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ACCEPTABILITY OF MIXED YORUBA-ENGLISH CODES

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ABSTRACT

Code-mixing and code-switching are common features of bilingualism. While some people see mixing or switching of code as a demonstration of lack of communicative competence, others are favourably disposed to mixed codes for reasons highlighted in this study. A sample of 126 drawn from among Lagos State University students and Lagos State civil servants were used in this study. A researcher made questionnaire titled "Acceptability Index of Code Mixing of Yoruba-English Bilingual" was administered on the subjects. Simple percentage and the student's t-test were used to test the research questions. From the analysis of data, it was found that language students and those who studied language differed significantly in their attitudes toward code-mixing than their counterparts respectively. Findings were discussed and recommendations were also made based on the drawn conclusions.

Background to the Study

Language is central to any situation that involves human interaction. It is an instrument of thought. It helps man to think, create, and keep record of events. Language is also used to seek, use and give information. It is indeed the major tool of communication in any social setting. Language is a part and parcel of people's cultural heritage and it is the index for assessing the developmental programmes of its speakers. Inventions and creations that transform human lives are made possible through the effective use of language (Obanya, 1999).

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic entity. As one of the colonized countries by the British, English Language has been chosen as the official language while there are about 400 indigenous languages (Bangbose, 1970 in Olatokun, 1979). In a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society such as Nigeria where there are bilinguals and multi-linguals, it is not impossible to find many people code-mixing and code-switching in communicating their thoughts and desires one with another.

Bilingualism can be described as "the alternative use of a language by the same speaker" while multi-lingualism is the "alternate use of more than two languages or codes by the same speaker" (Grosjean, 1982 and Bello, 1999) 132). Some characteristics of the bilingual, that is someone who speaks more than one language, include code-mixing and code-switching. Code-mixing is a type of language interaction in which two or more languages in the speaker's linguistic repertoire interact for the purpose of fulfilling a particular communicative need. Kachru (1975) defines it as "the use of one or more languages for consistent transfer into another, and by such a language mixture, developing a new restricted or not so restricted code of linguistic interaction".

From the above, it could be understood that code-mixing reflects a situation where a speaker employs two languages alternatively in one utterance (Fatokun, 2000). Code-mixing is often manifested at the lexical level. According to Bello (1999) code-switching is a total shift or change from one language to another. For instance if somebody who has been using a language like English as a means of communication decides to change totally to another language like Yoruba, such an individual has code-switched.

Gumperz in (1970) and (1982) sees code-switching as stylistic switching, that is switching from one variation of one language to another. Code-switching is a feature of bilingualism and not just a stylistic switching within a particular language as opined by Gumperz. Poplack (1980) in Romaine (1989) identifies three types of code-switching which are: tag-switching, intersentential, and intrasentential. Tag-switching is the insertion of a tag of one language in an utterance which is otherwise entirely in the other language, e.g. "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. Intrasentential switching involves a switch at the levels of a clause or sentence, where each clause or 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. Intrasentential 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 clause or sentence boundary.

Platt (1979) uses the term mixing as a neutral cover term for both code-switching and borrowing. For Singh (1985), code-mixing is reserved for intrasentential switching while he uses 'code-switching 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'.

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 having VSO/SVO, switches are possible before the object and not between subject and verb or vice-versa.

Amuda (1986) discovered violations of the equivalence constraint which arose through a mismatch of categories between Yoruba and English. He noted that Yoruba 'wá' was often used as a verb be (copula) with English predicate objectives, e.g. 'O wá very nice - it's very nice. Yoruba would never use 'wá' in this kind of construction rather it would be (ó dara púpò) - it's very nice).

Lawal (1991) is of the opinion that code-mixing and code-switching among bilinguals result from linguistic confusion and inadequacy especially limited 'interfacing' in the language in question. According to him code-mixing is also called

the frequent use of lexical items and expressions of one language (or more) while communicating in another language, e.g. □ it □ de devoir it arrive fin wa ven? - Lexical items from English (I unite - English pet word) and French (devoir - assignment) are inserted into an otherwise Yoruba utterance.

