THE EFFECTS OF CODE-SWITCHING AMONG IGBO-ENGLISH BILINGUALS

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Abstract
The aspect of code-switching is a common phenomenon among bilinguals in the whole world, especially in situations where all the participants in a speech act are from the same bilingual background. Also, code-switching is used to achieve a variety of goals in communication because it is grammatically rule-governed. Again, what is peculiar about code-switching in the Nigerian situation and particularly among Igbo-English bilinguals is the direction and dimension it takes. In the negative light, and very unfortunate too, the code-switching behaviour among Igbo-English bilinguals have assumed an alarming position, especially in recent times. This could be seen in the recent statements and comments made by Igbo linguists, who assume that in the nearest future, their mother tongue may be endangered. In the positive light, generally, code-switching facilitates communication. This paper, therefore, examines the linguistic processes of code-switching and its effects in communication (both positively and negatively) among Igbo-English bilinguals.

Introduction
Speech communities in Nigeria have a lot of linguistic phenomena traceable to language contact. One of such a phenomenon is code-switching and it has been a subject of research among linguists, socio-linguists, psycholinguists, neuro-linguists, and educators. Most linguists and scholars refer to it as language interference depending on which of the language it interferes in speech, whether the first language or the second language. Code-switching is a compound noun formed from code and switching. It is obviously different from borrowing, pidgin, creoles and language transfer in so many ways. Bolinger (1975, p.341) notes that, “codes are often referred to as jargons, especially by outsiders who have difficulty understanding them...”. This means that codes can be any language or dialect a person chooses to use on any occasion during communication between two or more persons. Bolinger affirms that:

Language variety can be called code.

Therefore, code-switching is intra-sentential and inter-sentential in language characterized by the speech behaviour of bilinguals (Bolinger, 1975, p.340)

Code-switching, to most bilinguals, facilitates communication in the sense that it provides continuity in speech act. It paves way for speakers to express attitude and emotion through an available method for bilinguals. To most linguists like Franklin et al. (2011, p.461), code switching is a speech style unique to bilinguals, which fluent speakers switch languages between or within sentences. According to them:

Code-switching is a universal language phenomenon that reflects the grammars of both languages working simultaneously... It occurs wherever groups of bilinguals speak the same languages. Furthermore, code-switching occurs in specific social situations enriching the repertoire of the speakers.

Incidentally, most linguists, socio-linguists psycholinguists and educators see code-switching and code-mixing as the same phenomenon and they use them interchangeably on the same context. As such this paper uses the two terms interchangeably and also accepts that the two terms are the same. In accordance to this, Wardhaugh (2010, p.98) notes that:

People then are usually required to select a particular code whenever they choose to speak, and they may also decide to switch from one code to another or mix codes even within sometimes very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process known as code-switching. Code-switching (code-mixing) can occur in conversation between speakers’ turns or within a single speaker’s turn. In the latter case it can occur between sentences (inter-sententially) or within a single sentence (intra-sententially).

Notably, the phenomenon of code-switching usually occurs in conversation more than in writing. Thus:

Code switching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change inter-personal relations with their rights and obligations (Gal, 1988 p.247).

However, before now, most scholars viewed code-switching as evidence for “internal mental confusion, the inability to separate two languages
sufficiently to warrant to designation of true bilingualism" (Lipski, 1982 p.191). But of recent, research and investigations have tended a proof that far from being a manifestation of mental confusion, code-switching is rather a complex set of constraints among speakers who are bilinguals. Eventually, this phenomenon has become a spring board for the formulation of various linguistic theories and counter theories about the representation of two languages in the brain of a bilingual. Most socio-linguists like Wardhaugh and others analyse code-switching as the interaction between some linguistic and non-linguistic variables of attitude and motivation as earlier noted.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, all the speech communities in Nigeria are affected by this phenomenon of code-switching. Nigeria, of course, has a peculiar example of code-switching in the sense that it is unidirectional. This is because in the Nigerian case, only one of the languages, that is, the English language, which always interferes in the mother tongue based on communication in both formal and informal contexts. Before it was believed that it was only uneducated individuals who code-switch but today in Nigeria, code-switching is now the language of the educated.

Language, Communication and Code-Switching

We can never refute the fact that language is the solution to most communication problems so that in many contexts, the words language and communication are used interchangeably. Nwadike (2008, p.13) observes that "language is the key to the heart of the people". Of course, through the process of communication, the actual role of language is appreciated, especially among humans and other various activities. Thus, this role of language has a lot to do with national unity and integration. Indeed, language has greatly preoccupied Homo sapiens with its capacity for communicative adaptability. This, of course, has caused language to have mystified characteristics beyond Homo sapiens and these characteristics have drawn Homo sapiens from different fields and walks of life including linguists, into the area of linguistic research and investigation. Colin Cherry (1957) in Emenanjo (1990, p.25) personifies the study of language as a mistress. Thus:

Language makes a hard mistress and we all are her slaves. It is difficult to exaggerate the influence which she exerts upon our lives, yet she is aloof and mysterious. Anyone who would consort with her, to study and understand her, lays himself open to a severe discipline and much disappointment.

