Code Mixing and Code Switching Among Igbo Users of English Language

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Abstract

Code switching and code mixing are commonly used throughout the world. Both occur when two languages are used spontaneously in one clause or utterance. Code switching is also a complex process, which involves different levels of switching or mixing in accordance to with proficiency in the languages used. The aim of this paper is to explore the use of code switching and code mixing in among igbo users of English language. The important question in this paper, is why do people code switch or code mix unconsciously? In my observations, there appears to be a general tendency to code switch or code mix irrespective of their education, age and culture. Types of code switching, such as the intersentential, intrasentential and extrasentential, will be discussed and also be substantiated with examples. as well as the causes of code switching will be discussed.

Key Words: Language, Igbo language, Bilingualism, Code mixing, Code switching.

Introduction

Code switching can be defined as the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation. Crystal (1987) suggests that code switching or language switching occurs when two bilingual individuals alternates two languages during their speech between them. This kind of language alternation happens generally amongst bilinguals. These alternations can include sentences and/or phrases from both languages in a long and successive sentence or paragraph. Code switching and code mixing are phenomena which occur regularly in multilingual communities reflecting social group memberships. The study of how individuals use and process two or more languages is an extremely important area of research,

especially as the world's bilingual population continues to increase.

There is a growing body of literature designed to explore how bilinguals process and switch in and out of languages. This usually occurs in speech production when an individual is speaking one language (English language) and then rapidly replaces a word or phrase in that language with a word in the other language (Igbo language). Although the terms code (language)-mixing and code-switching are used interchangeably in current discussions.

Code-mixing was originally described as using words and phrases from one language in place of those in the other language within a single sentence. On the other hand, code-switching has been described as switching between languages based on changes in the speech situation, where the topic or members of the conversation change. This implies that code-switching does not occur within a sentence, whereas code-mixing is intra-sentential and does not rely on situational changes in the conversation. Since more recent work has not focused on differences between these two terms, the current chapter will refer to the switching between languages (i.e., whether it be within topics, paragraphs, sentences, etc.) as code-switching, the terminology most frequently used within the domain of cognitive psychology.

Several reasons as to why bilinguals code-switch have been proposed (Heredia and Altarriba, 2001). One of the most common reasons is that bilinguals use words from the other language because they do not know the proper word in the language they are currently using. Therefore, they go in and out of languages because they do not have all the necessary vocabulary in both languages. However, Heredia and Altarriba (2001) have suggested that the absence of lexical knowledge may not be responsible, but rather the ease/difficulty of retrieval is responsible. A bilingual may know the needed word in both languages, but they may use the needed word more frequently in one language as compared to the other, and therefore, they are able to retrieve the word faster from memory in that language. Secondly, bilinguals may code-switch because the expression or feeling that they are trying to communicate has a better translation in one language or because no identical translation in the other language exists (Heredia and Altarriba, 2001;).

Research has also revealed that code-switching may be used as a defense mechanism in clinical settings where individuals may speak in their second or less dominant language in order to remove themselves from a painful or hurtful emotional experience (Altarriba and Santiago-Rivera, 1994). Lastly, code-switching also appears to have advantages in the marketplace (Luna and Peracchio, 2005), where it has been shown that persuasive advertising for products and services increases when advertisements or slogans that are normally presented in the second language (L2) include code-switches to the first language (L1)

The focus of this paper is to discuss code-mixing and code-switching patterns that have been observed in Igbo users of English linguage, with a focus on the cognitive processes that underlie the switch between languages. In this paper, there will be a discussion on types of code switching which will be supported with examples and the reasons for code switching will also be discussed. Code-mixing and code-switching as concepts of sociolinguistics will be given more attention.

Language as a Concept

Language is vital to human society. In fact, it is the instrument that people employ to

coordinate the affairs of society. There are many definitions that been proffered by scholars about what the term language refers to. Nonetheless, it is necessary that we provide some of the common definitions of language that are available in the literature and then attempt to discuss these in relation to the interest of this paper.