While explaining code-switching he has it that it refers to the use of two or more languages alternatively in one discourse. Thus longer stretches of utterances are rendered in one language while others are rendered in another language during a particular discourse. Examples given in Yoruba/French are:

- (1) 'T'óga ó bá ti wá, nous avons beaucoup de choses à faire'
 - (2) 'Sorry for disturbance. Wo, lgbá wo la ni Adéola?'
- In furtherance, he explains that it is often believed that code-switching could be a result of the desire to use a particular language as a means of exclusion, that is to cut off non-users. Investigation has revealed that this is due to the shortcoming of the speaker in the codes or languages used (Grosjean, 1982).

While giving examples of how Nigerian English/Yoruba bilinguals code-mix by bringing in English vocabulary while discussing with their friends, she presents these sentences:

- (1) In fact, "mo ni lady yon láná."
- (2) "O le "believe" pe mo gbágbé (Bello, 1999)

According to her code-mixing is a mere show of one's knowledge of the language he is mixing and she doesn't think it is bad as long as the context of use is proper and the listener understands the languages being mixed. But she warns that code-mixing should not come up in formal situations like in interviews, etc.

On code-switching Bello (1999) explains that this means a total change from one language to the other. This is done by marking off the expressions from another language with the use of quotation marks in writing, e.g. "Jim had a delicious plate of pepper soup" "isi ewu."

Reasons why people code-switch according to Grosjean (1982) and Bello (1999) are summarized as follows:

- Due to a change in the topic of conversation whereby a topic is better discussed in a language than the other.
- To exclude certain persons present from a portion of the conversation.
- To enable a third party understand what is being discussed.
- To identify oneself with a particular person or group of people.
- To introduce puns or jokes into a conversation.
- To lay emphasis on a given statement or to show contrast.
- To quote the exact language used by the original speaker.

More examples will be presented by this researcher. The examples are samples of code-switching commonly used amongst Yoruba/English bilinguals. It is discovered that switches could occur in any site within the structure of Yoruba and English because they share a common structure that is the subject verb object (SVO) sentence structure. Examples are as follows:

- (i) Mo like omobirin yon very much
(I like that girl very much)

In the above, 'like' has occurred in the verb position and 'very much' in the adverbial position.

- (ii) Girl *ven* pretty *gan-an* (That girl is very pretty).

'*ven*' in Yoruba is 'Oyén aséfihán (demonstrative qualifier) after the subject and before the verb (is) which does not appear in the code-switched utterance.

- (iii) O *kí* olojo *ibi* happy birthday. (You congratulate the celebrant happy birthday)

- (iv) Here the phrase 'happy birthday' occurs after the clause o *kí* olojo *ibi*.
O *gba* deposit *lówó* *mí* *kó* to release *igbó*. (He collected a deposit from me before releasing the bottle).

- (v) Olu o *gbé* at number 2 Oladipo Street.
(Olu lives at number 2 Oladipo Street).

In this sentence 'at number 2 Oladipo Street', a prepositional group functioning as adjunct has been used after the Yoruba utterance 'Olu n *gbé*'.

Amongst the Yoruba musicians a lot of code-mixing and code-switching are used. In the late 70s Ebenezer Obey sang thus:

Operation feed the nation, 'n' 'yíba n' g'wéde.

Atunla Ishola, an Apala musician of blessed memory too sang:

Oh my way to London, kò séwú yárá
Gan-an-mí yá fí, iróyín kò t' dójúba.

While Ebenezer Obey switches from English into Yoruba, Ishola switches from English to Hausa 'Gan-an-mí yá fí' and then to Yoruba 'iróyín' kò t' dójúba' meaning 'seeing is believing'.

Considering the fact that mixed codes are common features of bilingualism, this writer considers it necessary to determine the extent to which these features are acceptable to different categories of people. Acceptability in this paper has to do

with what respondents feel about the use of code-mixing and code-switching. Respondents include language and non-language university students as well as civil servants. The study will also determine whether gender of respondents (male and female) will affect respondents' attitude toward code-mixing and code-switching. The following research questions will therefore serve as anchor for this study.

Research Questions

- (i) What is the attitude of subjects 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 those who studied language and those who did not 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 sample used for this study consists of 126 subjects made up of 126 university students (39 language and 47 non-language students) and 40 Civil Servants among whom 32 studied language. The university undergraduates were randomly selected from the 400 level students in the Faculty of Education, Lagos State University. While the Civil Servants were Degree holders of various fields randomly sampled in Lagos State. Meanwhile, the subjects were made up of 47 males and 79 females.

