



CODE-SWITCHING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE: EVIDENCE OF POOR IGBO LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE AMONG IGBO YOUTHS

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Abstract

In linguistics, code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties in the context of a single conversation. Competence and performance are twin linguistic concepts that have to do with the ability of a speaker of a language to have basic knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language and being able to use the language effectively in concrete situations. The research was guided by Markedness theory of Carol Myers-Scotton. This theory holds that speakers make language choice because of their own goals. The research was a physical contact research; in which the researcher moved into the field and observed the students as they code-switched. From the findings, the researcher discovered the major reasons why they code-switch is because they are poor in Igbo linguistic competence and performance. So there is evidence of struggle for linguistic freedom. The researcher equally discovered the implications of code-switching for the development of the Igbo language, and finally, stated how the findings could help in the development of the Igbo language.

Introduction

Language means different things to different people. That is why Harley (1995) remarks that definition of language is surprisingly elusive. Generally, language is a means of information. Where there is no language, there is no information.

The act of choosing a language or variety with which to communicate at any given time is a common feature of bilingual or multilingual societies. In such societies, people are always faced with communicative situations, which demand that they choose any appropriate code with which to express themselves. However, the choices they make are governed by a number of social factors and linguistic factors.

The social context determines to a large extent the language or variety that one chooses to use. It consists of a number of other factors such as the time and place of communication, the formality of the occasion, the topic under discussion, the degree of familiarity between interlocutors etc. Also the social characteristics of a person help to determine his choice of language or variety of a language at any given time. These social characteristics are the person's social class, ethnic group, religious groups, values, age and sex.

According to Schmitt (2002), in linguistics, code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a



single conversation. Speakers of more than one language, sometimes use elements of multiple languages when conversing with each other. Thus, code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a manner consistent with the syntax and phonology of each variety

Furthermore, linguistic competence and performance are twin principles propounded by an American linguist, Noam Chomsky in 1965 in order to explain what goes on in the field of language acquisition and usage. Linguistic competence is the innate knowledge of a language which a speaker has unconsciously; while performance involves the actual and proper application of the knowledge in linguistic field. It implies that for one to be a guru in any language, one must contain these two habits.

Code-switching is becoming rampant and turning into every day system of language among Nigerian university students especially in Anambra State. Code-switching is not bad in itself, but the way it is being used by these students is an indication that they lack competence and performance in the Igbo language. Going by this, it poses challenge to the development and sustenance of the Igbo language; as Emenanjo (1999:83) remarks,

Language is the key to the heart of the people, if we lose
the key, we lose the people. A lost language is a lost tribe; a
lost tribe is a lost culture, a lost culture is invaluable
knowledge lost.... The whole vast of archives of
knowledge and expertise...will be consigned to oblivion.

This study looks into code-switching among university students in Anambra State, as a proof of poor Igbo linguistic competence and performance, pointing out its implications for the development of the Igbo language; at the same time offering solutions that would better the situation. The universities under study are: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, and Madonna University, Okija.

Conceptual studies

Here, the researcher examines the basic concepts in this research. The concepts are: code-switching, language, linguistic competence, linguistic performance, and Anambra State

The concept of code-switching

Auer (1984) defines code-switching as the use of several languages or dialects in the same conversation or sentence by a bilingual person. According to this definition, code-switching means switching between different languages or language varieties by bilinguals in the course of a single conversation.

Besides, Gal (1988) describes code-switching as a conversational strategy used to establish relationship. It can be used to cross or destroy group boundaries. Ferguson (1959) notes that it is normal for people to switch from one language variety to another unconsciously.

According to Gumperz (1982) code-switching is distinct from other language contact phenomena, such as borrowing, pidgins and creoles, loan translation (calques), and



language transfer (language interference). Borrowing affects the lexicon, the words that make up a language, while code-switching takes place in individual utterances. Speakers form and establish a pidgin language when two or more speakers who do not speak a common language form an intermediate, third language. On the other hand, speakers practice code-switching when they are each fluent in both languages.

