

Code Switching and Code Mixing in Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language: Building on Knowledge

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Abstract

The primary goal of language teaching is to afford learners, proficiency in communicating in the target language, self-development as well as intercultural understanding of languages in the learning process. The teacher is therefore charged with the task of selecting appropriate strategies to effectively achieve his pedagogic goals, one of which is the use of Code switching and Code mixing. Traditionally, this strategy has been viewed negatively as signs of deficiencies in a speaker, though in a typical multilingual setting, speakers tend to select multiple codes or mix languages they consider appropriate to facilitate and clarify meanings in their language expressions. This study intends to project the socio- linguistic functions inherent in code switching and mixing that can help ESL students transcend from the known (L1) to the unknown (L2), especially in learning complex language contents; making the teacher's work, productive and less strenuous. A quantitative methodology was adopted to ascertain the efficacy of code switching and mixing as a teaching strategy. The results revealed that Code switching and mixing have progressive and positive effects in language learning, both for the teacher and learners in the ESL situation.

Keywords: First language, second language, code, code switching and code mixing

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Second language teaching and learning involve the pragmatics of code switching and code mixing, whereby the teacher consciously or unconsciously switches from one language to another or mixes certain linguistic items of two or more languages in a communicative context to achieve certain pedagogic purposes - primarily to facilitate the learning of complex language contents and achieve retention amongst students- especially in a second language situation.

Code is essentially a language variety or dialect used in communication while code switching and mixing are foundational concepts of bilingualism which involve the use of two languages by an individual.

Trudgill (2000:105) opines that 'speakers switch to manipulate, influence or define the situation as they wish and to convey nuances of meaning and personal intention'.

Students and teachers employ code switching and code mixing in and outside the classroom for clarification and ease of communication. The language of instruction greatly facilitates the acquisition of learning experiences as Waris (2012) observes that 'No matter how expertly the learning experience is selected, the mode of delivery plays a dominant role in imparting knowledge. A teacher can therefore exploit students' previous L1 learning experiences to increase their understanding of the L2; and one of such ways is by the alternation of codes in the pedagogic process.

This study attempts to ascertain the viability of code -switching and mixing as a strategy that can be gainfully employed by the teacher and students in the ESL classroom.

1.2 The Concept of First and Second Language

The term **first** language and the mother tongue are used interchangeably. According to Ogbodo et al. (2015:6), 'the first language is the language a person acquires from his first contact with his environment. It is the only language a monolingual person usually acquires in his native environment... L1 or MT is the language that ranks first in a person's speech repertoire... The term mother tongue is used to refer to the first language, since it is assumed that a child acquires this language from the parents who give the child his first social contact'.

In other words, the first language refers to the native language or the first acquired language of a speaker which takes the place of his major language.

The **second** language on the other hand is the language that is learnt after the first language, usually referred to as the L2 or the target language. According to Schmitt (2010), the second language refers to language by children and adults who already know at least one other language. Ogbodo et al. (2015) add that the second language ranks second in an individual's faculty.

For the purpose of this research, the first language refers to the native language of the learners in this study which is majorly the Igbo language while the second language refers to the English language which serves as the official language in Nigeria and also the language of instruction.

1.3 The Concept of Code Switching and Mixing

The phenomena of code switching and code mixing are as old as the culture of bilingualism and multilingualism. However, code switching and mixing are commonly studied as elements of spoken language, involving the alternation of codes.

Amidst several definitions of a code, Wardaugh (1986:87) defines Code as 'a system used for communication between two or more parties used on any occasion'. It therefore refers to the system by which communication takes place.

Similarly, Verschueren (2003) views code as any distinguishable variant of a language, involving systematic set of geographical area, a social class, an assignment of functions or a specific context of use.

Code switching and Code mixing have been viewed differently in certain areas of linguistic studies. However, Getha (2010) explains that the difference between code switching and code mixing is basically a theoretical difference based on a matter of grammatical items involved, in addition to the situation and topic.

Code switching is basically the juxtaposition of two languages in a spoken discourse which involves transferring from one code to another in communication; while code-mixing uses two or more codes in a single utterance.

The two concepts (CSW & CM) have been studied from different perspectives - Semiotics, Psychology and Socio-linguistics. This study centres on the social and linguistic motivations/ functions of code switching and mixing in the ESL classroom which involves the topic and setting of discussion, lexical needs, relationship building (solidarity) and group identity.

Mattson & Buvenhult in Waris (2012) summarise the functions of Code switching as switches, ranging from topic switch to affective and repetitive switches.

For the purpose of this study, code switching and mixing will be used interchangeably since the major concern is their functional relevance in the learning process.

