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Code-Alternation Among Selected Yoruba-English Bilinguals

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Abstract

The phenomenon of code alternation (CA) as a powerful language strategy existing in all communities in the world is very common place among Nigerian bilinguals. However, this common-placism does not translate into acceptability among the participants. As should be expected, different groups of people in the society are reflected in the patterns and use of CA, suggesting that social forces affect the performance of CA, making distinctions from those basic factors controlling basic structure with which they interact. It is also common knowledge that when speakers are bilinguals and CA is a component of the community, the type of code choices they make becomes a label for them, arising from adverse effect of the phenomenon regarded as a demerit. Accordingly, this paper sets out to provide quantitative evidence on the acceptability of these choices using selected Yoruba-English bilinguals. The findings reveal that there are variations in

attitude to CA, the dominant one being positive. The implications of this for language instructions have been discussed.

Introduction

Language is central to any situation that involves human interaction because it is an instrument of thought. Language helps man to think, create and keep a record of events. It is also used to seek and give information. It is indeed the major tool of communication in any social setting. Language is part and parcel of a people's cultural heritage and it is the index for assessing the developmental programmes of its speakers.

Nigeria, with over four hundred indigenous languages (Bamgbose, 1974), is no doubt heterogeneous, and this makes it very important and mandatory for the Federal Government to emphasize the use of the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba)as medium of instruction during the child's first three years in primary school. During this time English is a subject in the curriculum, thereafter English which is presently our official language, becomes the language of instruction (National Policy on Education, 2004). The essence of this is to promote the frontiers of the languages and possibly evolve a lingua franca from one of them. However the implementation of this policy been haphazard, has not produced the desired result.

As a result of this position of the Federal Government of Nigeria, every child is expected to learn at least one of the major Nigerian languages in addition to his/her mother tongue. The child also learns English language. By the end of Junior Secondary School, a school-going child in Nigeria is expected to have acquired three languages thus:

L1 – language of his immediate community (LIC)

L2 – a major Nigerian language apart from his mother tongue
L3 – English language.

The above being the case, many Nigerian school children have been observed to be more conversant and relaxed with their mother-tongue (Bamgbose, 1986) but are deficient in their appropriate use of a second Nigerian language and English. Amuda, (1986) observes that code-alternation is one of the literary features that many bilingual African writers employ to narrate their stories and dramas. He goes further to explain that writers and speakers switch from their languages of narration to another for reasons of stylistics or literary effect. Apart from the above code-switching and code-mixing are two vital speech forms of a bilingual's verbal repertoire which have received considerable socio-linguistic attention in recent time. (see Das,2011; MacSwan,2013; Kanngieser,2013)

Code-alternationin literature.

Code-switching is a linguistic term denoting the concurrent use of more than one language or language variety in conversation. It is the syntactically and phonologically appropriate use of more than one linguistic variety. Araromi (1999) defines code-switching as "the use of more than one language by communicationin the execution of a speech-act" while Grosjean (1982) defines it as "the alternate use of two or more languaes in the same utterance or conversation". To Bello (1999), code-switching is a total shift or change from one language to another. From these definitions, it is evident that at least two languages or two varieties of a language must come into contact before code-switching can occur. Another observation by Bamiro (2006) was that the contact occurs within a single speech or utterance.

For code-switching to be firmly established in any conversation, Pfaff (1979) submits that it must entail the ability to switch from code A to code B and that the alternation of codes is determined by the function, the situation and the participants. In other words, it refers to categorization of one's verbal repertoire in terms of functions and roles.

Switching between languages is extremely common and takes many forms. A long narrative may switch from one language to the other, sentences may alternate as a sentence may begin in one language and end in another or phrases from both languages may succeed each other in apparently random order.Such a behaviour can be explained only by postulating a range of linguistic or social factors such as:

(a)   speakers cannot express themselves adequately in one language, so switch to the other in order to take care the deficiency. This tends to happen a great deal when the speaker is upset, tired or otherwise disturbed. This factor is prevalent among the educated elites and their children. It is common to hear statements like:

(1)   Mo ṣẹ̀ṣẹ̀ parí iṣẹ́ yẹn ni and I am dog tired.   (I just completed the assignment and I am dog tired).

