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Virtual Vernaculars: Code-Mixing Dynamics among Yoruba/English Bilinguals on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

The exploration of code-mixing and code-switching phenomena, especially in online contexts, has predominantly focused on English/Chinese bilinguals, leaving a gap in understanding these linguistic phenomena among other bilingual groups engaging in online discourse. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the motivations underlying code-mixing and code-switching among Yoruba/English bilinguals within selected Facebook forums. Data were meticulously collected from two distinct Facebook forums: 'Ondo State people' and 'Nigerian Online Community', serving as a window into the digital linguistic practices of the Yoruba/English bilingual community. Employing Halliday's functional theory of language as the analytical lens, this study uncovered three core motivations driving code-mixing and code-switching: linguistic, social, and computer-related motivations. Linguistically, the motivating factors identified include lexical gaps, euphemism/dysphemism, and a lower level of English competence. Social motivations were tethered to language identity and language attitudes, while computer-related motivations were encapsulated by computer-aided code-switching and online linguistic creativity. This analysis underscores the unique 'linguistic world' of Facebook forums, where traditional language usage is streamlined, adapted, and evolved, reflecting a dynamic interplay of linguistic, social, and digital factors in modern bilingual communication.

INTRODUCTION

The linguistic phenomena of code-mixing and code-switching are quintessential markers of bilingualism, embodying the fluid linguistic interchange that occurs when bilingual speakers navigate between their linguistic repertoires. These phenomena, well-documented in sociolinguistic studies, unfold as bilingual speakers seamlessly transition from one language to another, a process that is seen by some scholars as a creative linguistic endeavor, and by others as a sign of linguistic incompetence (Hamers & Blanc, 1989; Gumperz, 1982). The diverse perspectives on code-mixing and code-switching reflect the complex nature of bilingual communication, where the interplay of linguistic, social, and cultural factors shapes the contours of speech (Ogungbemi, 2016; Olaluwoye & Ogungbemi 2020).

The distinction between code-mixing and code-switching is well articulated by Hudson (1996), where code-mixing is seen as a process of intertwining elements from different languages at the word level, often within a single sentence, while code-switching encompasses a broader linguistic exchange, transitioning between languages across sentences or discourse, often adhering to the 'socially determined norms' within a multilingual community (Hamers and Blanc, 1989). This dichotomy, however, does not diminish the intertwined nature of these phenomena, as Adegbite and Akindele (1999) argue that code-mixing often precipitates code-switching, illustrating a dynamic linguistic continuum.

Our digital age, characterized by burgeoning online

communications, provides a fertile ground for observing code-mixing and code-switching in action. In particular, the online space has emerged as a vibrant platform for Yoruba/English bilinguals, who engage in code-mixing and code-switching within Facebook forums, navigating between languages to communicate, connect, and foster a sense of community. This study examines the digital realm to explore the motivations driving code-mixing and code-switching among Yoruba/English bilinguals on selected Facebook forums: 'Ondo State people' and 'Nigerian Online Community'. Driven by insights from Halliday's functional theory of language, this investigation seeks to unravel the linguistic, social, and computer-related motivations that underpin code-mixing and code-switching in these online spaces.

Contrary to the view of Hamers and Blanc (2002), who regard code-mixing and code-switching as indicators of linguistic incompetence, this study posits that these phenomena are advantageous, fostering a rich linguistic dexterity among bilinguals. Such linguistic flexibility not only facilitates effective communication but also engenders a sense of cultural belonging and identity affirmation among the online community members (Ayodabo 2024). By investigating the virtual interactions of Yoruba/English bilinguals, this study aims to shed light on the intricate web of factors driving code-mixing and code-switching in the digital age, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of modern bilingual communication dynamics in online forums.

The linguistic realms of code-mixing and code-switching

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have garnered scholarly attention over the years, reflecting the interplay of languages among bilingual speakers. While existing literature has explored these phenomena across various digital platforms like emails (Huang, 2004), online discussion forums (McLellan, 2009), and chat rooms (Cardenas-Claros & Isharyanti, 2009), a majority of these studies predominantly focus on English/Chinese bilinguals. On the other hand, investigations delving into the interaction of English and Yoruba, as conducted by Ayeomoni (2006), Babalola and Taiwo (2008), and Lamidi (2009), have primarily centered around face-to-face communication dynamics. Despite the burgeoning digital communication era marking the mid-1990s (Georgakopoulou, 1997), the exploration of code-mixing and code-switching among Yoruba/English bilinguals in online domains remains scant.