1.4 Code Switching and Mixing in Teaching and Learning of English in Nigeria

The multiplicity of languages in Nigeria bring to fore, the increasing tendencies of switching codes in social interactions. The primary aim of switching and mixing codes amongst multilingual speakers is essentially communicative- a strategy to ease communication in the fastest and most efficient manner. Other reasons could be affective and psychological.

For learners, the need to express their understanding of new ideas to the teacher in a language that allows them to adequately convey their feelings and ask questions intelligibly without being misunderstood or embarrassed, compel them to code switch in most learning situations.

Some decades ago, code switching was viewed negatively as a sign of language deficiency of the user, but recent researches in this area have countered this assumption, establishing code switching with positive results, especially in ESL contexts.

Jowitt (2005) states that:

It is very clear that code switching, far from constituting a breakdown of a bilingual's grammatical system or being an uncontrolled and meaningless **Mischsprache**, is a systematic and meaningful mode of communication for many bilingual communities. It is not 'interference' or abnormality in the speech of a person. On the contrary, code alternation represents the creative use of both languages by a bilingual community.

The Nigerian educational policy recognises this assertion, with the inclusion of the three major languages (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba) and English as the modes of instruction in the primary and secondary education in Nigeria. Jowitt observes that indigenous languages have gained ground in Nigeria's school curriculum in recent years. English is used as the medium of instruction from the third year of primary school upwards, but before then, the students would have been taught extensively in their mother tongue; giving the students, solid pedagogic foundation to carry on in English at higher levels and the opportunity to make references to the MT where necessary.

Njoku & Izuagba (2001) reminisce on the prominence accorded English as the language of instruction at higher levels in the educational system in Nigeria and the inherent problems associated with it, especially in the remote areas of the country where there is lack or little exposure of the English language culture amongst students. The task of the teacher in such situations becomes daunting and frustrating, as the teacher is charged with exploring effective strategies to impart new ideas to students. One of such language strategies is switching between languages -the familiar language (L1) and the target language (L2)- in the pedagogic process.

Anih et al. (1987:50) capture the situation in these words:

It is of our utmost interest to consider the Nigerian learner in the planning of our curriculum. When we say the Nigerian learner, we refer not only to the city and urban centres, not only to the upper middle class who attend privileged schools, but also to the rural learner and the lower socio-economic class. We also refer to all Nigerian learners in their diversity of conditions and environments...What comes out of the above analysis is basing all curriculum considerations on the needs, fears, hopes and values of the learner... This justifies the injunction that all curriculum should be learner-centred....

Code switching affords the teacher the opportunity to take advantage of the entry behaviour of learners, based on their first language; to impart new learning experiences in the target language, gradually leading them from the known to the unknown. The teacher builds on their existing knowledge by recalling their previous knowledge on the subject matter, using familiar words in their first language that correspond and capture the ideas in the target language. This practice is most effective in the rural areas where the students are more in tune with nature and indigenous ways of doing things. A more efficient way of passing down knowledge in a new language therefore, is for the teacher to convey the new idea in their native language, using equivalent words and images that capture the learning tasks, for a quick grasp of the subject matter.

Code switching is therefore a viable strategy in language teaching because teachers and students are at will to express themselves without much linguistic inhibitions, thereby eliminating possible misrepresentation and misunderstanding in the learning process.

1.5 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to establish the positive sides of code switching, especially in facilitating the learning of English as a second language.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The research will serve as a reference point for the selection of appropriate teaching strategies in the teaching of English as a second language.

It will further assist in debunking the traditional stereotype associated with the use of code switching and mixing in language teaching, while promoting its prospects especially amongst users in the ESL classroom.

Stakeholders in the field of language teaching –policy makers, evaluation experts, teachers and students- will be sensitised and adequately informed on the gains of code switching and mixing as a learning strategy in the educational process, for possible adoption as an educational policy in Nigeria and across the globe.

2. Literature Review

Extensive research have been carried out over the years by scholars, on the area of code switching and mixing from different perspectives, ranging from Psycholinguistics (Jared and Kroll, 2001; Christoffels, Firk, and Schiller, 2007; Hushino & Kroll, 2008; Pyers and Emmorey, 2008; Verhoef, Roelofs, and Chwilla, 2009) to Semiotics (Halliday 1978; Trask and Stockwell, 2005) to Sociolinguistics (Hymes, 1978; Bokamba, 1989; Muysken, 2000; Grumperz, 1982; Getha, 2010; David, 2008; Trugill, 2000) to other related disciplines.

From the linguistic perspective, code switching has been studied from various perspectives – language production, proficiency development, gestural development, social motivations and functions and others.

Bokamba (1989:281) defines both concepts of code switching and code mixing 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 cooperative activity, where the participants in order to infer what is intended, must reconcile what they hear with what they understand.

