

CODE-MIXING AMONG IGBO PREACHERS

V C Onumajuru

University of Port Harcourt.

juruvc@yahoo.com/ v.onumajuru@gmail.com

Abstract

Code-mixing and code-switching are very common phenomena in any bilingual/multilingual setting, Nigeria being one of the typical examples. Almost every Nigerian (literate and non-literate) is involved in these phenomena in varying degrees. Whereas code-mixing involves the transfer of Linguistic elements from one Language into another in the same utterance/sentence (as between Igbo/English), code switching entails the switch or shift by bilingual or bidialectal speakers between different languages or varieties of the same language (as between Onitsha variety of Igbo and the Standard Igbo) and even between registers. This communication is based on code-mixing and its socio-linguistic implications in the Igbo community where preaching is supposed to be rendered in the local language. The motivation for the research is the overt reactions of some monolinguals in Igbo at different gatherings in Igbo communities where sermons/homilies were preached. The monolinguals who could not grasp the global message because of the mixed forms of Igbo and English in the same utterance by the preachers kept on asking the persons beside them: "What did he say? What does he mean"? The data were sourced from the speech forms of religious preachers in different parts of Igboland at different church services. The objective of the research is to examine the communicative effectiveness of the preachers and their listeners by watching the reactions of the latter as the former code-mixed Igbo and English in the same utterance. One of the highlights of our findings is that code-mixing truncates meaning and hinders global comprehension of the message by Igbo monolinguals who could not decipher the meaning of the English segments of the communication and continued seeking for clarifications from their co-listeners. The paper recommends that preachers should take time to know the composition of their audience and decide whether to deliver their message in one language (e.g. Igbo) and do a summary of what they have said in another (e.g. English) or get a good interpreter if in doubt of a mixed audience (i.e. both literate and illiterate listeners).

Keywords: Code-mixing, code-switching, Igbo

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the implications of the phenomenon of code-mixing among Igbo speakers. Before going into the discussion of the subject, we shall attempt a definition of the terms code, code-mixing and code switching as they relate to this work.

Code is defined by Wardhaugh (2002:87) as a neutral term to refer to any kind of system that two or more people employ for communication.

Crystal (1997:66) refers to code as a neutral label for any system of communication involving language. Code-mixing according to Crystal (1997:66) involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another. Ahukanna (1990:175) defines it as an intra-sentential switch in language which characterizes the speech behaviour of bilinguals.

Code-switching is defined by Crystal (1997:66) as a situation of switch by bilingual speakers between standard and regional forms of English, between Welsh and English in parts of Wales or between Occupational and domestic varieties. Gal (1988:247), as cited in Wardhaugh (2002:100), describes code-switching as a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations. He states that the ability to shift from one language to another is accepted as quite normal. Wardhaugh distinguishes between situational and metaphorical code-switching. He states that situational code-switching occurs when the languages used change according to the situations in which the discussants find themselves. Metaphorical code-switching on the other hand occurs when a change of topic requires a change in language.

Code-switching and code-mixing are very common phenomena in any bilingual/multilingual setting. Whereas code-mixing involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another in the same utterance/sentence (e.g. between

English and Igbo), code switching denotes the switch or shift by bilingual or bidialectal speakers between different languages or varieties of the same language (as between Onicha variety of Igbo and the Standard Igbo) and even between registers. Having defined the terms code-mixing and code-switching, the rest of our discussion will be based on code-mixing because of its high frequency of usage by Igbo religious bilingual preachers with English as second language.

Stridhar (1996:50), as cited in Wardhaugh (2002:95), observes that multilingualism involving balanced, native-like command of all languages in the repertoire is uncommon. He opines that multi-linguals have varying degrees of command of the different repertoires. The differences in competence in the various languages might range from command of a few lexical items, formulaic expressions such as greetings and rudimentary conversational skills all the way to excellent command of the grammar and vocabulary and specialized register and styles. Multi-linguals develop competence in each of the codes to the extent that they need it and for the contexts in which each of the languages is used. The competence of bilinguals/multilinguals is not exactly the same in all languages. The speaker is more competent in the code that he uses more often than the ones he uses occasionally.

An Igbo native speaker is so used to code-mixing that he does not always know when he mixes both English and Igbo, and Standard Igbo and dialect in the same utterance. The mixture has become so natural to literate Igbo speakers that they can hardly make a sentence in Igbo without one or two words of English. This paper investigates the code-mixing of English and Igbo (otherwise known as *Engligbo*) in the same utterance and the degree of comprehension of the message by Igbo monolingual listeners. The term *Engligbo* was originally introduced and popularized by a Nigerian musician of Igbo cultural origin-the late famous Oliver De Coque when he sang the song entitled *Engligbo* after the Nigerian Civil War in the early 1970s. The musician in that song was castigating the use of Igbo and English in the same utterance by Igbo speakers and described the practice as *ogbaluigboghali* meaning ‘a food for thought for the Igbo/what baffles the Igbo’. The refrain of the song reads as follows:

onye asuzina Engligbo ‘let nobody speak Engligbo anymore’.

He gave the following as examples of Engligbo in the song:

-i ga *etakekwanu* time ‘you must be careful’

-i kpalia m kita, e *tichee* m gi *lesson* ‘if you insult me now, I will teach you a lesson’

-unu *edisturbna* anyi ‘don’t disturb us’ etc.

The rest of this paper will be taken in two parts; the first part will deal with the preliminary statements and theoretical overview of code-mixing while the second part will be the presentation and analysis of some of the samples of the corpus of the Igbo preachers.