Zentella (1997) says that in popular usage, code-switching is sometimes used to refer to relatively stable informal mixtures of two languages, such as Spanglish, Franponais or Portuñol. Both in popular usage and in sociolinguistic study, the name code-switching is sometimes used to refer to switching among dialects, styles or registers, as practiced by speakers of African American Vernacular English as they move from less formal to more formal settings. Some scholars in interactional linguistics and conversation analysis have studied code-switching as a means of structuring speech in interaction. Some discourse analysts, including conversation analyst Peter Auer (1984), suggest that code-switching does not simply reflect social situations, but that it is a means to create social situations.

Crystal, (1987) notes that a varying degree of code switching may also be used between bilingual conversationalists depending on the person being addressed, such as families, friends, officials and superiors and depending on the location, such as church, home or place of work.

Having seen the above definitions of code-switching by different authors, the researcher defines code-switching as the mixture of two or more languages in a single conversation by multilinguals in order to ease conversation.

Language

Ohiri-Aniche (2013) defines language as the organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves. This definition shows that language is the key to human communication, and it is a systematic process. As such, for one to have competence and perform well in that one has to follow the system.

Okwudishu (2010) sees language as a communication system used by people of a particular community, region or country and consists of a set of symbols used in speech and writing. This definition makes it clear that language belongs to a community and the people of that community have to be familiar with the meaning of the symbols inherent in the language. As such, it is incompetence for any one in that community to be ignorant of the meaning of those linguistic symbols.

Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence which is the unconscious knowledge of the grammar of a language which allows the speakers of the language to understand and use the language freely in any given situation is defined differently by different linguists.

According to Chomsky (1965) linguistic competence is the innate linguistic knowledge which allows a person to match sounds and meaning. According to him, linguistic competence only functions "properly" under idealized conditions, which would theoretically remove any obstacles of memory, distraction, emotion, and other



factors that might cause even an eloquent native speaker to make or fail to notice grammatical mistakes. In this definition, Chomsky is of the opinion that linguistic competence has to do with unconscious knowledge of the rules governing the language. It differs from practical speaking of the language.

Fernandez and Cairns (2011) see linguistic competence as tacit and implicit knowledge of a language. From this definition, it implies that people do not have conscious access to the principles and rules that govern the combination of sounds, words, and sentences; however, they do recognize when those rules and principles have been violated.

As it concerns this paper, the writer defines linguistic competence as the ability of a speaker of a language to have full knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language in question.

Linguistic Performance

Linguistic performance seems to stand in opposition with linguistic competence, but the two go together. Linguistic competence paves way for linguistic performance. Different linguists have different definitions of linguistic performance.

Nordquist (2020) hanging on Chomsky (1965) asserts that linguistic performance is the actual use of language by a speaker in the real life situations. It is used to describe the production as well as the comprehension of language. Here, Nordquist tries to present linguistic performance as the practical aspect of linguistic, outside competence.

Besides, Carlson (2013) following Chomsky, defines performance, in opposition to competence, as the actual application of linguistic principles in the real life situation. The reason for the distinction is that competence is mental knowledge that a speaker or a listener has of a language. As such, despite having perfect knowledge of the correct forms, a speaker of a language may unintentionally end up in producing incorrect forms. This is because performance occurs in real situations and can be influenced by a lot of non-linguistic influences like distractions and memory limitations. These can hinder lexical retrieval and give rise to error both in production and understanding. So the speaker's knowledge of language is different from the actual use of that language.

As it concerns this paper, the researcher defines performance as the ability of the speaker of a language to apply the knowledge of the language properly in the actual life situation.

In sum, linguistic competence is a speaker's tacit knowledge of the structure of a language; while linguistic performance is what a speaker actually does with this knowledge.

Anambra State

According to Okeowo and Fatoba (2022) Anambra State is one of the states in Nigeria located in the Southeastern part of the country. It was created on 27th August, 1991. It has the land area of 4,844 km². It is bounded by Delta State in the West, Imo



State in the South, Enugu State in the East, and Kogi State in the North. The native language of the indigenes of Anambra State is Igbo language.

