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Bilingualism and The Problems of Code-Mixing and Code-Switching

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Abstract: This paper focuses of Bilingualism and the problem of Code – mixing and code-switching. It therefore aims at highlighting some of the problems so that bilinguals could become aware of them and from the awareness they could know the situation under which code-mixing should be avoided. Bilingualism, which is used here as the ability of one person to speak two different languages with a reasonable degree of competence, is a common linguistic phenomenon in all Nigerian speech communities. Anaan – English bilinguals, for instance, practice bilingualism by often mixing either Anaan with English or vice versa in the course of conveying a message or information. The mixing, in certain situation, often cause problems which may not be realized as such by the speaker. Data for the study were collected through personal interaction and observation of Anaan English bilingual and recording of their speech mannerisms on a number of occasions, which gave the researcher the opportunity of noticing the problem first-hand. This paper discusses the main problems associated with code-mixing. Findings reveal that Anaan English bilinguals code-mixing in their various language activities and it was concluded that code mixing is a serious linguistic trait among Anaan bilinguals. The paper recommends ways of curbing such problems.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Code-Mixing, Code-Switching, Problems.

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Introduction

It is language that best defines man's humanity, setting him apart from animals. Language, in the form we have it today, is crucial to man's survival and his all – round development. Without it, man could not deal effectively with changes in his environment, let alone organise his society to his advantage.

Due to its creative and dynamic nature, language has an amazing potentiality of serving a variety of communicative and social functions. Different people of the world have different languages by which they are identified. Some societies that are monoethnic and homogenous may use just one language or code for communication and in that case, the linguistic phenomenon known as code-mixing may be non-existent. But most societies are plural – ethnic and heterogeneous and so use more than one language for communicative purposes. In such societies, 'code-mixing' is a common language behavior. Brann, (2006, p.9) explains that the multiethnic nature of Nigeria makes her people bilinguals because they have to

communicate in what is called "further tongue". Yule (2014) describes speech as a form of social identity and is used consciously or unconsciously to indicate different social groups. These are contextual features that shape the kind of language people use. This includes the inter advents themselves, their discourse roles the physical environment and the word view of the cultural practices in the domain of discourse.

As an Anaan-English bilingual, the researcher has observed that code-mixing in some situations actually cause problems which the bilinguals themselves may not even be aware of. The study has identified these problems, their context of use and the effects they have on the users and the society at large.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is a common linguistic behavior in most language communities in Nigeria due to people's living arrangements. A layman's understanding of the term "bilingualism" is that it is the ability of one person to speak two languages. For the layman, 'ability' here is not qualified and which two languages are referred to is also a question for him to answer. But the linguists, being experts, have given more detailed definitions.

Thus, for Bloomfield (1933, p.55-6), the two languages are the mother tongue (L1) and a foreign language (L2). To be called a bilingual, in this view, the speaker of the L2 must first become so proficient in it that he becomes "indistinguishable from the native speakers around him". Additionally, the foreign language skill he has learned must not be "accompanied by loss of the native language" he had already acquired. For Bloomfield then, a fulfillment of the two conditions results in "bilingualism" which he economically defines as a "native – like control of two languages".

Weinreich's (1953, p.1) definition of bilingualism is that it is the practice of alternatively using two languages. There are, many other views which can be cited, but suffice it to say that, in this paper, bilingualism is used as meaning the ability of one person to speak two different languages with a reasonable degree of competence.

Who then is bilingual? A bilingual, according to Taylor, (1975), is a "person who can speak two languages that differ in speech sounds, vocabulary and syntax". Taylor further explains that the two languages may be unrelated like English and Chinese or they may stem from one family like German and English.

Lambert (1972) as cited by Ahukanna, (1990, p.177) has defined two types of bilinguals. These are coordinate bilinguals and compound bilinguals. A coordinate bilingual has two different and independent language stores. Moreover, he learns the two languages in two different environments. The environments may be at home, at school, or at work. A coordinate bilingual uses the different languages for different purposes and has a distinct reference for words in each language. In other words, he has separate semantic systems for each of the languages.

On the other hand, a compound bilingual uses the two codes (languages) interchangeably for one semantic reality – the two languages express the same background and the same culture (Ahukanna, 1990). A compound bilingual learns the languages at the same time and in similar circumstances. Miller, (1979, p.284) has noted that a compound bilingual is a person whose code-switching is beyond conscious control – i.e. he mixes codes constantly without any external motivation. The two languages cannot be said to dominate the other in conversation. For the foregoing explanations, we can categorise the Anaan-English bilinguals as coordinate bilinguals.

