

Teachers' Perception of Code-Switching as a Pedagogical Device in the Bilingual Yoruba-English Classroom

Oyeyemi Ifeoluwa Bamidele

Amity University, Haryana, India/ Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara, Nigeria

bamideleifeoluwa0@gmail.com

Abstract

The perception of teachers towards code-switching among Yoruba-English bilingual students in a bilingual school setting has not yet been adequately explored. In this paper, therefore, the perception of teachers on code-switching as a pedagogical device in the bilingual Yoruba-English setting in Akata Community Secondary School, Ganmo, Kwara State, Nigeria is examined. The objectives of this study are to: (i) explore the perception of teachers towards code-switching in the school based on interactions between teachers and students (ii) establish whether or not code-switching facilitates interpersonal communication for both students and teachers; and (iii) determine whether or not classroom code-switching is a pedagogically useful communicative resource. This study made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, guided by Hymes' theory of the Ethnography of Communication. The findings show that many teachers observed that their bilingual students alternate between languages during school hours. They also affirmed that the use of code-switching helps them to elicit content, manage the classroom, and promote interpersonal relations in the classroom. The paper concludes that code-switching is beneficial to bilingual students, but it also needs limitations so as not to hamper their competence in English.

Keywords: Code-switching, Yoruba- English, Perception, Teachers, Classroom

1. Introduction

Code-switching, the practice of moving back and forth between two languages, or between two dialects, is a common practice among bilingual speakers from all walks of life. It is a common linguistic phenomenon noted among bilingual populations. Code-switching occurs when a speaker uses two or more languages in the course of a single utterance (Wardhaugh, 2010). The competency with which a speaker is able to communicate depends on his or her ability to use the language or languages available to them. Macaro (2005) suggests that the fact that bilinguals can code-switch is an asset and a valuable addition to their array of communication strategies.

Code-switching is a widespread phenomenon in bilingual communities like Nigeria, where the speakers use their first language L1 (native language) and their acquired language called the second language (L2), in different settings (Dada, 2010). Nigeria as multilingual

country has over 400 indigenous languages (Yusuf, 2010), three of which are regional languages, (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba). Since language plays a key role in the teaching and learning process, there is a need for the right medium of instruction which is understood by both the students and the teachers. The English language has been accepted as the official medium of communication and instruction in Nigeria. It has come to stay as a second language to many Nigerians.

Setatiand Adler (2001) state that code-switching in a school classroom usually occurs in bilingual or multilingual settings, and at its most general, entails switching by the teachers and or learners between the language of learning and teaching and the learners' main language. Code-switching is a practice that enables students to harness their main language as a learning resource. This may be the reason why code-switching has recently attracted a lot of research, but only a few of such were related to schools.

In 1977, an official document entitled "National Policy on Education" was issued by the Federal Government of Nigeria, and was revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004 (National Policy on Education, 2004). This document assigned different functions to the many Nigerian languages in the nation's education sector at different levels. The policy states that at secondary level, English shall be the language of instruction while the language of the immediate environment, one of the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) other than that of the immediate environment and French shall be taught as school subjects (Olagbaju, 2014).

However, despite the directive to use English as a medium of instruction and communication, students do not completely use English in the expression of their ideas and feelings. For them to better express their ideas and feelings, they resort to code-switching. It is common to hear students code-switching within a given conversation in the school, despite the fact that many secondary schools place restrictions on the use of local languages among students. Teachers, likewise, code switch when explaining and giving directions and instructions to students; both teacher and students code-switch during the activities in the class.

2. Literature Review

Gumperz (1982) defines code-switching as a mixture of two languages. To Niemiec(2010) bilingualism is a phenomenon where speakers of a particular society or community speak at least two common languages, often mixing them in their conversations. Genesee (2002, p. 174) further suggests that "true bilingual communicative competence entails the ability to

adapt one's language use on-line in accordance with relevant characteristics of the situation, including the preferred or more proficient language of one's interlocutor".

In any bilingual or multilingual society, speakers are inclined towards speaking the languages that are common in their linguistic community. This study aligns itself with Níleap's (2006) definition of bilingualism which suggests that speakers may be equally fluent in all common languages, but one particular language would often be used predominantly depending on the situation, speakers, or topic discussed, and that a true bilingual is a rare occurrence in most bilingual and multilingual societies. He further suggests that speakers are also prone to use one language more frequently but this does not mean that they are less fluent in the languages they use less frequently.

This research focuses on the three major types of code-switching identified by Poplack (1980, pp. 613-615) which include: "tag-switching", "inter-sentential switching", and "intra-sentential switching". Tag-switching is described by Romaine (1989, p. 112) as "the insertion of words that can be put anywhere within the boundary of a sentence or speech without violating the grammatical rules of that sentence".