Given the escalating utilization of social media platforms like Facebook, a novel and rich terrain for observing linguistic interactions emerges. Facebook forums, characterized by their open and unmoderated nature, present a unique 'linguistic world' where the conventional use of language is simplified, adjusted, and modified. This study, thus, endeavors to bridge the existing research gap by delving into the motivations underpinning code-mixing and code-switching among Yoruba/English bilinguals within selected Facebook forums: 'Ondo State people' and 'Nigerian Online Community'. The choice of these forums emanates from their unrestricted membership and the liberty they afford to participants in language usage, rendering the language in posts highly diverse in style and propriety. Furthermore, these forums reflect a vibrant community where the phenomena of code-mixing and code-switching are vividly demonstrated by posters, rendering them fertile grounds for linguistic exploration.

The researchers' choice of Facebook as the investigative platform is deliberate, aiming to expand the scope of inquiry beyond the commonly studied domains of blogs, MSN messenger, emails, and wikis, and venturing into a social media sphere that has yet to be fully explored in the context of code-mixing and code-switching. This study, grounded in Halliday's functional theory of language, seeks to unravel the linguistic, social, and computer-related motivations that drive Yoruba/English bilinguals to engage in code-mixing and code-switching in these online spaces. In doing so, this investigation aims to contribute a broad understanding of how modern bilingual communication unfolds within the digital social sphere, augmenting the existing body of knowledge on bilingual communication dynamics in the era of social media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Facebook has emerged as a prominent platform for social interaction and, subsequently, a significant arena for studying the phenomenon of code-switching on the Internet. With its vast user base that encapsulates a myriad of linguistic backgrounds, Facebook offers a

fertile ground for analyzing linguistic behavior. As noted by Carlson (2010), the platform boasted over 600 million monthly active users globally, indicating its far-reaching influence and the extensive interactions occurring on it daily.

The platform is equipped with a plethora of features that facilitate socialization and information sharing among users, encompassing aspects of individual lives, friendships, and broader societal narratives. Some notable features include the home page, user profiles, friends list, messaging system, chat functionality, search engine, and the wall, where posts are displayed. To engage with Facebook, users are required to log in using a valid email address and password. The email addresses serve as an identifier, and users have the liberty to select from various email service providers like Yahoo Mail, Hotmail, and Gmail, among others, according to their preferences. While the email can reflect a user's real or imaginary name, it does not significantly impact the content they post; it primarily serves as a marker of identification within this vast social network. Once logged in, users can indulge in a range of activities including posting comments, sharing links, uploading, and tagging photos, thus contributing to the dynamic and interactive digital environment that Facebook embodies.

One of the engaging features of Facebook is its forums or groups, which act as internet message boards where users post and respond to messages concerning shared interests or topics. Among the various types of forums on Facebook, Listserv stands out as a distinctive kind. Listserv operates by allowing a user to disseminate a message to a multitude of individuals, essentially creating an electronic forum conducive for discussion. This functionality is particularly embraced by professional organizations, academic settings, or groups with common interests, enabling individual members to express opinions, pose questions, and engage in discourse. Listservs serve as asynchronous text-based communication channels where messages, sent by a user to numerous email addresses, fuel the discussion. These discussions could be moderated or remain unmoderated, as pointed out by Baron (2003), thereby providing a space for either structured or free-flowing conversation.

In essence, Facebook, with its expansive user base and versatile features, acts as a remarkable platform for investigating code-switching among internet users. The platform's forums, like Listserv, further enrich the potential for linguistic exploration, making Facebook an invaluable resource in the study of code-switching and other linguistic phenomena in the digital age.

The linguistic landscape of Facebook mirrors, to a significant extent, the synchronous modes of communication observed in platforms such as Chat, Yahoo! Messenger, Internet Relay Chat, Google Talk, and MSN Messenger, among others. However, users on Facebook exhibit a slight departure from the conventional norms of written discourse for various reasons. This deviation could stem from time constraints,

compelling users to convey their messages within a limited timeframe, thereby truncating words or sentences. The type of device, especially mobile phones with character limits or small keypads, also contributes to this trend. For instance, some mobile phones restrict text messages to 160 characters, prompting users to abbreviate words or employ acronyms to stay within this limit.

