers. Matsumoto and Kato (2022) analyse how the *shafu* use Japanese politeness strategies (*keigo*) selectively depending on whether their tourist clients are Japanese or foreign. The study reveals that the *shafu* often switches between honorific humility and casual friendliness, negotiating their social identity as both professionals and cultural performers. This research differs from previous studies by shifting attention from general accounts of tourism performance and hospitality practices to the specific communicative strategy of code-mixing. While earlier work has emphasized the *shafu*'s role as cultural narrators or performers of tradition, this study foregrounds how they actively employ code-mixing to navigate linguistic diversity, build rapport with multilingual tourists, and co-construct memorable experiences.

## 2. Methods

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology to explore the communicative strategies of The Shafu in the *jinrikisha* tourism industry of Arashiyama,

Kyoto, with a particular focus on code-mixing and language flexibility. The methodology is designed to investigate how The Shafu navigates multilingual interactions, adapt their speech to diverse audiences, and express hospitality through linguistic creativity. This research aims to describe the instances of code-mixing in The Shafu and tourist interactions and to analyze the pragmatic functions and cultural implications of language mixing. The research employs a case study approach grounded in descriptive and interpretive paradigms. The case of Arashiyama is selected for its rich tradition of jinrikisha tourism and its high frequency of international visitors, which creates an ideal site for observing multilingual communicative practices.

The documentation method is employed in this study. Arikunto (in Alfarisy et al, 2023) explains that the documentation method refers to a technique for collecting various types of relevant data in the form of records, books, transcripts, newspapers, inscriptions, magazines, meeting minutes, and photographs of activities. This method is applied to examine data that have been previously documented. The dataset comprised 50 videos of the *shafu*'s interactions with tourists, primarily sourced from the official Instagram account @Ebisuya\_Arashiyama and supplemented by reposts on related accounts. These recordings provide authentic instances of code-mixing, capturing how *shafus* navigate multilingual exchanges and mediate communication in real time. Each video ranged from 30 seconds to 2 minutes in duration, recorded in MP4 format with resolutions between 720p and 1080p. The content consistently depicted The Shafu guiding tourists through Arashiyama, employing ritual gestures, humorous commentary, and performative hospitality. Videos were selected based on their clear representation of tourist and guide interaction, visibility of ritualized gestures, and contextual markers of cultural tourism. The observations concentrated on naturally occurring interactions between The Shafu and tourists. These interactions, as depicted in the videos, were recorded and transcribed, the analysed to gather contextual information, including tourist demographics, route arrangements, and the dynamics of the interactions.

This study employed field observations in the form of recording and distribution techniques, combined with discourse analysis methods. The data were transcribed and coded from 50 video interactions, focusing on verbal exchanges, paralinguistic cues, and ritual gestures. Using a critical discourse analysis framework, the study examined how the *shafu* strategically shifted between Japanese and English, reframed narratives, and employed cultural references. Codes were developed around language switching, narrative simplification, humor, and hospitality markers, allowing for comparative analysis across videos. This interpretive process highlighted how the *shafu*'s communicative practices embody linguistic entrepreneurship, adapting language as a marketable skill within the tourist economy. The dataset was transcribed and coded using discourse analysis, focusing on verbal exchanges, paralinguistic cues, and ritual gestures, where language is not only a medium of communication but a marketable skill adapted to the demands of a globalized tourist economy. By examining these interactions, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how localized, non-institutional tourism actors negotiate language use in fluid and diverse communicative environments.

Discourse analysis was conducted through systematic transcription and coding of 50 video interactions, focusing on intra- and inter-sentence code mixing, pragmatic strategies such as repetition, metaphor, humor, and interactional features including transition points, audience design, and contextual triggers. Triangulation was achieved by integrating video data with non-participant observation, desk research, and documentation, thereby ensuring interpretive validity. Comparative analysis across transcripts revealed recurring communicative strategies and situational variations, demonstrating how the *shafu*'s practices embody linguistic entrepreneurship within the tourist economy.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 Result

This section presents findings with a focus on linguistic interactions between the The Shafu and tourists in Arashiyama, Kyoto, taken from videos uploaded on social media. Through audio-visual recorded conversations, one core theme emerges is code-mixing as a communicative strategy. This finding is situated within the framework of tourism sociolinguistics (Heller, 2011), highlighting how language is adapted in response to the multicultural demands of the tourism context.