(2)   Mi ò ní wá fún iṣẹ́ ọla. I am traveling to Lagos. (I won't attend tomorrow's lecture. I am traveling to Lagos).

(3)   Allah ki yaye. Bá mi kí bàbá àgbà. (Journey mercies. My regards to old man)

(b)   Switching to a minority language is very common as a means of expressing solidarity with a social group. The language change signals to the listener that the speaker is from a certain background if the listener responds with a similar switch, a degree of rapport can be established. This factor is evident among politicians during electioneering campaigns. Reference is usually made to the late Nnamdi Azikiwe who spoke the three major Nigerian languages fluently anytime he got to any of the regions then in Nigeria.

(c)   the switch between languages can signal the speaker's attitude towards the listener – friendly, irritated, distant, ironic, jocular etc.

Poplack (1980) in Romaine (1989) identifies three types of code-switching which are: tag switching, inter-sentential and intra-sentential. Tag switching is the insertion of a tag of one language in an utterance which is otherwise entirely in the other language. For example, "you know", "I mean" etc which are English tags. These are easily inserted at a number of points in a monolingual utterance without violating syntactic rules. Inter-sentential switching involves a switch at the level of a sentence, where each sentence is in one language or another. It requires greater fluency in both languages than tag switching as major portions of the utterance must conform to the rules of both languages. Intra-sentential switching involves the greatest syntactic risk and may be avoided by all but the most fluent bilinguals. Here, switching of different types occur within the sentence boundary. Code-mixing therefore takes place intra-sententially while code-switching is inter -sentential(Ogunsiji,2004)

Meanwhile, Poplack and Sankoff (1988) predict possible sites for code-switching for pairs of languages with different word order typology like subject-object-verb (SOV) and subject-verb-object (SVO as in Panjabi and English respectively. In this case, switches would not occur between verb and object but the subject, but between Welsh and English which have VSO/SVO, switches are possible before the object and not between subject and verb or vice-versa.

Code-mixing

This is a thematically related term but the usage of the term varies. Some scholars use code-switching and code-mixing to denote the same practice while others apply code-mixing to denote the formal linguistic properties of the said language contact phenomena and code-switching to denote the actual, spoken usages by multilingual persons. Code-switching and code-mixing are so much related in such a way that the latter may trigger off

the former. However, whichever way we look at the two terms, they are parts of the consequences of bilingualism. (see Akindele and Adegbite, 1999)

When we take a cursory look at these scholarly views, it could be submitted that code-switching and code-mixing are bilingual features that are rampant among students in educational institutions today. Its high effect is among students in tertiary institutions. Code-mixing, according to Singh (1985) is reserved for intra-sentential switching while code-switching is for any diglossic situation where only one code is employed at a time or in cases where the code alternation refers to structurally identifiable stages or episodes of a speech event. Lawal (1991) however, is of the opinion that code-mixing and code-switching among bilinguals result from linguistic confusion and inadequacy especially limited vocabulary in the language in question. According to Lawal, code-mixing is also called "interlarding" and it refers to:

the frequent use of lexical items and expressions of one language (or more) while communicating in another language e.g. "Ẹ ti ṣe devoir tí auntie fún wa yẹn?" – Lexical items from English (auntie = English pet word) and French (devoir – assignment) are inserted into an otherwise Yoruba utterance.

To be sure, code-switching refers to the use of two or more languages alternatively in one discourse. Examples given in Yoruba/French are:

(4)   Tógàá ò bá tiẹ̀ wá, nous avons beaucoup de choses a faire.

(5)   Sorry for disturbing you. Wòó, nígbà wo la ní iṣẹ́ Adédojà?

