

# **Code-Switching and Code-Mixing: Style of Language Use in Childhood in Yoruba Speech Community**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article is the report of an investigation into the types of languages acquired at different periods in the lives of members of the education elite in a speech community; to wit, the Ikale in the Irele and Okitipupa Local Government Areas of Ondo State. Through the questionnaire administered on about fifty respondents of the target population, the researcher could establish that the average child of the community starts to become bilingual from the primary school stage of his education. This, in effect, makes code-switching and code-mixing manifest in the child's linguistic performance right from his early age. The implication is that, since both phenomena correlate positively with the educational attainment of individuals, English language teachers should devise the means of preventing the demerits of code-switching and code-mixing from adversely affecting the language acquisition process of the child.

*Keywords: speech pattern, code-switching, code-mixing*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Code-switching and code-mixing are well-known traits in the speech pattern of the average bilingual in any human society the world over. The implication of the prevalence of the phenomena in the Ikale speech community for the English language teacher there is what this article sets out to indicate. Nobody seems to have hitherto done this.

The main body of the paper is divided into four sections. The first contains the definition of concepts. It is in the second that the previous investigations of scholars on code-switching and code-mixing are examined. The entire procedure for the current research constitutes the third section, while the fourth one contains the conclusion in which the afore-mentioned implication is explicitly stated.

## **2. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

In this section, the concepts to be defined are code, code-switching and code-mixing.

## 2.1 CODE

In this study, code will be taken as a verbal component that can be as small as a morpheme or as comprehensive and complex as the entire system of language. As such, the Yoruba language is a code, so also is its single morpheme.

## 2.2 CODE-SWITCHING AND CODE-MIXING

Several scholars have attempted to define code-switching and code-mixing. Among them are Amuda (1989), Atoye (1994) and Belly (1976). For instance, Hymes (1974) defines only code-switching as “a common term for alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of a language or even speech styles” while Bokamba (1989) defines both concepts thus:

Code-switching is the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event... code-mixing is the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from a co-operative activity where the participants, in order to infer what is intended, must reconcile what they hear with what they understand.

## 3. PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

Also, language experts across the globe have investigated in their experiments the causes, functions, characteristics and effects of code-switching and code-mixing. Such investigations on the causes of the phenomena, for instance, have revealed sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors. One is bilingualism or language contact that results “in lexical borrowings and mixture of English and vernacular expression” in the speech of West African bilinguals (Ansre, 1971; Bamgbose, 1971; Cheng & Butler, 1989). Some are status, integrity, self-pride, comfortability and prestige (Akere, 1977; Bokamba, 1989; Hymes, 1962; Kachru, 1989; Kamwangamalu, 1989). Other causes include modernisation, westernization, efficiency, professionalism and social advancement (Kachru, 1989; Kamwangamalu, 1989). According to these scholars, some of the functions of code-switching and code-mixing are intra-group identity (Gumperz, 1982); poetic creativity (Kachru, 1989) and the expression of modernisation (Kamwangamalu, 1989).

One of the major characteristics of both phenomena is their imposition as the norm of language use in the most bilingual communities (Kamwangamalu, 1989).

Among their effects, however, are undermining of certain traditional values (Kachru, 1989), innovations in the structure of one of the other of the languages

code-switched and code-mixed (Kamwangamalu, 1989) and making one language to be more dominant than the other, thereby causing the individual to switch always to the dominant language (Cheng & Butler, 1989).

It is observed that all the studies on the phenomena reviewed so far above are silent on the implication the phenomena have on language acquisition right from childhood. It is this area that this study focuses and explores in order to verify what the situational implications are in respect of the acquisition of language in childhood.

## 4. CURRENT RESEARCH

In order to ascertain this point, an investigation was conducted in a particular speech community; the Ikale in Irele and Okitipupa Local Government Areas of Ondo State. Here, Yoruba is mostly spoken as the first language (L1) of the citizens. The major towns covered in the area included Okitipupa (the headquarters), Ode-Aye, Ode-Erinje, Iju-Odo, Ilutitun, Igbotako, Ikoya and Ode-Irele.

### 4.1 INSTRUMENT

As shown in Appendix 1, a questionnaire was designed to find out from its respondents the types of languages acquired at different periods in their lives as well as the various functions that the languages were meant to perform. Fifty copies of it were randomly distributed to secondary school teachers who exhibited to a very large extent the traits of code-switching and code-mixing in their speeches and were very accessible to the investigator in the area at the ratio of three male (30) to two female (20) respondents. Being mostly Yoruba-English bilinguals, the respondents had qualifications equivalent to the first University degree. Thus the difference in the ratio of questionnaire distribution shows that there were more male than female graduate teachers in the locality.