Example of interaction:

- 1) The Shafu explains about Madhugiri Bamboo to the tourist

The Shafu : this is Japanese Madhugiri Bamboo.

Tourist : aa, Madhugiri bamboo.

The Shafu : yes, about 20 meters. So high *ne*.

Tourist : yeah.

The Shafu : okay. Let's take a picture. First point.

- 2) The Shafu explains about one of the destinations

The Shafu : People come for... how to say... **heart training**. *Kokoro no renshuu*.

Tourist : heart training?

The interaction above illustrates how the interweaving of English and Japanese components reflects not only lexical accommodation but also an affective invitation for tourists to engage emotionally. The emergence of the particle */ne/* in the English sentence in example (1), which seeks harmony or empathy, transforms the narrative from a factual explanation into a relational moment of shared sentiment, providing a friendly and engaging nuance to the conversation. Meanwhile, the phrase “*heart training*” in example (2) represents a creative translation of *kokoro no renshū* (training of the heart/mind), bridging the semantic gap for the tourist while maintaining cultural specificity. Such moments illustrate what Agha (2007) terms *enregisterment*, the process by which particular speech forms become recognizable social types.

Beyond these examples, several broader patterns were identified:

1. Strategic Language Alternation

The Shafu frequently alternated between Japanese and English depending on the tourist's response, demonstrating sensitivity to audience design. This alternation was not

random but occurred at key transition points, such as the introduction of cultural concepts or the invitation to participate in activities.

## 2. Pragmatic Creativity

Humor, metaphor, and repetition were recurrently employed to sustain tourist engagement. For instance, The Shafu often exaggerated gestures or repeated phrases in English to ensure comprehension, while simultaneously embedding Japanese cultural references to preserve authenticity.

## 3. Cultural Framing

Code-mixing was not merely functional but performative, framing the tourist experience as both accessible and culturally rich. By embedding Japanese particles like (e.g., */ne/*, */yo/*) into English sentences, The Shafu created hybrid utterances that conveyed warmth, solidarity, and cultural flavor.

## 4. Affective Hospitality

The linguistic strategies reinforced The Shafu's role as a cultural mediator, transforming routine explanations into affective acts of hospitality. Language became a tool not only for transmitting information but for cultivating emotional resonance and relational closeness.

## 5. Tourist Response

Tourists often echoed The Shafu's words (e.g., repeating "Madhugiri bamboo" or "heart training"), signaling both comprehension and participation in the co-construction of meaning. This echoing reinforced the enregisterment process, where hybrid speech forms gained legitimacy through tourist uptake.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that The Shafu's communicative practices exemplify linguistic entrepreneurship (Duchêne & Heller, 2012), where language is mobilized as a marketable skill tailored to the demands of a globalized tourist economy. Code-mixing, humor, and cultural referencing function not only as communicative strategies but as performative acts of hospitality, positioning The Shafu as both guide and cultural broker.

## 3.2 Discussion

The findings reveal that code-mixing in jinrikisha-based tourist interactions is not incidental but a deliberate communicative resource that shapes the tourist experience in Arashiyama. The examples of The Shafu's speech, such as the insertion of the Japanese particle *ne* into an English sentence ("So high *ne*") or the creative translation of *kokoro no renshū* into "heart training", demonstrate how linguistic hybridity is mobilized to achieve both clarity and affective resonance. These practices highlight the The Shafu's ability to negotiate meaning across linguistic boundaries while simultaneously embedding cultural nuance into otherwise simplified narratives.

