THE MORPHOSYNTAX OF ENGLISH-YORUBA CODE-MIXING: A BILINGUAL EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

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This article is a report of an empirical study which investigated the morphosyntactic aspect of Yoruba-English intra-sentential switching, otherwise called code--mixing. The question that bothered the investigator is how code-mixed sentences in two monolingual grammars can be generated since bilinguals do not just arbitrarily merge all the constituents of their two grammars into one when they switch. The study attempts to find out how Yoruba-English bilinguals switch grammars at mid-tree and still· end up with morphologically and syntactically coherent and interpretable sentences. The study reveals that switching takes place at both minor and major constituent boundaries, and that code-mixing is a discrete mode of language behaviour. There are however some syntactic constraints, and although the two languages differ in their surface structure, the category labels of different grammars have a cross–linguistic identity. English and Yoruba cooperated in a form of symbiotic union to produce smooth code–mixed utterances. Findings are then applied to bilingual education planning in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Code-mixing is a common socio-linguistic feature of the speech of Yoruba-English bilinguals. English and Yoruba languages in Nigeria have been co-existing and functioning together in discourse for quite sometime now. Diachronically, the growth and development of Yoruba-English code-switching and what Banjo(1983) calls language mixing dates back to the colonial days. The evangelization activities of the missionaries contributed in no small measure to the growth of bilingualism and hence code-mixing. Pariola(1983) observes that Yoruba-English code-mixing which began about the 1950s has now today reached a maturity stage. It is therefore not a new sociolinguistic phenomenon. Haugen(1965) refers to this phenomenon as one of the stages of the diffusion of languages in contact (Pariola 1983: 39).

English is a contact language in Nigeria, and in a situation such as this, the point of contact is usually the bilingual individual. There are, usually,

at least two interacting language groups, each representing two different and perhaps, bipolar cultural and linguistic groups. When languages come in contact, a variety of phenomena takes place among which are bilingualism, language convergence, borrowing, pidginization, creolization, language re-lexification, code-mixing, code-switching and language death. Among the Yorubas in Nigeria, bilinguailism and code-mixing resulted from Yoruba and English languages coming in contact with each other.

The pervasive spread of this mode of speaking among the educated Yorubas has become a compulsive societal desideratum, for Yoruba is to be maintained in the face of the prevalent and the overwhelming political role of English language in Nigeria.

In the literature on the speech of bilinguals, various terms such as code-mixing, code-switching, interladding, code-shifting and borrowing, have been used. Code-switching, Bentahila and Davies(1983: 301) refers to "the use of two languages within a single conversation, exchange or utterance". From their own point of view, the act of choosing one code, for a particular clause, phrase or word rather than the other, should be distinguished from the act of mixing the two languages together to produce what we might call a third code. Banjo(1983) argues a case for the necessity to distingush between code-switching and language-mixing. He says that while language-mixing has not quite achieved the status of a technical term, code-switching has, and that the latter tends to be used to cover the former in wider sense. He concludes that syntactically, code-switching occurs in a discourse made of sentences of language X plus sentences of language Y, whereas language–mixing occurs in a sentence made up of elements of the two languages. The author of this paper sees the two as almost similar except that one form is intersentential while the other is intra-sentential. This article is on the latter.

