

CODE SWITCHING IN IGBO-ENGLISH BILINGUAL CONVERSATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Every human society is characterized by the existence of diverse linguistic varieties. These speakers of these varieties at some points have various degrees of contact with the non-speakers of their variety, which one of the outcome of the linguistic contact is code switching. The work discusses the nature of code switching in Igbo- English bilinguals speeches. It provides a detailed explanation of the concept of code switching, and explains the typology of code switching and its manifestation in Igbo- English bilingual speakers' speeches. The findings reveal that code switching is functionally motivated and can be triggered by various conversational contexts.*

KEYWORD: Code Switching, Code Mixing, Bilinguals, Igbo,

INTRODUCTION

When two or more languages come in contact, there is tendency of mixture of varieties or a shift or transit from one linguistic system to another. One major influence of globalization is increase bilingualism. This refers to an individual or societal ability to use / speak two languages. It is a usual phenomenon to see bilinguals' code switch or mix in discourse situations. Due to the fact that people are increasingly becoming bilinguals and even multilingual, it therefore brings the issue of code switching and code mixing as glaring day to day linguistic phenomenon.

In a typical urban setting like Lagos, Nigeria, with a heterogeneous population involving people of diverse ethnic enclaves; there is bound to be the existence of many varieties like English, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Nigeria Pidgin English and even indigenous languages of neighbouring Benin and Togolese. It is a common phenomenon to see people shift from one variety of language to another. Likewise a child, who is a product of bilingual marriage, for instance, an Igbo speaking mother with an Hausa speaking father living in Lagos; will automatically be exposed to at least three or more languages; and one of the major consequences is code switching. Code switching occurs when a speaker uses two or more languages in the course of a single utterance. It is common to see second language speakers of English usually switch between their L1 - mother tongue and their L2 - English language and vice versa during their interpersonal conversation (informal communication).

Code switching is a communicative device utilized by bilingual speakers to achieve certain communicative intent.

For instance;

1. I think na o ga-abia today
I think that he/she will come today

2. My sister a pass-iala WAEC exam (-ination) ya
My sister has passed her WAEC examination
3. The session ga-ebido tomorrow
The session will start tomorrow

The instances above capture the phenomenon as a common occurrence among Igbo - English bilinguals. It therefore becomes imperative for a continuous research on the nature of bilingualism and its consequent sociolinguistic outcome. Against this backdrop the paper interrogates the role of Code Switching in achieving communicative intent in the speeches of Igbo English bilinguals.

1. The Concept of Code Switching and Code Mixing

Code mixing /code switching is a sociolinguistic phenomenon which occurs as an outcome of linguistic contacts especially among bilinguals and multilingual. Code switching is a communicative strategy utilized by bilingual speakers to achieve certain communicative intent. Code switching refers to the movement by a speaker to and forth from one linguistic code to another. According to Hoffmann (1991: 110), the term “code switching” refers to the “the alternate use of two [or more – OvD] languages within the same utterance or during the same conversation”.

Code switching is an alternation between two or more languages in a speaker’s speech. It involves the fusing of two or more varieties of language in a single conversational utterance. The word code is a neutral sociolinguistic referral of a linguistic variety which may either be a language or varieties of a language/dialects, style or register. Various scholars have come up with different definitions of the term Code switching and code mixing. Hymes (1976) notes that code-switching as “a common term for alternative use of two or more language, varieties of a language or even speech styles”, while Maschler (1998:125) sees code mixing or a mixed code as “using two languages such that a third, new code emerges, in which elements from the two languages are incorporated into a structurally definable pattern” .

Bokamba (1989) explained the two concepts noting that:

Code-switching is the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event... code-mixing is the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from a co-operative activity where the participants, in order to infer what is intended, must reconcile what they hear with what they understand. Code switching is a practice of alternation in discourse practice by switching to and fro the available subsystem or codes . the practice is individually based and emerges from interactions. Muysken (2000:1) tried another distinction of the terms, noting that code switching as “the rapid succession of several languages in a single speech event”, while code mixing refers to “all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence”. In his explanation of the two concepts, Faltis (1989) views that code mixing is the intra-sentential switching whereas, code mixing in the intersentential switch. He notes that language contacts are the outcome of increased social interaction between people of different linguistic culture, who are living as neighbours; and it is usually initiated by the assumed prestigious and powerful languages.

