



Article

A Sociolinguistic Study of The Effects of Yoruba-English Code-mixing on The Yoruba Language

Owolola Oluwaseun

Basic and General Studies Dept. Federal College of Forestry, Jericho Ibadan, Nigeria

SUBMISSION TRACK

Received: March 20, 2018
Final Revision: April 17, 2018
Available Online: april 28, 2018

KEYWORD

Yoruba, English, Code-Mixing, Language Death

CORRESPONDENCE

E-mail: owololaoluwaseun@yahoo.com

A B S T R A C T

This work investigates the effects of Yoruba-English Code-mixing on the Yoruba language. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it examines the reasons why people code-mix English with Yoruba and the effects of the code-mixing on the Yoruba language. The study is modeled after Crystal's (2000) theory of language death. Data for the study was collected with the use of self-designed questionnaire which was administered to 100 respondents. The analysis of the responses shows that a number of lexical items of the Yoruba language have been lost by the native speakers as a result of Yoruba-English code-mixing. It also reveals that this sociolinguistic phenomenon may hamper the growth and development of the Yoruba language as it has become more convenient for Yoruba speakers to code-mix than to coin new words for new concepts, items or ideas. The study, therefore, concludes that uncontrolled Yoruba-English code-mixing may render the use of the Yoruba language moribund, consequently leading to the death of the language. It is recommended that the native speakers of Yoruba should make conscious efforts to use "pure" Yoruba, minimizing the use of code-mix.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a multilingual community with most of its citizens at least bilingual; the reason for this is the fact that the languages in Nigeria come in contact with one another on a regular basis. It is normal for there to be influence when speakers of two or more come in contact and interact. When languages come in contact, a lot of linguistic processes take place, such as the evolution of pidgins, according to Adedimeji (2010:3) pidgin English is a combination of "[the] English language (the superstrate) and Nigerian

languages (the substrate). A lot of borrowings also occur as well as code-mixing. Code-mixing is simply the combination of languages in a speech event, mostly intra-sentential. There are possibilities that one who is exposed to more than one language use them together at particular times during conversation. The reasons for this are countless but the utmost concern of this study is the effect of code-mixing on the languages that are involved.

This study focuses on the effects of code-mixing Yoruba with English. These two

languages co-exist side by side in Nigeria. English language is a world language. The English language is widely spread and this is due to the widespread of the first speakers of the language. The coming of Europeans to Nigeria in 1553 for commercial purposes accounts for the contact of Nigeria with the English language. On their arrival, there was a major gap in communication, and the need to bridge this gap became very necessary. There was the need to find a means of communication between the Europeans and the many ethnic nationalities, now referred to as Nigeria. Pidgin English was fashioned.

The English language has played on the seeming inadequacies of the Nigeria's national languages. It has risen so high, gained grounds and has thus become the language of prestige, desired by everyone. In fact, acceptance in the Nigerian society is based on how well and how fluent one's use of English is. One cannot help but wonder what the lot of those who cannot speak it is. The implication of all this is that the country's indigenous languages have been relegated and the users of them are seen as people who cannot properly fit into the society. Even though certain measures and attempts have been made by several bodies and the government to somewhat increase the value and usefulness of the indigenous languages, there has been little or no improvements because some of the policies made have been left unattended to.

The contact of the Yoruba people with the English language has brought about code-mixing which of course is one of the manifestations of language contact. People find it convenient to shuffle English words in the use of the Yoruba language and this has effects on the Yoruba language. These effects could be long term or short term, finding this out is the pre-occupation of this study.