The Theories of code-switching

In the history of linguistics, a lot of theories had been propounded on code-switching. These are meant to explain more the meaning of code-switching and the better system to code-switch. Some of those theories are:

Sequential Theory

This theory was formulated by scholars of conversation analysis such as Peter Auer and Li Wei. It holds that the social motivation behind code-switching lies in the way code-switching is structured and managed in conversational interaction. In other words, the question of why code-switching occurs cannot be answered without first addressing the question of how it occurs. Using conversation analysis (CA), these scholars focus their attention on the sequential implications of code-switching. That is, whatever language a speaker chooses to use for a conversational turn, or part of a turn, impacts the subsequent choices of language by the speaker as well as the hearer. Rather than focusing on the social values inherent in the languages the speaker chooses ("brought-along meaning"), the analysis concentrates on the meaning that the act of code-switching itself creates.

Communication Accommodation Theory

The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), was developed by Howard Giles, professor of communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara. It seeks to explain the cognitive reasons for code-switching, and other changes in speech, as a person either emphasizes or minimizes the social differences between himself and the other person(s) in conversation. Giles posits that when speakers seek approval in a social situation they are likely to converge their speech with that of the other speaker. This can include, but is not limited to, the language of choice, accent, dialect, and para-linguistic features used in the conversation. In contrast to convergence, speakers might also engage in divergent speech, in which an individual person emphasizes the social distance between himself and other speakers by using speech with linguistic features of his own group.

Markedness Theory

The Markedness theory was developed by Carol Myers-Scotton, in 1993 with its initial focus on social motivations for code-switching. It posits that language users are rational, and choose to speak a language that clearly marks their rights and obligations, relative to other speakers, in the conversation and its setting. When there is no clear, unmarked language choice, speakers practice code-switching to explore possible language choices.

In other words, Markedness theory posits that speakers make the choice of language because of the goal they (speakers) play. They should equally put the listeners into consideration because they are also part of the conversation. Myers-Scotton introduced this model into the discussion of language in 1993 with its initial motive on the social motivation for code-switching.

Poplack's Theory

Winford (2003) said that Shana Poplack's theory of code-switching is the best known theory of the underlying grammar of code-switching. In this model, code-switching is subject to two constraints. The free-morpheme constraint which stipulates that code-switching cannot occur between a lexical stem and bound morphemes. Essentially, this constraint distinguishes code-switching from borrowing. Generally, borrowing occurs in the lexicon, while code-switching occurs at either the syntax level or the utterance-construction level. The equivalence constraint predicts that switches occur only at points where the surface structures of the languages coincide, or between sentence elements that are normally ordered in the same way by each individual grammar.

Theoretical Frame work

Among all these theories which had been enumerated above, this article will be guided by the Markedness theory. This theory holds that speakers make language choice because of their own goals. The listeners are also put into consideration because they are part of the conversation. The speakers choose their codes based on the other participant(s) and their relationship with others which they wish to have in place. As Schmitt (2002) notes that in selecting conversational language, the selected language is called the base, recipient or matrix language; while the other language is called the donor or embedded language.

Types of code-switching

Scholars use different names for various types of code-switching. According to Li (2000) and Winford (2003), these are various types of code-switching:

1) Inter-sentential switching. This occurs outside the sentence or the clause level (i.e. at sentence or clause boundaries). It is sometimes called "extra-sentential" switching. In Igbo-English switching one could say, "*Bịa ebe a. What happened?*" ("*Bịa ebe a. Gịnị mere?*").

2) Intra-sentential switching: This occurs within a sentence or a clause. In Igbo-English switching one could say, "*The dī anyị mkpa is to win this game.*" ("*The dī anyị mkpa bụ ka anyị merie n'egwuregwu a.*")

3) Tag-switching: This is the switching of either a tag phrase or a word, or both, from one language to another. It is common in intra-sentential switches. In Igbo-English switching one could say, "Do you know *na onye a bụ onye Igbo* and *a zuritere ya n'Igboland?*" (*I maara na onye a bụ onye Igbo, a zūlitekwara ya n'ala Igbo*)