Meyerhoff (2006) posits that code switching occurs on the sentential level unlike code mixing which operates with the use of a word or two and does not alternate whole sentence.

Heredia & Brown (2006) define code switching as ‘the practice of moving back and forth between two languages or between dialects or registers of the same language at one time’.

The essence of this movement is to achieve clarity and understanding of the subject matter in the target language, using a more familiar language which is the first language of the listener. The speaker therefore needs to further clarify his ideas, using the first language of the listener to explain ideas in the target language. In this way, the listener gains more understanding of the message by associating similar ideas in his first language with that in the second language.

Ahmad (2009) opines that code mixing is not just the mixing of two languages brought about by laziness or ignorance or some combination of these, it requires a relative knowledge of both languages and its associated norms.

This statement implies the acquisition a level of proficiency and shared understanding in the first and second languages by the speaker and the listener in a given context, for effective communication to take place.

Nordquist (2020) further notes that code switching is usually studied by Sociologists to determine why people code switch and the surrounding context of their conversation, whether professional or casual.

However, this study is premised on the social functions of code switching- what makes a speaker use particular expressions outside his normal language of communication and its implications in the ESL classroom. This area of interest -which has not received adequate attention- has been prioritised in this research, with respect to the use of code switching and mixing in areas such as topic of discussion, lexical needs, setting of discussion, creating group identity and relation- building in the study of English as a second language.

According to Meyerhoff (2006), ‘People who speak more than one language or who have command over more than one variety of any language, are generally very sensitive to the differences in the varieties of the languages they use and they are equally aware that in some contexts, one variety will serve their needs, better than another’.

This is obtainable especially in languages that have more developed orthographies than others. The implication is that speakers of such languages have varieties of lexical choices to choose from, compared to languages that have limited words in their lexicon.

In the second language learning environment, code switching and mixing is a very common phenomenon amongst teachers and students. For the teacher, this communicative strategy is employed in areas such as imparting new learning experiences (shifting topics), translation, assessment of learner’s understanding, explanation of complex grammatical contents, class management, repetition and emphasis of important language tasks and a host of others.

Baker (2007) points out that ‘code switching and mixing can be used to emphasize a particular point, to substitute a word in place of an unknown word in the target language, to reinforce a request, to clarify a point, for social identity and friendship, to ease tension and inject humour into a conversation.’

Waris (2012:133) asserts that ‘teachers make switching codes [sic] in the classroom to make meaning clear and to transfer knowledge to students in an efficient way... Generally, code switching is not always a blockage or

deficiency in learning a language, but may be considered a useful strategy in classroom interaction... yet it should be kept in mind that in long term[sic], when students experience interaction with the native speakers of the target language, code switching may be a barrier which prevents mutual intelligibility’.

In furtherance to the function of code switching, Waris (2012:131) notes that ‘code switching is used by the teacher to build solidarity and intimate relations with the students. In this sense, one may speak off{sic} the contribution of code switching for creating a supportive language environment in the classroom’.

3. Methodology

The study used a quantitative methodology, with the administration of effectively designed questionnaires that elicited required responses from both teachers and students.

3.1 Area Description

Considering the thematic concern of the study, the research was conducted in the rural area of Enugu state in south - eastern Nigeria, specifically in four selected communities of Ezeagu; to achieve a holistic result. The research samples were randomly selected, with no private owned schools represented in the area; since virtually all the schools in the area are public- owned.

3.2 Choice of Area

The choice of this area for the research was based on the suitability of the rural environment in ascertaining the gains of code switching and mixing, where there is visible deficiency in the use of English in social communication; compared to their native language. Against this back drop, second language learning in a rural environment was considered more viable for the research.

3.3 Presentation of Tasks

Two sets of questionnaires were administered to students and teachers respectively, to elicit responses on the use of code switching and mixing in their rural learning environment. Four secondary community schools were sampled with fifty students and twenty-five teachers in each school, as the sampling population. There were no private schools in the sample population because of their negligible population in the area.

The first questionnaire elicited teachers’ responses on the viability of code switching and mixing in teaching English as a second language and the possible challenges encountered while teaching a second language in a rural community.

The second questionnaire administered amongst students, sought the positive aspects of code switching and mixing in learning English as a second language, especially in a rural context; and how this practice has facilitated the learning of the English language within and outside the ESL classroom. The findings recorded were in tandem with the objectives of the research.

