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CODE-MIXING AND ITS BENEFITS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF IMO STATE POLYTECHNIC

Okafor, Theodore Madu
School of General Studies, Imo State Polytechnic, Omuma
email; theodoreokafor2022@yahoo.com, Phone; 08033295393

Abstract
The socio-linguistic situation in almost every institution of higher learning in Nigeria is multilingual. Therefore, the assumption is that the language of interpersonal and private communication activities differs from the norm. This paper examines code-mixing in the spoken communication in formal contexts among undergraduates of Imo State Polytechnic, Omuma. It looks at the centrality of context in determining the variety of the English language used by students. Based on the data obtained from spoken discourses recorded surreptitously in formal contexts, the paper discusses the code-mixed features, their patterns, their standard English version and advances reasons for code-mixing among the target group using accommodation theory. The findings reveal that the target group often code-mix in formal contexts based on reasons bordering on bilingualism, religion, familiarity, relaxed atmosphere and seeking favours.
Keywords: code-mixing, communication, context, language, bilingualism.

Introduction

Mastery of a language is often measured by how one selects language that suits a given context. Social context has been known to play a very important role in the choice of the variety of language to use. According to Trudgil (1974), "language varies, not only according to the social characteristics of the speaker (such as sex, age, social class, ethnic group), but also according to the social context in which a user finds himself," He further explains that many factors come into play in determining which variety to be used in a given context. For instance, certain subject matters under discussion like molecular biology or international economics are likely to produce a more formal variety than those used in the discussion of knitting or roller skittling.

The above illustration clearly shows that the physical setting and occasion of the language activity like academic lectures and ceremonial occasions are more likely to select relatively formal language than say, public-house arguments or family breakfasts. This underscores the need for one's vocabulary to be structured to suit the audience one is addressing. For instance, the choice of English variety of a formal discourse in a teacher-student relationship should be the standard English which is considered appropriate for formal contexts such as lectures, public addresses, business reports, formal discourses or when we meet people for the first time and uncertain as to how to respond to such persons.

The concept of code-mixing

Mayerchoff (2006) defines code-mixing as the "alternation between varieties or codes within a clause or phrase. Often, it elicits more strongly negative evaluation than alternation or code switching across

clauses. While Mayerchoff views code mixing as accruing between varieties or codes, Akindele and Adegbite (1989) argue that it refers to a situation whereby two languages are used in a single sentence within major and minor constituent boundaries". They posit that the mixing of items is almost at the word level. Paplack (1985) is in agreement with the above view as he describes code-mixing as "mixed speech". He shares the opinion that code-mixing occurs between languages, adding that code-mixing is associated with conversation that involves the use of two codes or languages and it is at the level of the lexical or phrasal items. He further explains that nouns are popularly involved in code-mixing, not only because they are relatively free of syntactic restrictions, but also due to the robustness of nouns in lexical items.

Crystal (2008) expresses similar views as those expressed by Akindele and Paplack as he maintains that code-mixing involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another. This means that a sentence begins in one language, then makes use of words or grammatical features belonging to another. Code-mixing is the mixing of code from two languages or more in some content of conversation in form of a sentence (ResearchGate, 2025).

Differentiating code-mixing from borrowing, Appel and Muyesken (1993) state that" codemixing and borrowing are not the same and that in order to differentiate between the two, the Saussurean "langue" and “parole” should be the yardstick". Thus, they maintain that borrowing involves an integration of two languages at the level of language.... code mixing integration at the level of parole". They further state that

In practice, it may not be simple to distinguish between them. The classical view is that code-mixing and borrowing can easily be kept apart. With code-mixing, the non-native items are kept not adapted morphologically and phonologically..... (Appel and Muyesken 1993).

In studies of bilingual language acquisition, code-mixing refers to a developmental stage during which children mix elements of more than are language. Nearly all bilingual children go through a period in which they move from one language to another without apparent discrimination. Ezeh (2022) states that code-switching and code-mixing in teaching code is essentially a language variety or dialect used in communication.

In the words of Abaya (2014), code-mixing is a socio-linguistic phenomenon prevalent in any bilingual and multilingual setting. Since bilinguals usually acquire two languages in different ways, it is most likely that they also share two different cultural experiences. This implies that the acquisition modes affect the usage as well as the choice of lexical items.