Moreover, most of the respondents were middle-aged, falling within the age brackets of 25 to 40 years. They could then be said to have reached a stage in their lives and had experience to a level at which their linguistic habits could be said to have stabilized. Also, their speech usages in Yoruba and/or English could safely be assumed to be characteristically indicative of most Yoruba-English bilinguals with similar educational background and life experience if the respondents' language behaviours are similar in identifiable situations.

The same investigator who had personally distributed the questionnaires to the respondents equally collected back all the fifty copies issues out.

## 4.2 FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

As shown in Appendix 2, the questionnaires indicate that forty-five (90%) of the respondents spoke Yoruba as their first language (L1); one (2%) spoke pidgin English; three (6%) spoke Ijaw and one (2%) spoke Urhobo before primary school age.

This demonstrates that before children in the speech community attain the school age, many of them are monolinguals and Yoruba is the only language of communication for most (90%) of them. At the primary school age, however, English starts to play an increasingly important role in their communicative lives, while Yoruba is still being acquired as the first language (L1), in addition to being taught as a school subject. Moreover, within this Yoruba-speaking community, especially in the urban centres, there are special private schools where the only language of instruction and the only language taught the pupils is English.

The point being made here is that, right from the primary school, two languages (Yoruba and English) start to co-exist in the speech stock of the average child in the community. In effect, the child starts to become bilingual right from the primary school stage of education. Since, at this stage, the grammar of the first language has not been thoroughly grasped, and the child would naturally want to express himself using all the linguistic resources at his disposal, it is likely that the process of “grammatical coalescence” of Yoruba and English would have begun at this level. This, in effect, makes code-switching and code-mixing manifest in the child’s linguistic performance right from his early age. A comparison of language acquisition and language use during the pre-primary school age with that of the primary school period shows that while only about 2% could use some form of pidgin English during the pre-primary school age, all pupils (100%) could use English at the Primary school stage.

However, at secondary school stage, language use by the pupils takes on a new dimension. Thus, in a continuum, the sequence of language use is such that Yoruba starts to be the dominant language at the pre-primary period of the child’s language acquisition; a balance is struck between Yoruba and English in the speech repertoire of the child at the primary school level, with English being used mainly in the classroom and Yoruba often used outside the classroom; while the English language is pre-dominant at the secondary school stage. At this third stage also, three of the factors that help to place English in its pre-eminent position are that it is offered as a compulsory subject; it is the language of instruction and that the use of its rival language (Yoruba) as “vernacular” is forbidden to all students. Thus, English replaces Yoruba as a dominant language eventually.

The low status and prestige of pidgin English in the speech community under reference does not make it to feature prominently in the language stock of students at secondary school. Therefore, the gradual change in status of only

Yoruba and English can be seen between infancy and adulthood in the speech repertoire of Yoruba-English bilinguals as represented by the respondents examined (shown in the bar graphs in Appendix 2).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The foregoing study appears to have shown that code-switching and code-mixing correlate positively with the educational attainment of individuals. As shown also, both phenomena have their merits as well as demerits in the speech repertoire of their users. One only hopes that English language teachers would now devise the means of preventing the demerits from adversely affecting the language acquisition process of the child.

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## APPENDIX 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE ON LANGUAGE USE

**Instruction:** Please, kindly fill this questionnaire completely by ticking the space you select for each number. Where the information demanded does not apply to you, leave the spaces for number blank (i.e., unticked).

1. Sex: Male..... Female.....
2. Please to which of these age-groups do you belong?  
1–20..... 21–30..... 31–40..... over 40.....
3. What language(s) do you often speak?  
Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....
4. What language did you first learn to speak before school age?  
Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....
5. What did you eventually learn at the primary school?  
Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....
6. What language(s) was/were used in teaching you in elementary/primary school?  
Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....
7. What did you eventually learn at the secondary school?  
Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....
8. What language do you normally use to communicate with your nuclear family (wife and children)?  
Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....
9. In what language do you normally interact with other members of your immediate family (father, mother, brothers, sisters)?  
Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....
10. What do you use to reach non-members of your close family (uncle, cousin, nephew, aunt)?

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Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....

11. In what language do you interact with your colleagues (friends)?

Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....

12. What language would you normally use if a colleague visits you in your place of work or if you visit such a colleague in his/hers?

Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....

13. What language would you use in speaking to a non-colleague or a person not familiar with you, if you visit or happen to come across such a person?

(a) in his office or place of work?

Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....

(b) in his Home?

Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....

(c) in an informal setting (like a party, club house, restaurant, market, football field, etc.)?

Yoruba ..... English..... Pidgin..... Others.....

14. Where did you do your elementary/primary education?

(i)..... (ii)..... (iii).....

15. Please, what is your occupation?

Messenger..... Cleaner..... Labourer.....