Furthermore, the discomfort associated with typing on small keypads can lead to shortened sentences, excessive use of abbreviations, and acronyms. Additionally, some users intentionally veer from standard usage as a form of convention or to align with the contemporary linguistic trends prevalent on the platform, even when they are aware of the correct or standard expressions. Crystal (2001) noted that the grammar in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is predominantly marked by colloquial constructions and non-standard usage, often mirroring patterns identified in other dialects or genres. For instance, there might be omissions of copular and auxiliary verbs, non-standard concord between subject and verb, or substitutions of one case form for another. Facebook has given rise to distinct linguistic features such as the use of abbreviations/acronyms, emoticons, flaming, shortened words, and non-standard spellings (Baron, 2003). On Facebook forums, a conspicuous trend is the extensive abbreviation of words, driven perhaps by the cyber language tradition or an effort to conserve time and energy. The approach to abbreviating words or using acronyms lacks a standard procedure, with users freely shortening any word. Examples include “wh” for “which,” “d” for “the,” “u re” for “you are,” “nt” for “not,” “ur” for “your,” and so forth, echoing the findings of Awonusi (2004) in his exploration of sociolinguistic features of GSM text messages within Nigerian English. The linguistic issues highlighted above extend to the use of the Yoruba language on Facebook forums. Posters often neglect the utilization of tone or diacritical marks crucial for proper pronunciation and meaning in Yoruba. In the absence of these marks, context becomes a vital clue in deciphering the intended meaning. Moreover, there’s a noticeable inconsistency in spellings and word usage in Yoruba, with posters not adhering to a specific spelling style.

The digital era, heralded by the internet, has fostered a practice of multilingualism, giving rise to diverse linguistic expressions by bilingual speakers online, thus capturing the attention of scholars’ keen on exploring this evolving trend. As the number of internet users’ surges, and as new computer-mediated technologies emerge, the linguistic trajectory of the online realm remains an open-ended exploration. The phenomena of code-mixing and code-switching, particularly between Yoruba and English, epitomize the linguistic dynamics playing out on the internet, mirroring the fluidity and adaptability of language in response to the digital medium.

Diverging from traditional grammatical frameworks that prioritize language form, Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) foregrounds the usage of language as a medium to articulate meaning. SFG is fundamentally

semantic and functional, delving into the realms of meaning and the pragmatic application of language (Bloor & Bloor, 1995). Its focus on the functional aspect renders it a compelling tool for exploring the deployment of linguistic elements and grammatical patterns to articulate diverse semantic values (White, 2000; Ogungbemi, 2023). Halliday posits that the architecture of every natural language should be elucidated through a functional lens (Halliday & Hassan, 1976). A hallmark of SFG is its categorization of language and grammar into three metafunctions, namely experiential or ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This segmentation reflects SFG’s keen attention to the mechanisms through which speakers craft utterances and texts to relay their intended meanings (Ogungbemi, 2018a). These three metafunctions are encapsulated within a vast system network that delineates all possible meaning potentials, branching into several sub-networks like the Transitivity network, the Thing network, and the Quality network. A network comprises numerous ‘systems,’ each harboring a set of semantic features. To generate an utterance, the system network is navigated, selecting specific semantic features, thereby activating the pertinent realization rules (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

The ideational metafunction furnishes grammatical resources at the clause level to interpret both the inner and outer experiences of the word, representing the world’s functions and meanings through the transitivity system. It serves as a semantic framework for analyzing reality representations in a linguistic text, enabling the recreation of similar experiences through various lexicogrammatical choices influenced by distinct mind styles or authorial ideologies (Fowler, 1986). This metafunction reveals how certain linguistic choices encode the author’s ideological stance, shaped by social and cultural institutions, underscoring that linguistic codes are far from neutral reflections of reality and are imbued with ideologies.

On the other hand, the interpersonal metafunction elucidates the utilization of language for interaction, expressing judgments and attitudes. Grammatically, at the clausal level, the interpersonal metafunction is manifested through Mood, which engages with the topic of information or service, whether it’s giving or demanding, alongside the tenor of the relationship among interactants, reflecting gender or status-based power dynamics (Haratyan, 2011; Ogungbemi, 2018b). Lastly, the textual metafunction concerns the organization of messages in relation to others, fostering coherence and cohesion. Haratyan (2011) asserts that at the clausal level, the textual metafunction is represented through Theme. Halliday’s functional theory of language aligns well with this study, shedding light on the social functions executed by posters on Facebook forums. It further unravels how forum users adeptly navigate between languages to convey their communicative intentions, thereby enriching our understanding of linguistic dynamism within digital social platforms.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for this study were meticulously harvested from the digital realm, specifically from distinct forums on Facebook, namely ‘Ondo State People’ and ‘Nigerian Online Community.’ The selection of these forums was orchestrated through a well-structured sampling procedure, employing the simple random sampling method to ensure a fair chance for every forum member to be included in the study. This approach not only bolstered the inclusivity of the sampling but also fortified the integrity and representativeness of the data collected. The data acquisition spanned a substantial period of four months, stretching from April to July 2012. This time frame was deliberately chosen to ensure a broad coverage of discussions, thereby enhancing the objectivity and reliability of the findings. It allowed for a rich, temporal insight into the dynamics of language usage among the forum members, providing a robust foundation for thorough analysis. Furthermore, the selected forums are characterized by regular updates, a feature that significantly benefited the researchers by facilitating timely data collection. This regular influx of new discussions and interactions enriched the dataset, ensuring that the data remained fresh and relevant throughout the collection period. Post-collection, the amassed data underwent a rigorous qualitative analysis. This method of analysis was chosen for its prowess in unraveling the intricacies of language usage and interactions within the online communities. It allowed for an in-depth exploration of the code-switching and code-mixing phenomena, rendering nuanced insights into the linguistic behaviors exhibited by the forum members. Through this meticulous approach, the study aims to contribute a broad understanding of linguistic dynamics within the realms of digital social interactions on Facebook forums.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic Motivations