Bello (2007:18-19) observes that code-mixing has adverse effects on semi-educated Yoruba/English bilinguals; the speakers end

up not being competent in either languages, she gave the following examples:

- a. *Mo mo nkan ti mo contain* (I know my worth)
- b. *O fabricate iro yen ni* (he conceived the lie)
- c. *Ile wa focus* (our house is conspicuously positioned)
- d. *Mo gazette e ki nto kan an* (I positioned it before nailing it)
- e. *Olopa yen gazette ori e* (the policeman aimed at his head)

One thing is evident from the examples above that the English words involved in the code-mixing are not even properly used. The first example, 'contain' is used to mean 'worth', meanwhile in the contexts above they are not synonyms and cannot be used as substitutes. Therefore it could be said that code-mixing alternatives are not always correct, but context sheds more light on the meaning that is intended. Bello (2007:19) also observes that there is inappropriateness in code-mixing is both grammatical and semantics; this is because there is no meaningful relationship between what is said and what is meant. She further says that speakers seem to be incompetent in the use of both languages.

Humaira (2012) looked at the importance of mixing/code-switching in classroom settings and discovered the following:

- a. When teachers code-mix, they do not do it consciously, they do not know functions and outcomes of this process
- b. Students on their own code-switch for equivalence
- c. Students also code-mix to hold the floor in a conversation or speech event
- d. In a classroom setting, code-mixing allows for message reinforcement, for emphasis or clarification of already sent message
- e. In a classroom setting, it is used or introduced for conflict control.

Ayeomoni (2006) looks at code-mixing and code-switching in the childhood language of certain children in Nigeria, it was observed that most children are exposed to two languages right from primary school. And so

they begin to code-mix because they have not properly learnt the grammar of both languages, it is easy to take from here and there to make a complete sentence. According to him, code-mixing has both negative and positive effects on a child. The responsibility lies on the language teacher to ensure that the students take good advantage of the sociolinguistic phenomenon.

Code-mixing is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that cannot be wished away, this is because it serves good purposes; but the problem lies where code-mixing begins to adversely affect the speaker and the language(s) involved. Bello (2007) noted that it affects indigenous languages and affects the competence of the speaker in the use of either language.

II. METHODS

This study is modeled after Crystal's (2000) theory of language death. He observes that language death is harsh; an unwelcoming yet true, and it is just like the death of human beings. He states that languages die with the death of their speakers. He notes that

“the people may live but the language may still die...the members of a community remain alive and well, often continuing to inhabit their traditional territory; but their language nonetheless goes into decline, and eventually disappears to be replaced by some other languages”.

He further states that one culture can influence or dominate the other(s), and people start adopting the dominant culture, their mores and values. This dominance will gradually touch on the language of the subjugated and eventually swarm it. He points out that languages that lack prestige lose out to the prestigious ones as the speakers do not feel safe using the former but adores using the latter. The status of the indigenous languages becomes gradually eroded until nobody wants to use them again.

The instrument used for data collection in this study is a questionnaire. The questionnaire has twenty nine (29) items divided into three

sections. The first section comprises the biographical data. The second section comprises ten (10) items, they are close-ended questions aimed at surveying opinions of respondents on the rate and likely effects of code-mixing. The third section asked an open ended question on the reason why people code-mix. Respondents were asked to provide Yoruba words for some lexical items written in English. Respondents were Yoruba/English bilinguals in the University of Ilorin. They were 100 in number.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Many Nigerians cannot speak their indigenous languages without adding English words to it.

Table 1: Code-mixing English with indigenous Nigerian language

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	44	44%
Agree	46	46%
Strongly Disagree	6	6%
Disagree	3	3%
None	1	1%

Table 1 shows that 44% of the respondents strongly agree that many Nigerians cannot speak their indigenous languages without adding English words to it, 46% agree, 6% strongly disagree, 3% disagree and 1% is indifferent. From the data obtained, it is clear that people aware that code-mixing has become part and parcel of Nigerian linguistic setting, this is due to the fact that Nigerians are exposed to many languages; Nigeria being a multi-lingual state. This exposure has made it almost impossible not to code-mix. The reasons for which people code-mix are so many but the negatives almost outweigh the positives. The effect of code-mixing on our indigenous languages has somewhat been adverse, it could be said that on the positive side it aids communication.