Following the linguistic perspective, Sapir (1921) cited in Swann et al (2004:162), defines language as 'a purely human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols'. Wardhaugh (2006) explains that language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for communication.

In addition, Halliday (2003) describes language as a semiotic system or a system of meaning. Verderber (1999) notes that language is the collection of words and the system for their use in communication. These descriptions reflect Noam Chomsky's asocial view of language. In other words, they mirror an approach to language study that is formalistic, abstract, and focused on explaining the form or system of language. However, as a member of society, you would have observed that language is a communal possession. That is, there is a link between language and its users/society.

More importantly, sociolinguistic investigation of language focuses not just on the study of language as a system but also on the contextual examination of the nature and use of language. Thus, aspects of language such as context, communicative purpose, speakers' background among other factors are of interest to scholars in the field of sociolinguistics. For instance, based on its manner of acquisition and use, a sociolinguistic study of language could classify it as the first, second or foreign language of its users. If you take English as an example, its classification as a first, second or even foreign language in a speech community, is based on how people acquire the language, the functions they deplore it to perform, etc. Sociolinguistic study of a language could also focus on its vitality.

Language is a major means of identifying a set of people, nation or country. Some list of linguists, define language as the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by a people of a particular country. The word language is derived from "lingua" the Latin word for tongue, which rightly emphasizes the speech aspect as basic in language. It is often called that man is a "social being" and what, perhaps, plays the vital role in enabling man to act as a "social being" is his ability to use language for communication.

Language is the fundamental tool for social interaction that opens up the possibilities to convey, inform and share different ideas, thoughts, messages, feelings and viewpoints.

Ayeomoni, (2006) asserts that: The indispensability of language has been inexorably tied to the existence of man in the society. Language plays an important role in our lives.

Adetuyi and Okediran (2004) observe that language is the most powerful instrument of cohesion of all species. Human, animals and plants, in fact, every living thing has its language, verbal and nonverbal. It is presented here as a capstone of the myriad forms of sociocultural arrangements in nature.

Skiba, R. (1997) asserts that: "Language is intrinsic to the way we think, to the way we construct our groups and self-identities, to the way we perceive the world and organize our social relationships and political systems".

In the perception of Auer Peter(1998) :"language is not an abstract construction of the learned or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its basis broad and low close to the ground".

Igbo Language

Although Igbo language share the same feature with other languages of the world, it may be viewed differently from different authors. Umezi (2021) defines Igbo language as 'Kwa' language spoken by Igbo people as their mother tongue. This definition captures the group of language where Igbo language belongs. Besides, Umezi (2022) defines Igbo language is one of the 'Kwa' languages spoken by the Igbo people, and stands as their common unifying language. This definition resembles that of Umezi (2021), but the second definition added the unifying function of Igbo language as a feature that is very fundamental. As it concerns this work, the author defines Igbo language as the language of the people who occupy the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. This definition is geared towards drawing the attention of the Igbo people to the fact that they are the fundamental owners of Igbo language; other people who speak Igbo language are just partners.

The Concept of Bilingualism

Scholars in the field of sociolinguistics have noted that defining the term bilingualism is a bit complex and not as straightforward as it appears. One of the issues which seems to complicate efforts at defining the concept is, as Wardhaugh (2006) noted, the idea that some speakers are actually bi-dialectal rather than bilingual. In other words, they speak two varieties of a language that are distinctly different and not two languages.

Another issue is the complication posed by the notion of the degree of competence that bilinguals exhibit in the use of the two languages. This will be examined more closely later. Suffice to say for now that these issues have influenced scholars' perception of bilingualism over the years.

Nonetheless, let us consider some of the definitions that scholars have proffered for the term bilingualism. A classic description of bilingualism is that of Bloomfield (1933) in which he defines the phenomenon as "native-like control of two languages." The major argument that has been raised against this definition is that it imposes the idea of perfection on bilinguals' linguistic control of two languages when in actual performance a bilingual exhibits different degrees of competence in the two languages when in actual performance a bilingual exhibits different degrees of competence in the two languages (cf. Chomsky, 2006).