Adekunle in Emenanjo (1990, p.240) also supports Cherry's view of language as a mystified female to understand and study. Thus:

The more engrossed one gets in the noble occupation of unravelling the mysteries of language either as a linguist, a poet, a communication expert, a novelist or dramatist, a physical acoustician a medical practitioner, a psychologist, or an anthropologist the more mystifying this mysterious but deceptive phenomenon becomes...

The other characteristics of language, which is the use of language for communication, is limited by the bounds of social interaction and the depth of human creative ability. The characteristics of language use can be seen in interpersonal and inter-group cooperation. This therefore, proves that language is part and parcel of the social man (socio-linguistics).

Pettigrew of the Communication, is the medium in which man relates socially with his fellow man. Wardhaugh (2010, p.2)

Communication among people who speak the same language is possible because they share such knowledge, although how it is shared and, even more so, how it is acquired are not well understood...language is a communal possession, but at the same time an abstract entity.

Coincidentally, Nigeria is one of the multilingual nations in the world, because of this multilingual nature, for there to exist adequate inter-ethnic-linguistic communication, individual trend towards bilingualism which somehow have been formalized by the adoption of English language as the official language of the country and also the language for pedagogy. Due to the multilingual situation in Nigeria, language switching, code-switching and the use of other codes like pidgin has been the only medium to depict the socio-cultural context of communication which is predominant, especially among Igbo. Therefore, asserting the positive and negative effects of code-switching among bilinguals, Chukwu (2012, p.129) adds that:

...since code-mixing involves alternation of codes, it then means that the person involved has exhibited knowledge in the two codes, no matter the level of competences. It is
However, the difference in the types of bilingualism as has been briefly identified... the positive and negative implications of code-mixing.

Nigeria has three major languages which are: Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa and these language groups make a substantial population of mother tongue as well as various numbers of second language users. Notably, these three major languages in Nigeria along with English and Arabic as foreign languages have enjoyed the status of acceptance in recent times. Because of this, every educated Nigerian is essentially bilingual, communicating with his fellow Nigerians of other linguistic groups in English.

Fromkin et al (2011, p.460) demarcated bilingualism according to various degrees. The ability to speak two or more languages, either by an individual speakers, individual bilingualism, or within a society, societal bilingualism... there are various degrees of individual bilingualism. Some people have native like control of two languages, whereas others make regular use of two languages with a high proficiency but lack the linguistic competence of a native or near native speaker in one or the other language. Also, some bilinguals may have oral competence but not read or write one or more of their languages.

Critical speaking in a positive light, bilinguals have better chances in facilitating communication during a speech act because they can switch from one code to another for better outcome.

The Effects of Code-Switching among Igbo-English Bilinguals

In the negative light, and very unfortunate too, the code-switching behaviour among Igbo-English bilinguals in Nigeria has assumed an alarming position, especially in recent times. This could be seen in the recent statements and comments made by Igbo linguists who assume that in the nearest future, their mother tongue may be endangered.

The reason for this endangerment, according to them, is that of recent, most children from Igbo native land are enrolled into the nursery and kindergarten from age one. At this age one that the Igbo child is enrolled into formal education, the language of communication pedagogy with these children is English. Even after school hours, Igbo parents continue to speak English and Igbo languages to these children. The result of this among Igbo children is that most of them are now bilingual speakers of Igbo and English. This phenomenon is termed by the Igbo linguists as “Engilgo”. Unfortunately, one of the earliest reactions to this phenomenon is seen in an article by Nwafor (1971, p.44) entitled “Engilgo” as a “new medium of communication... which is a hybrid of the English and Igbo languages”. Therefore, Nwafor sees code-switching as a function not only of the dominance of English in the Nigerian society and the multiplicity of dialects of Igbo but as a conscious display of the knowledge of a prestigious English language. According to him, Code-switching is not confirmed to the educated Igbo for just as there is in existence what has been termed Engilgo, one also occasionally listens to Enginhusa, or Englyoruba.

Pertaining code-switching and language endangerment, Njemanze (2012, p.103) also observes that some people have negative attitudes towards their language while others do not. Igbo language speakers constantly drift from their native language to the English language thus producing what is termed “Engilgo” (the combination of English and with Igbo word) as in “kedx onye break[r] this jug?”. How kwann? My mum b’fora here today – o, Boy nnq – o, etc.