The use of *ne* in English utterances illustrates how The Shafu transforms factual information into relational discourse. Rather than simply describing the bamboo's height, the utterance invites tourists into a shared moment of empathy, softening the interaction and creating a sense of conviviality. Similarly, the translation of *kokoro no renshū* into "heart training" shows how The Shafu bridges semantic gaps by offering tourists an accessible yet culturally marked phrase. This hybrid expression maintains cultural specificity while ensuring

comprehension, thereby enacting what Agha (2007) terms *enregisterment*, where particular speech forms become recognizable social types within tourism discourse.

These findings underscore that code-mixing serves multiple discursive functions. First, it simplifies complex cultural concepts without erasing their distinctiveness, allowing tourists to grasp meanings quickly while still sensing cultural depth. Second, it indexes authenticity by embedding Japanese words and particles into English speech, giving tourists the impression of engaging with “real” cultural signs. Third, it manages affective tone, as humor, repetition, and hybrid phrasing create warmth and relational closeness. Finally, it signals hospitality, positioning The Shafu not only as a guide but as a cultural mediator who crafts emotionally gratifying experiences. Importantly, tourist responses, such as echoing The Shafu’s words (“Madhugiri bamboo,” “heart training”), demonstrate co-construction of meaning. This uptake validates The Shafu’s communicative strategies and shows how tourists actively participate in enregistering hybrid speech forms. The interaction thus becomes collaborative, with both parties contributing to the production of authenticity and emotional resonance.

Reflecting on these findings, it becomes clear that language in this context operates as a commodified resource. The Shafu’s code-mixing is part of a broader entrepreneurial practice where linguistic flexibility is tailored to the demands of global tourism. By weaving Japanese cultural markers into English discourse, The Shafu simultaneously satisfies tourists’ desire for authenticity and ensures smooth communication. This dual function exemplifies *linguistic entrepreneurship* (Duchêne & Heller, 2012), where language is strategically deployed as both a communicative tool and a marketable skill. In sum, the data show that code-mixing is central to the The Shafu’s performative hospitality. It is through these hybrid utterances that The Shafu welcomes tourists, reduces linguistic barriers, and creates collaborative spaces of cultural exchange. Far from being a linguistic accident, code-mixing emerges as a strategic, affective, and commercially aware practice that enables The Shafu to co-construct authentic and emotionally resonant tourism experiences in Arashiyama.

#### 4. Conclusions

Code-mixing in jinrikisha-based communication emerges as a pragmatic, performative, and relational strategy that is deeply embedded in the tourism discourse of Arashiyama. It enables the *shafu* to mediate cross-cultural encounters, localize global meanings, and craft affectively rich experiences in one ride, one conversation at a time. The hybrid utterances produced by the *shafu* are not random or incidental; rather, they are shaped by repeated tourist interactions, the desire to be understood, and the necessity of performing competence and friendliness within a competitive tourism market.



Figure 1. Communication between The Shafu and Tourist

These practices show that the *shafu* take an active role in how conversations unfold. By mixing languages, they don't just respond to tourists, they shape the interaction and make sure communication works smoothly. At the same time, the bottom-up dimension reflects grassroots processes of linguistic innovation, where situated repertoires are constructed through trial, improvisation, and affective responsiveness. The *Shafu* are not passive users of global English or institutional tourism scripts; instead, they actively assemble communicative resources that respond to the fluid demands of tourist encounters.

The code-mixed phrasing observed in *shafu*-tourist interactions contributes to the emergence of what may be termed a "tourism foreign language register." By this, we refer to a distinctive communicative style characterized by informal and semi-formulaic expressions, emotionally expressive utterances, and the embedding of local linguistic elements. This register reflects how code-mixing is strategically employed to balance accessibility for tourists with the preservation of local cultural identity. This register exemplifies the micro-politics of language use in tourism, where communicative strategies simultaneously simplify content, index cultural authenticity, and enact hospitality. Ultimately, code-mixing functions as a central communicative practice through which the *shafu* co-construct authentic, emotionally resonant, and culturally meaningful tourism experiences.

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