Mackey (1970) describes bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individuals. Similarly, Llamas et al (2007) define bilingualism as "the ability of a speaker or group to speak two or more languages." Fromkin et al (2011:460) define bilingualism as "the ability to speak two (or more) languages, either by an individual speaker, individual bilingualism, or within a society societal bilingualism." While Llamas et al's and Fromkin et al's definitions attest to the idea that bilingualism involves the use

of more than one language. While bilingualism has been described as involving the use of two languages, the concept is often also used in the literature to refer to the use of three or more languages. For the sake of clear delineation of concepts, in this course we prefer to refer to bilingualism as the control of two languages. It is important to also state that bilinguals can be ranged along a continuum of a rare instance of speakers who have native-like control of two languages and at the extreme end, speakers who have just a minimal control of the second language (Spolsky, 2003).

In addition, the bilingual's competence in the two languages usually depends on her/his needs and uses of the languages. This submission is important as many scholars have perceived bilinguals as two monolinguals living in one person. However, it has been observed that the constant interaction of the two languages that a bilingual use ultimately produces a different language system.

Code Mixing as a Concept

The term code-mixing or language alternations are used to describe more stable situations in which multiple languages are used without such pragmatic effects. In studies of bilingual language acquisition, code-mixing refers to a developmental stage during which elements of more than one language are freely mix. Nearly all Igbo-English bilinguals go through a period in which they move from one language to another without apparent discrimination.

Essien, Okon (1995) defines code- mixing as "a language phenomenon, in which two codes or languages are used for the same message or communication. Code-mixing generally takes place in informal situations, usually among speakers with the same linguistic background. It occurs at home, in parties among intimate people etc.

Code-mixing is done for specific purposes, serving both linguistic and social functions. Essien (1995) also asserts that code- mixing is adhoc and strongest in areas such as the academic disciplines, the professions, politics and the economy. Code-mixing is one of the features of the use of language in Nigeria, resulting from the complex linguistic system and biculturalism. It involves the presence of the dominant English language (the target language), and the indigenous Nigerian languages (igbo languages) in speech making Code-mixing is the change from one language to another within the same utterance or in the same oral/written text. It is a common phenomenon in societies in which two or more languages are used.

Studies of code-mixing enhance our understanding of the nature, processes and constraints of language and of the relationship between language use and individual values, communicative strategies, language attitudes and functions within particular socio-cultural contexts. Code-mixing leads to language hybridization that in turn gives birth to the issues of language maintenance, shift, and desertion.

Wardhaugh (2002) characterizes that "code mixing occurs when during conversation; speakers "use both languages" together to the extent that they shift from one language to the other in the course of a single utterance". In code-mixing sentences, pieces of one language are used while a speaker basically using another language. Code mixing is a mixing of two codes or languages, usually without a change of topic. Code mixing often

occurs within one sentence, one element is spoken in language A and the rest in language B. In formal situation, the speaker tends to mix it because there is no exact idiom in that language, so it is necessary to use words or idioms from other language

Code Switching as a Concept

Bilingual speakers often switch codes, that is, move from one language to another and back again in the course of conversations. Sometimes, it is unclear which one they are speaking at any particular point. The process may result in language mixing. But in most cases, one of the languages wins out, and the other is demoted to subsidiary status. while using the subordinate language speakers code-switch (one of five strategies employed) to lighten the cognitive load of having to remember and use two different linguistic systems. Code-switching may become an integral element of bilingual speech when there is no functional differentiation between two languages in contact or restrictions on their use. Where languages in contact have significant place in the socio-economic context, codes witching may lead to the evolving of a "new" language, such as Nigerialish, Engligbo, etc. But if one of the languages has a superior position in the socio-politico-economic arrangement, there is a tendency for people to shift from the less "significant" language to a dominant socioeconomically viable language.