Inter-sentential switching involves a switch at a clause or sentence boundary (Romaine, 1989, p. 112) where, for example, the clause or sentence could be in L1 before changing to L2 in another clause (Yletyinen, 2004, p. 15). Intra-sentential switching occurs when words or phrases from another language are inserted into a sentence of the first language (Yletyinen, 2004, p. 15).

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework considered in this study is Hymes' Ethnography of Communication (EOC) theory, formerly known as Ethnography of Speaking. This framework analyses communication within the wider context of the social, cultural practices and beliefs of the members of a particular culture or a speech community. It was propounded by Hymes (1962) specifically for analysing patterns of language use within speech communities in order to provide support for his idea of communicative competence. According to him, EOC must investigate directly the use of language in contexts of situations so as to discern patterns appropriate to speech activity. It must also take a community in context, investigating its communicative habits as a whole. This means that other than divorcing linguistic form from its function, the analysis of a community's communication, linguistic or otherwise, must occur with respect to the socio-cultural context of its use and the functions of the meaning(s) conveyed. It also takes into account both the communicative

form, which may include but is not limited to spoken language, and its function within the given culture.

Saville-Troike (2003, p.18) proposes that the concept of communicative competence must be embedded in the total set of knowledge and skills which speakers bring into a situation. These skills or the total set of knowledge within the context of the classroom is underscored by the language of the students and their ability to navigate between their native language and the language prescribed for the classroom. Saville-Troike (2003) further describes aspects of culture that are relevant to communication. One aspect of this being - the values and attitudes held about language and ways of speaking, which is transmitted to students by teachers. Therefore, code-switching within the context of the classroom can be viewed as a valid attempt to meet the needs of both teachers and students within the classroom as it relates to understanding the subject matter during the teaching and learning process. This is of particular interest in the tradition of ethnography and even more so in the specific area of the Ethnography of Communication.

The ethnography of communication allows language to be examined in a specific context, which in this case, is the school. Thus, members of the class are the speech community; the speech situation is the lesson; and the speech event is the communication of particular lesson objectives, tasks, or activities enacted by the teachers through communication and response from the students.

4. Methodology

This study made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods which were guided by Hymes' methodological approach to the ethnography of communication. For this research, observation, alongside recordings of classroom interactions, interviews and questionnaire surveys were adopted in exploring different aspects of the code-switching phenomenon.

The respondents in the study were bilingual in Yoruba and English, which enabled them to easily code-switch. The teachers who participated in this study taught various subjects in the school and all of them had over five years' teaching experience. All the teachers who participated in the study (a total of thirty) were bilingual in Yoruba and English.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, teachers' responses to the questionnaires, observations and interviews are discussed and analyzed. After the transcriptions of the recorded classroom discourses were made, the researcher took some excerpts which contained code-switching patterns and then made use of content analysis as a method in analyzing and classifying the code-switching patterns.

5.1 Qualitative interpretation of results

Extract 1

Student: Ma, what is the difference between idioms and Proverbs?

Teacher: Have you been taught anything like "akanloèdè" in Yoruba?

Student: Yes

Teacher: Oya ẹ́ fún mi níàwọ̀n example

Students: TaiwoṣeàyàGbanga, Bukola fi aké koori

Teacher: Yes, those are good examples of idioms. Akanloèdèàània ní pèniidioms... (The conversation continues)

Translation

Student: Ma, what is the difference between idioms and Proverbs?

Teacher: Have you been taught anything like "idioms" in Yoruba?

Student: Yes

Teacher: Then give me examples.

Students: Taiwo is bold, Bukola is stubborn

Teacher: Yes, those are good examples of idioms. 'Akanlo Ede' is the same as idioms... (The conversation continues)

Extract 1 is taken from an interaction in Junior Secondary School (Jss) 2 between the English teacher and the students. This recorded data indicates that code-switching is a powerful instrument for teachers and students to seek and provide explanations of abstract terms and concepts. The teacher was teaching a lesson on idioms using monolingual English during the English session of the lesson, and during the lesson a student asked the teacher a question about the difference between an idiom and a proverb. In response, the English teacher asked if they had been taught about idioms in Yoruba, switching from English to Yoruba using inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching in order to explain the topic to them.

This interaction draws our attention to two main pedagogic findings. First, the teacher, although keen to use unilingual English, recognizes the importance of the L1 (Yoruba) for explaining incomprehensible concepts to the students. Secondly, the students' inability to differentiate between "an idiom" and "a proverb" could be attributed to the restricted language use pattern in the classroom.

In the JSS1 Class, as Extract 2 below shows, the teacher switched languages using inter-sentential code-switching by repeating the same sentence in Yoruba and English. The

rest of the classroom discourse went on in Yoruba with code-switching to English where necessary, as shown below.

