An Analysis of Code-switching and Code-mixing amongst Students of our Lady of Mount Carmel College Muea-Buea in Cameroon

A. S. Ezemba *, F. C. Chilozie*, O. M. Ezemba* and A. H. Uwaezuoke *

* Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The research work aims at providing an analysis of code-switching and code-mixing amongst students of Our Lady of Mount Carmel College Muea-Buea in Cameroon. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze code-switching and code-mixing students of Our Lady of Mount Carmel College Muea-Buea in Cameroon. Thus, the researcher used a qualitative research method which involves recording utterances and observation. The instruments used in collating the data were: a note book to prevent data loss and a smart phone for recording utterances. The data collated were analyzed using Van Dijk functional approach of discourse analysis. One major finding of the study is that Code-switching and Code-mixing helps to ease and strengthen communication between the teacher and students involved in classroom interaction. From the conversations collected, it was discovered that two forms of code-switching take place during communication, they are: the intra and inter-sentential code-switching. The researcher also discovered several motivating factors as to why students’ code-switch and code-mix and these factors were classified under the linguistic, social, and stylistic factors. From the data collated and analyzed, it is evident that the linguistic factors are the most prominent factors that play major roles as to why students code-switch and code-mix. Lastly, it was observed that code-switching and code-mixing can have positive and negative impacts on the students.

Keywords: Codeswitching; codemixing; pupils; factors; linguistics.

*Corresponding author: E-mail: ezembastephaniea@gmail.com;
1. INTRODUCTION

Code switching and Code mixing are important aspects of language given their use and status in the speech pattern of the average bilingual in any human society. Not until recently, code switching and code mixing was seen as evidence of "internal mental confusion, the inability to separate two languages sufficiently to warrant the description of true bilingualism" (Lipski 1982:191).

Codeswitching which is sometimes referred to as 'code-mixing', 'codeshifting' or 'code-changing' has been defined as the act of "alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent" [1]. In the words of Milroy and Muysken [2], code-switching is the alternate use by multilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation. Macswan [3] claimed that code-switching is a speech style in which fluent bilinguals move in and out of two or more languages. Obiamalu and Mbagwu [4] submit that code-switching is a bilingual situation in which speakers move from one language to another in their linguistic repertoire for various linguistic and social factors. Ahmad [5] said that code switching helps to facilitate the flow of classroom instruction since the teacher do not have to spend so much time trying to explain to the learners or searching for the simplest words to clarify any confusion that might arise. As switching between languages is exceedingly common and takes many forms, we can recognize code-switching more often as sentence alternation. A sentence may begin in one language, and finish in another or phrases from both languages may succeed each other in apparently random order. Such behavior can be explained only by postulating a range of linguistic or social factors such as the following: speakers cannot express themselves adequately in one language so they switch to another to work around the deficiency. This may trigger a speaker to continue in the other language for a while and also switching to a minority language is very common as a means of expressing solidarity with a social group. The language change signals to the listener that the speaker is from a certain background; if the listener responds with a similar switch, a degree of rapport is established. Thus, code-switching is a linguistic term for referring to the use of more than one language in conversations. Importantly, according to Clyne(2000), code switching can occur between sentences (inter sentential), within sentences (intra sentential), within a word itself (intra word) and switching of either a tag phrase or a word (tag switching). As such, code switching is conceived as a normal phenomenon between the bilinguals or multilingual speakers.

Code-mixing is a thematically related term, but the usage of the terms code-switching and code-mixing varies. Some scholars use either term to denote the same practice, while others apply code-mixing to denote the formal linguistic properties of language-contact phenomena and code-switching to denote the actual, spoken usages by multilingual persons. Essien, Okon, [6] defines code-mixing as a “language phenomenon which two languages are used for the same message or communication”. Kim [7] submits that, code-mixing includes all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentences. In other words code-mixing refers to the mixing of various linguistic units (morpheme, words, modifiers, phrase, clauses and sentences) primarily; it involves mixing two languages within a sentence. Some work defines code-mixing as the placing or mixing of units (words, phrases, sentences) from two languages within the same sentence and speech context, while code-switching is the placing or mixing of units (words, phrases, sentences) from two codes within the same speech context. The structural difference between code-switching and code-mixing is the position of the altered elements—for code-switching, the modification of the codes occurs inter-sentententially, while for code-mixing, it occurs intra-sentententially.

Various scholars and writers have provided reasons as to why individuals code switch and code mix. Researches from sociolinguistics have provided account of language use and studies in the domain of language have identified certain factors that could account for why speakers switch from one language or language variety to another. These reasons have being stratified into three basic classes in relation to context. They are the linguistic factors, social factors and stylistic factors.