The linguistic motivations identified and discussed are lexical gap, euphemism/dysphemism, and low level of competence in English, all of which contribute to speakers’ strategic code-switching to express ideas, emotions, or cultural nuances more effectively.

Excerpt 1

Solomon Temitope *Yeye borroface* i hav told u *dat ojue a ja. Iwaju o se lo ehin o se padasi*

June 19 at 5:37am

‘Unserious Borroface, I have told u that you will regret it. You can’t go forward and going back is impossible.’

Samuel Babayomi *okanlomo* of d *oduduwa* land, *ma base relo*. 2nd term na sure banker

July 3 at 5:37pm

‘The greatest son of the Oduduwa (Yoruba) land, continue with your work. Your second term is sure’.

The sentence “[Solomon Temitope *Yeye borroface* i hav told u *dat ojue a ja. Iwaju o se lo ehin o se padasi*]” is a mix of English, Nigerian Pidgin, and Yoruba, creating a rich tapestry of linguistic and cultural expression. The phrase

“*Yeye borroface*” is a colloquial and mildly mocking term often used in Nigerian contexts to describe someone perceived as unserious or frivolous. The clause “i hav told u *dat ojue a ja*” would be loosely translated to “I’ve warned you about the challenges ahead” or “I’ve told you the road is chaotic”, with Pidgin grammar but English vocabulary embedded in a sense of caution. The Yoruba proverb “*Iwaju o se lo ehin o se padasi*” is best translated as “You can’t move forward, and you can’t go backward,” adding depth and weight using cultural wisdom to denote a situation of impasse or difficulty.

Pragmatically, the sentence serves several communicative purposes. The humorous tone in “*Yeye borroface*” creates a playful yet critical engagement, balancing lightheartedness with admonishment. The straightforward statement “I hav told u” is an authoritative one, showing the position of the speaker, an adviser or a person who warned. This proverb in Yoruba has added weight to cultural identity and the seriousness of the situation. Weaving these linguistic elements together, the speaker gets to a nuanced expression that resonates with a bilingual or multilingual audience familiar with the interplay of English, Pidgin, and Yoruba. Such blending of languages and cultural codes would give more emotional weight to the message and reinforce its socio-cultural context, both in an impactful and relatable way. Also, ‘*okanlomo*’ in the above example is an agglutinating word that is inundated with meaning. Before someone could be referred to as ‘*okanlomo*’ in Yoruba cosmology, it means that the person might be influential in the society. Such a person can be a minister, governor, president, etc of a country. So, the expression ‘greatest son’ does not carry the Yoruba meaning of the expression. The difficulty in getting an equivalent expression could have motivated the poster to alternate code.

Excerpt 2

Enuwure SmartMr 419, pretendance d whole nigeria reget u. awon *afin* ati *abuke* o le rin mo jst bcos of u mimiko *bastardomo egbira*

July 23 at 7:52pm

‘A cheat, pretender, the whole Nigeria has a regret. The albino and the hunchback cannot walk freely just because of you, Mimiko, an Egbira man’.

In the text above, all the features of dysphemism are found. One of them is ‘name calling’ like ‘bastard’, ‘omo egbira’. Dysphemism is a major weapon used in forums to abuse one another. Euphemism is not really pronounced on the forums, rather what we have is dysphemism. The posters insult one another at the slightest provocation. They take liberty and derive joy at insulting one another on the forums. The two languages are used to achieve this. However, the posters prefer Yoruba language to English because the former can express their intentions perfectly. In other words, indigenous language carries more weight in showcasing the posters’ world view than foreign language. Example of this can be seen below:

Excerpt 3

Adeyemi Kazeem Abolanle *Oleeeee, Barawooooo, Army Robber, Asewodomitilla*, u must marry him by- fire by-force. nonsense idiot

Thursday at 10:35pm

‘Thief, armed robber, prostitute, you must marry him by force.’