Theoretical Framework

Contextual theory

This paper is anchored on the contextual theory developed by J.R Firth initially alongside Malinowski (1939). In their view, in order to completely interpret a given piece of language, so many things must be taken into consideration, and one of such is context. By context, we mean the language, its properties, the

people involved, time and place and any extra information that aids interpretation. The importance of contexts in language study is captured by Finegan thus:

A grammarian can be viewed as a coin whose two sides are expression of meaning. But language has a third face, so important to producing and interpreting utterances that it can override all else. That face is context and only in a particular context can an expression convey a speaker's intended meaning and be interpreted correctly by the hearer (Finegan 2008).

Ogbulogo (2005) observes that "the meaning of certain classes of words could be lost, if meanings were treated as just entities. This is to say that a given utterance can only be interpreted to make meaning within a given situation of use, but not because of the tag it bears or the grammatical items that it carries.

Code-mixing by undergraduates has been found to be dependent on context of discourse. This context influences choices made by interlocutors to achieve communication goal.

Methodology

The data used for this study were surreptitiously recorded in two formal contexts involving both staff and students of Imo State Polytechnic, Omuma. The contexts were considered formal based on the role relationship, the physical setting and the subject matters that were being discussed.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The study adopted an eclectic approach involving Labor's Quantitative paradigm and Guile's Accommodation theory. There are two discourses in all, numbered 1 and2.The interlocutors are tagged A, B.... etc. as the case may be.

Discourse One (Lecturer versus Students)

1A: Remember to come along with your lab coats when coming by 4p.m.

2B: A beg you people should stop making noise.

3C: If na lab coat, no wahala

4A: Ok, please don't forget your lab coat, I repeat. No agbada or the like is allowed.

Table 1 showing identified code-mixed items in discourse one.

Context	Role Relationship between Particlpants	Code-mixed Items	Pattern of Occurrence of code-mixed item	Standard English version	General comments
Formal Domain Education Subject section/practical	Lecturer and students after a lecture	A beg If na lab coat, Na wa No wahala No agbada	English pidgin English pidgin English pidgin English Pidgin English Pidgin	Please If it is lab coat It is surprising No problem Traditional outfit for men	Over familiarity and the unconventional venue of this discourse have contributed to the use of code mixed features

Analysis of Discourse One

The discourse presented above was surreptitiously recorded after a lecture at Imo State Polytechnic, Omuma. The role relationship between the participants was that of lecturer and students. The domain of language use was a presumed classroom, although the venue was actually outside the classroom with students clustered round the lecturer who stood in' the middle giving instructions shortly after the day's lectures. The code which ought to have been "transactional" turned 'personal' with the students feeling too free to express themselves in whatever code they chose to express themselves. The fact that this event took place outside the classroom made the students too familiar with him and obviously influenced their choice of informal language code-mixed largely with English pidgin words. Another factor is the unconventional venue for this particular discourse which was in front of the classroom block. This made the setting informal and the atmosphere too relaxed to be seen as a formal one by the students. Using Labor's model, we can say that the sociolinguistic factors of familiarity and relaxed atmosphere were the motivations for speech behaviour of the participants in this discourse, not minding the domain, topic and role relationship.

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Discourse Two

key: Student: A

Lecturer: B

A: Glory be to Jesu

B: .....and Honour to Mary

A: Good morning, Ma

B: morning, and how are you today?

A: very well, thank you, Ma.

B: What brings you here? I thought you have graduated long ago?

A: Yes Ma, I have. I just "breezed" in this morning with my younger brother for his post UTME so I decided to come and greet my' mummy'

B: That's kind of you. So where do you stay now?

A: I am 'patching up' with a private school in Port-Harcourt.

B: Ok, that may just be a stepping stone for you.

A: That's correct, ma. Please ma (switches over o another discussion entirely) I don't know if you will be able to assist my brother in securing admission.

B: Well, agaghim enye gi hundred percent assurance now, but if there is any way, by the special grace of God, I will assist. Let me have his details.

A: Thanks so much, ma. Ka odi,ma

Table two showing code-mixed items in discourse two, the role relationship, standard English version and comments

Context	Role Relationship between Participants	Code-mixed Items	Pattern of Occurrence of code-mixed item	Standard English version	General comments
FORMAL DOMAIN: Director's Office Subject: Admission Request for a brother	Director, Admissions/a former student of the institution	Breezed in patching up well, agaghim. Kao di, Sir. Glory be to Jesu	English slang English slang English –igbo Igbo-English Catholic way of greeting	Came around Temporarily working with I am not sure…. Good bye Glory be to Jesus Christ	Shared religion and some degree of familiarity between the interlocutors gave rise to the code-mixing of English and Igbo and even slang words in an otherwise formal context.