Instrumentation

An instrument 'Acceptability index of code-mixing of Yoruba-English Bilinguals' (ALCOMYEB) 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 .94 was established.

S/N	ITEMS	S/A	%	S/D	%	Total
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)

(*) denotes number of respondents greater than 50%
 From Table 1, 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 code-switching and code-mixing.

Picking those items that received negative responses from the subjects, for item 1, 78 respondents out of the total, 126 agreed 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 believe 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 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 indicate their objection to the statement that for dislike of being stigmatized, they rather 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 bilingual's speech (item 10)
- ♦ It is not a crime to code-mix because some occasions demand for it (item 11).
- ♦ To exclude someone from conversation, code-mixing is needed (item 12).
- ♦ It is a mark of ethnic or group identity (item 13).
- ♦ To quote the exact 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 & 25).

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 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 is in consonance with the views of Grosjean (1982) and Bello (1999).

Research Question 2

Is there any significant difference between the attitude 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 toward mixed codes among bilinguals

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-Crit.	Remarks
Civil Servants	40	69.75	9.80	124	0.78	1.96	P > .05 Not Signi.
University Students	85	71.16	8.74				

$$t(df 124) = 0.78;$$

$p > .05$ - Not Significant

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 attitude of those who studied language and those who did not toward mixed codes among bilinguals?

The student's t-test was computed to compare the mean scores of language and non-significant difference in their attitudes toward mixed codes among bilinguals. The table is presented below:

Table 3: Comparison of Attitude of those who studied language and those who did not study language

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-Crit.	Remarks
Those who studied language	71	72.23	9.53	124	2.43	1.96	P < .05 * Signi.
Those who did not study language	53	68.36	8.3				

$$t(df 124) = 2.43; P < 0.05 \text{ * Significant}$$

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

Decision: Reject null hypothesis.

From Table 3, it is revealed that a significant difference exists between the attitudes of those who studied language and those who did not toward mixed codes of bilinguals. The mean scores of those who studied language (72.23) exceeds that of those who did not study language (68.36). This situation is expected because those who studied language are expected to know and understand the concept of mixed codes better than those who did not study language at the university level.

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 mean scores of the groups are carried out as follows:-

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-Crit.	Remarks
Male	47	69.55	9.98	124	0.07	1.96	P > .05 Not Signi.
Female	79	71.41	8.45				

$$t(df 124) = 1.07 P > 0.05 \text{ Not significant}$$

Findings:-

Calculated $t < \text{table } t$. Therefore, no significant difference

Decision:-

Do not reject null hypothesis.

It is discovered that no significant difference exists between the attitudes of male and female respondents toward mixed codes 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 exposed to formal education, 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 mean scores of language and non-language university students in order to determine 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

Groups	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal.	t-Tab.	Remarks
Language students	39	74.28	9.6	84	3.07	1.96	P > .05 *Signif.
Non-language students	47	68.51	7.3				

t at df (84) = 3.07; $P < .05$ *Significant

Findings: Calculated $t \ 3.07 > \text{table } t$. Therefore, there is a significant difference.

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis emanating from the research question.

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

Groups	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal.	t-Tab.	Remarks
Male	27	69.93	8.9	84	0.75	1.98	P > .05 Not Signif.
Female	59	71.47	8.4				

t at df (84) = 0.75; $P > .05$ Not significant

Findings: Calculated $t \ 0.75 < \text{table } t$. Therefore, there is no significant difference.

Decision: Do not reject null hypothesis.

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 bilinguals. Although the mean scores 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 is 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 attitude towards the mixed codes of bilinguals. This might be due to the fact that the respondents are bilinguals themselves. Considering the fact some of the respondents have negative attitudes toward mixed codes, it is expedient that language teachers give more explanations on mixed codes and their functions. People living in multilingual communities like Lagos must realize the fact that when two or more languages are in contact, phenomenon such as code-mixing, switching, language interference and language transfer cannot be ruled out. It should also be noted that a person's degree of code-mixing or code-switching is determined by factors such as relevant extra-textual circumstances, linguistic and non-linguistic of the language event or text concerned (Gregory and Carroll, 1978). In other words, factors such as individual's level of competence in his second language, academic and social status, topic of discussion and situation are important in determining the rate at which he or she code-switches.

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