The sentence “[Adeyemi Kazeem Abolanle *Oleeeee, Barawooooo, Army Robber, Asewodomitilla*, u must marry him by-fire by-force. nonsense idiot]” is an exciting combination of dynamic Nigerian Pidgin with culturally embedded terms combined into an expressive phrase in one breath. “u must marry him by-fire by-force” is an oft-used phrase in Nigerian Pidgin to indicate compulsion. “Nonsense idiot,” the words are pure English to imply insult. It further shows intensity in tone. Besides, there are other examples of Nigerian Pidgin words and expressions with cultural and emotional weight like “*Oleeeee*” (thief), “*Barawooooo*” (a thief in Hausa), “*Army Robber*” (armed robber), and “*Asewodomitilla*” (a Yoruba insult for promiscuity). This fusion of languages and cultural expression underlines a speaker’s desire to make an emphatic and effective utterance relevantly. The sentence functions on several pragmatic levels. The excessive insults and stretched vowels, like “*Oleeeee*” and “*Barawooooo*,” are comedic and hyperbolic, fitting the style of a Nigerian verbal fight or roasting. All at once, the use of regional and cultural slang also emphasizes the speaker’s identity and anchors the message in local speech patterns. The instruction “u must marry him by-fire by-force” is an act of domination; it depicts the speaker as an authoritative figure who demands the listener’s life choices. It’s this blend of humor, cultural resonance, and power dynamics that makes the message both accessible and emotionally impactful for a bilingual or multilingual audience. The latter reflects the complex sociolinguistic practices of communication common in Nigeria.

Low Level of Competence in English

The posters do not enjoy the same level of performance or competence in English as it is in Yoruba. This makes the bilingual speakers on the forums to code-mix and code-switch to Yoruba when they are stocked in English. In other words, the posters decide to switch to Yoruba as a last resort to hide their incompetence. This is illustrated below:

Excerpt 4

Wasiu Adeyemi Fajemisin abeg go sell *jedijedi*, u really gud for advert

Friday at 8:45am

‘Please go and be selling drugs for pile. This is because you are good in advertisement’

The sentence “[Wasiu Adeyemi Fajemisin abeg go sell *jedijedi*, u really gud for advert.]” is an interesting manifestation of linguistic creativity and a mode of cultural expression, typical of the Nigerian environment. This utterance, representing a combination of features from both Nigerian Pidgin and English, is packed with

its communicative functions such as humor, politeness, and evaluative commentary. We can now appreciate more of its depth through the framework of SFG and code-switching theory. From an SFG perspective, a number of metafunctions is realized in the sentence: ideational metafunction, through which experiences and processes are represented, is seen in this imperative “go sell *jedijedi*”; this clause uses a material process-the action that is intended to be taken by the addressee, “Wasiu Adeyemi Fajemisin”; the object “*jedijedi*” may be a local term used humorously as a product to promote here. Complementing this, the declarative “u really gud for advert” is a relational process assessing the addressee’s capability in advertisements. As such, these two processes establish a call which is literally based on lighthearted banter.

The interpersonal metafunction indicates the relationship between speaker and listener through mood, tone, and modality. The imperative “abeg” is mitigated with a politeness marker, quite frequent in Nigerian Pidgin, and turns the command into a request. The declaration which follows, “u really gud for advert,” contains a compliment, enhancing the camaraderie even more. All these features together make an informal and friendly tone, which is suggestive of familiarity and mutual respect between the speaker and the addressee.

Structurally, the sentence is cohesive in its textual metafunction. It introduces the subject of discourse through the Theme “Wasiu Adeyemi Fajemisin” and then presents new information of directive and complement through the Rheme. The informal register of ellipses and conversational style further makes the speech function coherent to be appropriate for casual interactions.