The distinction between code switching and code mixing is plagued with fluid and fuzzy terminology boundaries. Gardner-Chloros (1991) maintains that switches may occur not only within or between languages; but also between dialects of a given language. This may be consciously or subconsciously. In his words Wardaugh (1998:103) observes that “people may not be aware that they have switched, or be able to report following a conversation, which code they used for a particular topic”. In as much as the switches may be subconscious, sociolinguistic researches have shown that it is not randomly switched but a conscious and purposeful activity meant to achieve certain communication functions in a communication situation (Gumperz 1991, Hoffman 1991).

Agbedo C U (2011) observes that code switch in Nigerian context is not remarkably different from Code switching in other countries of the world. He observes that the slang term **Wenglish** exists and it refers to an English variety that is being influenced by Welsh. Also in India there is **Hinglish** an informal reference for the insertion of English words, phrase or clauses in a conversational utterance. There are also other varieties like **Tanglish** and **Banglish** (mixtures of English with Tamil and Bangla respectively). We also have **Taglish** –Tagalog and English and in Singapore, **Singlish** , which is a mixture of English with Mandarin Chinese, Chinese dialects and Malay is spoken in Singapore. **Spanglish** in the US, Portunol in Brazilian –Uruguayan border. In Nigeria, we have the **Engligbo**- which is a mixture of English and Igbo language. Franceschini (1995:51) observes that there are, “more and more evidence that code switching is a language universal in the behaviour of multilingual speakers, or to employ a shorthand definition of code switching using several languages or language varieties in the course of conversation is based on conversation, internal mechanisms observable in various social contexts all over the world”

It is pertinent to note that there are always syntactic constrain which are applicable to each language variety. Certain syntactic constrains may be permitted while others may not be. The norms vary from one language group to another. Each speech community establishes its own convention that is most suitable to its linguistic system.

Functions of Code Switches

- i. Speakers may code switching for group identification, affiliation and to indicate solidarity to a particular linguistic group or a listener(s); in this case the speaker shifts from his own code to the listener’s code. (Milroy 1987, Gal 1978). This role is important as a discourse enhancing strategy.
- ii. Code switching also plays various pragmatic functions such as mitigating and aggravating messages (Koziol 2000), distancing strategy (Davis 1999).
- iii. Speakers can code switch when there is communicative incompetence. It could be a sign of deficiency or ignorance in one of the languages in contact. That is to say that one of the roles of code switching is to compensate for conceptual or linguistic deficiency in the bilingual speaker’s linguistic repertoire. Code switching may occur when the speaker do not have the appropriate expression or tag to provide continuity in a stretch of utterance. The available lexicon/expression from the other language /code is (are) inserted / switched to compensate for the lack of communicative competence (Gysel 1992, Adendorff 1996).
- iv. Speakers code switch for purposes of emphasis. Gad (1979) observes that a speaker may code switch to reiterate a point in another language as a means of buttressing a point.
- v. Code switching can occur in a situation where a variety, normally used for a specific purpose is used in a different situation because of change or choice of topic. One language could be

complementary to the other. In other words, the language in use may be deficient in some quarters.

- vi. It could also be a conscious display of the elites and prestigious language. One may shift to another language to show off or pride himself as a speaker of the prestigious variety.
- vii. People may code mix according to their mood or psychological disposal. It could be used to conceal certain information for the sake of privacy and secrecy, in this situation code switching serves a separatist function.

DATA AND DISCUSSION

This work is anchored on Adendorff (1996:389) idea of code switching. He sees code switching as a “functionally motivated” behaviour. The work sets out to investigate if actually code switching is functionally motivated and to find out the varied functions that trigger off code switching in Igbo-English bilinguals where code switching is fast gaining credence in all formal setting.

