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LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE: LINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF CODE SWITCHING AND CODE MIXING TO THE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

Onwe, Godwin Onwe
Department of English State College of Education, Ikwo
&
Oguji Emmanuel Akpu
English Department, Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo

ABSTRACT
This paper examined code switching and code mixing as speech elements in second language learning. It highlights the important position occupied by the concepts as against the notion that their mastery showcases language failure. The Cross-linguistic Influence (CLI) theory of Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman (1986) was used as the analytic tool for this study. The paper corroborates its stance that code switching and code mixing are universal language-contact phenomena that manifest bilingual proficiency and mastering. The findings of the study included that reasons abound for the second language learners to have recourse to code switch, some of which are for cultural identity, social interactions, and inability to find an equivalent word in the context. Finally the paper recommends that second language learners should be wary of over dependence on the code switching and code mixing in order to attain reputable standards in the use of the English Language; teachers should be more creative, to break the constraints which the standard variety of English places on them amidst the growing demand for linguists in Nigeria to create their own Standard English.

Introduction

The English language was introduced to Nigeria in the nineteenth century when freed slaves of Nigerian origin returned sequel to the abolition of slave trade (Akindele and Adegbite, 1999). These freed slaves were later to work as translators or interpreters for missionaries who used the language for evangelism. They were also used in schools established by them (missionaries). English later became the language of administration, education and other official purposes upon British colonization of Nigeria. Indeed the English language in Nigeria today is largely a product of colonial encounter between Britain and the many ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. But it was not the same English that was dropped on the shores of Nigerian at the inception of colonialism in the nineteenth century that is wholly spoken in Nigeria today. Indeed that English used in Nigeria today has been domiciled and nativitised to suit our purpose and linguistic objectives. Users of the English language have devised many means of communication with one another to adequately express their messages. Some of ways that Nigerian speakers of English adopt in their bid to clearly pass their messages are code switching and code mixing. English in Nigeria has been subjected to Nigeria linguistic peculiarities, spoken with an indigenous accent as well as yielding semantic derivations that are influenced by the nation's language ecology. It is also this quest for easier and clearer communication between the middle men in their business transactions and their masters that brought about different forms of English. The present study is focused on code switching and code mixing and the

implications for the English language as a second language in Nigeria.

Distinction between Code Switching and Code Mixing

The main thrust of linguistics is to ensure that communication takes place. It is in the light of the above assertion that code switching and code mixing in English language as concepts would be discussed in this paper as veritable aspects of the English language that have added impetus in the realization of linguistic goal in the society. Ekechi (2006) sees code mixing as the mixing of a phrase in one language into another in making an utterance. For instance,

> "Biko, give me that book." Instead of "please give me that book."

He went further to define code switching as when a speaker says one or more sentences in a language and switches over to another language in constructing other sentences. Linguistics believed that interference like the above occur through the phonological or sound pattern of the language, through the syntax or the grammatical structure of the language, the lexis or diction in a language and the linguistic environment. According to Odoemenam, Ibiam and Ugwu (2007) code mixing is a process in which the Speaker starts off a sentence in English or his mother tongue and then inserts at some points in the sentence a word, a phrase or clause from the mother tongue to English. See example;

> That matter agaghi a work (that matter cannot work/is not possible).

Sentence 3 can be regarded as English expression because it begins with an English subject and the last word is also English but the words underlined are not English words, they are Igbo words. See also;

> Bia Kanyi ga na junction (let us go to the junction).

Linguists see the above constructions as absolute grammatical because they convey complete meanings and do not contain error of syntax or lexis (what is actually going on in the mind of the speaker is that he seems to be thinking simultaneously in two codes (languages) and he cannot easily make up his mind which code to use for the entire utterance. Sometimes code mixing occur when the speaker cannot easily recall a ready equivalent of the word, phrase, clause in grammatical positions in which the mixing occur. (Odoemenam, Ibiam and Ugwu, 2007).

To Odoemenam, Ibiam and Ugwu, code switching involves two or more participants in a speech setting or conversation. A speaker says one or more sentences in one language *and* then switches over to sentences in another language. Bia kanyi rie nri or are you not hungry? Both code switching and code mixing result when two languages straggle for supremacy in the mind of the speaker. That is why Alaba (2010) opines: Bilingualism is produced through the acquisition of the non-native language when two languages come into contact.

Alo (1995, p.76) writing on the same subject matter says that code mixing as a linguistic concept and code switching are two communication strategies often employed by second language speakers. To him the term code mixing is used to refer to variation within a single sentence. It is found when the elements of two languages (L_1 and L_2) are contained within a single sentence. For instance a word in the learner's L_1 may be incorporated in a structure of a sentence in the L_2. Code switching refers to variations in the use of two languages in a speech situation. This may be found when a speaker changes his

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language or code because of a change of a subject matter or discourse or participants.

