Code-switching: Insights from code-switched English/Igbo expressions

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Abstract

This paper points out that code-switching is situation-based. With data from English/Igbo code-switching, four situations emerge. The first is interpreted as a case of borrowing. The second is argued to be a form of quasi-borrowing. Certain English expressions have been assimilated into Igbo and used synonymously with the Igbo equivalents. Support for this is drawn from the fact that Igbo monolinguals and partial and full English/Igbo bilinguals use the expressions. The third represents real code-switching and is motivated by the need to show solidarity or relax formality and some other socio-psychological factors outside the scope of this paper. The fourth involves names, which by convention ought not to be substituted to preserve their referential properties. Via these situations, the paper concludes that a good number of expressions designated code-switched expressions do not qualify to be.

1.0 Introduction

Code-switching is basically a switch from a language to another in an act of conversation. Wardhaugh (1998:103) points out that it is often quite subconscious. In his words, "people may not be aware that they have switched or be able to report, following a conversation, which code they used..."

From the foregoing, it is an indication that code-switching is a phenomenon closely associated with bilingualism. Noteworthy is the fact that it is sometimes referred to as code-mixing, code-switching or code-changing. However, some linguists have used the terms; code-switching and code-mixing to distinguish two types of alternation. Whereas they used code-switching to describe alternation involving sentences from two languages, they used code-mixing to describe alternation involving lexical or phrasal constituents from the languages within a sentence. (cf Gumperz, 1976; Fasold, 1984) Sometimes, code-switching is used to refer to both types. The one involving alternation of sentences in a single discourse is known as inter-sentential switching while the one involving alternation of lexical and phrasal categories within a sentence in called intra-sentential switching. (cf Poplack, 1980; Kachru, 1978) This paper intends to look at both types but we shall use the term; code-switching to refer to both types.

2.0 Delimitation

Code-switching is a phenomenon that is wide spread in the world occasioned by bilingualism, even multilingualism, which appears to be the norm for many people. It has therefore received a good amount of attention. The attention cuts across its motivation, its effective evaluation within a speech community and most recently, its internal permutations. May it be noted that some of the linguists to whom this attention could be credited are Pfaff (1979), Poplack (1980), Gumperz (1982), Bentahila and Davies (1983), and Wardhaugh (1998).

The bias of this paper is to categorize code-switching. Dwelling on this bias, Wardhaugh (1998) classifies code-switching into two, *situational code-switching* and *metaphorical code-switching*. He explains that situational code-switching occurs when the languages used change according to situations in which the conversants find themselves. On the other hand, when a change of topic requires a change in language, metaphorical code-switching occurs. These two types of code-switching are captured by Gumperz (1982:70)

> Code-switching occurs in conditions of change, where group boundaries are diffuse, norms and standards of evaluation vary and where speakers' ethnic identities and social backgrounds are not matters of common agreement. Yes, if it is true that code-switching styles serve as functioning communicative systems, if members can agree on interpretations of switching on context and categorizing others on the basis of their switching, there must be some regularities and shared perceptions on which these judgments can be based.

What the above suggests, among others, is that code-switching is motivated by situation. That is, it is situation-governed.

In this paper, code-switched English/Igbo expressions have been examined for the purpose of categorizing them and the categorization is primarily based on the motivations for such language mixing. The examination has been done with recourse to two of the four questions framed by Pfaff (1979), for distinguishing between code-switching and borrowing. The third question has been framed in this paper to give strength to the second question.

i. Does an LI equivalent exist?

ii. If so, is it also used in the community?

iii. What is the spread of its use?

2.1 Code-switched English/Igbo Expressions

The code-switched English/Igbo expressions presented here were collected from conversations at different places: at homes, from teachers in the primary schools, people in different public places, etc. Our subjects were mostly bilinguals but some Igbo monolinguals were also recorded. The persons were not allowed to suspect the collection. Below are glossed samples of code-switched expressions collected for this study. Igbo items in the expressions are in italics.