Clerk..... Typist..... Executive Officer.....

Receptionist..... Administrative Officer.....

Teacher.....

Primary..... Secondary..... Post-secondary.....

Private/any other please indicate.....

16. (a) Have you ever worked in any other State than yours? Yes..... No.....

(b) For how long? ..... years

17. For how long have you worked:

(a) on your own? ..... years

(b) as an employee (i.e., a paid worker)? ..... years

18. Have you ever worked or lived in a big city or town (like Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Benin, Port Harcourt, Enugu, etc.) and for how long?

Yes..... Years..... No.....

19. In which of these areas of knowledge do you specialise?

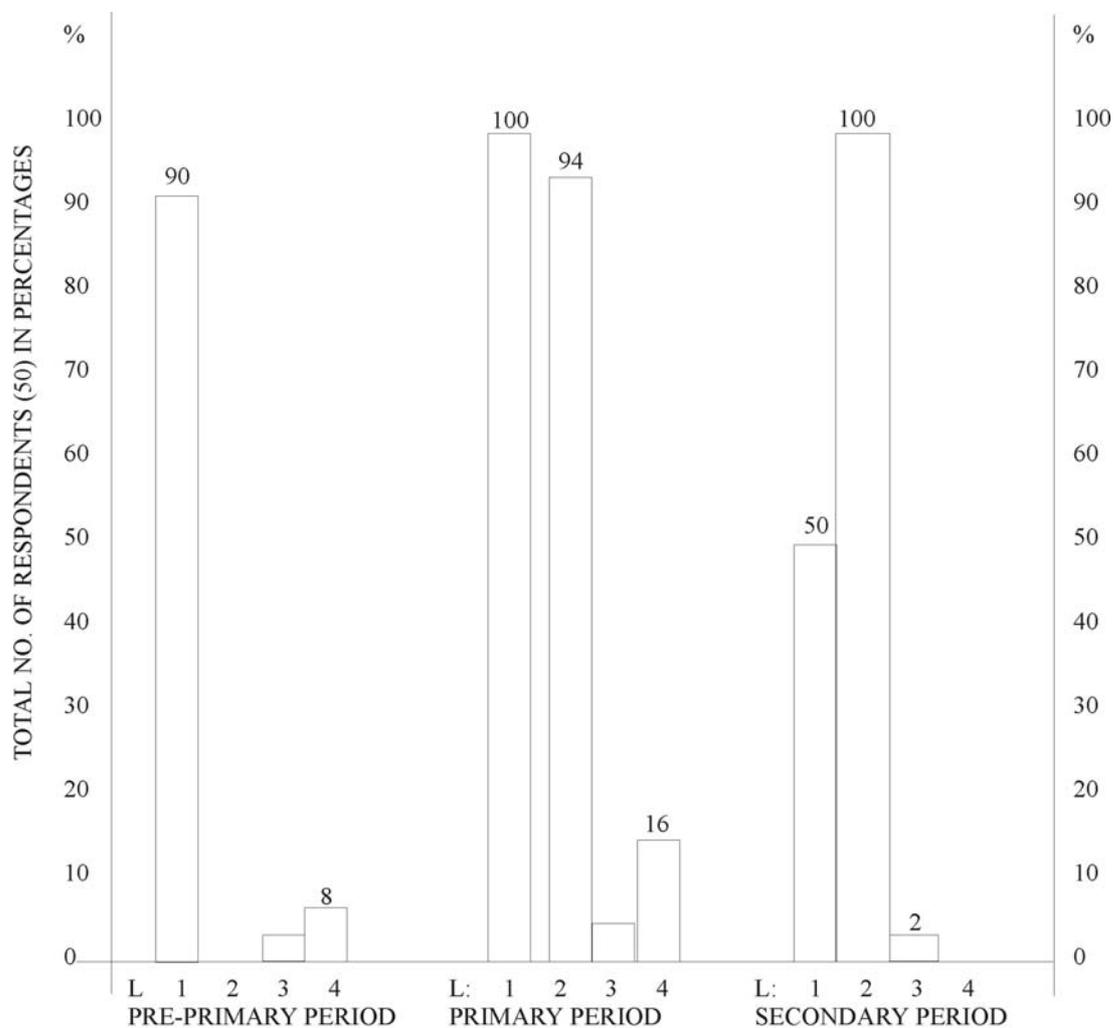
The Arts.....

The Social Sciences.....

The Sciences.....

APPENDIX 2

LEARNING AND USE OF LANGUAGE IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE PERIODS OF THE EDUCATED IKALE – YORUBA BILINGUAL



KEY:  
 L1: Yoruba    L2: English    L3: Pidgin    L4: Other Nigerian Languages