

Use of Codes: A Model of Language Shift in Nigerian Communication

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ABSTRACT

The predominance of code and bilingual usage among university students and the youths triggered the curiosity to investigate the preference for code choice/mix and its attendant problems, within Federal University of Technology, Owerri [FUTO]. There was random selection of statements made by the students within the university environment. This study shows the impact of language mix and switch among Igbo-English bilinguals. It also reviews how bilingualism manifests itself as interference in the second language (L2) situation. The study also brings to the fore the issue of language dependence of the Igbo/English bilingual. The study concludes by affirming that bilinguals should control influence on their code choice, to avoid becoming linguistic incompetent individuals in the future. The subjects of this study are Igbo students in the Information Management Technology (IMT) Department, of Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

1. Introduction

Language and communication are twin concepts that are basically essential to man. Thus, both concepts are intrinsically connected because language gives life to communication and has always been central to the study of man in his environment. It is also a dynamic construct which has social relevance especially in its environment of usage. Thus, it is a social phenomenon and a heritage of not only one individual but of all the people who belong to a speech community (a group of people who live together and speak the same language).

The greater value of language lies in its communicability, which is the individual's ability to use the words in a given context. This portrays language as an organized activity which uses words to accomplish its designated function. (Njemanze, 2012). Finally, language is highly dynamic; it changes and grows as it adapts to new environments and different users. Lexical items are constantly being modified as new ones are added or the meaning of old ones extended. Words sometimes get into a language from another language through the process of borrowing or loan translation.

A typical example of the dynamic nature of language is neologism which involves the invention of new words or expressions to take care of advances in science and technology. Communication on the other hand, involves the exchange of information between creatures of a kind. Communication strengthens the feeling of togetherness through the exchange of messages. It creates a common pool of ideas which translates thought into action.

Hence, in a communication process, message/information is transmitted from a sender to a receiver who, in turn, is expected to decode and react to such information. Bilingualism is the ability of an individual or members of a community to use two languages effectively. A bilingual is naturally first exposed to the culture of his native language or mother tongue before other languages and cultures. The thoughts and worldview of the bilinguals are thus, encoded in an individual's mother tongue or native language.

However, there has been the conception that language switch among those speaking more than one language within a single conversation is indicative of some linguistic incompetence. It is also seen as a transitional stage of learning whereby one language starts dominating the other. However, research has shown that language switch has been a linguistic tool which is used by bilingual speakers to change or negotiate different role relationships.

Akindele & Adegbite, (1999) view bilingualism as the use of two languages by an individual or a community. Thus, bilingualism emphasizes the existence of two languages in the repertoire of an individual or speech community. It is

a consequence of languages in contact; it deals with the direct or indirect influence of one language on the other with each of the two languages having its own peculiar grammatical, phonological, lexical and discourse rules; forming its own code of communication among the community or individual who use(s) it. Communities with more than one language, often have their speakers indulge in diverse communicative situations where they alternate from one language to another as situations demand. Bilingual communication is a major fact of life in today's world and among the citizens of many of the world's countries.

David Crystal (1992) estimates two-thirds of the world's children grow up in a bilingual environment. Considering only bilingualism involving English, the statistics that Crystal has gathered indicate that, of the approximately 570 million people world-wide, who speak English, over 41% or 235 million are bilingual in English and some other languages. Some examples of bilingual speech communities across the world include: Wales, where English and Welsh are spoken; Canada, where French and English are spoken; Nigeria, where Igbo and English are spoken alongside Yoruba and English; Hausa and English; Efik and English, etc.

2. Bilingualism and Communication in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the English language is evidently the major colonial legacy of the British colonial masters to Nigeria which added to the already existing multiplicity of languages. The history of the English language in Nigeria is like Oral Literature in Africa that is transmitted from generation to generation. According to scholars such as; Babajide (2001:3), Adekunle (1976), Auer (1984) and more, the advent of the English language in Nigeria dates back to 1472 (15th century) in places such as Warri, Calabar when they started having contact with Europeans. During the popular phases of Nigeria's socio-political history and was influenced by such factors as missionary activities, trade and commerce.