Code-switching in this form can make a people culturally and linguistically dead especially in situations when the language and cultural values become subordinated. In fact, the Igbo language and culture falls under this group because according to Gbanite (1975) in Emenano (1990, p.89) “Igbo has never been given a good chance” in schools and is at best “offered as an optional paper in the School Certificate Examinations”.

Actually, Gbanite sees no reason why anyone should be embarrassed to hear some of our educated men and women babbling their mother tongue in such ear-piercing phrases as “Dianyi, how kwann? Why I blagh yesterday? O-ja mm, never mind.

He also interprets code-switching among Igbo pupils as indicative of falling standard of education when he notes that:

In a certain school in Umunahia Zone Elementary 4 pupils (grade 4) couldn’t translate; my mother sit na ya ga-aga aha tomorrow; nyem that his book ososo and such other simple sentences into English.
Another negative effective of code-switching among Igbo-English bilinguals is constant tautology. Chukwu opines that:

> Repetitive code-switching is close to tautology. But unlike tautology, where simple idea may be repeated using the same code, repetitive code-mixing involves a repetition of an idea using different codes. For instance, the following are familiar tautologies but not repetitive code-mixing... On the other hand, tepot is not only tautology but also code-mixing because it involves two languages, Igbo and English. (Chukwu, 2012 p.130)

He further explains that, “there can be code-mixing without tautology. Example, Nyem that book (Igbo/English mix) (Give me that book).

There are numerous examples of both repetitive and ordinary code-switching made by Igbo-English bilinguals during communication. Such examples are as follows:

Otú onye na ediba here (Someone came here).
Nne we m na ede m n’eme kitchen (Please give me that knife in the kitchen).
Gwa your mother na m gbaa abia tomorrow (Tell your mother that I will be coming tomorrow).
Gwa na m na that I won’t be there again. (Tell them that I won’t be there again).
Don’t insult me n’ini like mkaari gi ahu a gwa na (please don’t insult me am tired of it).
I don’t care mba ara the gwaara ene na-aekwu ebe ahu. (I don’t care about whatever you are saying there).

Positively, code-switching facilitates communication in a speech act in the sense that, when there is a bridge may be due to the use of the appropriate word or sentence that would depict exactly what a participant means, he may tend to use the other language that has the main lexemes that will portray his idea vividly. This aspect of code-switching has greatly helped bilinguals easing communication and bringing out the proper imagery on discussion. Carroll (2006, p.301) attributes this to language learners. Thus:

> On a balance, it seems reasonable to conclude that one’s native language provides the context for learning a second language... Evidence for transfer does not, however, mean that “language habits” are automatically transferred from L1 to L2. Rather, it appears that L2 stimulates a reorganization of existing linguistic knowledge.

**Conclusion**

Most Igbo-English bilinguals code-switch because they want to show high proficiency in the prestigious English language and play down on their mother tongue (Igbo language). Anukanna (1985) in Osuafor (2002, p.203) presents series of examples of this situation in code-switching among Igbo-English bilinguals. See his illustrations...

...onye chore ogu pue outside (He who wants to fight should go outside)
My mother ga aga ahia tomorrow (My mother will go to the market tomorrow)
Gwa your brother na m chore iju ya tomorrow. (Tell your brother that I want to see him tomorrow)... O putara na m magh my brand?
Nna this one dikwa hot! (My brother, this one is hot).

Anukanna adds that “At times code mixed expressions treat the marginal alternative as standard lexicon of the dominant pattern. E.g. O signi ni that document? (Has he signed that document?)
O clear go the container? (Has he cleared the container?)

According to him in the above phenomenon, ‘ala’ and ‘go’ which are Igbo past forms are suffixed to the English ‘sign’ and ‘clear’.

Finally, it is important that every Igbo speech community in Nigeria be sensitized on the consequences or negative effects of code-switching as a major cause of language endangerment. Also, linguists from Igbo speech communities should come together, have one voice, and organize seminars, workshops, and conferences in order to save their rich cultural heritage from going extinct as Bolinger (1975, p.385) warns: “A language also dies bit by bit as words grow obsolete and pass from use. But obituaries are harder to write than birth notices.”

Anukanna (1990, p.175) supports thus:

> finally, and most importantly, there is need for a change in the attitude of Nigerians in general and the Igbo in particular towards their mother tongue. If there is no conscious and vigorous effort in language use to stem the tide of unidirectional code-mixing which favours English to the detriment of the mother tongue, ... complete elimination by the dominant English language.
REFERENCES


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