



Linguistic Features of Code-Mixing and Code-Switching: The Case of Educated Ogba Bilinguals

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Abstract:

Code-mixing and code-switching are known to be universal phenomena among bilinguals. Not until recently, code-mixing/code-switching was seen as evidence of “internal mental confusion, the inability to separate two languages sufficiently to warrant the description of true bilingualism”. However, studies have proved that code-mixing/code-switching is not a manifestation of mental confusion but a rule-governed behaviour among bilinguals, which is motivated by various socio-psychological as well as linguistic factors. This paper seeks to explore and analyse the linguistic features in code-mixing and code-switching. It also investigates and finds out that in more cases, code-mixing and code-switching motivate the bilinguals in Ogba as

they borrow words from other languages, especially English, to make speech utterance or writing. This to a large extent minimizes struggling with words among Ogba bilinguals because they easily code-mix/code-switch to continue speaking and/or writing. It has been observed that code-mixing/code-switching is more predominant among the Igboid/English bilinguals (which Ogba belongs to) compared to any other linguistic group in Nigeria. This paper explains why the Ogba people code-mix/code-switch a lot by looking at the history of the Ogba language contact with English, the socio-psychological factors as well as the linguistic factors/features that contribute to the predominance of code-mixing/code-switching among educated Ogba/English bilinguals. The study investigates the linguistic features of code-switching that include intra-sentential code-switching, inter-sentential code-switching and code-switching at word, phrase and clause levels, which are examined in both male and female Ogba/English bilinguals in conversations. It is found that intra-sentential code-switching (37.15%) is the highest code-switched area, and code-switching at word (31.21%), clause (21.54%) and phrase (6.42%) levels, being a part of inter-sentential code-switching, are the successive areas.

Keywords: *features, code-switching, code-mixing, ogba, bilingual.*

Introduction

Code-switching is a linguistic behaviour that arises in a bilingual situation. It limits speakers in a conversation as to decide which code they should use to utter particular phrases or words in the course of carrying out their utterance.

Even in general meetings of any forum, in Ogba where the language of deliberation was supposed to be Ogba, the speakers at the meeting became conscious of the use of language. They strived to use only Ogba language and that affected the pace of their speech. It became slower but amazingly, nobody was able to make three

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sentences without bringing in one or two English words or expressions. This is an indication that code-mixing/code-switching has become a habit for most Ogba/English bilinguals, and habits are not easy to change.

Linguistic Factors

Undoubtedly, there are certain linguistic factors that contribute to the predominance of code-mixing/code-switching among the Ogba. It is part of the cultural history of Ogba speakers that have always adopted loan words from languages of whatever cultures they came in contact with, and there has never been any academy in any Ogba speaking community or state to attempt to restrict new words coming into Ogba language whether through the front or back door.

Ogba is one of the most prominent languages in Rivers State, South-South of Nigeria that belongs to the Igboid group, its history is interesting for many reasons, including its flexibility in borrowing from other language such as Edo, Igbo, Ikwerre, Kalabari and others, a flexibility that has enriched its vocabulary over the centuries, including English. Code-mixing/code-switching arises as a result of languages fused into contact, other phenomena that could result from languages coming together in contact with one another are: bilingualism, borrowing, pidginization and creolization. Code-switching which is sometimes referred to as “code-mixing”, “code-shifting” or “code-changing” has been defined as the “act or alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent” (Poplack, 1980).

However, some people have used the term “code-mixing” and “code-switching” to distinguish two types of alternation in the use of two languages. Code-mixing refers to the alternate use of constituents from two languages within a sentence, while code-switching refers to alternate use of sentences from two languages in a single discourse.

Linguistic Features in Ogba/English Code-Mixed

As a speaker proceeds in speaking in a different language or dialect throughout the course of a

conversation, this lexical practice occurs both by accident and on purpose for a host of different reasons. Code-mixing/code-switching is indicated in the sentences one to six below to illustrate the difference between the two terms as used by an educated Ogba/English bilingual.