2. Code-Mixing Model

In the process of code–mixing, Yoruba-English bilinguals do not just merely merge all the constituents of their two grammars into one. The study reveals that grammars are switched at mid–tree and grammatically acceptable sentences are produced. In order to show how these two separate grammars combine to generate hybrid phrase structure rules
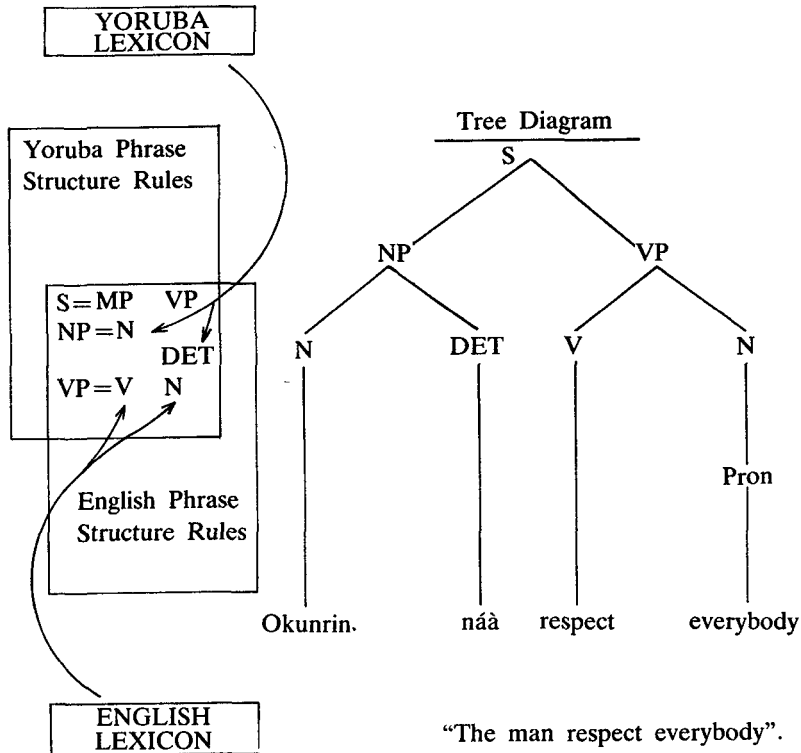
(PSR) and insert lexical items into phrase markers' terminal nodes, the author chose a theoretical, syntactic framework of analysis known as the context-free, phrase structure Grammar (CF-PSG). The approach was adopted in order to be able to state explicitly the syntactic relationships that exist between Yoruba and English phrase structures. The PSR was to determine the linear order and the hierarchical struture of the constituent parts, and which language fills the various terminal nodes. The PSR was also meant to define the grammatical role of the immediate constituents of the code–mixed sentences.

The study was based on Woolford's(1983) model, especially on her research on Spanish-English 'code-switching'. English-Yoruba code-mixing is however different in many respects, though certain common grammatical categories cut across these different languages. Most Yoruba constructions have the S. V. O. structure like English language though the structural organizations within the syntactic categories like Noun Pharse (NP), Verb Pharse (VP), Prepositional Phrase (PP) and Adverbial Pharse (ADVP) are different. Following Woolford(1983) the diagram in figure one is a partial representation of a model of how English and Yoruba grammars work together to generate code-mixing sentences. Under this model there is no alteration in the grammars of the two languages and no hybrid rules are created. Each grammar generated its own parts of the sentence. The lexical items of the two grammars are distinct and each lexical element fills the space created by rules from the same language. The Yoruba lexical items fill the terminal nodes created by Yoruba Phrase Structure Rules while English lexical items also fill terminal nodes created by English PSR. However, both lexicons may have equal access to terminal nodes created by common PSR.

In this model, the terminal nodes NP = N + DET are filled by the Yoruba lexicon while the whole of the VP = V + N are filled by the Eglish lexicon. The PSR of the two languages thus genrated the code-swtiched sentence:

Okunrin náà   respect   everybody.
Man(N) the(DET)   respect(V) everybody(pron)
"The man respects everybody".

which is put on a tree diagram overleaf to show the internal hierarchical structure of the sentence.

THE MODEL

YORUBA LEXICON

Yoruba Phrase Structure Rules

S = MP VP
NP = N
DET
VP = V N

English Phrase Structure Rules

ENGLISH LEXICON

Tree Diagram

S

NP VP

N DET V N

Pron

Okunrin. náà respect everybody

"The man respect everybody".

3. Assumptions

The study assumed that:

1. There are no significant alterations or adaptations in the structure of Yoruba and English during the process of code-mixing.

2. Codes may be switched after any constituent in discourse provided that such a constituent is not a bound morpheme. This is to test Poplack's (1980) 'Free Morpheme Constraint' which establishes that there is no word-internal code-swtching.

3. Code-mixing tends to occur at syntactic categories in discourse where juxtaposition of L1 and L2 structures does not violate a syntactic rule of either language. This is to test Poplack's (1980) 'Equivalence Constraint'

which states that a switch is possible only if it involves no violation of the surface syntactic rules of any of the two languages, i.e. the superficial structures of the two languages must be identical in the code-switch portion before switching is possible.

4. Code-mixing is not a verbal skill but a deviant linguistic behaviour.

5. Code-mixing is governed by some rules, hence the predictability of switch points.

4. Significance

The study investigated the syntax and morphology of Yoruba-English code-mixing in a bilingual setting in Nigeria. Of much significance is the topic to bilingual education planning, especially language policy in Nigerian schools, with respect to medium transition policy, especially the switch from Yoruba to English in primary 4.