Bilingual communication is often habitual; thus, it means that one acquires a communicative pattern which cannot easily be given up. Bilingual situation thus, makes an individual to function with varying degrees of competence in at least two languages. This type of language habit once formed becomes a self-identity. Njemanze, (2012) asserts; it is therefore very common to hear a Nigerians switch from either his/her mother tongue to English or start a discussion in English and conclude in his/her mother tongue. An example of this situation is seen in the statements of selected Igbo/English bilinguals within FUTO environment;

- ❖ Stop using this your "kabu-kabu" to block our entrance (Dilapidated old cab)
- ❖ This girl is never serious "Oge-o.-bula" (always)
- ❖ Kedu nke bu this show-off from this man? Who is he? (Why does this man show-off always)
- ❖ We are very fortunate "inwe onye di ka prof" in our midst etc. (To have someone as educated as a Professor)

There are many types of bilingualism, they include: Social Bilingualism, also known as National Bilingualism and Individual Bilingualism. We also have Simultaneous Bilingualism, Sequential or Consecutive Bilingualism, Late or Adult Bilingualism, Informal Bilingualism or Am-bilingualism, Non-balanced Bilingualism, Co-ordinate Bilingualism, Subordinate Bilingualism and Incipient Bilingualism. In addition to the list above, we also have Compound Bilingualism, Stable Bilingualism and Transitional Bilingualism. However, one peculiar issue prominent with whatever type of bilingualism an individual exhibit is the reciprocal influence of one language over the other. Prominent in this study is individual bilingualism.

2.1 Individual Bilingualism

This type of bilingualism makes an individual to have native-like competence in two languages, a bilingual is fully competent in one language and has an average or above average competence in another. He/ She has varying degrees of competences. Most educated Nigerian's are bilingual in English and his/her mother tongue, whatever "the mother tongue" is. He or she uses English in formal situations and the mother tongue in less formal situations and informal conversations.

There are also Nigerian's who are multilingual. Others are monolingual who speak only their mother tongue, which may be an indigenous language in the case of the non-educated, or those raised exclusively with only the English language. However, if he or she understands, speaks and functions within two languages, he or she is considered to be a bilingual.

3. Code-Switching and Mixing

Fanon asserts, that, "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (17). Thus, it is part of human communication to change linguistic codes. People have the tendency to switch from one code to another based on their linguistic situation. Language use is dictated by context, domains of usage, and the function the language is expected to perform. The concept of speech helps in the understanding of appropriateness of a code.

Code-switching is distinct from other language contact phenomena; such as borrowing, pidgin and creoles, loan translation (Calques), and language transfer (language interference). It often occurs because the speaker can either not find an appropriate word in his mother tongue or because he or she finds the terms in the target language more convenient to use.

The linguistic setting of Nigeria makes it possible for two or more codes (and language varieties) to exist. When speakers have two codes in their repertoire (and use the codes), they often engage in code switching (CS). Code switching is the use of two language varieties in the same conversation (Myers- Scotton, 239). Code-switching is the ability to switch from one language to another with ease. The rate of the ease at which a speaker switches depends on the individual.

Code switching occurs when elements of two or more linguistic systems are randomly used. Speakers practice codeswitching when they are each fluent in both languages. It sometimes depends mainly on who the speaker is, the topic he is discussing, the receiver of the message and the context and time of the message and the context and time of the discussion. It may occur as a result of receding competence in a language or the influence of a second language or reduced context of the first language. An example two residents of Port Harcourt discussing official matters might unconsciously switch to mother tongue (MT) if they speak the same MT. However, if the topic of discussion is an informal one, they might relapse to Nigerian Pidgin (NIGP), even when in an office setting, depending on the relationship between the people discussing. Also, it is not uncommon to hear workers of lower cadre, (clerks, messengers, labourers), interacting freely in their MT among themselves but switching to Standard British English (SBrE) to their superior. Thus, within the same settings a speaker can use different languages. Trudgill, (126) notes that code switching can be manipulated by speakers to influence or define the situation as they wish, to convey different meanings and personal interactions. All these are factors determining code switching and mixing. Trudgill continues that the above can be done in two ways, firstly by mixing two languages at once. The switch can be noticed within the words and sentences in an utterance. The result of this code switching is that it makes discussion more intimate and friendly. Secondly, a speaker can switch from one language like SBrE to the MT completely in a speech.

Code switching is a normal phenomenon that can be observed in bilinguals and multilingual. Code switching at times is as a result of communicative incompetence. A person who is more proficient in a code may switch to it, even though it is wrong for the topic or setting. It is noted that generally in Nigeria, different codes are used ranging from SBrE, SE at one extreme to the NIGP and locally intelligible languages on the other hand. These exist side by side; some of these languages are suitable for use in all situations. A speaker can use different languages or varieties of the same language in different situations or contexts and for different reasons, Egbejimba (27).

Wall work (108) sees code mixing as different from switching. Mixing takes place in mid sentences, from one language to another, whereas code switching might take place in the same utterance. For example, mixtures from MT with SBrE words in the same sentence such as "biko bia here" "meaning "please come here" these utterances are combination of lexical items from Igbo and English. Code switching and code mixing are integral parts of the communicative competence of participants in a multilingual community such as the populations of this study. Every day of our lives we hear people mixing codes Igbo and English, English, Igbo and pidgin etc.