Education and mobility of people from their places of origin to other parts of the country favour shift from local languages to English in Nigeria. Kuntze (2000:289):"Code switching is conventionally thought of, as the mixing of two languages in an utterance," since the interchanging of languages in a given conversation could involve the use of not only words of the languages involved but also their different grammars and morphological features.

According to Kuntze (2000) "if the morphology and syntax are consistent with only one of the languages, any non-native lexical item must be borrowed; if not then, it is case of code switching" (p.289). Similarly, Fasold (1984) considers the interchange of grammatical structures in an utterance as code-switching, when the grammatical structure of a clause is different from that of a preceding one. This may imply that lexical items may belong to one language and the grammatical structure to another. Such covert cases of code-switching are encountered in igbo-english bilinguals, otherwise meaningless, that are direct translations of mother tongue.

Many proficient speakers of English are unaware of deviant sentences and pronunciations in the Igbo-English repertoire (An Igbo person could pronounce the word "vulcanizer "as "fokaniza," just as most people in the city say it). Therefore, first and second language learners are acquiring models of English riddled with deviants. Code-switching in Nigeria is a characteristic of transitional bilingualism and may indicate a process of shift from traditional languages to English. Sometimes, people consider that code switching and code mixing have the same meaning. But actually both of them are different. People in the bilingualism or multilingualism situation often change language or variety of languages. This situation depends on situation or the need for communication such as when a person uses a standard language when he meets his guest. When he knows that, actually, the guest is his old friend, the person switches his standard

language into informal language. This phenomenon is called code switching.

Types of Code Switching

There are three main types of code-switching: **Inter-sentential, Intra-sentential**, and **Extra-sentential** (also known as **'Tag switching'**).

Inter-Sentential

Inter-sentential switching is a type of code-switching that occurs in two different sentences in which the first sentence is in full primary language (L1) and then followed by the second sentence in full second language (L2). In other words, inter-sentential switching is when a speaker switches his language from one to another in different sentence or after the turn-taking with another speaker. inter-sentential switching occurs in two separate sentences in an utterance because the bilingual speaker lacks proper or equivalent lexical resource, wants to be understood better by the other party of similar language ability and wants to show belonging to a certain group.

Examples;

- Mechie xzq ahx. I want to sleep.
  Close the door. I want to sleep.

- Bunye m oche, let me sit down.
  Give me a chair, i want to sit down

- Mee qs[sq, you are late for work.
  Hurry up, you are late for work.

- Nye ha ego nr[. they are hungry.
  Give them money for food. They're hungry.

- Nkechi b[ara qrx taa, looking very tired.
  Nkechi came to work today, looking tired.

Intra-Sentential

Intrasentential code-switching' is the practice of switching between two languages within a single sentence structure while adhering to grammatical rules. Intra-sentential switching occurs within a sentence or a clause. It switches at the clause, phrase or word level if no morpho-phonological adaptation occurs. In intra-sentential code switching, the shift is done in the middle of a sentence, with no interruptions, hesitations, or pauses to indicate a shift. The speaker is usually unaware of the shift. Intra- sentential switching is the most complex type of code switching in which the speakers are able to control two linguistic systems simultaneously.

Examples;

- Chioma ga-ab[a na my house tomorrow ma q bxrx na q lqta school.

Chioma will come to my house tomorrow when she is back from school.

- please gaa wetara m my hand bag n'ime office m.
  please go and get my handbag from my bag.

- gbanyere m that bulb ka mx hx xzq mee my assignment.
  On that bulb so that i can do my assignment.

- Enter the car ka any[gaa somewhere weta ihe.
- Nyem my phone ka mx kpqq onye police ahx now.

Intra-word switching: Occurs within a word itself, such as at a morpheme boundary.

- Chanji [[elam] ego a.
  change this money for me.

- help [godu ya] bute akpa ahx
  help her carry the bag

- Bringi [godu] the phone.
  Please bring the book.

Extra-sentential (also known as **'Tag switching'**).

