

## CODE-MIXING AND CODE-SWITCHING AMONG SELECTED IGBO ENGLISH UNDERGRADUATE BILINGUALS IN EBONYI STATE UNIVERSITY, ABAKALIKI.

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### **Abstract**

*This study examines the effects of code mixing and code switching among selected Igbo-English Undergraduate Bilinguals in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The work adopted descriptive research design, and a sample of 30 code-mixed and 76 code switched words were used for the study. Findings of the study show that Igbo English bilinguals in Ebonyi State University have recourse to both code mixing and code switching due to lack of lexicon-semantic coverage, mother tongue interference, overgeneralization of words among others. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Government should continue to make good policies that could involve not only for the development, modernization and standardization of indigenous language but also for the development of lexicon of the language to meet the needs of language users. This will help us to give every language an equal status since no natural language is inferior to another in the linguistic sense.*

**Keywords:** *Code Mixing, Code Switching, Bilinguals, Igbo-English Interference*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society consisting of six geo-political zones with over 400 indigenous languages. Apart from the country's ethnic-linguistics diversities, there is also a foreign language known as English language which also serves as the nation's lingua franca. Therefore, one of the inevitable consequences of language in contact is bilingualism which Weinreich (1974:120) has described as the alternate use of two languages. On a global basis, bilingualism has existed as an essential factor that dictates the economic, political and social interdependence that exist between different people and societies.

The contact language in Nigeria i.e. English has become more compounded with several varieties. Such varieties are often as a result of the speaker's level of exposure, education, profession or occupation. Emeka-Nwobia (2016:110) has pointed out that in situation of language contact, the point of contact happens to be the bilingual individual with at least two interacting language groups with each representing different cultural or linguistic groups. The type of contact that started initially was a minimal type and this was because the users of English were very few then, and lived separately with the indigenous users of local language. This was the early part of colonialism in Nigeria. Later, the contact between the local, language and foreign language increased. More so, there was increase in the school enrolments especially at Primary School level of education. It led to the emergence of few educated élites. This situation brought about social and political interaction between the colonialists and indigenous people.

In Igbo speech community, it is observed that when people speak two languages, there is tendency that they would mix the code of the two languages, consciously or unconsciously. It is on this basis that this study attempts to investigate the effect of code-mixing and code switching among selected Igbo and English Bilinguals in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.

Nwokwu (2018) stated that the use of language in a multilingual society is a careful phenomenon. Because of the centrality of English language to the various pursuits of individuals and the society, language (and of course bilingualism in Nigeria) has become an object of curiosity for many fields of study. As instrument of communication, the existence of indigenous language existing side by side with contact language has made many Nigerians bilinguals. The concept, "bilingualism" deals with the structure of a particular language co-existing in a bilingual individual. Accordingly, Chukwuokoro (2016) notes that complications in the English Language such as intricate morphological processes, unfamiliar syntactic structures and difficulties in permissible grammatical constructions hamper the flow of expressions of users of English as a second language. This results in the influence the languages exert on each other and this includes: interference, code-mixing, code-switching and others.

The concept of code mixing and code switching together with some of their sociolinguistic implications will be the main focus of this papers. This is because of the fact that majority of the bilinguals has varying abilities to keep their two language separate so as to speak the right one at the right time. With the day to day development of western education, the bilinguals have formed the habits of using two languages simultaneously in their communications. The use of two languages by bilinguals has no doubt become part of our social as well as linguistic

manifestations. These are easily noticed during natural conversation, informal communication, ordinary dialogue and many other speech situations.