Speaking further on the relevance of the concepts to linguists and speakers of English Alo (1995, p.76) opines:

> Several factors may account for the phenomenon of code switching. Socio-linguistic, pragmatic and cultural uses. The phenomenon may be used as a communication strategy to identify with a group of people for example, ethnic, religion, political or social groups and to negotiate social relations. The language II learner may also code mix and code switch as an avoidance strategy: (to survive and communicate).

Opara (2008, p.22) defines code switching as the ability for a linguist to move from one language to the other within the same discourse but not within the same sentence, for example,

> Mr. Ibe: What about cigarette? (English)
>
> Mr. Adamu: Ba na so (Hausa) I don't need it.
>
> Mr. Olufemi: M ofe rara (Yoruba) I don't need it
>
> Mr. Okeke: A choghi m (Igbo) I don't need it.

In a nutshell, code switching occurs in bilingual or multilingual settings. Code mixing on other hand is the tendency or ability to use elements of two languages within the same sentence for example,

i. Se (hope) you know (mixing of Yoruba and English).
ii. You kuku (actually) know how to do it? (mixing of Hausa and English).
iii. This boy, mutum banza ne (bad person) (mixing English and Hausa).
iv. Nne (Lady), alikirim gi (I like you) (mixing of Igbo and English).

In our society the native language is acquired first and the acquisition of the first language often impedes perfect acquisition of the second language due to the factors affecting the teacher and learning of English in Nigeria.

Code Switching

The concept of code switching from English language to a native language is not peculiar to Nigerians only but cuts across the world. It would be to identify a social group, ethnic groups or even religious sect therefore, it is an acceptable phenomenon in as much as it is grammatical and syntactically correct. Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams (2011, p. 461) define code switching as a speech style unique to bilinguals in which fluent speakers switch languages or within sentences. They illustrated with the following sentences to show that it cuts across languages;

English and Spanish

1. Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English and **termino en espariol.**
2. Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English and finish it in Spanish.

Code switching between French and English

3. I mean, **c'est un** idiot, that guy.
4. I mean he's an idiot, that guy

Between German and English

5. Johan **hat mir gesagt** that you were going to leave.
6. Johan told me you were going to leave.

Korean and English

7. **Chigum ton-uls ops-nunde**, I can't buy it.
8. As I don't have money now, I can't buy it.

Between Mandarin and English bilinguals

9. **Women zuotian gu kan de** movie was really amazing
10. The movie we went to see yesterday was really amazing.

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Code switching has its own internal grammatical structure. For example bilinguals will commonly code switch between a subject and a verb. For example,
'mis amigos finished first. My friends finished first.
Code switchers also follow the word rules of the languages. For example in Spanish noun phrase, the adjective usually follows the noun, as opposed to the English noun phrase in which it precedes, as shown by the following:

English: My mom fixes green tamales
Adj + N
Spanish: Mi mama hace tamales verdes
N + adj

A speaker might code switch as follows in Spanish
My mon fixes tamales verdes
Mi mama hace green tamales

Code switching follows a definite word order in its construct, therefore would not accept deviant utterances as follows:

- My mom fixes verdes tamales
- Mi mania hace tamales green

Furthermore, Akmajian etal (2001:307) refers to the term code switching as a situation in which a speaker uses a mixture of distinct language varieties as discourse proceeds. This occurs quite commonly in everyday speech with regard to levels as for example when speakers mix formal and informal styles.

(6) *American (Arizona) and English*
We must not permit the state of California to deplete the water supply of the state of Arizona. Ain't no way we're gonisa give 'em that water.
(7) *Between American South West (Spanish) and English*
It's now ocho y media (eight-thirty) on a Saturday night, and we're gonna hear a new artist con (with) his new group. You're in time with la maquina ritmica (the rhythm machine). This example (taken from a radio broadcast on a station KXEW "Radio fiesta" Tucson, Arizona is predominantly based on English with a mixture of Spanish words. *See another example:*

- Estaba training para pelear
- They were training to fight

Code switching as Distinct from Borrowing

According to Fromkin etal (2001:463) code switching is to be distinguished from (bilingual) borrowing which occurs when a word or short expression from one language occurs embedded among the words of a second language and adapts to the regular phonology, morphology, and syntax of the second language. In code switching, in contrast the two languages that are interwoven preserve their own phonological and other grammatical properties. Borrowing can be easily distinguished from code switching by the pronunciation of an element. See examples below; sentences (1) involves borrowing and sentence (2) code switching

(1) I love biscottis (biskatiz) with my coffee,
(2) I love biscotti (bisko:ti) with my coffee.

In sentence (1) biscotti takes on an (American) English pronunciation and plurals -s morphology, while in (2) it preserves the Italian pronunciation and plural morpheme - i (plural for biscotto 'cookie').

Akmajian earlier quoted views borrowing as when speakers of one language borrow words from another language, the foreign words come to be used as regular vocabulary items. For example, when a speaker of English says "they had a great deal of savoir-faire. We might well recognize that the term savoir-faire was originally a borrowed word (or loan word) from French,

but it has because to be used as a vocabulary item in English. In contrast the Spanish phrase ocho y media in (7) above is not a borrowed vocabulary item that English speakers now use, but rather is a result of code switching between English and Spanish.