Equally important is the fact that the description and characterization of code-mixing help to create a framework for the discovery and statement of rules of speaking. The study is useful from pedagogical point of view; teachers get into grip with pupils' interference and interlingual problems and teachers become more aware of linguistic relativity and hence more equipped for language instruction.

5. Research Procedure

Data were collected through various data elicitation techniques such as the researcher's own intuitive knowledge of Yoruba-English, especially the author's own code-mixed sentences recollected and written down. These sentences were subjected to post-data verification acceptability test because intuitive knowledge is dangerous to depend on for analysis. Oral and written sources of data were explored. Oral data were collected through controlled elicitation technique, surreptitious tape recording of utterances heard in homes, schools, public places and from radio and television programmes, including music from recorded cassettes, and church sermons. The utterances were transcribed into sentences and coded into syntactic categories using the PSG approach. The code-mixed sentences are

later glossed.

6. Analysis

(1) Switching Between A Main and Subordinate Clause

(1) Ó máà understand pe exam. náà ko le. He (pron) will (modal)
   understand (V) that (conj.) exam (N) the (DET) not (Neg.) difficult
   (Adj.)
   "He will understand that the exam. is not difficult".

(2) Ti mo bá lowó 'I wouldn't mind.
   If(cond) I(pron) happen to have money I wouldn't mind.
   "If I have money I wouldn't mind".

(3) In case it is difficult máàsee òpò. OR (Maa sòpò)
   In case it is difficult not (neg) do (v) bother (V).
   "In case it is difficult do not bother".

(4) This is the first test tí ose OR(T'ose)
   This is the first test which/that (rel. pron) you do
   "This is the first test which you did".

(2) Switching Between NP and VP

Switching at major constituent boundaries such as between NP and VP
takes place and any of the constituents can be in either of the two
languages, as in:

(5) The Headmaster gbá omo máà ní eti "The H/M slapped the child in
   the ear".

(3) Switching within the verb phrase

Within the VP, there are switches between the verb and an object NP as
in:

(6) Òjó gbé dead body.
   Òjó carry dead body.

"Òjó carried dead body".

(4) Switching within VP at the boundary of PP

It has been found that switching is possible within the VP, at the boundary of a prespositional phrase as in:

   (7) Ade, wo under the bed (imperative).
       Ade, look(v) under (prep) the bed.
       "Look under the bed Ade".

(5) The Phonology of Yoruba-English Code-Mixing

In Yoruba-English code-mixing the phonology of the two languages blend, sometimes the two merge imperceptibly into each other, creating a form of phonological hybrid words. Prominent among the phonological processes which take place during the process of code-mixing are assimilation and contraction, as shown in items No 5-9 of the summary of findings below:

7. Findings

(1) Inflectional Constraints

Yoruba inflected words are not permissible in Yoruba-English code-mixing; they make utterances awkward and grammatically unacceptable. The reason is that Yoruba syntax marks neither tense nor number morphologically, hence we cannot say:
   *Mo ti examined ẹ
   I have examined it
   *Mo ti spent owo naa
   I have spent the money
   *O depends
   It depends
We usually say:

(8) Mo ti examine ẹ
(9) Mo ti spend òwó naa
(10) O depend.

(2) Idiom Constraints

Idioms cannot be split nor their words inflected; they 'are usually left intact in the stream of utterances. It is also not permissible to use the past participle form of a verb. We cannot say:
  *Ọmọ naa ti given up.
  Child(N) the(Art) has(perf.) given up.
  "The child has given up".
We can, however, say:

(11) Ọmọ naa ti give up.

because "give up" is the phrasal verb or idiom which is never split or inflected.

(3) Word-Internal Morpheme Cosntraint

It is not possible to switch across word-internal morpheme boundaries. This implies that neither Yoruba nor English free morpheme can be . split into two halves, one half being Yoruba and the other half being English. The only intriguing exception is the creolized Yoruba word "Bukateria" the English equivalent of 'cafeteria'.

(4) Selectional Restriction

Some English prepositions such as: on, in, at etc. cannot co-occur with or select Yoruba pronouns like "ẹ"(him/her) "yin"(you), "wọn"(them). This co-occurrence restriction does not affect such English prepositions as "beside", "across" "through" etc. We can therefore say:

(12) Mo lie beside ẹ
     "I lie beside him/her".
(13) Mo sleep across wọn.