In other words, code mixing and code switching among students have adversely affected their competency in the use of language because the contact language dominates the mother tongue (Igbo). This has resulted to the inability of the bilingual individual to achieve native like fluency in either languages. Therefore, the study is aimed at finding out why Igbo English bilinguals resort either to code mixing or code switching and suggest ways that will minimize code mixing and code switching among the Igbo English bilinguals. However, this research will help the Igbo English bilinguals to master each code fluently and work towards achieving native like fluency in either of the languages. More so, this study would assist government on her national policy on modernization and standardization of indigenous languages. Hence, the research is limited to the insertion of lexical items from one language into another. In this case, mixing English words with Igbo utterances will be addressed

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is Ethno-Linguistic framework. This approach was led by Hymes (1972), Saville – Troike (1989) and they are concerned with situation and uses of pattern and functions of speaking as an activity in its own right. Hymes (1972) developed a speaking grid which comprises several components. Below is Hymes (1972) speaking grid;

S – Setting temporal/physical circumstances

P – Participant speaker/hearer/receiver

E – Ends purpose/goals outcomes

A – Act sequence message form /content

K – Key tone/manner

I – Instrumentalities channel

N – Norms of interaction and interpretation

G – Genre textual categories

The grid – “Speaking” forms a basic ingredient of ethno-linguistic phenomenon. This framework helps in the recognition of the close relationship between speech events and their social or cultural contents. It broadens the notion of communicative competence.

The phenomena of code mixing and code switching involve the use of two or more languages in a talk exchange but the main difference between the two is that while code mixing occurs at the intra-sentential level, code switching takes place within inter-sentential circumstances. The two phenomena are to show how languages in

contact naturally influence each other notably in the area of borrowing of vocabulary or lexical items. The change of codes, together with the issues of interference and integration, according to Haugen (1965:105) is one of the stages of diffusion of language in contact, and this has taken a great proportional influence in bilingual interactions.

Languages are rule governed no matter whether or not such a language is mixed with others. Okon (1995:112) while studying code mixing in Ibibio language assumes that it appears that only the major constituents of an English sentence may be inserted to or code mixed with an Ibibio sentence. This may be at the position of noun phrase, verb phrase, adjectival, adverbial or propositional phrase. He further observes that there has been a growing phenomenon in language use and communication from language in contact. He observes that the changes of codes as inserting varying chunks of English into the performance of the West African languages in trying to show the influence of English on African is done in an informal manner. Incidentally, the phenomenon has become almost inevitable to bilinguals and it has resulted in a situation involving occasional change of codes formed from other codes.

This study was carried out in a heterogeneous speech community (Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki) where witching and mixing of codes in different languages are easily noticed. Apart from among Igbo-English bilinguals, others like Hausa-English, Efik-English, Ijaw-English, Yoruba- English and a whole lot of other bilinguals often interacts easily and since language mixing has become an almost unavoidable phenomenon, switching and mixing of codes are freely used. Even apart from code-changing between English and the speaker's mother tongue, it can be between two or more local languages but much depends on the competence of the interlocutors.

In any informal exchange between Igbo and English bilinguals, the change of code is always a reminder that the speakers have multiple identities and not minding their linguistic virtuosity, the mixing of codes is always of highest frequency. The speakers have the freedom of deploying the two languages in their repertoires in a characteristic manner. Scotton (1982:164) has identified some types of code change as "marked" while others are "unmarked". By unmarked, she means that the seemingly random switching which does not have a new motivation. This switch to English or Igbo may not be as a result of certain motivation covertly implied. In a homogeneous setting where everyone shares a mother tongue, the language alone is the unmarked choice. However, the use of language may be to affirm the speaker's identity as ethnic brethren or either to affirm their acquired status or educated persons or to show that a speaker is different from others in the group. Scotton

concludes that speech can either be marked or unmarked depending on the interpretation. A marked choice generates implication.

There are some sociological implications in the mixing and switching of codes in speakers utterances. Code changing generally occurs in an informal situation. Often when a speaker cannot easily and immediately find an Igbo word or expression for what he intends to put across, he resorts to the second language (English) to bail him out. This however, does not imply insufficient knowledge of one's language or the other. Banjo (1996:40) has equally observed that while English signals formality, mother tongue, pidgin or the mixing of English and the mother tongue signals familiarity or informality.