Theoretical Underpinning

The analytic tool for this study is the Cross-linguistic Influence (CLI) theory. CLI was first coined in the mid eighties by Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman (1986). It includes every concept concerning the phenomena of language influence such as transfer, interference, avoidance, borrowing and other L_2 related aspects of language loss. In addition, CLI is a new area of investigation and as Cenoz (2001) opines, it is still in its infancy. CLI research has mainly focused on second language (L_2) acquisition and how the native language influences the learning of L_2.

Cross linguistic interference is a bilingual syndrome and according to it, the structure and vocabulary of a language that has been previously acquired by a language learner interfere with the efforts of the learner to learn a target language. According to Berthold (1997) cited in Hammarberg (2009), it is one language influencing the other at the level of word order, use of pronouns, determinants, tense and mood. Also, cross linguistic interference may be viewed as the transference of the elements of one language to another at various levels including phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical.

The transfer of features from one language to another could be negative or positive. Negative transfer occurs when a learner makes a distinct linguistic feature of one language to function in a different language. Positive transfer, on the other hand, occurs when the features of one language acts positively in the learning of another language. In other words, it aids the understanding of a target language because of the inherent similar features.

Conscious interference and unconscious interference are types of cross linguistic interference. As the names imply, conscious linguistic interference is a conscious influence that is exerted upon a language which results in changes in the inner structure of the language while unconscious interference occurs without the awareness of the language user. These can occur at the levels of grammar and phonology.

Research on CLI emerges from a psychological perspective and seeks to explain how and under what conditions that knowledge of a first language (L_1) influences the production, comprehension and development of a target language (TL) (De Angelis, 2007). Traditionally, CLI focuses on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. Tremblay (2006) submits that the ways that learners' native language influence/interfere in the acquisition of a second language (L_2) include the fact that learners' first language (L_1) is their only knowledge of a prior language system hence, they transfer features of the L_1 to the L_2 until they are proficient in the L_2.

Despite being a new area of investigation CLI is considered apt for the present study because studies (such as Angelis, 2007; and Hammarberg, 2009) indicate that it captures instances of one language influencing the other at different levels of language learning.

Implications of Code Switching/Mixing to Speakers of English as a Second Language

According to Akmajian etal (2001) code switching is mixing styles for a certain rhetorical effect: the juxtaposition of formal

speech-making style with informal colloquial style adds emphasis to the speaker's position and increases a feeling of solidarity with the audience. It is interesting to note that there are cases of code switching in which a speaker mixes distinct (mutually unintelligible) languages, a situation that often arises in bilingual or multilingual areas such as Nigeria.

A common misconception is that code switching and code mixing are indicative of a language disability of some kind, for example that bilinguals use code switching as a coping strategy for incomplete mastery of both languages or that they are speaking "broken" English. These characterizations are completely inaccurate. Recent studies of the social and linguistic properties of code switching indicate that it is a marker of bilingual identity and has its own internal grammatical structure. Code switching does not necessarily indicate incompetence in language rather it shows mastery of the two languages in contrast (Fromkin 2011). More so, unconscious interference occurs without the awareness of the language user.

According to Alo (1995) the phenomenon may be used in a communication strategy or identity with a group, for example ethnic, religion, political or social groups and to negotiate social relations. (Opera (1999:22)) has this to say in this direction: Nigerian writers often switch codes to their first language in their texts. Wole Soyinka does this in *"Madman'* and *"Specialists'* and *"The Lion and the Jewel'* Many people including teachers and pupils do this because they cannot find equivalents in English and are afraid that in even trying to translate, they might lose some of the nuances of meaning in the texts. Some writers too often use pidgin to depict the speech of a non literate person or to give it creditability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The only threat posed to English language by code switching and code mixing is that it may affect the level of performance in the use of the English language by the learner of English as a second language especially if code switching and mixing become preponderance in the learner's speeches. For a bi-linguist, who shows perfection or mastery in both the $L_1$and L_2, code switching shows proficiency in his second language. On the whole, code mixing and code switching as forms of language interference tend to weaken the quality of language performance of the individual bilingual speakers. However, it may be difficult to avoid. As Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman in their Cross-linguistic Influence (CLI) theory rightly posit, the structure and vocabulary of a language that has been previously acquired by a language learner interfere with the efforts of the learner to learn a target language.

In conclusion, although not many learners/users of English as a second language can overcome or totally avoid manifestations of interference in their use of English, efforts should be made to minimize the interference through learning and using the structures in English language properly especially for a second language learner. Teachers should be more creative, to break where necessary the constraints which the standard variety of English places on them amidst the growing demand for linguists in Nigeria to create their own Standard English. This will help the second language learner to attain proficiency in the English language.

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