Code-mixing Yoruba with English language can lead to the gradual death of Yoruba language

Table 2: Yoruba-English Code-mixing and the effect on the Yoruba language

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	28	28%
Agree	36	36%
Strongly Disagree	14	14%
Disagree	22	22%
None	0	0

Table 2 reveals that 28% of the respondents strongly agree that Yoruba-English Code-mixing have effects on the Yoruba language, 36% agree, 14% strongly disagree and 22% disagree. This implies that code-mixing affects the indigenous languages in that gradually words are lost in the lexicon of the Nigeria's indigenous languages because they are replaced by the English language representations of such senses. It is convenient to code-mix and so people do not bother to know the indigenous representations of certain words, and at the end of the day, English takes over since that is what is known. Imagine that this happens for most words in the Yoruba lexicon, then there is little or nothing left.

It is not only the death of speakers, or their being swarm by larger and stronger languages that leads a language to death; speakers can kill their own languages. The death and decay of a language can start gradually, when speakers start replacing words in it with words from other languages. Words in Yoruba language are being replaced with their English counterparts, and for such words, speakers may hardly remember they exist. Dorian (1998:1) says that "languages are seldom admired to death but are frequently despised to death", indigenous languages in Nigeria has been treated as second fiddles even among the owners of the language. English is the language of prestige and has so much function accrue to it; it is the language of education, governance, basic interactions and so on. To a very large extent, English defines status in Nigeria, except of course if money redefines the status of an individual who is a bad user of the English language.

Dorian (1988:1) further asserts that "it is fairly common for a language to become so exclusively associated with low-prestige people and their socially disfavoured identities that its own potential speakers prefer to distance themselves from it and adopt some other language". This is exactly the case with English and Nigerian indigenous languages. People want to be associated with English language; even illiterates want to be able to speak a word or two in English language when the opportunity for it arises. Parents are reluctant to transfer the ancestral language to their children, which lead to the gradual loss of the language.

Many people code-mix to show a level of knowledge of the English language

Table 3: Code-mixing and linguistic prestige

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	27	27%
Agree	50	50%
Strongly Disagree	19	19%
Disagree	4	4%
None	0	0

Table 3 shows that 27% of the respondents strongly agree that code-mixing confers linguistic prestige on people, 50% agree, 19% strongly disagree while 4% disagree. This affirms that many people code-mix to show that they have a level of understanding of the English language, even when it is unnecessary to do so. People love to show that they understand or know English and so they use it every now and then while speaking even in Yoruba. It becomes alarming that even illiterates and semi-literates will do the same at any given opportunity to show knowledge and feel recognised. This is due to the prestige given English language in Nigeria today. The truth is that code-mixing shows more of incompetence than competence. Inability to get lexical items in a language to express oneself will make someone code-mix, so rather than show knowledge, sometimes it may be a pointer to incompetence on the part of the speaker.

Yoruba-English Code-mixing causes underdevelopment of Yoruba language especially its ability to provide words for new concepts or foreign ideas.

Table 4: Yoruba-English Code-mixing and the effect on the Yoruba language

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	37	37%
Agree	50	50%
Strongly Disagree	12	12%
Disagree	1	1%
None	0	0

Table 4 shows that 37% of respondents strongly agree that code-mixing can cause the underdevelopment of Yoruba language, 50% agree, 12% strongly disagree while just 1% disagrees. Languages can live as much as they can die, they reproduce; this is why there are new words for new concepts around the world, languages have the ability to birth new names for new or foreign ideas. Languages develop and should not be static, if it is static it is only for a while; in less than no time, regression sets in. code-mixing will not allow for development of local languages; especially their ability to give names to new words, concepts or ideas (especially if they are foreign). It becomes very convenient to code-mix than to coin new words for such concepts. Even if there are new words, it will be easier for people to code-mix rather than look for those words.