Switches to one's first language serves as a positive symbol of his own group identity in a situation where two speakers of the same linguistic and ethnic identity had been communicating in their mother tongue. If a neutral person comes in, the tendency is to switch to English so as to carry the third party along. Banjo (1996:97) calls this phenomenon "sociological motivated code-switching". The switch is motivated by the social circumstances prevailing at that point in time. The phenomenon of code-switching is similar to borrowing but the difference is that while borrowing is more permanent, code mixing can be a form of ad-hoc arrangement. The use of one's mother tongue may be to establish personal rapport or solidarity with fellow speakers. The change of code is therefore motivated by role – relationship, prestige or solidarity between speakers. At this point, language is not used to create distancing effect rather to convey speakers intimacy. Emeka-Nwobia (2014: 5-6) identifies four types of switching as follows:

**(i) Tag-switching:** this occurs when tags and certain set phrases in a given language are inserted into an utterance of another language. For instance;

3. M na- acho i ga toilet

I want to go to the toilet

I want to defecate

**(ii) Intra-sentential switching:** In reference to Harmers and Blanc (2000), she notes that this occurs within the sentence or clause boundaries; that is within clausal or sentential boundaries. In this type of code switching, "the two languages are mixed within such circumscribed linguistic units as the clause or even the words" [www.lotpublication.nl/publish/articles/00240/bookpart.pdf](http://www.lotpublication.nl/publish/articles/00240/bookpart.pdf).

Example in Igbo;

Biko sort [-uo] the books, emechaa kam bia join [ia] gi to arrange the place.

[Please sort the books, after I will come join you to arrange the place]

Please sort the books; I will later join you to arrange the place

M ga-erichafu the food ma oburu na odi sweet.

I will eat up the food, if it is sweet

Biko light [iara] m kandulu [candle] a

[Please light me candle this]

Please light this candle for me

**(iii) Inter sentential switching:** This usually occur in turn taking involving bilinguals. This can

happen when a change of language occurring at clausal or sentential boundaries. It involves

switches between sentences and clauses. It occurs outside the sentence and clause boundaries

and this accounts to why some scholars call it ‘extra-sentential switch’. here a clause or

sentence is one variety (language) and the next clause or sentence is in another language.

For instance;

I love travelling by road, mana ugboala m adighi mma

I love travelling by road, but my car is bad

‘Thank you for the food’, O toro uto nnukwu

Thank you for the food, it was very sweet

**(iv) Intra-word switching:** This switch occurs within a word boundary. It involves switches

within a word or morpheme boundaries.. For instance in Igbo language;

**Stopu** [kwaa} ya.....Stop it

**Alaiki** [ro m ya].....I don’t like him/her/ it

**Chanji** [godu ya].....Change it first

**Bringi** [godu] the book.....Please bring the book.

## Methodology

### Sources of Data and Techniques of Analysis

The data used were obtained at the Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki and the subjects were undergraduate Igbo-English bilinguals who were engaged in series of conversational discourse. They have age range of 18-30 years and their discussions were recorded and later transcribed:

**Text I Code Switching**

- Speaker A - My guy, kedu Kwanu? → My guy, how is it?
- Speaker B - O dim ma, what's up? → It's okay. What's up
- Speaker A - Today's lecture di egwu! → Today's lecture is wonderful!
- Speaker B - Is it general course ka o bu nka ngalaba unu? → Is it a general course or Departmental one?
- Speaker A - The programmes in the university adighi fecha fecha → The programme in the university is quite tedious.
- Speaker B - Nwayo nwayo nwanne, we' ll surely get there → Slow and steady bros, we' ll surely get there!
- Speaker B - Biara m nulo gi but you were not there → I came to your house but you were not there.
- Speaker A - Sorry. A gara m izuta ihe → Sorry. I went to by something.
- Speaker B - It is your lecture note ka m biara I were → It is your lecture notes that I came to collect.
- Speaker A - It is a pity, o bu Paulo ji ya → It is a pity! It is with Paul
- Speaker B - When will it be available ka m bia were ya? → When will it be available so that I can come and collect it?
- Speaker A - Bia echi, I will get it for you Come tomorrow, → I will get it for you.
- Speaker B - Alight, ka emsia → Alight, Bye – bye.