Code-switching can be Intralingual or Interlingual. Intralingual code-switching occurs when a speaker switches from one dialect of a language to another, Interlingual code-switching involves a switch from one language to another language. Intralingual code-switching is much harder to identify. The switch from one code to another can be at any point when the language or the codes are congruent. Code-switching has been treated in different ways and from different perspectives by different scholars. Some see it as the alternation of two languages within a conversation (e.g. Amuda, on Yoruba/English; Myers-Scotton on Swahili/English, code-switching, there are others who claim that code-switching can happen between two dialects of the same language(e.g. Blom and Gumperz; Debose; Woolard).

However, a country may be a bilingual country while many of her citizens are monolingual. In countries such as Cameroon, part of the population is monolingual, speaking neither French nor English but only their indigenous languages. In Canada, a large proportion of the population is monolingual either in French or English and learns the other language in school.

4. Attitude of Nigerian Bilinguals Towards English.

The present-day Nigerian youth see English as a colonial and dominant language. Attitudes of the Nigerians in thinking that their native languages are inferior to English however necessitated the adoption of English as the official language in Nigeria without opposition. It was difficult for Nigerians to adopt any of the three languages: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa as their official language. The multiplicity of native languages in Nigeria created a problem of understanding in communication among the different ethnic groups.

Since the English language was adopted as a second language, it has been reshaped with distinctive codes to suit their experiences. Thus, there is the substrata influence in the communication pattern of these youths. These substrata influences induced linguistic incompetence which has made English language learning problematic.

To remedy attitudes towards the language dependence in Nigeria or in any other multilingual nation, there should be promotion, accommodative, and tolerance-oriented policies. Though the focuses of these policies are varied, there is a view that language policies are instruments of social control across social and political domains. Moreover, 'language policies are best understood in their relationship to broader societal policies among a group.

Language attitude can affect the economic, educational and social life of a language group because, a language with a low status in a community, will have speaker's with little access to the higher occupational opportunities. Language attitudes can also affect the success of learning, could co-determine linguistic modernization, result in cultural alienation and even affect nation building. (See Njemanze, 2012).

4.1 Use of Codes in Bilingual Communication: A Model of language Shift in Nigeria

In Nigeria, most speakers of minor languages endeavor to learn one of the major languages (sometimes in addition to English), especially the one that is dominant where they reside. And many of those who have one of the three major languages as their native language also acquire English, and another language of the country. (Njemanze, 2014). Many Nigerians are bilinguals, thus, there abound linguistic diversity in Nigeria, and hence, most people grow up speaking more than one language.

English coexists with about 250 Nigerian indigenous languages largely as a result of language contact and interaction, a situation which has produced reciprocal influences between English language and other indigenous languages. (Akere, 2005,p.1).

Myers –Scotton however, remarked that the varieties 'participation in code-switching may be in different languages, or dialects or styles of the same language' (2). Debose and Woolard also noted that code-switching is not necessarily between two distinct languages but could also be between two dialects or two closely related varieties. Code-switching in this study centers on three codes, namely Standard British English, Nigerian Pidgin and (the various) Nigerian indigenous languages.

Code-switching/ usage sometimes serve as a strategy for social alienation. On the one hand, by switching from one language to another a speaker may deliberately choose to alienate some people knowing that they do not understand the language s/he switches to. On the other hand, a switch from one language to another may be an attempt to accommodate others in a discourse. For instance, the pidgin language of the 'Kegites' club in our various universities is a measure of social exclusion, (for non-members) and a switch to the conventional pidgin in the university environment depicts social inclusion.

As is highlighted above, (especially in Nigeria) it is obvious that the reluctance of the Europeans to learn other languages prompted the substitution of European words for Nigerian words to ease communication problems. This has encouraged code-switching which has boosted the spread and development of NIGP and interaction among Nigerian university students in the various university environments. There is, therefore, a good measure of blending of words either based on the ethnic location of the university or the degree of formality involved.

Thus, it is common to hear NIGP being mixed with words from some ethnic origins especially from the ethnic location of the university. Here are some examples of code-mixing in the major ethnic languages in Nigeria;

Hausa; code-mixed with NIGP;

- ‘kai you no dey hear word? – (hello, don’t you listen?)
- ‘i no dey for this wahala’ (i am not part of this problem)

Igbo; code-mixed with NIGP;

- ‘why u dey make garagara’ (why are you showing off)
- ‘Nna-a waka fast’ ((boy) please walk faster)

Yoruba, code mixed with NIGP;

- ‘wetin dey sele ? (what is happening)
- ‘Ejo-o comot for road’ (please leave the road or excuse me).

We also have the Edo/Delta ‘wafy’ code-mixed pidgin. This brand is usually associated with Nigerian slangs. Some examples are;

- ‘you dey para’ (are you annoyed)
- ‘i don kpeme’ (i am dying)
- ‘omo you dey bale much for my grub’ (boy, you are eating my food greedily).