"I slept across them".
but we cannot say:
*Mo sleep on ẹ
"I slept on her/him".

(5) Phonological Processes

On the hypothesis that there is no significant alteration or adaptation in the phonology and morphology of the two languages this study has proved this hypothesis false. The following adaptations take place.

(6) Assimilation and Contraction

The most interesting discovery is that of assimilation and contraction in verbo-nominal collocation, and adaptation which I describe as morphophonological hybridization. For instance, we have the following hybrid words resulting from the phonological processes:

(14) gbé òwó accommodation = gbowaccommodation
     "stole accommodation/rent money/fees".
(15) fẹran enjoyment = fẹrenjoyment
     "likes enjoyment".
(16) wo under the bed = wonder the bed
     "look under the bed".
(17) Mi kò ni idea = mii laidea
     "I have no idea".
(18) Mi kò ni experience = Mii lexperience
     "I have no experiences".
(19) Ọmọ na kò ni appetite = Kò lappetite
     "The child has no appetite".

(7) Vowel Epenthesis

Vowel epenthesis (insertion) is a feature of Yoruba-English morphology, which becomes more prominent in code-mixing. To maintain vowel and consonant harmony in Yoruba-English utterances, an additional vowel is inserted between two consonants in loan words, as Yoruba words do not allow complex consonant clusters. This type of adaptation makes switching

very smooth. For instance we have:

(20) "mo pass ẹ" realized as:
Mo pasi ẹ "I passed it".

(21) Boy yẹn break record lana.
becomes: Boy yẹn breaki record lana.
Boy (N) that (Adj) break (N) record yesterday.
"That boy broke the record yesterday".

(8) Stress and Intonation Pattern

Yoruba-English bilinguals carry over or transfer their Yoruba stress and intonation pattern into their code-switched utterances, with some consequences or at the risk of intelligibility. This is manifested in juncture raising and cantenation.

(9) Diphthongization

Yoruba-English speakers are fond of diphthong monophthongization, and this behaviour distorts speech, creates semantic ambiguity and reduces intelligibility too. Monophthongs too are diphthongized.

The study has revealed that code-mixing is a verbal skill and not a deviant linguistic behaviour. Bilingual code-mixing facilitates interpersonal communication, enhances speakers' social cosmopoliteness, conceals linguistic inadequacies and also aids learning. What all these claims and counter claims suggest is that although there are perhaps very few, strict, absolute constraints preventing a switch from Yoruba to English or vice-versa in certain environments, there are certainly some obvious tendencies for the two languaes to fulfil rather different roles. Yoruba-English speakers, during code-mixing tend to resort more to Yoruba than English for grammatical or function words such as the determiners, pronouns and conjunctions, while they resort more to English for lexical words such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives despite the fact the Yoruba is the matrix language.

8. The Implication of Code-Mixing for Bilingual Education

A bilingual education policy is one which employs two or more lan-
guages either simultaneously or successively for instructional purposes.
According to the National Policy on Education, the language policy is to
be implemented through a bilingual or even a trilingual approach. The two
medium transition policies——the Late English Medium (LEM) and the
Early English Medium (EEM) can be executed through mixed medium or
specifically code-mixing from mother tongue (MT) to English language in
Nigerian primary schools. The LEM policy encourages transitional biling-
ualism, a situation whereby MT is used in the early, formative years of the
primary school pupils, that is classes 1–3. This policy will allow pupils to
adjust to school and perhaps to learn and master subject matter until such
a time when the pupils' English is developed enough to be used as a
medium instruction. This situation encourages too mixed medium for
classroom instruction. Code-mixing will prepare the pupils for the tasks
which they are to face from classes 4 upwards, for English is to be used as
the medium of instruction from classes 4-6.

For an effective use of mixed medium or code-mixing, primary school
teachers need to be sufficiently literate in the language of the school
environment and English language. Knowledge of the syntax of the two
languages involved is of prime necessity because teachers need to know
some of the various possibilities for switch and their constraints. This
knowledge will guide them in the selection of lexical items from the
lexicon of the two grammars in order to produce grammatically acceptable
switched utterances. Teachers have to be re-trained to know that, for
instance, English adjectives, determiners, tense, aspect and mood are
different from those of the Nigerian languages. A restructuring of Teachers
Education programme is therefore mendatory if the Mother tongue educa-
tion policy is not to be a collosal waste. The consequences of the
unbriddled use of code–mixing at present, and its misuse, may be dis-
astrous if nothing positive is done, especially in the face of the emergent,
orchestrated trilingual policy whose goal is language (MT) maintenance.