Extract 2

Teacher: Kí là kòlà̀nà? Ta lólèsòfúnmi? Àbí ẹ̀ rántí?

Student: Ọ̀rò orúkọ

Teacher: Bẹ̀ni, ọ̀rò orúkọ, which we call noun in English. Kíwáníòrò orúkọ? What is a noun?

Student: Oro-orukojé orukoeniyan, eranko, ibikantabinnkan

Teacher: Bẹ̀ni, tori ẹ̀ naaṣe ma n sope a noun is a naming word.

Translation

Teacher: What did we learn yesterday? Who can tell me? Or you cannot remember?

Student: Noun

Teacher: Yes, noun. So, what is a noun?

Student: A noun is the name of a person, animal, place or things

Teacher: Yes, that is why it is said that, a noun is a naming word

Extract 2 reveals that code-switching can be used to facilitate communication between the teachers and the students. The recordings indicate that the second language can make it easier to understand the intended message.

Extract 3

Teacher: Give me more examples of simile

Student A: Dami is as tall as a peacock

Teacher: Peacock báwo? ŠéDami ó gaju peacock lo? Can't you say she is as beautiful as a peacock, ó wa lo gabí peacock

Student B: Bashira is as cunning as a fox

Teacher: That's a good example. Class, give me more... (conversation continues)

Translation

Teacher: Give me more examples of simile

Student A: Dami is as tall as a peacock

Teacher: Peacock, how? Is Dami not taller than a peacock? Can't you say she is as beautiful as a peacock, instead of saying she is as tall as a peacock

Student B: Bashira is as cunning as a fox

Teacher: That's a good example. Class, give me more... (Conversation continues)

Extract 3 is from an English lesson in a JSS3 Class. During this part of the classroom discussion, students were asked to provide examples of simile (figure of speech). Student A

gave the example "Dami is as tall as a peacock". In an attempt to correct the student, the teacher switched back and forth from Yoruba to English. In this classroom, both the teacher and the students were in a bilingual mode as both Yoruba and English were activated, and both parties were free to use any of the two languages. During an interview, this teacher indicated that due to low proficiency levels of the students in English, she adopts a bilingual mode of instruction to facilitate effective communication.

Extract 4

Student: Good afternoon ma

Teacher: pèlẹ́ báwoni

Student:dáadáaní ma. Ma, I have dropped the notes on your table

Teacher: ó dà, ó ẹ

Student: yes ma

Translation

Student: Good afternoon ma

Teacher: Sorry, how are you?

Student: I'm very well, Ma. Ma, I have dropped the notes on your table

Teacher: OK, thank you

Student: Yes ma

This category of perception towards code-switching for interpersonal relations highlights the fact that the classroom is not only a place of formal learning but also a social and affective environment in its own right, where teachers and learners negotiate relationships and identities. To build rapport with individual students, create greater personal warmth and encourage greater learner involvement, a teacher may, therefore, when the occasion is appropriate, switch to the students' native language.

5.2 Quantitative interpretation of results

This section is concerned with the analysis of data gathered from questionnaires distributed to all the teachers.

5.2.1 Teachers' perception of code-switching in the classroom

In addition to observations via classroom recordings, questionnaire surveys and interviews were also used to explore the perception of the teachers toward code-switching in the classroom. The teachers were asked to indicate whether they would encourage code-switching in the classroom. The responses showed that 85% of the teachers expressed that they would encourage the use of code-switching, while 15% would discourage its use. This is

detailed on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Suitability of code-switching in the classroom

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	25	85%
No	5	15%
No opinion	0	0
TOTAL	30	100%

5.2.2 Teachers' perception of using code-switching as a pedagogical device

In relation to teachers' attitude to the use of code-switching for teaching and learning in the classroom, most of the teachers showed a positive attitude towards its use during their classroom interactions. Table 2 below shows the responses of the teachers to questions on language use (including the use of code-switching) in the bilingual classroom.

Table 2: Teachers' perception of the suitability of code-switching as a pedagogical device

As a bilingual teacher, do you believe that:	Yes		No		Total
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	
Code-switching will facilitate the language learning process	26	89%	4	13.30%	30 (100%)
The practice of code-switching will increase the students' reliance and dependency on the teacher	23	77%	7	33.3%	30 (100%)
Code-switching should be included as an integral part of lessons	19	67%	11	37%	30 (100%)

There should be a strict separation of the Yoruba and English languages in the classroom	7	33.30%	23	77%	30 (100%)
Code-switching should only be used as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted	23	77%	7	33..3%	30 (100%)
Code-switching is an efficient, time-saving technique	26	88.60%	4	13.30%	30 (100%)
English is best taught in English-only classrooms	28	93.3%	2	7%	30 (100%)
The use of Yoruba language in the classroom will result in a decline in the standards of English usage	12	32%	18	68%	30 (100%)
The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker	11	33%	19	67%	30 (100%)
The more English that is used, the better the results for the student	28	93.30%	2	7%	30 (100%)

Table 2 above shows teachers' responses to the idea of using code-switching in the classroom. The data indicate that 89% of the teachers affirmed that code-switching would facilitate the learning process and that it is an efficient, time-saving technique. In addition, 67% of the respondents opined that code-switching should be included as an integral part of the lessons. On whether the practice of code-switching would increase the students' reliance and dependency on the teacher and whether code-switching should only be used as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted, 77% of the respondents agreed to this.