Code-mixing is thus, a common feature of Pidgin (English). This in turn brings out creative nature and uniqueness of NIGP position when a native speaker of a certain language (substrate) abandons that language for another (higher) language (the superstrate), (Njemanze, 2014).

An analysis of the utterances of some bilinguals using English and Nigerian language (Igbo), reveal some interference features, hybridization in English patterns and pedagogical defects in English language usage in the University environment.

The influence of native languages and the influence of phrasal verbs like “get back”, “go back” whose meaning is “to return” would seem to account for the addition of “back” in the following instances..., (see Njemanze, 2015).

See other examples below;

S/No	Standard English (SE)	Coded English (CE)
1.	We reversed the decision.	Nnaa we reversed back the decision.
2.	I hope you retrieved the money from the dupe.	Nne I hope you retrieved back the money from ndi akanakpa.
3.	The team will regain its lost glory.	Ha ga e regain back its lost glory.
4.	I will revert to the original bill.	M ga a revert back to the original bill.
5.	Children should not reply when scolded	These Children ‘unu a trayikwala’ to reply back when scolded.
6.	The Super Eagles replied with four goals.	The super Eagles ‘sachara’ back with four goals.
7.	Business has returned to normal after the strike.	Business has return back to normal after the strike.

However, Most English texts used in Nigeria are written using the models used in monolingual communities. The Nigerian situation is such that English language is the only link between the various ethnic groups and the textbooks that are in use are not designed to meet the linguistic needs of the specific language groups in Nigeria, but written for all Nigerians even at all school levels. The result is that errors which have close correlation with “...structural and cultural contrasts seem to be endemic and can be categorized as a form of English...” (Oluikpe 1974). There is also the problem of “translational English” which arises from cultural differences between L1 and L2 and consequently this can impede international communication. These differences are found in such cultural items as marriage, farming season, burials, births, foods, sports and superstition (See Oluikpe 1974).

5. Discussion

The conflicting functions which English language performs are at the root of the usage and this causes learning problems for the English language learner. There are several environmental, socio-economic, cultural, psycholinguistic pedagogic and organizational factors which impede effective usage and learning of English language in Nigeria. Based on the various factors that impede the 'code-free' usage of the English language, this study discovered the prevalence of the following types of interference;

- **Phonic interference**, which suggests transfer of rules guiding the sound of a dominant language to the subordinate or target language which occurs at the phonemic (i.e. sounds) stress, syllable and the intonation levels.
- **Grammatical interference**, where the grammatical system of the mother tongue intrudes into that of the target language. This depends solely on the level of competence of the speaker involved (i.e. mastery of the structural rules of the target language.)
- **Discourse Interference** This exhibits itself basically at the level of greeting, which for instance is brief and straight to the point in English but extended in the Igbo Language. Using English for extended native greetings exhibits this interference.
- **Lexical Interference:** This is caused by linguistic and cultural factors. Lexical interference was examined under the following headings:
- **Semantic contrast:** Here items in Nigerian English (NE) that have equivalent items in native English but express different meanings.
- **Semantic Extension:** This refers to items that have equivalence in native English but express wider meaning in NE.
- **Semantic transfer:** Some items present in NE but the concept they express here are absent in the British English.
- **Loan creations:** Certain items present in NE denote NE experiences, which are also present in Native English but expressed differently.
- **Slangs:** This is often created to serve as a strategy for social alienation

6. Recommendations

This study therefore recommended that:

- The indigenous languages should be developed, modernized and standardized to widen their cognitive frames.
- Language switch should be seen and treated as rich and a veritable communicative tool because of its role in the process of communication.
- The status of the indigenous language should be brought at par with English language so that it will no longer be seen as the language of the less educated.
- Borrowing should be encouraged as a means of preserving cultural items missing in other languages.
- Finally, each language should be completely rich and capable of presenting realities not viewed or experienced in other languages.

7. Conclusion

Language switch and code choice are strategies of a bilingual speaker to make up for gaps created by linguistic dependence in the two languages. Often, the phenomenon of language switch expresses a seemingly lack of the needed word equivalent in the target language to accurately express a thought. The bilingual thus, chooses appropriate lexical item from either the base or second language that serves as a compensation for such lack. This paper also presented the characteristic effects of the speaker's environment, which dictates the code used by the speaker. This research shows that in the university system, English language is used.

However, the dominance of the English language exists more at the level of usage. In practice, most bilinguals still see, think and speak their thoughts in their first language. This explains why the level of interference is relatively high for better communicative purposes. (See Anjola, 2010). The result of this study suggests that when there is language switch, it is often a device by the speaker to make him better understood. Language switch is therefore a function of audience, topic and setting of conversation and the phenomena can both be conscious or subconscious.

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