Lawal upholds earlier literature that switching is used to exclude non-users but he was quick to add that this is due to the

shortcomingof the speaker in the codes or languages used.This might not be particularly right if we consider the creativity and ingenuity of hip-hop artists in their use of mother tongue and the English language.   On code-mixing, Bello (1999) presents English/Yoruba sentences such as:

(6)   In fact, mo rí lady yẹn lánàá.

(7)   O ò lè believe pé mo gbàgbé.

To Lawal, code-mixing is a show of one's knowledge of the language a speaker is mixing and there is nothing bad in it as long as the context of use is proper and the listener understands. He however warns that this should not come up in formal situations.

It is discovered that switches could occur in any site within the structure of Yoruba and English because they share a common structure (SVO). Examples are as follows:

(8)   Mo like ẹ̀wà very much   .
         (I like beans very much)

(9)   Girl yẹn pretty gan-an
         (That girl is very pretty)

(10)   Mo kí ọlọ́jọ́ ìbí, happy birthday.
         (I congratulate the celebrant, happy birthday)

(11)   Ó gba deposit lọ́wọ́ mi kó tó release ìgò.
         (He collected advance payment before releasing the bottle)

(12)   Olú ń gbé ní nọnba 2, Ọládipọ̀Street.
         (Olu lives at number 2, Oladipo Street).

In sentence (8) above, "like" occurs in the verb position and "very much" in the adverbial position while in sentence (9), "yẹn" is a demonstrative qualifier after the subject and before the verb (is) which does not appear in the code-mixed utterance. In sentence (10), the noun-phrase "happy birthday" occurs after the clause, "mo kí ọlọ́jọ́ ìbí ". In sentence (11), the noun "deposit" occurs in the object position after the noun phrase, "ó gba" and "release" is a verb that occurs before "ìgò" which occurs in the object position. In sentence (12) "at number 2 Oladipo Street", an adverbial phrase has been used after the Yoruba utterance, "Ọlá ń gbé".

Amongst Yoruba artists, it is common to hear a lot of them traverse on the corridor of code-switching and code-mixing. This phenomenon dated back to the early 70s when popular juju musician in the like of Ebenezer Obey sang:

Operation feed the nation, nìjọba tún gbé dé
(Government has introduced Operation Feed the Nation) and when austerity measure was introduced in the 80s, the same musician sang:

Ká fètò si ká jọ ṣe /2ce
Austerity measure yìí galọ́lá
Austerity measure yìí kọ yọyọ
(Let's join hands and do it together
This austerity measure is serious
This austerity measure is beyond measure)

The late àpàlà music maestro, Haruna Ishola also sang the song below to commemorate his first visit to London:

On my way to London, kò séwu rárá
Ganni ya fiji, ìròyìn kò táfòójúbà
(On my way to London, there was no problem at all seeing is believing, it is better seen than told).

While Ebenezer Obey switches from English to Yoruba, Haruna Ishola switches from English "On my way to London" to Yoruba, "kò séwu rárá", to Hausa "ganni ya fiji" and then to Yoruba ìròyìn kò táfòójúbà". In the contemporary Nigerian music, most fújì, jùjú, àpàlà and other musicians in Yoruba spice their music with code-alternation. Among gospel musicians, a code-mixed chorus like this is a common occurrence:

I just want say,
Bàbá o, È ṣé eéeè
I just want to say
Bàbá o, Ẹ ṣeun

and when someone prays in Yoruba in the Pentecostal church, the congregation respond, "amen" instead of "àmín" and to confirm the Nigerianness of their English at the end of the prayer, they chorus:

Amen, amen, amen in Jesus name.

to conform with its Yoruba equivalent:

Àmín, àmín, àmín lórúkọ Jésù

As is obvious from the existing literature, code alternation is very common in the Nigerian linguistic environment but does this translate to its acceptability among its participants? The rest of the paper addresses this issue.

Research Questions

(i)   What is the attitude of selected English/Yoruba bilinguals towards code-mixing and code-switching?