One of many identified linguistic factors that could motivate code switching is lack of register. According to Lowi (2011), there is usually a kind of lexical gap either in the lexicon of a bilingual or in the language system itself which will motivate the speaker to code switch alternatively to the other linguistic resources available to him in other to keep the conversation. There are many...
One of many identified social factors that directly prompts the need to code-switch is the "social context". According to Waudhaugh (2011), social context is the social setting or background where discourse is situated in relation to other social considerations that influence communication. It includes the location of discourse, social structure of discourse, the social identity and the consideration of the participant of discourse. In other words, the social structure or context can prompt a speaker to move from language to another in a single discourse [10-12]. Another social factor that prompts code-switching as identified in Yusulf, Anne, and Inuwa [13] is the participants and the topic of discourse. Following the narratives by Holmes [14], the participants are the speakers or language users who are involved in a particular interactions or conversation which consist of who is speaking or listening. As such, the choice of which code to use in a particular component of discourse is fully determined by the participant involved in the discourse or particular interaction.

Lastly, several studies with regards to the nature of language use especially on how speakers manipulate various linguistic strategies in creating style have identified various stylistic factors that could motivate the need to code switch. In a stylistic narrative of the impact of code switching in the discourse of bilingual school children, scholars identified the following listed factors that could necessitate the need to code switch [15-17]. They are: to capture attention, to emphasis on a point, to make a precise point, to ease communication and to communicate more effectively. Some researchers believe that speakers may decide to use the communicative strategy of code switching to emphasize a point or capture attention of the audience. In a regular speech when a speaker moves from one language or language variety to another, there is usually emphasis and attention on the particular linguistic unit that was inserted or alternated. Also, Waudhaugh (2003:309) submits that speakers can code switch in an effort to create communication effect, explore the style of communication, and in the same vein ease communication.

Thus, this study intends to bring awareness to the students on the existence of code switching and code mixing and how they switch and mix codes unconsciously in their day to day classroom interaction. It will equally unveil the importance, the reasons and the effects of switching and mixing code and it will also help them understand the nature of language use.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research is based on a qualitative analysis of code switching and code mixing amongst student in natural conversation. The approach combines the methodological framework of Van Dijk functional approach to discourse analysis with an analysis of the grammatical structures of conversational data. Discourse analysis (DA) is a research method for studying written and spoken language in relation to its social context. It is a common qualitative research method in many humanities and social science discipline including linguistic, sociology, and anthropology. The aim of discourse analysis is to examine how language is used in real life situations. The sampling technique used in the data collection is the random sampling method. The instruments used for data collation was a smart phone and note book. The data collated were analyzed along three basic lines of concern: linguistic factors, stylistic factors, and social factors.

3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the interaction between the language teachers and students hence forth, referred to as speaker 1 and 2 respectively.

Data 1:

a. S1: Bonjour
Gloss: Good morning

b. S2: Bonjour madam
Gloss: good morning madam

c. S1: Aujourd’hui nous discuterons d’une date très importante dans l’histoire du
bilinguisme. In Cameroon, we honor the first Fridays of February do you know why?

Gloss: Today we would discussed on a very important date in the history of bilingualism. In Cameroon we honor the first Friday of February do yo know why?

d. S1: Yes, Pas ce que, c’est la journée du bilinguisme.
Gloss: Yes, because, it is bilingualism day.

e. S1: Correct we celebrate bilingualism on this day. Le bilinguisme est la maitrise de deux langues, c’est la capacite de parler couramment deux langue.
Gloss: Correct we celebrate bilingualism on this day. Bilingualism is the ability to be fluent in two languages.

f. S1: Alor savez-vous comment nous appelons les gens qui parle couramment deux langue? They are referred to as bilinguals.
Gloss: So do you know how we refer to those who are fluent in two languages? They are referred to as bilinguals.

The analysis for the above presented data will be based on the factors responsible for code-switching and code-mixing. These factors can be deduced to be the linguistic and stylistic factor. The most prominent linguistic factor that prompts the need to code-switch and code-mix is the "failure to retrieve correct words". The failure to retrieve correct word might be as a result of incompetent linguistic performance. Such an instance is seen when the speaker in data 1 (e) tries to recall the word “bilingual” in English language but fails to do so. And instead of wasting such time, the speaker would rather switch to French language in order to retrieve the word because it is faster and easier. This is seen when he refers to them as “bilingue”.

In the same light, another factor that prompts the need to code-switch and code-mix is the stylistic factor of “making a precise point”. An example of this is seen in data 1 (b) where the speaker lays emphasis on the history of bilingualism but in order to make a precise point, the speaker calls out the name of the country where bilingualism is of great importance and the speaker does this by saying in 1(b) “In Cameroon”, we honor the first Friday of February.

It is important to note that the utterances presented in data 1 shows the existence of two forms of code-switching and they are: the intra-sentential and the inter-sentential. The inter-sentential code-switching involves a switch between sentences and an example of this is switch is seen in data 1 (b and d). The intra-sentential form of switching involves switching within sentences. An example of an intra-sentential switching is seen in data 1 (c and e).