Code-Mixing and Code-Switching

Ahukaana, (1990, p. 175) uses code-mixing and code-switching interchangeably and defines them as "intra-sentential switching in language which characterize the speech behavior of bilinguals". Essien, (1993) defines code-mixing as "a language phenomenon in which two codes or languages are used for the same message or communication". In this paper code-mixing and code-switching are used interchangeably and they denote a bilingual's habit of allowing the two languages he is versed in to interfere with one another in the course of his communicating a message or information.

Problems

'Problems' here refer to the unpleasant or the negative effects of code-mixing'.

The problem associated with code-mixing

Some positive things have been said about code-mixing. A mention of only three of them would suffice here. One is that code-mixing is usually resorted to for fear of a breakdown in communication. Two, most bilinguals code-mix because of the deficiency in the vocabulary of either of the languages in contact. Three, some bilinguals are said to code-mix in other to display how sociable, accommodating, hospitable and selfless they are.

In spite of these seemingly cogent reasons in favour of code-mixing, a careful consideration of some of the situations in which most Anaan-English bilinguals exhibit this linguistic behavior has revealed that code-switching can and often does give rise to certain problems that otherwise would not have arisen. We would discuss just five of them.

Self-betrayal or exposure of otherwise secret information

In certain situations, the use of one's mother tongue for communicating some confidential message in a multilingual gathering is normally seen as an advantage. In our own situation, English is our lingua franca but Anaan is not.

So in some occasions, Anaan-English bilinguals may wish to share a secret in the midst of other people who also understand English but not Anaan. In such a situation, the discussion should be strictly in Anaan. One then needs to imagine how self-betraying hence embarrassing it would be if one of the bilinguals suddenly switches to English thus giving the general audience a clue of what they were talking about. Let us consider a few examples:

1. Mon owo ebo ke Chairman iyeme people from other ethnic group esin application.

"People say that the Chairman does not want people from other ethnic group to submit applications".

2. Yak isop idem iyono sa edehe k'itie emi idehe safe for strangers k'eyo amakum.

"Let us hurry up and leave because it is said that this place is never safe for strangers in the night".

In (1) secrecy has to do with the tribalistic posture of the Chairman but the code-mixing has let the cat out of the bag making the affected people begin to nurse some ill-feelings towards the Chairman ever before they are told why they should not submit their applications. In (2) the speaker is interested in confiding in his colleagues what they should do to save their lives as the community in which they find themselves is noted for its hostility towards strangers in the night. But the code-mixing is self-betraying for the phrase 'safe for strangers' could give their unfriendly hosts some clue as to what their worry is.

There is yet another dimension to this same problem. As already noted in the introduction; a people are identified by their own language. Language for a people serves as a natural bond of love, unity and destiny; it is also language that qualifies a people to share the same culture.

Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech sound combined into words (Udoka, Enang and Utin, 2018). It is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which social group operates (Ogwu, Agabnu and Ofordile 2010). Based on this, for proper knowledge of any language, there is need to study the dynamics of such languages, since it is the means of communication within social group.

For as noted by Gladestone (1972, p.192).

Language and culture are inexorably intertwined. Language is at once an outcome or a result of the culture as a whole and also a vehicle by which the other facets of the culture are shaped and communicated.

Thus, people see speech in their mother tongue as a mark of solidarity. It is against this background that code-mixing in certain situations, where solidarity is the watchword, can lead to suspicion and distrust. As a matter of fact, people feel they belong more together when they use their mother tongue for communication. At times, people receive better treatment in the hands of people with whom they share a common language. It is to demonstrate a feeling of solidarity that some government officials who are assigned the duty of addressing a people with whom they do not share a common language normally break protocols by using the people's native language in greeting and in saying one or two things to the people. Though such attempts at speaking the people's native language may not be smooth, the natives are usually excited to see "another person" use their own language. The impression the people would have is that such an official really loves them.

Embarrassment and Breakdown in Communication

Code-mixing in the midst of people who do not share same bilingual background can be embarrassing apart from causing a break down in communication. This tendency is common in some tertiary institutions where multilingualism is practiced. Some Anaan-English bilinguals who are teachers may code-mix while addressing students who are obviously from diverse linguistic backgrounds. They would do this because of the presence of a few Anaan-English bilinguals in the group.

The mixing could take any of these forms:

3. Our topic last week akabana se e?

"Our topic last week was on what"?

4. Our advice to you is that you should work hard ade anyin imaha.

"Our advice to you is that you should work hard but you remain stubborn".