However, regarding the idea of using strictly Yoruba and English in the classrooms, or whether the use of the Yoruba language in the classroom would result in a decline in the standards of English, and whether the ideal teacher of English should be a native speaker,

most of the respondents disagreed. The percentage of negative responses was 77%, 68%, and 67% respectively.

6. Findings and Implications of the Study

6.1 Classroom code-switching as a pedagogically useful communicative device

The study established that code-switching can be used to increase the students' comprehension of the subject matter during the lesson and that it helps the weak students to understand the concepts taught and to explain the meaning of words and sentences that might not otherwise have been properly understood. This is supported by Adendorff (1993) who argues that code-switching helps learners to understand the subject matter better. The study, thus, establishes that code-switching is a pedagogically useful communicative resource. The study also established that code-switching is an effective tool for adding emphasis to vaguely understood points when teaching for clarity and understanding and that it is effective in explaining difficult concepts. Extracts 1, 2 and 3 reveal that code-switching can be a pedagogically useful resource. Lin (2013) suggests that students find classroom interaction more natural and easier when code-switching takes place. This conducive atmosphere that code-switching contributes to is important in the teacher-student relationship since it gives them an opportunity to communicate in a more informal way where the risk of misunderstanding can be avoided, thus making teaching more effective.

The study found that code-switching aids in building and strengthening interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. It creates a conversational and relational effect that makes communication easier and that it helps students and teachers to participate and interact with each other freely. This corresponds to the findings of Adendorff (1996) that teachers and students use code-switching for communicative reasons which enables them to achieve both social and educational targets. Code-switching is thus used to convey precise meanings with ease, to emphasize points, identify with particular groups, to close status gaps and to establish goodwill and support. This also corresponds to Canagarajah (1995), which suggests that code-switching serves micro functions such as classroom management functions. These include managing discipline, negotiating directions, teacher's admonitions or warnings, requesting help, pleading, official and unofficial interactions among others.

6.2 Perceptions of students' use of code-switching in the classroom

As has been stated earlier, it is very common to see learners' code-switch within a bilingual classroom, especially as they acquire new languages. In a bilingual classroom, students combine both languages in a single utterance. To a lot of educators and researchers, the use of code-switching is seen as a sign of lack of proficiency in the desired language (Palmer,

2009). Some researchers believe that students learn a language more fluently if maintain the desired language (Palmer, 2009). The more they are forced to use the target language, the better they learn it. Therefore, code-switching does not suggest remaining within the first language. It is believed that if a student relies too much on the native language, he/she would not fully develop the second language. Therefore, some teachers in the bilingual classroom usually want to encourage students not to combine both languages.

When the teachers were asked which areas they believed code-switching affects the growth of the students, 12 out of 30 teachers opined that code-switching can affect the students in their writing skills, verbal skills, and reading skills. These teachers see code-switching as negatively affecting the growth of students specifically in their reading and writing skills. However, the majority of the teachers reflected on how the use of code-switching may help students gain confidence in the second language or may help students express an idea they may not be able to express in the target language. In this instance, these teachers commented on how the use of code-switching can positively affect the students socially and academically within the classroom.

7. Conclusion

This paper set out to explore the perception of teachers towards code-switching in bilingual classrooms based on the interaction between teachers and students. The analysis of the classroom data, the interviews and the questionnaires reveal that teachers and students code-switch in their classroom interactions to perform certain teaching and learning functions. Equally, the attitudes of the teachers towards code-switching in the classroom are predominantly positive, however, teachers who have a negative attitude towards it avoid code-switching in the classroom to a large extent. Code-switching could also be beneficial as teachers explain cultural topics, give comments to students' responses and clarify content. Furthermore, in relation to interpersonal terms, code-switching is also beneficial as the teachers try to encourage students, motivate them, and tell jokes to provide a positive environment in the classroom. Conclusively, it can be stated that the use of code-switching is beneficial for bilingual students but it also requires limitations because it could also hamper their competence in English.

Finally, this study recommends that a similar study can be conducted to gather sufficient data on classroom interactions by utilizing intensive classroom observations to deepen the understanding of teachers' perspectives towards code-switching. This research also recommends that further research should be conducted in other schools to validate the findings of this study, and extend the frontiers of bilingual learning.

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