(1) Cup *ahụ dị n'elu* table.
Cup that is on top table
'The cup is on the table'

(2) *Ọ* mark-*ị-chala* *ule* *ahụ*.
He mark-SE-complete exam that
'He has finished marking the exam'

(3) Obi *zụrụ* car *ọhụrụ*
Obi buy-PST car new
'Obi bought a new car'

(4) Eze *na-e*-criticise *onye* *ọbụla*.
Eze AUX-VP-criticise person all
'Eze criticises everybody'

(5) *Ndi* *ori* *ahụ si* *na* window *wụpụ*
Those stealing that through in window jump-out
'The thieves jumped out from the window'

(6) The pencil is red. *Ọ na-acha* *ọbara ọbara*.
It AUX-VP-colour blood blood
'The pencil is red. It is red'

(7) Modern means of transportation, *Ụzọ agba ọhụụ* *eji* *eme* *njem*.
way era new use doing journey
'Modern means of transportation, the modern way of traveling'

(8) Transportation by canoe *bụ* *iji* *ụgbọ mmiri* *eme* *njem*.
is to use vehicle water doing journey
'Transportation by canoe is using a water vehicle to travel'

(9) We have many types of colour, but *ndị anyị ga-eleba anya dị* seven
those we FUT-VP-look-into eye is seven
'We have many types of colours, but we will look into seven'

(10) *Anyị na-ere* cosmetics *na* provision.
We AUX-VP-sell cosmetics and provision
'We sell cosmetics and provisions'

(11) *Ego ole bụ* Sunlight soap?
Money much is Sunlight soap
'How much is Sunlight soap'

(12) *Ọ bụ* one hundred and fifty Naira.
It is one hundred and fifty Naira
'It is one hundred and fifty Naira'

(13) Madam, *I nwere* chance *ka I kpaa m isi*?
Madam, you have chance that you plait me head
'Madam, are you free so that you can plait my hair?'

(14) *Nye m* that money.
Give me that money
'Give me that money.'

(15) *Ọ bụghị* a question of *ịlụ ọgụ*
It be-not a question of to fight fight
'It is not a question of fighting.'

(16) *Achọrọ m ịga* toilet.
VP-want-APL me to go toilet
'I want to visit the toilet.'

(17) *Anyị batara* this morning.
We enter-towards-APL this morning
'We came in this morning.'

(18) *Bịa, enyia, I ga-e-take-kwanụ* time.
Come friend-this, you FUT-VP-take-ENC time
'Come, my friend, you will have to take your time.'

(19) *O nyere m* Longman dictionary *ya.*
He give-PST me Longman dictionary his
'He gave me his Longman dictionary.'

(20) Just now *ka o si ebe a pụọ*
Just now that he from place this leave-OVS
'It is just now he left here.'

2.2 The Examination

The list of English items, forming part of the code-switched expressions, according to the number of the expressions, is as follows: (1) *cup, table*; (2) *mark*; (3) *car*; (4) *criticize*; (5) *window*; (6) *this pencil is red*; (7) *modern means of transportation*; (8) *transportation by canoe*; (9) *we have many types of colour, but...seven*; (10) *Cosmetics, provisions*; (11) *Sunlight powder*; (12) *One hundred and fifty*; (13) *madam, chance*; (14) *that money*; (15) *a question of*; (16) *toilet*; (17) *this morning*; (18) *take, time*; (19) *Longman dictionary*; (20) *just now.*

Applying the questions to these English expressions in the samples above, four situations emerge:

I. Some of them lack the L1 equivalents. Examples are *mark, cosmetics, provisions, powder*, pencil, *colour*, etc.

II. Some of them have the L1 equivalents which do not enjoy widespread use in the Igbo speech community. Examples are *table, window, one hundred and fifty, madam, toilet* etc.

III. Some of them have L1 equivalents which enjoy widespread use. Examples are *criticize, in fact, morning, chance* etc.

IV. Some of them are names which are not substitutable. Examples are; *Sunlight Powder, Longman Dictionary*, etc.

Situation I accounts for borrowing. Ahukanna (1990) fails to acknowledge this. Hence, he has commented, "The flooding of Igbo conversations with English words irrespective of domains of sphere of language use...could thus be explained, in part, in terms of the "deficient" Igbo lexicon..." Indeed, he did not put into consideration the fact that bilinguistic contact is also bicultural contact. Gaps in the languages are occasioned by gaps in their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, if the contact is sustained, borrowing becomes inevitable.