Data: 2

a. S1: Mylene, peux-tu définir le mot adverbe?
Gloss: Mylene, can you define an adverb?

b. S2: (silence)
Gloss: (silence)

c. S1: alor mylene, tu ne sais pas ce qu’est un adverbe? So you're trying to tell me you haven't come across le mot adverbe
Gloss: so mylene, you do not know what an adverb is? So you're trying to tell me you haven't come across the word “adverb”?

d. S2: sir, I have come across le mot mais je ne me souvien pas de la définition.
Gloss: i have come across the word, but i do not remember the definition

e. S1: wandaful
Gloss: wandaful (slang expression).

From the data presented, the researcher highlights the presence of an intra-sentential code-switching and this form of code-switching is seen in data 2 (g and f)

Data: 3

a. S2: Bonne après-midi monsieur.
Gloss: Good afternoon sir.

b. S1: how was your siesta
b. S2: (laugh)... trop court.
Gloss: (laugh)... too short.

c. S1: okay ashai (expression or sorry). Ce soir nous discuterons du verbe. What are verb ? ilfaudrait le définir en française.

Another factor that prompts the need to code-switch and code-mix are the social factors. There are different social factors that may cause speakers of a language to code-switch and code-mix. In data 3, the researcher highlights “the mood of the speaker” as an important social factor that can prompt code-switching because there are individuals whom their moods depict how they speak eg if they are in a good mood,
they can express themselves easily whilst if in a bad mood, they find it difficult to grasp some words. An instance of such is seen data 3(i).

From the above presented data, it can be observed that code-switching and code-mixing can affect the students both positively and negatively.

Positively, code-switching is beneficial because knowledge of two languages can help one access an equivalent expression in another language as seen in data 1(e) while Negatively, it serves as a marker of incompetent linguistic performance and this is seen in data 1(e).

The analysis made several findings as seen below;

i. In each of the recordings, two types of code-switching were pertinent. These are the intra-sentential codeswitching and inter-sentential codeswitching. The existence of these types of code-switching boils down to language contact.

ii. In each recording, it was observed that there are several motivating factors as to why speakers of a language code switch. These factors as mentioned above are linguistics, stylistics, and social factors. The linguistic factors are more prominent than other factors as to why speakers of a language code-switch. This linguistic factor being “the failure to retrieve the correct word from the target language”

iii. Lastly, code-switching and code-mixing in our day to day classroom interaction can either positively or negatively affect speakers.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research work is based on an analysis of code switching and code mixing amongst secondary school students. This study attempts to bring awareness to the existence of codeswitching and code-mixing amongst the secondary students of Our Lady Of Mount Carmel College Muea-Buea in Cameroon. The theoretical approach adopted for this research work was Van Dijk Discourse Analysis, some conceptual clarification were made which include; a clarity of the terms code switching and code mixing for a better understanding and this was done by citing what some scholars said about these terms. From the conversations recorded and presented, it was discovered that two forms of code-switching take place during communication, they are: the intra and inter-sentential code-switching. The researcher also discovered several motivating factors as to why students’ code-switch and code-mix and these factors were classified under the linguistic, social, and stylistic factors.

4.1 Conclusion

Code-switching is seen more frequently in our daily life and it is a growing trend not only amongst students but in society as whole. Code-switching is a linguistic phenomenon which commonly occurs in bilingual and multilingual speech communities. The use of code switching in the classroom can be a useful tool in assisting both the language teacher and students in their teaching and learning process. The researcher observed that there are two forms of code-switching which takes place during communication and they are the intra-sentential and inter-sentential code-switching. The researcher also discovered several motivating factors as to why students code-switch and code-mix and these factors were classified under linguistic, social, and stylistic factors. The study has been able to create awareness to the students towards the existence of code switching and code mixing. Secondly, the research also provides data to language for the teachers to know the area of weaknesses of their students and to help them to improve in those areas ie where code-switching and code-mixing affects the students negatively. Thus, we do not only explore the errors, we also pose the necessary and recommendable solutions.

The researcher recommends that all French bilingual teachers must know the ability of their students in the class especially in a French subject. By knowing these students abilities, the teacher can consider the use of code-switching and code-mixing in the class. Code-switching and code-mixing is a way of making easier the study of language for the native English students and by using code-switching and code-mixing in a classroom, this students become more acquainted with French language and they begin to gain a better understanding of the language as a whole. And also, for pedagogical purposes, code-switching and code-mixing can be expanded to include parents, alongside teachers to study the entire domain that can affect student’s learning environments and their linguistics behaviors. Lastly, Code-switching and code-mixing can be expanded to include psycholinguistic approach. Using such an
approach will be beneficial as it helps explain the errors students make in language teaching performance.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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