4. Results

4.1 Results on Teachers Questionnaires

Questions	Variables	Percentage
1. How long have you been teaching English language in the rural community?	Less than ten years	58%
	More than ten years	42%
2. What level of students?	Junior secondary	65%
	Senior secondary	35%
3. What is the first language (L1) of your students?	Igbo	95%
	Hausa	1%
	Yoruba	1%
	Others	3%
4. What is your first language?	Igbo	94%
	Yoruba	1%
	Hausa	1%
	Others	4%
5. Do you have any formal training in the local language (Igbo)?	Yes	100%

	No	0%
6. Do you consider your students as having adequate formal background knowledge in their local language?	Yes	95%
	No	5%
7. Do you code switch and mix in your classroom activities with students?	Yes	98%
	No	2%
8. Do you think that their knowledge in Igbo language can facilitate the learning of English as a second language?	Yes	98%
	No	2%
9. In what areas?	Learning tasks	98%
	Affective development	80%
	Questioning	95%
	Others	65%
10. Rate the effectiveness	High	92%
	Average	6%
	Below average	2%
	Poor	0%

The responses of the teachers (both in the junior and secondary streams of the schools) showed the relevance and viability of code switching and mixing in the teaching of ESL, although some teachers noted that code switches are more efficient in areas such as vocabulary development and reading comprehension. The effective use of code switching and mixing is largely dependent on the students' knowledge of the first language, as well as their ability to link the similarities of the L1 and the L2, to maximally build on the existing knowledge of the students. Ultimately, the teachers' questionnaires affirmed the complementary role of code switching and mixing in facilitating the teaching and learning of English, especially in achieving language tasks, affective goals and class control.

4.2 Results on Students Questionnaires

Questions	Variables	Percentage
1. What is your first language?	Igbo	97%
	Yoruba	1%
	Hausa	1%
	Others	1%
2. What language do you use at school within the classroom?	English	48 %
	Igbo	30%
	Both	22%
	Yoruba	0%
	Hausa	0%
	Others	0%
3. Do you study in your LI and English language?	Yes	95%
	No	5%
4. Does your teacher use your first language while teaching?	Yes	97%
	No	3%
5. Does that improve your understanding?	Yes	94%
	No	6%
6. Do you use your L1 in talking to your teacher in class?	Yes	90%
	No	10%

7. In what context?	Asking questions	55%
	Giving explanations	30%
	Creating rapport	5%
	Not applicable	10%
8. What language do you use in interacting with your fellow students in class?	English	5%
	Igbo	84%
	Both	10%
	Others	1%
9. Rate the usefulness of using your L1 within your class and outside the classroom	High	90%
	Average	7%
	Below average	3%
	Poor	0%

The students' questionnaires revealed the usefulness of code switching and mixing amongst students, both inside and outside the ESL classroom. The students, not only use their first language in clarifying learning tasks and contents with their teacher; but also in sharing mutual knowledge on various subjects amongst themselves.

5. Discussion of Findings

The research result gave an insight on the facilitating role of code switching and mixing in the teaching and learning of English language as a second language, from the perspective of both students and teachers. It revealed that code-switching and mixing (especially in Igbo and English), instil confidence amongst students to express their language inadequacies, learn freely and improve on the target language. It also gives students the opportunity to express their understanding of language activities in the target language to the teacher, using appropriate feedbacks in the L1. The result of the students' questionnaire, generally confirmed the effectiveness of code switching and mixing in the teaching and learning of English language as a second language.

Code switching can therefore be regarded as an indispensable language learning tool in a second language situation, especially in the teaching of language tasks; such as vocabulary development, reading comprehension, word formation and meaning as evident in the 98% recorded in questioning and affective development, from the teachers' responses.

Similarly, students' responses confirmed their understanding of pedagogic activities in the classroom with the aid of code switching and mixing, with a high percentage of 97%. Additionally, findings from the questionnaires attest that teachers use code switching to achieve class control. Students feel relaxed when the teacher creates a conducive learning experience, using hints from their first language; and this promotes shared understanding amongst learners and the teacher. Code switching is also a viable tool in developing affective skills amongst language learners, by sustaining interest and inducing the right attitude to learning in the ESL classroom. When students imbibe the right learning attitude, they become more responsive to learning tasks and are positively disposed to accommodate new learning experiences. Ultimately, the research revealed the significance of code switching, not only in the cognitive domain but also in the affective and psycho motive domains of knowledge.

6. Conclusion

The practice of code switching and mixing add great value to language learning- not just in learning language contents -but in enforcing the right attitudinal disposition (affective mode) and a physically conducive language environment (psycho motive domain). Developing affective skills help students to imbibe readiness to learn while the psycho motive aspect provides the mental balance for learners to apply critical and positive thinking towards learning. Interestingly, the practice of code switching and mixing is used by both teachers and students in the learning process, culminating to a productive and stimulating learning experience of English as a second language.

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