(ii)   Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of civil servants and university students toward mixed codes among bilinguals.

(iii) Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of language and non-language specialists toward mixed codes among bilinguals?

(iv)   Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of male and female respondents toward mixed codes of bilinguals?

(v)   Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of language and non-language university students toward mixed codes of bilinguals?

(vi)   Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of male and female university students toward mixed codes of bilinguals?

Methodology

(a) **Subjects:**   The population for the study comprised the staff and students of Lagos State University, Ojo. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 126 subjects, made up of 86 students (39 Yoruba language students and 47 non-language students) and

40 members of staff who were also Yoruba/English bilinguals and who are referred to in this study as civil servants.

Instrumentation

An instrument, Acceptability index of code-mixing of Yoruba-English Bilinguals (AICOMYE) containing 25 items and drawn on a four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D), was administered on the subjects. The instrument was subjected to a reliability test after its initial construction using the Cronbach Alpha statistical formula. A reliability co-efficient of .67 was established.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics of simple percentage and the t-test as appropriate.

Results and Discussion

Research question one:
(1)   What is the attitude of subjects toward code-switching and code-mixing?

Table 1: General Attitude of Subjects Toward Code-switching/Mixing

S/N	ITEMS	SA/A	%	SD/D	%	TOTAL
1.	Code-mixing/code switching is a bad habit that should be discouraged.	78*	61.90	48	38.10	126 (100)

2.	People code-mix due to lack of adequate linguistic facility in the languages of communication.	74*	58.73	52	41.27	125 (150)
3.	Code-mixing merely shows one's knowledge of the language he is mixing.	67*	53.17	59	46.83	126 (100)
4.	Code-mixing is done out of laziness and it is embarrassing.	49	38.89	77*	61.11	126 (100)
5.	Code-mixing is good as long as the context of use is proper and the listener decodes the codes being mixed.	89*	70.63	37	29.37	126 (100)
6.	I don't like being stigmatized and so I don't code-mix at all.	44	34.92	82*	65.08	126 (100)
7.	I do code-mix but not in the public.	76	60.32	50	39.68	126 (100)
8.	Code-mixing fills a momentary linguistic need.	88	69.84	46	30.16	126 (100)
9.	Code-mixing is a good	57	45.24	69*	54.76	126 (100)

	communication resource.					
10.	Code-mixing is a normal feature of a bilinguals' speech	83*	65.87	43	34.13	126 (100)
11.	It is not a crime to code-mix because some occasions demand for it.	112*	88.89	14	11.11	126 (100)
12.	To exclude someone from conversation, code mixing is needed.	86*	68.25	40	31.75	126 (100)
13.	Code-mixing might be necessary as a mark of ethnic or group identity.	104	82.54	22	17.46	126 (100)
14.	To quote the exact language used by an original speaker, I support the use of code-mixing or code-switching.	87*	69.05	39	30.95	126 (100)
15.	It is only a monolingual and those who are ignorant that will regard code-mixing as a	79*	62.70	47	37.30	126 (100)

	jargon or gibberish.					
16.	People are impressed when code-mixing, code-switching is done fluently in the codes mixed/switched.	89*	70.63	37	29.37	126 (100)
17.	Those who code-mix or code-switch are bilinguals or multilinguals, so they should be respected.	69*	54.76	57	45.24	126 (100)
18.	Most people who code-mix or code-switch effectively could be good interpreters.	96*	76.19	30.	23.81	126 (100)
19.	Code-mixing/code-switching is an asset to individuals and nations	77*	61.11	49	38.89	126 (100)
20.	A bilingual who code-switches effectively would be effective as a teacher, intelligence (security officer) etc.	90*	1.43	36	28.57	126 (100)

21.	Some bilinguals switch from one language to the other when they want to shift or switch their personalities.	92*	73.02	34	26.98	126 (100)
22.	Some resort to code-switching because certain feelings/emotions are better expressed in one language than the other.	119*	94.44	07	5.56	126 (100)
23.	Tiredness, anger or excitement might influence bilinguals to code-mix or code-switch	99*	78.57	27	21.43	126 (100)
24.	Stress may make an individual not to find appropriate words and this might lead to unintended code switching/mixing.	105*	83.33	21	16.67	126 (100)
25.	In an extremely painful situation, a bilingual may code mix/code-switch.	110*	87.30	16	12.70	126 (100)

From the table one above, one could say that the subjects have a generally positive attitude towards code-switching and code-mixing. But their responses to some items indicate negative disposition toward the phenomenon.