4) Intra-word switching: This occurs within a word itself, such as at a morpheme boundary. In Igbo-English switching one could say, "But *taa, ọ dī sick oge anyị si lecture returnuo.*" ("*Mana taa, ahụ adighị ya mgbe anyị si ihe ọmụmụ lọta.*"), Lecture holduru today (*A kuziri ihe taa*)

Experience of Code-switching among University Students in Anambra State

The data was collected from one Federal University, one State University and one Private University. The field work among university students shows the level of code-switching among them. The situation shows that they lack knowledge and command of the Igbo language. This is made manifest in the discussions recorded among the students of different institutions in the state. They are:

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Uju: Nkechi, a sị na Chika dị sick?

Nkechi: Ee, ọ bụ na hostel ha ka m si now.

Uju: Hostel ha ọ dị far from this place?

Nkechi: Mba, ọ dịchaghị all that far.

Uju: I mara na after this lecture ka anyị gaa hụ ya.

Nkechi: I dị sure na lecture ga ehold?

Uju: Why I ji ekwu like that?

Nkechi: VC nwere meeting with ndị staff niile.

Uju: Then, ọ bụrụ na ndị mmadụ anaghị na lecture hall, anyị ewere opportunity a gaa hụ ya.

Nkechi: Ọ dị better like that.

Madonna University, Okija

Uche: Nnaa this VC nawao, ọ dị serious n'academics.

Chika: Nke ahụ bụ eziokwu; any small thing mmadụ ga-eme e nye ya carry over.

Uche: Ọ naghị asmile at all.

Chika: Nke ka njọ bụ na onye nwee two carry over, ọ tufuo one year.

Uche: School fees sịzie gị gịnị?

Chika: O nweghi school na- akwụ ihe anyị na-akwụ na school fees.

Uche: Kedu ihe ha jizi the whole money eme?



Chika: Nke ahụ bụ their business.

Uche: Ka m ga zụta pen na exercise book.

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus

Ikenna: Asị m ka m ga kwuo school fees m na Bank tupu time lecture eluo.

Ugoo: Biko time lecture oluwere?

Ikenna: Ee, ọ fọdurụ nanị seven minutes

Ugoo: Oh, lekwe lecturer ka ọ na-abanye na lecture hall.

Ikenna: Kede lecture anyị nwere now?

Ugoo: Ọ bụ Mr. Ugbọ.

Ikenna: Ọ bụ na Ị maghị na o ji time eme ihe.

Ugoo: Ka anyị gawa before anyị agaa late.

The findings

The findings in the field show the following:

First, these students code-switch between English and Igbo languages. This shows that these are two domineering languages in the area.

Second, code-switching occurs among the students because they could not produce at-the-spot Igbo equivalent of what they had in mind. So, most of them lack knowledge of Igbo grammar.

Third, Most of them lack foundation in the Igbo language. Even those that grew up in Igbo speaking areas find it difficult to speak hitch-free Igbo grammar.

Fourth, it is one of the speakers who initiates the code-switching. This supports the Markedness Theory of code-switching, which is the guiding theory of this research.

Fifth, they code-switch sometimes because the word they had in mind had no Igbo equivalent, or they do not know it. As such, they code-switch for the sake of convenience.

Sixth, they code-switch in unofficial discussions. It is not a lecture hall language among the students.

Seventh, the code-switching occurs mainly in oral discussions.



Eighth, they code-switch in order to fit in. Very often, these students code-switch, both consciously and unconsciously, to act or talk more like those around them.

Ninth, they code-switch if they want to get something. A lot of students code-switch not just to fit in, but to actively ingratiate themselves to others.

Tenth, it is noticed that some people code-switch in order to hide in plain sight, a habit most common among people in a group.

Eleventh, code-switching helps them to convey a thought. Certain concepts need that perfection to come across effectively. Many of the students switch languages or employ colloquialisms to express particular ideas.

Analysis of the Findings and Recommendations

In the analysis of the findings, there are a lot of implications and lessons from the study. The recommendations have to be properly harnessed for a better growth and development of Igbo language. The analysis of the findings will hang on the evidence of struggle for linguistic freedom and the implications of code-switching for the development of the Igbo language. Then the recommendations will hang on the benefits of the findings for the development of Igbo language.