5. Those of you who are not serious with your academics akpenna eka eketono nyam urua so that you don't miss two things at a time.

"Those of you who are not serious with your academics should better go and start trading lest you miss two things at a time".

Notice that the speaker starts with English but switches to Anaan. This underscores the fact that the teacher is aware that English is the medium of instruction here but the code-mixing is involuntarily done. The problem here is that students who do not share the same bilingual background as the teacher's will definitely grumble for having been cheated. It might be difficult to convince them later that the segment of the utterance that was in Anaan was not an abuse directed at them. Apart from this, the teacher will be looked down upon as somebody who is mean and tribalistic. Moreso, educated Anaan-English bilinguals usually code-mix when communicating with their illiterate parents.

Some typical examples of this are:

6. Papa mon abank ebon dad collateral ndi-nte-enno loan anke apply ke for.

"Papa my bankers say unless I provide some collateral, I would not be given the loan I applied for".

7. Ntokeyen eyo mfin edenge recalcitrant and indolent ikamma ikop se owo etan

"The children of nowadays are recalcitrant, indolent and refuse to listen to advice".

One of the problems here is that communication would have broken down by the time the illiterate old man fails to understand the meaning of "collateral" and "Loan" in (6), "recalcitrant" and "indolent" in (7).

Dual cultural allegiance and the resultant confusion

Code-mixing is a manifestation of mixed cultural values and standards. If it is accepted that language is a vehicle for a people's culture, then it is valid to say that to code-mix is to give allegiance to two cultures.

Lambert, (1972, p.385) has opined that

The whole process of becoming bilingual can be expected to involve major conflicts of values and allegiance, and bilinguals could make various types of adjustments to the bicultural demands made on them.

Thus, each time a bilingual code-mixes, he is telling his audience that he belongs to two cultures. And we know that dual allegiance, as it were, can be problematic. Take the case of an Anaan-English bilingual who has the task of pouring libation, a traditional practice which is unEnglish in all respects. In some occasions the composition of the audience could force the performer to code-mix producing something like:

8. Our beloved forefathers

Se ayid ndito anyin mi-o!

Yak this function we're about to start

Adad edidiong ono ukeed ayid-o

Ekpeme our guest nne ayid nko-o!...

(Anaan)

"Our beloved forefathers

Here we, your children, are

May this function we're about to start

Bring blessing to all present

Protect us and our guest…"

(English)

The problem here of trying to use two codes in taking with "the Dead" who do not understand English lies in the near-loss of both the poetic quality of the incantation and the solemnity that usually characterize such moments.

Retardation of the development of the mother tongue

The fourth problem associated with code-mixing is what Ahukanna, (1990, p.175) has described as "linguistic sabotage directed against indigenous languages". This same writer concludes that code-mixing is a linguistic process that could lead to the pidginization of Nigerian languages.

My interest here is not to delve into how code-mixing could lead to the pidginization of Nigerian languages but to support the idea that it is linguistic sabotage which retard the development of Anaan and other indigenous languages.

That most Anaan-English bilinguals code-mix when they lack ready vocabulary in their language to express certain ideas is a fact. But it is also a fact that most of the time that they code-mix, it is not as a result of deficiency in the vocabulary of the native language, rather it is as a result of the unwillingness of the bilinguals to stay with one code, especially, the mother tongue. Let us consider a few cases of code-mixing that are not motivated by lack of appropriate words or phrases in either of the language.

9. Some people ede very wicked akpanakpan those who are not educated.

"Some people are very wicked especially those who are not educated".

10. Nyemme i-hurry over the matter sa aboho ke ini asuk abba.

"I don't want to hurry over the matter because there is still plenty of time (on my hand)".

11. When I was a student nkesidaaha edem ke mkpoba keed so nyem afo ade hardworking akan ade.

"When I was a student, I was never backward in anything so I want you to be more hardworking than you are now".

12. At least akpenaa anye anno nyien my due respect nte andi sponsor anye kufok nwed.

"At least he should give me my due respect as the person who is sponsoring him in school".