Through the theoretical framework of codeswitching, the sentence is an example of strategic switching between Nigerian Pidgin and English. Pidgin phrases like “abeg”, “go sell *jedijedi*”, and “u really gud” index an informal, localised identity and create solidarity and cultural resonance. The English term “advert”, on the other hand, adds a modern and professional aspect to it, appealing to a wider or cosmopolitan audience. This kind of linguistic blending is a common sociolinguistic practice in Nigeria, where speakers move between languages with ease to suit their communicative purposes. The pragmatic functions of codeswitching are evident here. First, the use of Pidgin aligns with the speaker’s intent to engage humorously and inclusively, making the message relatable to a Nigerian audience. Second, the shift to English emphasizes the evaluative and aspirational aspect of the statement, highlighting the addressee’s suitability for professional advertisement work. By doing so, the speaker balances informality with a subtle nod to professional credibility. In the culturally relevant reference to a “*jedijedi*” product, there is also a playful use of local health terms in colloquial ways, adding humor. It adds lightness to this frame of encouraging action that does not make the message boring. This use of humor, plus the compliment “u really gud for advert”, underscores the addressee’s perceived potential and effectiveness in promotional endeavors.

Social Motivations

Apart from the linguistic motivations of code-switching, social motivation is also an important factor that necessitates switching on the FACEBOOK forums. This can be illustrated below:

Excerpt 5

Borby Mubby Jaji @femi oja si gan. Dats naija 4 u

July 23 at 5:29pm

‘@femi, you are highly informed. That is Nigeria for you.’ The sentence “[Borby Mubby Jaji @femi oja si gan. Dats naija 4 u]” exemplifies the creative blending of Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin to establish cultural identity and camaraderie in an online forum setting. The phrase “oja si gan” (a Yoruba slang meaning “you are highly informed” or “you’re sharp”) reflects the poster’s deliberate use of a localized expression to resonate with a culturally aware audience. Moreover, the retention of “oga” as a marker of respect and familiarity underlines the poster’s intention to be companionable and friendly with the addressee, even without confirming whether the addressee is a Yoruba-English bilingual. This linguistic choice follows a trend seen throughout such forums, in which Yoruba is being used increasingly as a lingua franca among posters themselves, reflecting its cultural importance.

As might be expected, the author of the poster has intertwined Nigerian Pidgin and varieties of English in a balanced relation to communicate a message closer to the universal. “Dats naija 4 u” is used to mean “That’s Nigeria for you”, providing a comment on the ills or realities of Nigerian society, yet broadening the inclusiveness of this message to non-Yoruba speakers. This is characteristic of fluid code-switching among Yoruba and the clear-cut adaptability and dominance of Yoruba with English on Facebook. While Igbo or Hausa, for example, are other indigenous languages that are less used in code-switching on these forums, Yoruba’s emergence as a dominant code-switching language reflects its cultural influence and the poster’s confidence in its shared understanding among the participants of the forum. Further research could explore why, out of all the indigenous languages, Yoruba has taken on this role, perhaps shedding light on its evolving status as a socio-cultural bridge in digital spaces.

Language Attitudes

The attitudes of the posters on FACEBOOK forums are very positive towards Yoruba language. This makes them switch code at any slight opportunity they see to do so. Both languages on the forums are almost on equal footing when it comes to the attitudes of posters towards the languages. For instance,

Excerpt 6

Dare Femjack Ondo State pple need a senge of goverment, iroko must go by the grace of God,
nitoripe igbo ni ile eye, igbo ni ile iroko, o yaa’ pada sigbo

June 18 at 9:59pm

‘Ondo State people need a change of government, as a result of this, ‘Iroko’ must go by the grace of God. This is because birds reside in the forest, Iroko trees reside in the forest, therefore Iroko, go back to the forest.’

The motivation for the switch between English and Yoruba in the message is based on the speaker’s need for expressiveness, audience engagement, and cultural authority. The Yoruba parts permit the speaker to use culturally resonant metaphors, such as “igbo ni ile eye, igbo ni ile iroko,” which would lose their meaning if they were directly translated into English. The metaphors, which have their origin in Yoruba proverbs, give more weight to the message and are thus deeper and more culturally representative for the Yoruba-speaking audience. This switch puts emphasis on solidarity: including a broader audience and reinforcing cultural identity. Besides, using idiomatic expressions in Yoruba positions the speaker as a traditional wise man; this lends authority to the argument and creates a closer link with the audience in terms of cultural values.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, such switching underlines the bilingual identity of the speaker, bridging modern political commentary with the traditional Yoruba rhetorical practices. The Yoruba phrases invoke metaphor and cultural imagery central to Yoruba discourse, adding credibility and depth to the message being conveyed by the speaker. Further, the switching between the two languages ensures the message gets across to both those fluent in English and Yoruba-speaking audiences for inclusivity. Pragmatically, the Yoruba passages explain, highlight, and drive home the moral and cultural justification behind the political appeal to action; the argument becomes stronger because of humor, relatability, and solidarity. By addressing different linguistic groups, he unites them under a common goal: to stand up for political change. Furthermore, this positive attitude is demonstrated to the extent of using the mother tongue for proverbial expressions in the forums. For instance,

Excerpt 7

Akinboyowa Olu @Olorunda Ayorinde: Tinibu is an opportunist, Mimiko had concludue all arrangement even b4 election. *Igba ti Aja nsele, igbo lobo wa.*

‘@Olorunda Ayorinde, Tinubu is an opportunist. Mimiko had concluded all the arrangements even before the elections. When Dog is keeping home, Monkey was in the bush.’