From data provided above, it is observed that code switching can occur in different part of the sentences produced. It could happened at the beginning of a sentence or at the end of a sentence. This conversation between speaker A and speaker B contains code switching at the level of subject position as well as the complement positions

**Table I**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Igbo Sentences	14	40
English Sentences	16	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

From the figures above, there is indeed high degree of code switching at the intra-sentential level especially in informal settings. In any informal setting where Igbo-English bilinguals are interacting, the switch from one language to another is often unconsciously made. Out of a total number of 30 sentences, 14 which represents 40% are Igbo sentences code switched with English sentences 16, which represents 60%. Thus, the use of a language may be to affirm the speaker's identity as ethnic brethren or either to affirm their acquired status as educated persons or to show that a speaker is different from others in a group. Again, Code switches to one first language could serve as a positive symbol of his own group identity. In the data used in this study interpersonal relationship is usually negotiated and maintained.

### Text II Code – Mixing

- A:** A choro m an exercise book kita → I need an exercise book now  
 E nwere something m choro read → There's something I want to read  
 O bu maka that novel unyahu → It is that yesterday's novel  
 My boss sim summarize ya osiso osiso → My boss directs me to summarize it quickly  
 I want to start it ugbu a before chi ejie → I want to start it now before it is too late
- B:** Nwoke m take it easy → My guy take it easy  
 Every time, o na -adi gi hurry hurry → Every time, you are always in a hurry  
 Please wetere m the novel enyi m nwoke dere → Please bring the novel my  
 boy friend wrote  
 A choro m I check ihe di na ya → I want to check its content.  
 But jee zuta the exercise book na next shop → But go and buy the exercise  
 book in the next shop.

In our data, code mixing has been observed in various positions of the sentences constructed both at A and B levels. Based on our data, English words of different classes are rendered and code mixed, with Igbo language. Notably, contents words may be inserted into the Igbo sentences. Apart from these content words, there is the use of group words.

**Table II**

Code	No of Sentence	No of Mixed Words	Percentage
English	10	34	44.7
Igbo	10	42	55.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>



The figures shown above indicates that there are a total of 20 sentences. The 20 sentences consist of 34 English Words and 42 Igbo words. These are represented by 44.7% and 55.3% respectively. There is need to point out that Igbo language is the mother tongue or first language (L1) of the speakers used in this study. And the words code switched takes 42 words in all the sentences used while English takes 34 words. From the analysis, it seems reasonable to arrive at the conclusion that the speakers (mother tongue or first language) invariably use more words that are code-mixed. The sentences of Igbo and English are mixed intra-sententially. Sometimes, the sentences that are code mixed often originally start as Igbo sentence before English words, phrase or clauses.

### **Conclusion**

From our study code mixing and code switching in conversational discourse serves as means of negotiating social relationship, the informal setting of the exchanges also make the speakers feel more relaxed and to maintain the freedom of code choice. The phenomenon of code mixing and code switching have become popular and unconsciously utilized among Igbo English bilinguals. Code switching is observed as a linguistic behaviour that arises as a result of languages coming into contact while code mixing refers to the alternate use of constitutions from two languages within a sentence. It is unavoidable linguistic phenomenon; it gives non speaker of a particular language an opportunity to participate in a discourse unconsciously. Sometimes, it is a habit formed as a result of peer group influence commonly associated with undergraduate students in Ebonyi State University.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the foregoing discourse, the following recommendations are made; that the teaching of indigenous language like Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and other languages should be given due priority attention in the school curriculum. The research finding will make people see the need to speak and learn the Igbo language bearing in mind that one's language is ones foremost identity. Government should continue to make good policies that involve not only the development, modernization and standardization of indigenous languages but also their popularization through the production of textbooks and literary works. School libraries should be stocked with relevant textbooks in indigenous languages. Parents, guardians, and stakeholders in educational matter should not relegate indigenous languages to the detriments of English language.

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