Picking those items that received negative responses from the subjects, for item 1, 78 respondents out of the total 126 are of the opinion that code mixing/code switching is a bad habit that should be discouraged while only 48 disagreed. For item 2, 74 respondents representing 58.73% agreed that people code-mix due to lack of adequate linguistic facility in the language of communication, while only 52 (41.27%) disagreed. This indeed is in agreement with the view of **Lawal (1991)** who believes that code mixing among bilinguals' result from linguistic confusion and inadequacy especially limited vocabulary in the language being used. Responses to item 9 also indicate an unfavourable attitude as 69 respondents disagreed with the statement that code-mixing is a good communication resource.

Responses to other items tend towards positive attitudes toward code-mixing and code-switching. Notable among these include that of item 4 where 77 respondents (61.11%) disagreed with the statement that code-mixing is done out of laziness and it is embarrassing while only 49 (38.89%) agreed. To item 5, 89 respondents (70.63%) believe that code-mixing is good as long as their context of use is proper and the listener decodes the codes being mixed. In response to item 6, 82 subjects indicated their objection to the statement that for dislike of being stigmatized, they rather not code-mix at all.

Other notable reasons in favour of code-mixing/code-switching in the table include the following:

-          Code-mixing is a normal feature of a bilinguals speech (item 10).
-          It is not a crime to code-mix because some occasions demand for (item 11). To exclude someone from conversation, code-mixing is need (item 12).
-          It is a mark of ethnic or group identity (item 13).

- To quote the e3xact language used by an original speaker (item 14).
- A bilingual who code-switches effectively would be a good interpreter teacher, intelligence officer, an asset to himself and nations (item 18, 19 and 20).
- To shift personalities (item 21).
- To express certain feelings and emotions (item 22).
- Tiredness, anger, excitement, and stress and even painful situation might make bilingual to code switch (items 23, 24 & 24).

That code mixing is a normal feature of bilinguals' speech is in agreement with the view of **Bello (1999).** The view of respondents that code-mixing affords bilinguals the opportunity to exclude a non-speaker of the language of discourse in conversation; to identify with one's ethnic group; to quote the exact words of the original speaker among others are in consonance with the view of **Grosjean (1982)** and **Bello (1999).**

Research Question 2.

Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of civil servants and university students toward mixed codes among bilinguals?

The t-test comparison of the means of civil servants and university students was done in order to investigate the possibility of a significant difference in attitude towards mixed codes and results are displayed in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2: Comparison of civil servants and university students attitudes towards mixed codes among bilinguals

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t calculated	Critical t	Remarks
Civil servants	40	69.75	9.80	124	0.78	1.96	Not significant at 0.05
University students	86	71.16	8.74				

p>.05

The table reveals that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of civil servants (69.75) and university students (71.16). The observed or calculated t-value of 0.78 is less than the critical value of t (1.96 for df of 124 at 0.05 alpha level. The hypothetical question is therefore not rejected.

The finding should not be a surprise since the civil servants are educated like the university students; hence there is no significant difference in their attitudes toward mixed codes of bilinguals.