The problem is that almost invariably the degree of teachers' linguistic
competence at the primary school level of education is so low that very
few of them can be said to have enough language competence that can
make them conform to their new role demands. There are very few
language specialists and those that we have do not like to teach, and

mother tongue experts are also few and far between. If 'code-switching' as a medium of instruction is given official recognition, a number of things have to be done. My humble submissions are embodied in my suggestions and recommendations.

In sum, the researcher believes that a continued trend, that is the use and misuse of mixed medium, may result in weakened communicative competence of the teacher and pupils. The emergence of a new Yoruba-English (a creolization of Yoruba or English) is imminent. Its unbriddled use and misuse may lead to the radical alteration in the phonology, syntax and semantics of Nigeria's MTs. It may also lead to block translation and borrowing.

9. Suggestions and Recommendations

In order to obviate or remove the adverse effects of code-mixing, and in order to make an effective, good use of it, the author suggests the following:

More researches should be carried out on the use of code-switching, code-mixing and mixed medium in different subjects at the classroom level in order to evaluate its pedagogic value and problems. Teachers need to be re-trained, especially in language Arts in order to have more MT teachers. This also implies that MT education should be encouraged by making it compulsory for all secondary school pupils to do an pass one other Nigerian language apart from their own MT at the school certificate level. All Grade Two Teachers must also offer and pass two Nigerian languages to qualify as teachers. Nigerian languages should be in the curriculum even at the tertiary level and made as one of the optional core courses for those reading Education at the NCE and degree levels. The methodology for teaching the Nigerian Languages should be an integral part of the B. Ed language Arts and B. A. Ed(English) in the universities. Linguists should work harder on the codification of the minority languages so that the orthographies of these languages get well developed for use. Linguists and languge planners should try to arrive at a standardized form of language mixing for uniformity of application. If code-mixing in Nigerian languages and English is well developed and standardized, instructional and evaluation materials might be prepared in mixed media, as a transitional measure between class 1-4.

10. Conclusion

Although all the ramifications of the syntax or Yoruba-English code-mixing have not been exhausted, the author has tried to show that switching is possible at both the minor and major constituent boundaries, such as within NP, VP, PP, ADVP and between phrasal categories. A few syntactic constraints and other have been discovered and described. Certain claims, like those of Poplack (1980) on Equivalence constraints and others have been disproved while some hypotheses have been proved valid in this study. The analysed corpus have shown that there are significant alterations or adaptations in the structures of both languages during the code-mixing process. There are, for instance, morphological and phonological adaptations which result in hybridization as exemplified in vowel epenthesis, jucture raising, vowel deletion, assimilation and contraction.

Codes could be switched and in fact were switched after any constituent boundary, though after a free morpheme. There is no word internal code-mixing. Code-mixing can take place even where the surface syntactic structures of the two languages are different. Yoruba syntax differs from English, especially in word order — most Yoruba adjectives are post positive while those of English are often preposed, yet code-mixing takes place. Code-mixing is not a deviant linguistic behaviour, nor is it used for concealing or covering one's linguistic inadequacies or incompetence. One language may have more sense of humour than the other, or one may carry more emotional overtone than the other. It is the pragmatic role differentiation of languages that determines code choice. The research findings proved that much as there exists linguistic universals, languages differ in their structural organizations. The co-operation between Yoruba and English grammars which made it possible to produce structurally and lexically code-mixed sentences, is a formidable evidence which goes further to support Woolford (1983) that 'the category labels of different grammars have a cross-linguistic identity. Language mixing is a possible instructional medium which could be used as a transitional language policy before the final switch to English is effected in primary 4. in Nigerian schools.

For language maintenance purpose, code-mixing and code-switching are desirable. These sociolinguistic phenomena go a long way to manifest the socio-cultural and linguistic ties which exist between Nigerian languages and English. The frontiers of knowledge can only be widened in English is allowed to co-exist side by side with Nigerian languages, and this can only

be made possible through the acceptance and adoption of code-mixing as a medium of instruction in Nigerian primary schools.

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