The data were audio – recorded speeches taken during lecture periods, student – student interactions; students and lecturers interaction. The recorded speeches were transcribed and the areas of interest – speeches that contained switches were identified and extracted from the lot. The selected data were identified and classified according to the situations that triggered off the code switching. This is to ascertain how speakers utilize code switching to express language speaker communicative intent.

There are four major types of switching:

- (i) **Tag-switching:** this occurs when tags and certain set phrases in a given language are inserted into an utterance of another language. For instance;

3. M na- acho i ga toilet

I want to go to the toilet

I want to defecate

4. Wetara m biscuit ahu

Get that biscuit for me

5. Nyem key m.

Give me key me

Give me my key

6. Wetara m that book

Get me that book

Bring that book to me.

- (ii) **Intra-sentential switching:** this occurs within the sentence or clause boundaries; that is within clausal or sentential boundaries (Hamers and Blanc 2000:260). In this type of code switching, “the two languages are mixed within such circumscribed linguistic units as the clause or even the words” www.lotpublication.nl/publish/articles/00240/bookpart.pdf.

Example in Igbo;

7. Biko sort [-uo] the books, emechaa kam bia join [ia] gi to arrange the place

[Please sort the books, after I will come join you to arrange the place]

Please sort the books; I will later join you to arrange the place

8. M ga-erichafu the food ma oburu na odi sweet.
I will eat up the food, if it is sweet

9. Biko light [iara] m kandulu [candle] a
[Please light me candle this]
Please light this candle for me

ii) **Inter sentential switching:** This usually occur in turn taking involving bilinguals. This can happen when a change of language occurring at clausal or sentential boundaries. It involves switches between sentences and clauses. It occurs outside the sentence and clause boundaries and this accounts to why some scholars call it 'extra-sentential switch'. here a clause or sentence is one variety (language) and the next clause or sentence is in another language.

For instance;

10. I love travelling by road, mana ugboala m adighi mma
I love travelling by road, but my car is bad

11. 'Thank you for the food', O toro uto nnukwu
Thank you for the food, it was very sweet

(1) **Intra-word switching:** This switch occurs within a word boundary. It involves switches within a word or morpheme boundaries.. For instance in Igbo language;

12. *Stopu* [kwaa} ya.....Stop it

13. *Alaiki* [ro m ya].....I don't like him/her/ it

14. *Chanji* [godu ya].....Change it first

15. *Bringi* [godu] the book.....Please bring the book.

Muysken (2000) captures the typological approach to code mixing as; insertion, Alternation and Congruent Lexicalization.

Insertion: this is characterized by insertion of word or clauses from one variety to the morphosyntactic structure of another variety.

16. M na-ahu ya kwa ubochi na school
I[is] seeing him every day in school
I see him every day in school.

17. The boys gbalikwara nnukwu
The boys try[past participle tense] hard
The boys tried very hard

18. Nne idikwa popular
Girl, you are popular

Alternation: Alternation of languages is an important aspect of bilingualism. It is common and usual phenomena. This alternation usually occurs between structures from [different] languages. This involves the adjunction of conjunctions and appositions rather than insertion. Verbs are often incorporated through adjunction to a helping verb.

Congruent Lexicalization

Muysken, (2000: 221), observes that the notion of congruent lexicalization underlies the study of style shifting and dialect/standard variation, as captured in Labov (1972) and Trudgill (1986)'s work; rather than bilingual language use proper. Congruent lexicalization is similar to

language variation and style shifting: switching is grammatically unconstrained and can be characterized in terms of alternative lexical insertions. Linguistic convergence feeds into congruent lexicalization and the two processes may reinforce each other. Some cases of word-internal mixing can be viewed as congruent lexicalization

CONCLUSION

Code switching is a common phenomenon in multilingual Nigeria, especially among the Igbo - English bilinguals. Among the three regional languages in Nigeria, Igbo-English bilinguals seem to be more vulnerable to this phenomenon as it is almost difficult to see an educated Igbo speaking person speak in complete Igbo language without code switching to English. This to and from switch is known among the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria as *Engligbo*. It is imperative that people get aware of linguistic situations and possible consequences of bi/multilingualism in their society.

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