Situation II is what we may call 'quasi-borrowing'. The items involved have been assimilated into the L1 and are more frequently used than their L1 equivalents. A proof of this is the fact that such items do not only characterize the speeches of true English/Igbo bilinguals, many Igbo monolinguals use them as well. For example, (1), (5) and (16) were uttered by Igbo monolinguals. This situation may

have led Ausrel (1971:71) to claim that 'code-mixing' is associated with both bilinguals and monolinguals.

Situation III exemplifies real code-switching and it is type of code-switching that linguists have tried to account for the factors that motivate it. Agheyisi (1977:7), who has used "interlarded speech" to refer to code-switching, argues that it could occur in formal contexts. According to her, in the formal and informal context, it is employed to relax the stiff formality that is associated with official transactions and interactions. This factor is captured in Obi's account of his encounter with the police in Achebe (1960:66-77):

> ...we were not there for ten minutes before a police car drew up beside us and one of them flashed his torch. He said: "Good evening, sir." I said: "Good evening." Then he said: "Is she your wife?" I remained very cool and said: "No". Then he said: "Where you pick am?" I couldn't stand that, so I blew up. Clara told me in Igbo to call the driver and go away. The policeman immediately changed. He was Iho, you see he didn't know we were Ibos. He said many people these days were fond of taking other men's wives to the beach".

The policeman switches from Standard English to Nigerian pidgin (a substrate of English and Nigerian languages) and finally to Igbo. This defines a continuum in which formality is relaxed.

In the informal context, Agheyisi supra argues that code-switching marks ordinary conversation with friends, relatives and colleagues.

Agheyisi's factors engendering code-switching could be married with Wardhaugh's (1998:103) factors which include solidarity with listeners, choice of topic and perceived social and cultural distance. Indeed, the policeman's switch to Igbo is motivated by solidarity. Also the informal context involving code-switching is solidarity-based.

Moreover, (6 - 9) which illustrate a typical teaching/learning situation in a local primary school are motivated by the topic of discourse and the need to relax formality for the purpose of ensuring comprehension.

All other cases under Situation III are motivated by psychological factors which can hardly be given an objective account. We can subjectively say that some speakers consciously code-switch in an L1 based discourse so as to display their knowledge of the assumed more prestigious L2 (in this case English). However, there are many who to them, it is an unconscious linguistic behaviour. This argument is supported by Gumperz (1982:61). According to him, participants in

conversational code-switching are immersed in the interaction and are often quite unaware of which code is used at any one time. Wardhaugh (1998:105), cited in the first section of this paper, gives more strength to this position.

Situation IV cannot be described as code-switching or borrowing. Speakers of (11) and (19) are not expected to change the names in their speeches. In fact, an attempt to do so would hamper the referential properties of the items.

3.0 Conclusion

This paper has identified four situations in which mixing of English/Igbo expressions occur. In the first situation, the English expressions involved, lack Igbo equivalents. Hence, this is interpreted as a case of borrowing. In second situation, the English expressions involved have become part of the Igbo lexicon even though they have Igbo equivalents. This is supported by the fact that they are used by Igbo monolinguals. This, we termed 'quasi borrowing'. The third situation is the situation that involves real code-switching. As has been illustrated, it is motivated by the need to show solidarity and to relax formality. Other factors are psychological, which the paper believes can hardly be given an objective account. The fourth situation is justified by convention. Names should be used as they are whether they are substitutable or not. The reason is usually to preserve the referential properties of the names.

In fact, this paper has revealed that a good number of expressions designated code-switched expressions may not be true code-switched expressions. The English/Igbo cases presented and examined here are strong evidence.

Abbreviations

SE – Stem Extender; PST – Past Tense; AUX – Auxiliary; VP – Vowel Prefix; FUT – Future Aspect; APL – Applicative; ENC – Enclitic; OVS – Open Vowel Suffix

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