Tag-switching is the switching of either a tag phrase or a word, or both, from one language to another (Wei, 2000). A tag in one language is inserted into an utterance which is otherwise entirely in other language. The insertion of a tag to an utterance has virtually no ramifications for the rest of the sentence.

This is because tags have no syntactic constraints, they can be moved freely, and they can be inserted almost anywhere in a discourse without violating any grammatical rules. In other words, tag-switching can be defined as a switching that occurs when someone inserts short expressions or tag in other language than the main language in the utterance.

Examples

- M na-achq []x wine
  I want to drink wine

- Nye chika pillow ahx
  Give me that pillow

- Nye m slippers m
  Give me my slippers

- Zxtara m pen
  Buy me pen.

Reasons for Code switching

Lack of L2 Competence:

A lot of igbo-english bilinguals do not have enough linguistic competence in the second language. In other words, they do not have enough language proficiency. Therefore, lack of literacy in L2 is found to be the first and most dominant factor for code-switching among the participants

Lack of Vocabulary Knowledge:

Most of the igbo-english bilinguals do not know the English words. Therefore, they have to code switch to their mother tongue or their first language.

Ease to Speak in speaking in the first language (L1): A lot of igbo-english

bilinguals more comfortable when speaking in their own language compared to speaking in English .

Pragmatic Reasons: It is assumed that speakers may resort to code switching in order to draw attention to the conversational context because alternating between two languages is at times highly meaningful.

To Fill the Gap: in Speaking, The A lot of igbo-english bilinguals compensate for the stopgaps and interruptions using their native language. To avoid gaps in communication, code switching is used as a compensatory strategy for the lack of fluency in the target language.

To Emphasize a Point: bilinguals repeate the message to be communicated in the target language in their mother tongue in their attempt to give the meaning by using a repetition technique. Repetition as a specific case of language alternation is used for two purposes: First, that may communicate the meaning they intended accurately in the target language. the use code switching to communicate the message more clearly. Repetition as a code switching strategy is used to make speech seem fashionable or to „add emphasis" in the second language so that the addressee would capture what they say and be impressed.

To Maintain Privacy: The least noticeable reason of code switching is to maintain privacy. Bilinguals code switch so that other people would not understand what they are conveying with friends from the home Igbo land.

Conclusion

Concept of code-mixing and code-switching is an ordinary phenomenon in the area of bilingualism. These phenomena occur when bilinguals substitute a word or phrase from one language to another language. Code-mixing and code-switching are widespread phenomena in bilingual communities where speakers use their native tongue (L1) and their second language (L2) in different domains. In monolingual societies, people may think that code-switching and code mixing is very unnatural. However, code-mixing and Codeswitching may influence bilinguals" languages positively. Code switching occurs when the bilinguals attempt to maintain order, to create solidarity or empathy, to cover lack of experience or strategies, to rephrase or modify their speech among many other reasons. The phenomenon of code switching is consequently also present in second language learning situation. For instance, during an English lesson in a school, English and the first language which are also called frequently switched. Many teachers of English code switching as a communicative strategy for learners with insufficient vocabulary resources and thus as a source of concern. Consequently, these teachers may be intolerant of switching to the native language. At the same time, recent studies suggest that code switching is a part of the process of acquiring a second language and that may be an important competence in itself in the way the speaker is able to alternate between the two languages and employ each language for specific purposes. The native language is (in most cases) a common code of communication which makes it possible to level off the linguistic advantage held by the teacher. Thus, in spite of the existing but unwritten pedagogical rule to speak the target language, the second language learners are aware of the possibility to retreat to the native language if necessary. Code switching and code mixing is widely

observed especially in multilingual and multicultural communities. Although it is not favoured by many educators, one should have at least an understanding of the functions of switching between the native language and the target language. Teaching in bilingual education is a challenging activity since bilingual teachers have to make learners comprehend the lesson. They do not only have to be able to teach in English very well, but they also have to be able to make lesson clearly understood by the students.

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