S/N	ANAAN EQUIVALENT	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT
9.	a. Usuk owo b. ede c. akpanakpan	Some people Are especially
10.	a. Nyemme b. Ifeghe mboho ke mkpo ade c. Sia aboho ke ini asuk ababa	I don't want to Hurry over the matter Because there is still time
11.	a. Idaha nkedehe ayen ufoknwed b. nkesidaha edem ke nkpo ba keed c. K'uto ntak ade d. Nyem (afo) e. esin ifik f. akan ede	When I was a student I was never backward in anything So (for that reason) I want you To be (more) hardworking Than you are now
12.	a. Nkom ekpede die b. akpena anye anno nyien c. udeme ukpono emi d. nte andisin e. anye (ufok) nwed	At least He should give me My due respect As someone who sponsors Him in school

Notice that the expressions are explained according to their collocation or grammatical units. As the analysis shows, none of the cases of the code-mixing is motivated by deficiency in the vocabulary of either Anaan or English – the equivalent words or expressions attest to this claim. It is therefore obvious that some Anaan-English bilinguals simply refuse to maintain a single code during conversation. Such an involuntary behavior, as it were, does not make for proficiency in the mother tongue. Or should we say that such an unwarranted code-mixing is a deliberate or conscious display of the knowledge of the so-called prestigious language (English)? It goes without saying that if Anaan speakers did not find themselves in a second language situation, they would have proficiently employed their language for all communicative purposes. In the course of doing so, if they lacked words for particular concepts, they would have resorted to borrowing which is linguistically legitimate.

Camouflage for ignorance and inadequacies

On certain occasions, code-switching can be a camouflage for ignorance or poor knowledge of the two languages in contact. People who are not well-versed in either of the two languages often code-mix to give the impression that they too have a grasp of the languages (David Eka, 1990). In some cases, people with very little formal education but who are well-to-do reason that code-mixing is a sign of civilization and sophistication. So they look at the educated bilinguals with a feeling of admiration and jealousy resolving silently to code-mix at the next opportunity they have to converse. It can be self-mocking when an Anaan-English bilingual, for instance, who does not speak his mother tongue very well, manages to intersperse his English dominated speech with some Anaan words. Such a development can never allow for a thorough mastery of either of the two languages. This is yet another dimension of the problem.

Findings

The paper set out to discuss bilingualism and the problems of code-mixing and code-switching with Anaan-English bilinguals as the focus. Before the discussion, the key terms used have been defined and explained.

Five main problems associated with bilingualism as manifested through code-mixing have been identified and discussed at length. These are:

i. that code-mixing can be self-betraying when an otherwise confidential information conveyed strictly in the mother tongue is exposed through a sudden and involuntary switch to the foreign language.

ii. That code-mixing in the midst of people who do not share the same bilingual background can be embarrassing both to the speaker and the audience. This is in addition to causing a break down in communication.

iii. that culturally, it leads to dual allegiance since the bilinguals have invariably imbibed valued from the cultures to which they constantly adjust to strike a balance. The resultant imperfect adjustment often results in the creation of a confused personality.

iv. that apart from retarding the growth and development of the mother tongue, code-mixing can also adversely affect the bilinguals by not allowing them to be proficient in the use of either of the languages in contact.

v. that some people resort to code-mixing as a camouflage for their ignorance or poor knowledge of either of the languages, that code-mixing in the midst of people who do not share the same bilingual background can be embarrassing both to the speaker and audience. This is in addition to causing a breakdown in communication.

Conclusion

Code-mixing as a legitimate phenomenon is used to achieve a variety of communicative goals. As a human behavior, it is highly unpredictable – no listener knows in advance that the speaker in from of him is going to code-mix and even if he does, it is not expected that he should direct him on how to do it. Just as it is not a part of the linguist's task to legislate on how people ought to speak a particular language, it is also not the intention of this writer to lay down rules on how and when bilinguals should code-mix if they want to. Rather, the paper serves to draw the attention of Anaan-English bilinguals particularly and others generally to some of the problems that are associated with code-mixing so that they could become aware of them and possibly refrain from mixing codes indiscriminately.

Recommendations

Normally, when problems are identified, the next pertinent thing to do is to proffer solutions while going to do the same here, we want to remark that the problems we have identified, in our own case, are inextricably tied up with human linguistic behavior which the suggested recommendations may prove incapable of altering. Nevertheless, below are the solutions suggested in the hope that they could serve either practical or academic purpose or both.

i. Code-mixing as a camouflage for inadequacies should be avoided as it constitutes a barrier to the attainment of sound linguistic skills. Code-mixing is not a casual matter. It can hide the verbs or the nouns.

ii. Cases of mixing codes as a result of laziness or as a fashion should be discouraged so that bilinguals could become proficient in their mother tongue as well as in the foreign language.

iii. In order to develop our indigenous languages, Nigerian bilinguals should drastically reduce their frequency of code-mixing when setting out to communicate in their mother tongue especially with uneducated speakers.

iv. Anaan language and others should be taught in schools so that the practice of code-mixing caused by deficiency in the knowledge of the mother tongue can be checked.

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