Yoruba-English Code-mixing may lead to incompetence in both languages involved

Table 5: Yoruba-English Code-mixing and the effect of speaker's competence in both languages

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	47	47%
Agree	40	40%
Strongly Disagree	5	5%
Disagree	6	6%
None	2	2%

Table 5 shows that 47% of the respondents strongly agree that Code-mixing may result to incompetence in both languages involved especially if the speaker does not have a proper mastery of both languages. 40% agree,

5% strongly disagree, 6% disagree while 2% are indifferent. When speakers know only bits of this language and bits of that and just augment them to cover up for deficiency, he/she may not be able to master either languages properly.

An average educated Yoruba speaker prefers speaking English to speaking Yoruba.

Table 6: The linguistic preference of educated Yoruba speakers of English

Variable	Frequency	percentage
Strongly Agree	20	20%
Agree	46	46%
Strongly Disagree	21	21%
Disagree	12	12%
None	1	1%

Table 6 shows 20% of the respondents strongly agree that educated Yoruba people prefer to speak English than speak their indigenous language, 46% agree, 21 % strongly disagree, 12% disagree and 1% is indifferent. This is exactly the case with English and Nigerian indigenous languages especially the Yoruba language. People want to be associated with the English language; even illiterates want to be able to speak a word or two in the English language when the opportunity for it arises. Parents are reluctant to transfer the ancestral language to their children, which lead to the gradual loss of the language. Educated Nigerians prefer to use English language for communication, it shows class and status; even illiterates or semi-literates who know only a couple of words want to use them at any given opportunity.

People can control code-mixing.

Table 7: Speakers' control over code-mixing

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	50	50%
Agree	34	34%
Strongly Disagree	11	11%
Disagree	4	4%
None	1	1%

Table 7 shows that 50% of the people who responded strongly agree that people can actually control the urge to code-mix, 34% agree, 11% strongly disagree, 4% disagree and 1% didn't respond. The implication of this is that it may be difficult but code-mixing can be controlled and minimized so that it is only used when there is a genuine use for it such as to aid communication, for clarity of speech, to quote another person verbatim and so on. Consciously, speakers can minimize or control the rate of code-mixing. It should be noted that code-mixing is not an aberration to a sociolinguistic setting, but uncontrolled; it can damage a whole lot.

Code-mixing aids communication

Table 8: Code-mixing and effect on communication

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	30	30%
Agree	40	40%
Strongly Disagree	21	21%
Disagree	9	9%
None	0	0

Table 8 shows that 30% strongly agree that code-mixing can aid communication, 40% agree, 21% strongly disagree and 9% disagree. In other words, at particular times, code-mixing makes communicating easier, especially when the interlocutors use different indigenous languages and one person doesn't understand English well, code-mixing makes things easy. It is used for emphasis and also to exclude some other people from communication.

If Yoruba-English code-mixing is not controlled it can affect the Yoruba language

Table 9: The need to control Yoruba-English code-mixing

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	41	41%
Agree	50	50%
Strongly Disagree	7	7%
Disagree	2	2%
None	0	0

Table 9 shows that 41% of respondents strongly agree that there is a need to control Yoruba-English code-mixing for the good of Yoruba language. 50% agree, 7% strongly disagree and 2% disagree. This means that if code-mixing is not controlled, and English remains a language of prestige and people feel safe using the English language because of its status, it will negatively affect the use and status of the Yoruba language. Words will gradually be lost and then gradual death may set in.

The reasons given by respondents on why people code-mix

- Incompetence in one's native language and more exposure to English leads to code-mixing. They cannot find appropriate words for an expression, they code-mix. This way there is clarity of expression
- People code-mix to show others that they are educated, and they know how to speak the English language
- It is fashionable to code-mix, it has become a custom
- People code-mix so that people who do not understand their indigenous language can have an idea of what is been said
- Some people code-mix to show they are educated and refined
- It has become a way of showing 'levels' or class among 'big boys' and 'big girls'.
- Social and technological developments make people code-mix because there will be new terms in the foreign language that the local languages may not be able to provide words for.