1. (a) John biari your house nwnazniahnuru, but owno wo oyne o ohnuru.
(b) John came to your house a day before yesterday but didn't meet anybody.
2. (a) Okoro di la ije school but oje la late.
(b) Okoro is going to school but he is late.
3. (a) James agbu wo uniform ka today.
(b) James is not wearing his uniform today.
4. (a) John biari ede ki nwnanazniahnuru, he did not meet anybody.
(b) John came to your house a day before yesterday, he did not meet anybody.
5. (a) Okoro di la ije ulo-ekwo but he is late.
(b) Okoro is going to school but he is late.
6. (a) James agbu wo awo-ekwo ka today.
(b) James is not wearing his school uniform today.

In the six sentences above, 1 – 3 illustrates code-mixing while 4 – 6 illustrates code-switching.

Methodology

The main reason for this study was to investigate the linguistic and structural features of code-mixing and code-switching in Ogba/English bilingual conversations. The data, based for this study was of approximately twenty conversations of ten minutes each. However, six main conversations were selected. Observations, a basic and important tool for data collection, which is the most appropriate for this type of

research was used. The researcher himself as a non-participant observer made observations which were recorded through an audio recorder. The data collected were mostly conversationalists' words, which require appropriate method to capture the exact language. Digital recorder was used to record conversations, which provided access to the verbal output of the conversationalists.

The study focused on different linguistic features of code-mixing/code-switching among Ogba/English bilinguals and instances of the speakers code-switching are identified and transcribed from audio recordings of their conversations. In this way, data were collected, transcribed and analysed, which helped in the completion of the process in the form of descriptive report.

Results and Findings

Before moving to data analysis, it is to be clarified that this study focuses on the instances of different linguistic features of code-mixing/code-switching and not their motivations. Efforts were made to just bring into account the actual frequencies and percentage values of these instances. Intra-sentential and inter-sentential code-mixing/code-switching were considered. First, examples of the intra-sentential code-mixing/code-switching and inter-sentential code-mixing/code-switching are as follow:

1.

❖ Kpeni ye je akpari maka influence. Some bad influences change.

• Now we discuss influence like this some bad influences change it.

• As we are talking about influence so some bad influences changed.

2.

❖ I am not taking assignment afterwards. Nkani chepi_a, idebe_g nwnaisno ememu wure osa wo.

• I am not taking any assignment afterwards. Remember that last five I with received are.

• I am not taking any assignment afterwards. Remember that I have received the last five.

The second example reveals that the code-switching data do not have the insertion of lexical items, phrases and clauses but also long stretch like sentence and because of this alteration inter-sentential code-switching occurs. Second, the researcher was interested to know the frequency of words switched. So, for the purpose to answer this question, it was found from the data collected that after intra-sentential code-switching, code-switching at the word level has the highest frequency. There are almost (31.21%) instances of code-switching of word level. One of such examples is given below.

3.

❖ I just told you that la Peter Ohia was the father, till then we were talking about Mr. Johnson.

• I just told you that that Peter Ohia was the father, till then were talking about Mr. Johnson.

• I told you that Peter Ohia was the father, till then we were talking about Mr. Johnson.

Third, the proportion, by which conversers switch phrases, were searched, and it was discovered that code-mixing/code-switching as phrase level is not the growing preference of conversers in Ogba/English bilingual conversations. It was observed that only (6.42%) places in the present study were where code-mixing/code-switching at phrase level occurred. The example below shows code-switching at phrase level.

4.

❖ Ego ikouko la ochichi ka president Buhari is being interviewed by the persecutor.

• Scarcity money president Buhari is being interviewed by the persecutor.

- During scarcity of money, president Buhari is being interviewed by the persecutor.

The fourth main objective of this study was the knowledge about the use of code-switching at clause level. To find this, it was discovered that quite unexpectedly clauses were switched at a higher rate than phrases. Here (21.54%) instances were found where code-switching at clause level occurred. To have an idea of code-switching at clause level, example is given below:

5.