Evidence of Struggle for Linguistic Freedom

From the findings above, it became obvious that the students code-switched between Igbo and English language, which is the language of the Igbo colonial masters. The findings show that the students did not code-switch intentionally. They had in mind to speak Igbo language, but they did not have enough Igbo vocabularies to make up the complete flow of the conversation. The root cause of it is that they lack solid foundation in Igbo language acquisition. In other words, they are lacking in Igbo linguistic competence and performance. This is because much emphasis had been placed on English language right from their nursery school till tertiary institutions. As such, to speak Igbo means to search for air inside an ocean.

Implications of code-switching for the development of the Igbo language

Every language is growing; and there is no language in the world that would like to encounter any obstacle on her way to progress. From the findings on the level of code-switching among University students in Anambra State, the following implications are foreseen for the development of Igbo language:

First, code-switching among these students exposes Igbo language to the danger of going into extinction. This is so because if the students who are of Igbo origin cannot speak pure Igbo language among themselves in a single conversation, then Igbo vocabularies would gradually go out of their minds.

Second, the level of code-switching among these students showed that Igbo language still lack some vocabularies if compared with other languages of the world.

Third, Code-switching can become part of these students in such a way that they may unknowingly use it in official gatherings where pure Igbo language should be used.



Benefits of the Findings for the Development of Igbo Language

Code-switching is not a problem in itself. The findings on the level of code switching among university students in Anambra state will help the Igbo linguists and the promoters of the language in the following ways:

First, the level of code-switching among these students made it clear that Igbo language lacks some vocabularies. It will help the promoters of Igbo language and culture to know those words that are lacking so as to make effort to improve.

Second, the findings will help a lot in word borrowing, which helps to improve the Igbo vocabularies. The promoters of Igbo language should know those words frequently used by these students where the Igbo vocabularies are lacking. They can modify these words to be proper Igbo vocabularies. Some of the words we have today in Igbo language were borrowed from foreign languages through code-switching. Example of such words are: sayens (science), Computa (computer), etc.

Third, the awareness of the danger of Igbo language going into extinction created by the findings will help the government to impose academic laws and regulations which will go a long way in the promotion of Igbo language among the youths. Example of this is the law made by the ministry of education, Anambra State which included Igbo language among the subjects one must pass in order to be promoted into senior secondary school.

Fourth, code-switching if properly organized can serve as a means of teaching Igbo language to beginners. As Cook (1991) asserts that code switching may be integrated into the activities used for the teaching of a second language. Cook describes the Institute of Linguistics' examinations in Languages for International Communication test as one which utilizes code switching. At beginner's level, students may use the second language for obtaining information from material such as a travel brochure or a phone message to answer comprehension questions in the first language. At advanced stages, the student may be required to research a topic and provide a report in the first language. This approach is one which uses code switching as a foundation for the development of a second language learner who can stand between the two languages and use whichever is most appropriate to the situation rather than becoming an imitation native speaker. This method can be employed in teaching Igbo language in schools and in other places.

Fifth, awareness created by the findings will help University authorities to organize seminars and conferences on the effects of code-switching on the learning abilities of the students and the need for one to embrace Igbo language which is good language.

Conclusion

In linguistics, code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation. This paper centered on code-switching among university students in Anambra State as evidence of poor Igbo linguistic competence and performance among Igbo youths; bringing out its implications for the development of Igbo language. It is clear from the paper that code-switching is not bad in itself. On the other hand, it has some negative effects on the development of Igbo language. From the findings, we have seen the major reasons



why people code-switch. We have equally discovered the implications of code-switching for the development of the Igbo language, and finally, we stated how the findings could help in the development of Igbo language. People should not make code-switching their every day system of communication; especially now that Igbo language is still developing wings to fly in the same proximity with other major languages of the world. Igbo language should not be sacrificed on the altar of code-switching. The Igbos should be proud of their language and make effort to speak it without mixture of any other language.

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