Research Question 3

Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of language and non-language specialists toward mixed codes among bilinguals?
T-test was calculated in order to compare the mean of language and non-language students for the purpose of establishing the existence or non-existence of a significant difference in their attitudes towards mixed code among bilinguals. The table is presented below:

Table 2:   Comparison of language and non-language students' attitudes

Group	N	X	SD	DF		Critical t	Remarks
Language specialists	71	72.23	9.53	124	2.43	1.96	* significant at 0.05
Non-language specialists	55	68.36	8.31				

Table t. at df (124) – 1.96 t cal = 2.43; p<0.05

Findings

Calculated t 7 table t. Therefore there is a significant difference. From table 3, it is revealed that a significant difference exists between the attitudes of language specialists and non-language specialists toward mixed codes of bilinguals. The means of language specialists 72.23 exceeds that of non-language specialists of 68.36. This situation is expected because language specialists are expected to know and understand the concept of mixed codes better than the non-language specialists.

Research Question 4

Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of male and female respondents toward mixed codes of bilinguals?

In order to test the null hypothesis emanating from this question, the t-test comparison of the means of the variables are carried out as follows:

Table 4: Comparison male and female attitudes towards mixed code of bilinguals

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t calculated	Critical t	Remarks
Male	47	69.55	9.98		0.07	1.96	Not significant at 0.05
Female	79	71.41	8.45	124			

Table t at df (124) = 1.96; t = 1.07 p<0.05

Findings: calculated t < table t.   Therefore, no significant difference.

It is discovered that no significant difference exists between the attitudes of male and female respondents toward mixed code of bilinguals. Despite the fact that there is a difference between the means of male 69.55 and female 71.41, the difference is not statistically significant. Since all the respondents are educated, this might be a reason why there is no significant difference between their attitudes toward mixed codes among bilinguals.

Research Question 5

Is there any significant difference between language and non-language university students' attitudes toward mixed codes of bilinguals?

The t-test table below shows the computation of the comparison of the means of language and non-language university students in order to investigates the possibility of a significant difference in their attitudes toward mixed codes of bilinguals.

Table 5: Comparison of language and non-language university students' attitudes toward mixed codes of bilinguals

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t calculated	Critical t	Remarks

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t calculated	Critical t	Remarks
Language students	39	74.28	9.61	84	3.07	1.98	* significant at 0.05
Non-language students	47	68.51	7.37				

Table t at df (84) = 1.98; t = 3.07 p<0.05

Findings: Calculated t 3.07 > table t. Therefore, there is a significant difference.

In consonance with the result of research question 3, there is a significant difference between the attitude of language and non-language university students toward mixed codes of bilinguals. There is no doubt that the content knowledge of language to which the language students were exposed to give them an edge over their non-language counterparts.

Research Question 6

Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of male and female university students toward mixed codes of bilinguals? To test the null hypothesis emanating from the research question, t-table below gives the analysis.

Table 6: Comparison of Male and Female students' attitudes toward mixed codes

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t calculated	Critical t	Remarks
Male	27	69.93	8.97	84	0.75	1.98	Not significant at 0.05
Female	59	71.47	8.43				

Table t at df (84) = 1.98; t = 0.75; p>0.05

Findings: Calculated t 0.75 < table t. Therefore, there is no significant difference.

Like the result of hypothesis four that recorded a non-significant difference between the attitudes of male and female respondents toward mixed codes of bilinguals there is also no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female students toward mixed codes of bilingual. Although the means of female 71.47 exceeds that of the male 69.93, the difference is not statistically significant. These results go to show that gender factor in not significant in determining attitudes toward mixed codes of bilinguals. This might be the result of the equal opportunities being enjoyed by both sexes in terms of educational opportunities.

Conclusion

A general conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that respondents have positive attitudes towards the mixed codes of bilinguals. This might be due to the fact that the respondents are educated and informed. Considering the fact that some of the respondents have negative attitudes towards mixed codes, it is expedient that language teachers give more explanations on mixed codes and their functions. As Ayeomoni (2006), has suggested, since CA correlate positively with the educational attainment of individuals, English language teachers should devise the means of preventing the demerits from adversely affecting the language acquisition of the child. People living in heterogeneous communities like Lagos must realize the fact that when two of more languages are in contact, phenomenon such as code mixing switching, language interference and language transfer cannot be ruled out.

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