❖ Edeni la bu ede nye bjarula, at least, mmu odi ka obu la ije eru gire ngwa question me.

- Here up to we reached, at least I and if you not reached then question me.

- We have reached till this point, at least, if you haven't, then question me.

Discussion

The code-mixing/code-switching data, which has a variety of code-switching items, revealed that in some cases as shown in the example 3 above, where there is intra-sentential code-switching, the matrix language is English (that is, the predominant language is English).

Conversely, if we take a look at the other example 1 above, then it is obvious that there is a shift from English to Ogba at the matrix language of code-switching. But still if we take the above example 5 above, it is open to eyes that the matrix frame is shared by both English and Ogba and hence it is a bit difficult to decide whether it is English or Ogba that makes the matrix language. It reveals that conversers have produced sentences which contain English and Ogba stretches of varying lengths that perform various functions.

First, in order to remove confusion and for the sake of simplicity, we have taken English as the matrix language as majority of the conversations contain more English than Ogba. As English is the medium of interaction in the recorded conversations, so it can also be said that the matrix language designations solely based on the

criterion of having the highest number of morphemes from that language.

Second, it is clear from the data and its analysis that intra-sentential code-switching is much higher than inter-sentential code-switching. As intra-sentential code-switching involves switching of short stretches of discourse, so one possible reason for this could be that it is easier to switch shorter stretches than longer ones. Another reason can be that as longer stretches of language were produced only when instructions were given or when questions were asked, both of which occurred rarely and that is why intra-sentential code-switching leads to inter-sentential code-switching.

Third, as mentioned in the findings, code-switching at word level has the second highest value and it seems that it is because of the simple nature of the lexical items, which fits well in the matrix language structure. This opinion is also averred by Wu (1985) who refers to the high frequency of words and phrases as they are very short and bear a relatively complete unit of meaning and hence should be focused on in conversations. Most inserted words in the present study belong to the category of helping verbs and conjunctions. Helping verbs usually need other words for message delivery. Grammatical structure is incomplete without them but still they cannot tell when they are alone. That is why they are mostly used with main verbs.

The data in the present study reveal that most of the switched helping verbs in Ogba are “la”, “bu”, “ede” “ije-eru”, “odika” which refer to verbs, pronouns and conjunctions in English as “and”, “which”, “there”, “reach”, “if”, respectively, the mostly switched conjunctions in Ogba include “la”, “bu” and “ihirika”, “makala” whose gloss in English is “and”, “which” and “because”. It is important to mention that nouns were switched less. One lesson could be that nouns used in the collected data mostly represent some sort of concepts, which either had no equivalent in Ogba or was difficult to recall at that time. Example includes:

- ❖ Ambivalence, kin̄i k̄o ka o mean?

- Ambivalence, what mean is it of?
- Ambivalence, what does it mean?

Similarly, Malik (1994) account of code-switching, which advocates our results, says that even English is the medium of conversation (in our case the matrix language) then information carrying items, register and technical words are likely to be from English and linkers; and other grammatical items from other languages. So, it can be said that the findings, as is obvious from the above example, are quite in accordance to this study of Malik.

It was discovered that the growing concern and preference of the conversers was code-switching at clause level (21.54%) than at phrase level (6.42%). The high level of code-switching at clause level is opposite to Wu's (1985) view that the high frequency of lexical and phrasal code-switching is because of the short form. This study indicated that clauses, which have a relatively longer structure than phrases, have high frequency of code-switching than the short form phrases.

“Every Nigerian speaker (literate, semi-literate and non-literate) is involved in the phenomena of code-mixing and code-switching of English and the native language” (Onumajuru, 2007). Similarly, it is perceived that code-switching is more predominant among the Ogba people than any other ethnic group in South-South Nigeria. According to him “unlike the Ogoni and the Ikwerre, the Ogba man does not discuss with a fellow Ogba man in Ogba language without adding English words” (Ogbonna, 1985).