(Text 7)

The motivation for codeswitching in the sentence “[Akinboyowa Olu @Olorunda Ayorinde: Tinibu is an opportunist, Mimiko had concludue all arrangement even b4 election. *Igba ti Aja nsele, igbo lobo wa.*]” lies in its blend of English and Yoruba to deliver a politically charged message with cultural depth. The English section—“Tinibu is an opportunist, Mimiko had concluded all arrangement even b4 election”—lays the groundwork for the argument, providing factual or perceived commentary in a straightforward manner. The Yoruba proverb “Igba ti Aja nsele, igbo lobo wa”

(translated as “When the dog is in trouble, the forest is its refuge”) metaphorically underscores the speaker’s critique, implying that individuals resort to familiar resources or strategies in challenging situations. This switch to Yoruba adds expressiveness and cultural resonance, leveraging the deeper symbolic meanings of the proverb to strengthen the argument.

Sociolinguistically, this codeswitching highlights the speaker’s ability to connect with both English-speaking and Yoruba-speaking audiences, demonstrating a dual linguistic identity. By integrating Yoruba, the speaker taps into a shared cultural heritage that reinforces the message’s authority and relatability. The proverb provides clarity and emphasis to the point being made while also invoking humor and relatability, as proverbs are widely understood and appreciated in Yoruba culture. Furthermore, by using both languages, the speaker fosters inclusivity and solidarity among a diverse audience, ensuring the political critique resonates across linguistic boundaries while anchoring it in cultural authenticity.

Computer-Related Motivations

The bilingual speakers on the FACEBOOK forums find it to be more comfortable and conducive to code-switch on computer than on face-to-face communication. They can praise, abuse and insult on the computer than in real life conversation (Akinola, 2018). For instance, in text 3 above, what the poster says when he/she code-switches to Yoruba will have been impossible in verbal exchanges. The following examples prove that a special kind of code-switched language is produced by online creativity as Yoruba grammar is transferred to English syntax in the FACEBOOK forums.

Excerpt 8

Olatunbosun Gbenga @all,ondo ple wise up dont be mega *mugus*

June 21 at 7:16am

‘@All, Ondo people, try to wise up. Do not be like fools’

In the above text, ‘mugu’ is a slanging expression that means ‘a fool’ or ‘stupid person’. However, Yoruba language does not use letter ‘s’ to mark plurality or number, but English does. This is a special use of language that does not exist in syntax of Yoruba or in Yoruba standard usage. The speaker, Olatunbosun Gbenga, is issuing a warning or an advisory note to a group identified as “@ all, ondo.” The subject matter revolves around being cautious and not falling prey to deception, indicated by the phrases “wise up” and “don’t be mega mugus.” The interaction is between Olatunbosun Gbenga (the issuer of the directive) and the intended recipients (the general or specified audience identified as “@ all, ondo”). The relationship is informal, as expected given the casual language and the use of slang (“mega mugus”), suggesting a degree of familiarity or shared cultural background.

The message is written in a digital context, presumably on a social media platform given the timestamp and format.

The language is concise and directive, employing a mix of standard English and colloquial expressions, indicative of informal digital communication. Most of the message is in English, the dominant language in the message. Phrases like “wise up” and “don’t be” are standard English expressions. The term “mega mugus” represents a mix where “mega” is borrowed from standard English, amplified in meaning, and “mugus” is a term likely from Nigerian Pidgin or local slang, meaning fools or easily deceived persons. The code-mixing in this message serves to convey the message in a relatable manner to the intended audience, potentially resonating more effectively due to the cultural or linguistic shared knowledge. It also reflects the speaker’s identity and sociolinguistic background, emphasizing the informal and urgent nature of the communication.

A similar example is given below:

Excerpt 9

Adeyemi Adebayo Some idiot ones are just saying rubbish here.wot as dat ur mimiko do 2 help u? which work as he done in ondo state? *mumus* answer me.

June 18 at 6:45am

‘Some idiots are just saying rubbish here. What has Mimiko done to help you? Which work has he done in Ondo State? Will you answer me stupid people?’