Analysis of Discourse two

The domain of language use here is Admission's Director's office. The speech situation is supposed to be formal, while the role relationship between the participants is that of student-lecturer (Director). 'A' wishing to accommodate his speech towards that of I' uses "Glory be to Jesu", knowing that 'B' too is a practicing catholic. 'B' converges to show religious solidarity. As soon as there is slight role change from the lecturer who becomes less transactional, the student also converges by using the phrase "breezed in". We notice that speaker A, who all the while had been accommodative in his speech pattern, did so because he desired assistance or a favourable interaction which was for B to assist A in securing admission for his, younger one. In this discourse, B was not conscious of A's intentions. He (B) possibly at the initial stage thought that A came by just to greet him, not knowing that the main reason for A's seemingly good posture was all because he needed B's assistance.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred using Labor's model that the motivations for the code mix in this discourse were religion and seeking for favours.

Discussions

Different reasons have been adduced by linguists as to why bilinguals or multilinguals code-mix. These range from covering up deficiencies or in competencies as a mechanism to exclude person (s) from having a complete understanding of the subject of discussion to demonstrating a personality of mixed identity.

In addition to the above catalogue of reasons, our findings reveal the following reasons as being responsible for code-mixing in formal contexts among interactants.

Bilingualism: The ability of students to speak other languages beside the English Language was discovered to be responsible for the use of some of the identified items code mixed with standard English expressions. Most of the lexical items identified were from the Igbo language which happens to be the language of the immediate community. Some of these items include “agaghim”, ka odi" among others.

Religion: The code-mixing of particularly catholic expressions was motivated by religion, in this case christianity (specifically, Catholicism).

Familiarity: Other findings also reveal that the subjects for this study tended to code-mix more in formal contexts when their interlocutors were people they were familiar with. A good example of these abound in the discourses where words like “wahala”,“na wa”,“abeg" among others were freely used without any objection by the lecturer.

Relaxed atmosphere: The study also reveals that the students code-mixed more in formal contexts when their interlocutors made the atmosphere relaxed by becoming unofficial or using informal English as well.

Seeking favours: Crystal, while defining the Accommodation theory, posits that it is a theory in sociolinguistics which aims to explain why people modify their style of speaking to (accommodate) become more like or less like that of their addressee(s). For example, among the reasons why people converge towards the speech patterns of their listener are the desires to identify more closely with the listener, to win social approval or simply to increase the communicative efficiency of the interaction.

From our data, especially discourse 2, the main reason why our subjects modified their style of speaking by code-mixing was to adapt to the speech pattern of their interlocutors so as to create a form of solidarity and eventually be granted what they wanted.

Benefits of code-switching

Study Smarter (2024) identified the following benefits of code mixing: it enables speaker to draw upon.

1. Rich vocabulary choices, where terms from are language may express minces not available on another.
2. Cultural references and idioms that carry emotional or societal significance. It enables individuals to express and maintain their cultural heritage within a multilingual framework.
3. Convenient communication shortcuts, especially in technology-driven and globalized environments.
4. It enables social integration. Code mixing facilities bridges between different linguistic communities, enhancing social collision.
5. It encourages the evolution of language by introducing novel expression and terms.

6. It permits identity expression code-mixing allows bilingual or multilingual expression of ones identity and connect with others who share the same linguistic background.
7. It allows ease of communication as it makes speech more fluid and natural among speakers who are comfortable using multiple language.
8. By mixing language, speakers after enrich their interactions and convey meaning more dynamically. The importance of code-mixing goes beyond casual conversation. It is a reflection of identify, adaptability and linguistic creativity.
   Oct 2024 www.studysmarter.co.uk code-mixing: definition & analysis.

Conclusion

From this study, it is evident that in order to completely interpret a given piece of language, the context of use must be taken into consideration. The data for this study is replete with instances of code-mixed standard and nonstandard English words/expressions. This suggests that language choice must be suited to the given context, and a very important aspect of context is provided by social conditions (Alo, 2004). In order to transmit and decode meaning, we do more than arrange the form of language (sounds and words) in a particular order. Meaning has to be constructed in a manner that is socially acceptable.

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