When two or more languages come in contact, for instance, Ogba and English, there is the tendency of mixture of varieties or a shift from the linguistic system to another. As earlier indicated, in a meeting, Ogba bilingual, strive to use only Ogba language which is not difficult because that affected the pace of their speech. “It is usual to see bilingual’s code-switching or code-mix in discourse situations” (Ohia, 2016).

This tendency to borrow at will made the Ogba speakers to more receptive to code-mixing/code-switching as the English words have been so well interacted into Ogba language. Clear examples of Ogba borrowing from other languages is as follows:

Ogba	Igbo	English
Sukulu	Sukul	School
Nglassi	Glassi	Glass
Collegi	Collegi	College
Mbayni	Ochendo	Umbrella
Tablu	Tablu	Table
Arusu	Arusu	Rice
Iyu	Gi	You
Redio	Redio	Radio
Mitini	Metin	Meeting
Pokiti	Boketi	Bucket
Cheng	Chengi	Change
Chingom	Chingom	Chewing-gum
Kop	Kop	Cup
Foto	Foto	Photo
Windo	Windo	Window

Ti	Ti	Tea
Kolta	Korata	Coal
Roba	Roba	Rubber

Lexical Gap

Globalization, science and technology have brought about lexical gap that are yet to be filled. Some terms/words are yet to have equivalents in Ogba lexicons. The speakers readily report to hybridization in order to list the lexical gap. It is ironic that Ogba language league are at the forefront in developing new words to fill the lexical gap brought about by globalization, science and technology, yet the effort has not yielded any fruitful result due to the clash of the dialects of the Ogba language – Omoku, Egni, Igburu and Usomini. When lexical gaps are filled, it is impossible in pluralization, articles and compounding as these components present in English and other languages are completely in the Ogba language. In compounding, most of the speakers in Ogba, when they code-switch and code-mix do not know how to balance it in English. In this regard, Abosede & Orisawayi (2013) when speaking of students’ errors aver: “in compounding, most students did not understand the fact that compound words’ behave grammatically and semantically as single words. Since compound words behave as units between their component elements, no affixes (whether inflections or derivations) can occur (p.375).

Low Level of Competence in English

A balanced lingual is one who has attained a reasonable level of competence in both languages. This seems to be an ideal situation that is rarely achieved. Most people have one language dominating the other, in case of Ogba English bilinguals, it is the dominance of Ogba over English even among the educated class. Although Jowitt (1991) notes that, sometimes the mixing of another language and English produces so fine a balance of the two that it is not easy to distinguish between the host and the parasite (p.67). A closer look at most Ogba-English code-switched expressions shows the syntactic structure is basically Ogba, even where

English-lexical content may be inserted as in *ti* and *tea* above. This shows that Ogba is still dominant. Therefore, the tendency to code-mix/code-switch among Ogba bilinguals could not be explained in terms of dominance of English but rather the opposite. However, we cannot rule out the cases of people who have not acquired enough competence in English to enable them effectively use English for communication. Such people easily resort to code-mixing/code-switching to hide their incompetence. This is common among the younger generation of Ogba English speakers, some of whom have low level of competence in English. See example in a speech made in an occasion thus: the meeting should have a printed agenda – *mitini ni me wno mgbabukwu*.

The above is a clear example, the code-mixing of meeting (English) and *mitini* (Ogba) clearly exposed the difficulty encountered by the speaker as a result of lack of equivalence of Ogba word for “meeting”.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that Ogba lexicographers should work diligently and in a coordinated fashion to develop new Ogba terminologies to fill the lexical gap created by science and technology and the local media houses should have access to these standardized terminologies. By so doing, the developed terminologies will become household terms. Language teachers should also do more in encouraging students to communicate in only one language at a time instead of mixing different languages at a time. This, to an extent will help to reduce the incidence of code-switching and code-mixing among the Ogba English bilinguals as well as help in the development of the Ogba language and also develop competence in English language.