‘Mumu’ in the text above shares the same meaning as the word ‘mugu’. The poster has creatively coined the word by adding ‘s’ to the root word to form a plural. There is no word like ‘mumus’ in Yoruba lexicon. It is just the making of the poster on the forum.

Adeyemi Adebayo is expressing frustration or criticism towards certain individuals, questioning their statements and challenging their views regarding the achievements of Governor “Mimiko” in Ondo state. The content is confrontational and seeks to elicit a response or justification from the readers. The message is from Adeyemi Adebayo (the author) directed towards an unspecified group referred to as “idiot ones” and “mumus.” The language indicates a power dynamic where the author positions themselves as superior or more informed, demanding answers from the others perceived as less knowledgeable or naive. The message is direct, with rhetorical questions intended to provoke thought or reaction, characteristic of interactive written discourse in digital communication environments.

Phrases like “wot as dat” and “mumus” indicate a departure from standard English, likely reflecting Nigerian Pidgin or local dialect influences. “Wot” is a colloquial spelling of “what,” and “mumus” is a derogatory term likely derived from Nigerian Pidgin, similar to “fools” in standard English. These elements of code-mixing serve various functions, including emphasizing the author’s emotional state, creating a sense of solidarity or identification with a particular linguistic or cultural group, and potentially appealing to or challenging the audience in a more impactful or relatable manner. The choice of language and style underlines the informal, urgent, and confrontational nature of the message.

Further, since the use of emoticons is lacking in the forums, posters creatively use to represent emoticons are words. For instance, instead of using the normal emoticon to represent wink, what the poster does is to write the word 'wink' and put asterisk at both sides of the word at the end of the post. For instance,

Excerpt 10

Philips Adeniji Babatunde If you can't beat them just join them to creat more impact..How many years are we going to live in this earth that we'll continue killing our self over Nigeria *wahala*.....Pls let everybody compromise theirselves with bribe.....infact i will fight for my own share.....*wink*

July 21 at 10:04am

'If you can't beat them then join them to create more impact. How many years are we going to spend on this earth that we will continue to kill one another on Nigerian problem. Please let everybody be complacent with bribery. Infact, I will fight for my own share'

The text revolves around the frustrations and resignation experienced by the author concerning societal issues in Nigeria, specifically focusing on corruption and the idea of succumbing to prevalent corrupt practices for personal gain. The tenor involves a single author communicating to an unspecified public audience on social media. The language suggests an informal relationship, characterized using colloquial expressions and a casual tone. The mode is written, but it emulates spoken language, which is typical in many social media contexts. The text includes informal language, ellipses, and emoticons that signal a casual, conversational quality.

The post is primarily in English but is interspersed with Nigerian Pidgin expressions (e.g., "Nigeria wahala") and informal, colloquial language that reflects local speech patterns. This mixture of English with Nigerian Pidgin and informal expressions is indicative of the author's linguistic repertoire and the sociolinguistic context in which they operate. The poster expresses a local identity and aligns themselves with a broader community that shares this mixed linguistic code. Certain ideas or sentiments may be more effectively conveyed or emphasized in one linguistic variety over another, such as the phrase "Nigeria wahala" to express the frustration and trouble associated with Nigerian societal issues. The poster's likely intention in utilizing a combination of the English language and Nigerian Pidgin is to cultivate a message that is more comprehensive, relatable, and captivating for a varied Facebook audience. The text reflects the author's pragmatic intention to provoke thought, evoke solidarity or shared understanding, and perhaps to satirize or criticize the status quo. The use of humor ("wink") and the directive to compromise with the corrupt system indicate a nuanced stance that combines resignation with a critique of societal issues.

CONCLUSION

The phenomena of code-mixing and code-switching

cannot be ruled out in human language. If languages continue to have contact with one another, code alternation cannot be ruled out. If a speaker has two or more languages in his/her speech repertoire, there is a tendency for that speaker to mix and switch from one language to another. This switching can be done consciously or unconsciously when speaking. When this happens, it is called code-mixing and code-switching. This study has investigated the use of code-mixing and code-switching, which are features of bilingualism in a society. The study pays particular attention to code-switching among bilingual users of English, Yoruba and Pidgin in Internet chatting, using different forums on FACEBOOK. The study has answered the question: What are the possible motivations behind the code-switching behaviour of the users of these forums? Further, the study sheds light on the differences between the language use in face-to-face communication and that of cyber language, thereby helping bilinguals be aware of the contrast embedded in cyber language and real-life communication.

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