IV. CONCLUSION

The effects of code-mixing on Yoruba language can be both negative and positive. Research has shown that uncontrolled code-mixing is one slow killer of any language. It is very obvious that for reasons well known, Nigerians cannot do without code-mixing, especially when they are exposed to the two languages and can speak both fairly well. It is not only the death of the speakers of a language that or their being swarm by a larger

or stronger language that can lead to language death, preference of one language over the other(s) can lead to the death of a language.

Death and decay of a language starts gradually, when speakers of the language starts replacing words in it with words from other languages, when words in Yoruba are replaced with their English counterparts, for such words the speakers rarely remember they exist again and that word is gone. Languages should develop and should not be static, it should be able to make available new words for new items, but code-mixing will not allow this because it is an available alternative. The language will not grow; it comes to a point of standstill, retrogression sets in and then the process of decaying starts.

Code-mixing should be consciously controlled and minimized, it is easier to deliberately decide to speak one language through a conversation; it helps, when mistakes are made, people notice and then correct, the process of learning continues. But when incompetence is covered up by code-mixing, the inadequacies are not noticed and it leads to incompetence. Conscious efforts should be made to control this.

Language teachers should treat it as urgent, explaining the advantages and disadvantages of this phenomenon and helping students through correctly and efficiently using code-mixing to their advantage and not allowing it affect their competence and performance.

REFERENCES

- Adedimeji, M. (2012). Ten Critical C's of perspectivising the historicism of the English Language in Nigeria,. *Awka Journal of English language and literary Studies Volume 3*, 1:178-196.
- Adewale, R. (2010). Aspects of Code switching and Code mixing in Selected Nigerian home videos. *Akungba Journal of Linguistics and Literatures*, 2141- 5420.
- Ahukanna, I. (1998). Bilingualism and code-mixing in language in Nigeria:The case of the Igbo- English bilinguals. In E. Eminajo, *Multilingualism, Minority languages and language Policy in Nigeria*. Agbor: Nigeri Central books limited Agbor and the linguistic Association of Nigeria.
- Alabi, T. (2007). Language Contact: the Nigerian experience with English (Eds). In O. Obafemi, G. Ajadi, & V. Alabi, *Critical perspectives on English Language and Literature* (pp. 88-95). Ilorin: Department of English, University of Ilorin.
- Auer, P. (1998). Bilingual conversation revisited(Ed). In P. Auer, *Code Switching in conversation, languag interaction and identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Ayeomoni, M. O. (2006). Code-switching and Code-mixing: Style of language Use in Childhood in Yoruba Speech community. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(1): 90-99.
- Bello, O. R. (2007). Code-mixing or Code mix-up: A sociolinguistic study of Semi educated Yoruba/ English bilinguals. In D. Adeyanju, *Sociolinguistics in the Nigerian Context*. Ile ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Bernstein, B. (1990). *Class, Codes and Control*. London: Routledge.
- Crystal, D . (2000). *Language Death* . U.S.A: Cambridge University Press.
- Hudson, R. A. (1996). *Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press.
- Humairah, B. (2012). *Code Switching and Code - mixing in English Classroom*. Retrieved from <http://www.humairahbima.blogspot.com>
- Idiagbon, M. S. (2007). Code-mixing with English and the future of the Nigerian Languages. *Journal of Nigerian English Studies association*. Nigeria: Devconsort Publisher Vol 3 No 4.

Kautman , D & Aronoft, M. (1991). Morphological disintegration and reconstruction in L1 attrition.(Eds). In H. Seliger, & V. Rago, *First Language attrition*. (pp. 175-188). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Meyerhoff, M. (2006). *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. London: Routledge.

Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An introduction to Sociolinguistics*. U.S.A: Blackwell Press.