Similarly, Jowitt (1991) states: “in fact, as we shall see, loan-words account for only a tiny proportion of the forms characterizable as Nigerian English. Moreover, if applied consistently across the world the advice would require an American, say, to explain to a British correspondent the meaning of “sophomore” or “Barrette”, or a Briton to explain to an American the meaning of “sofa” or “silencer” (p.31).

Ogba/English bilingual present should also encourage their wards to develop competence in both their first language (L1) Ogba and the second language (L2) English rather than hybridization of the two languages.

It is very important to note that conversers must have familiarity and knowledge of each other’s other languages; otherwise, they will spoil the grammars of the concerned languages during code-mixing/code-switching. It is obvious from the data analysed that the ratio of intra-sentential code-mixing/code-switching was higher than inter-sentential code-mixing/code-switching. A severe use of intra-sentential code-mixing/code-switching makes conversers language broken and gives them wrong impression and difficulty in understanding the language. Jacobson (1983) quoted by Aichum (2003) also addresses this fact when he says that if a converser uses intra-sentential code-switching, then “the co-converser is not exposed long enough to anyone language to derive from his co-converser’s talk – the grammatical, semantic and lexical rules of English nor Spanish” (p.35). This does not mean that people should say goodbye to the use of intra-sentential code-switching, rather they should take care of the place and proportion regarding its use.

Conclusion

To many, code-mixing/code-switching have become a habit and occurs subconsciously. Related to the language attitude is the cultural attitude. Most Ogba people seem to be proud of their culture and find it difficult to abandon their language completely even when speaking another language. The paper also pointed out that there is increasing lexical gaps in Ogba brought about by new inventions and globalization. Although there seems to be

enough effort to fill these gaps by developing and dissemination vocabularies to make effective speaking and communication in Ogba easier, some of the younger generations of educated Ogba speakers do not deem it necessary to know these lexical items in Ogba since the English equivalents solve their communicative needs.

We shall conclude by saying that code-mixing/code-switching is a natural language phenomenon which is not bad in itself but let it be guided among the Ogba/English bilinguals. The question of who speaks what language, to whom and when does not arise. Most Ogba bilinguals readily code-mix/code-switch not minding the occasion of speaking whether formal or informal, whether addressing fellow Ogba/English bilinguals or Ogba. Banjo (1983) distinguishes between code-mixing and code-switching in the following terms: “For our own purposes, we will define code-switching as a phenomenon in which, in a language event, two interlocutors (or the same speaker) make utterances sometimes in mixing on the other hand, refers to a speech act in which the utterance contains elements of language A and language B...” (p.42).

In a similar vein, Igboanusi (2002) made an insightful revelation: “While it is true that in most bilingual situations, the two languages in contact are complementary in the sense that they are equally mixed to facilitate communication based in (sic) any one of the languages that it is true that in Nigerian context (as earlier studies have indicated), language mixing is unidirectional in that it is only English that always interferes in mother tongue – oriented speech” (p.42). Look at speaker A1 the only aspect *mmu je eche bu nde jire Liberia eme me* Nigeria affect *bu* the economic aspect. Speaker B1: Of course, the economic aspect *dia hni*

English Gloss

Speaker A1: The only way in which *mmu je eche* that our involvement in the Liberian crisis would affect Nigeria is in the economic aspect of it.

Speaker B1: *Ikene kure*, the economic aspect is there.

It is clear in A1 and B1 above, we have a combination or mixture of items from Ogba and English. Ndimele (2011) states that “The current Ogba orthography has eliminated all redundancies and ambiguities that bedeviled the previous efforts. Thus, the current alphabet and its sounds are represented... starting with the vowel system before the consonant system” (p.107).

This study was an attempt to know about the practice of code-mixing/code-switching by the conversers in Ogba/English bilinguals in Nigerian context. We conclude that code-mixing/code-switching is a natural, creative and innovative way of communication of Ogba/English bilinguals, which is used as a technique for facilitating communication. It suggests that making use of the code-mixing/code-switching phenomenon, there is a frequent use of different linguistic feature of code-mixing/code-switching between the two languages by conversationalists.

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