2. Background

2.1 Objective of the study

The objective of this paper is to discuss with ample examples the speech behaviour/pattern of some Igbo native bilingual preachers. In other words, the communicative habit of some Igbo bilingual preachers will be investigated so as to determine the effectiveness or otherwise of the message delivered/received in terms of its comprehension by the Igbo monolinguals.

2.2 Scope and limitation of study

The paper targets Igbo religious preachers such as priests, pastors and lay preachers. The data are sourced from the preaching and homilies of some “men of God” at churches, in the streets, in the buses and at crusades in different parts of Igboland at different times.

2.3 Data and methodology

The corpus for the research was collected through uncontrolled audio cassette recordings and jottings of the preaching of targeted Igbo preachers. In transcribing the corpus, we retained only the segments of homilies/preaching that contain the speech forms (*Engligbo*) that are relevant for our study and analysis of code-mixing between Igbo and English in Igbo communications.

2.4 Causes of code-mixing and its implications

Wardhaugh (2002) suggests motivation as one of the causes of code-mixing among speakers. He lists solidarity, accommodation to listeners, choice of topic and perceived social and cultural distance as possible reasons why speakers mix the codes while speaking. Wardhaugh however argues that whatever motivates a native speaker to mix codes during speech must be an unconscious stimulus because most speakers are not aware that they have mixed the codes in the course of the same discussion. For an Igbo speaker that mixes English and Igbo, this paper suggests the following as some of the possible causes of *Engligbo*:

- i) Lack of adequate knowledge of Igbo can cause a void in the sense that whenever a speaker lacks an appropriate word during his speech, the English word immediately comes in handy and fills the vacuum.
- ii) Laxity in Language Use: When the speaker does not take time to organize his thoughts and words.
- iii) A Demonstration of Multilingualism: An Igbo native speaker normally likes to show and prove to his hearers that he can also speak some other languages, and chipping in some words of English alongside Igbo words will show his hearers that he is also learned.
- iv) A Demonstration of Language Management: Just as in the case of multilingualism, an Igbo native speaker may want to show that he can manage other Languages and so he mixes his codes in utterances.
- v) Habit/Mannerism: It is a matter of habit for most Igbo speakers to mix Igbo with English. It is very rare to find an Igbo speaker who speaks pure Igbo.
- vi) Code-mixing can also occur when the speaker is discussing a topic that is strange or foreign to him.

2.5 Implications of code-mixing in reception and comprehension of messages

The purpose of this section is to examine the extent to which comprehension is enhanced between communicating partners in code-mixing situations. Vanoye (1973:14) using varying degrees of the command of different repertoires distinguishes reception from comprehension of messages. He illustrates with examples the different stages by which a message can be received but may not be understood. He argues that the comprehension of a received message will depend on the degree of the command of the different repertoires. In other words, if the locutor does not possess the same degree of the command of the different repertoires, the message he dispatches may be received, but may not be understood by the listener. For instance, when an English native speaker and an Igbo native speaker do not understand each other's language, communication cannot take place between them because the code is uncommon to both partners. The situation of the two conversants may be represented as in the following diagrams:

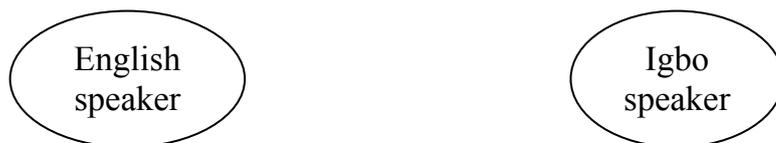


Figure 1: Code uncommon to both partners - no communication.

In the above situation, the message (whether in Igbo or English) may be received by the communicating partners but may not be understood due to their ignorance of the different codes or languages.

Another example may be a situation where two language learners have very limited knowledge of the languages they are exposed to. In this case, the language learners have very limited knowledge of the different codes. The situation can be represented thus:

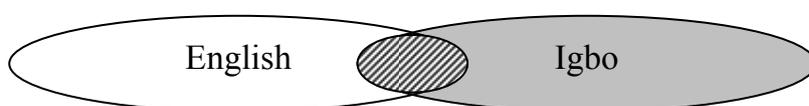


Figure 2: Limited knowledge of codes by both partners—minimal comprehension of message.

In the above, the message is received but the comprehension is minimal because the knowledge of the codes is limited to both partners.

Yet in another situation, the comprehension is larger because the linguistic repertoire of the code common to the conversants is large but certain linguistic items coming from the locutor may be strange to the interlocutor such that the message is received but not completely understood. The situation can be represented thus:



Figure 3: Larger knowledge of code by both partners- comprehension of message large but not total.

The next stage is that where the message is received and is completely understood because all the linguistic elements from the speaker are familiar to the listener. Such a situation may be represented as follows:

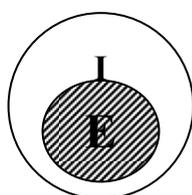


Figure 4: Excellent knowledge of code by both partners-total comprehension of message.

From the above illustrations, it is observed that effective communication takes place only in the fourth stage (Figure 4), where all the linguistic elements are common to the communicating partners. This is an example of a perfect communication. The above analyses

adapted from Vanoye (1973:14-15) show that code-mixing may hinder the perfect comprehension of a message by the receiver because of the presence of the linguistic elements of another code in the same utterance unknown to the receiver.

3. Data analysis

3.1 Presentation of data

This section presents the data realized through uncontrolled audio cassette recordings and jottings of the preachings of targeted Igbo preachers. The data are presented exactly as they are realized by the speakers, - in *Engligbo*. The correct version of what should be said is also presented side by side in Igbo as well as the English equivalent as in the following:

<i>Engligbo</i>	Gloss in Igbo	Gloss in English
1. Ihe ọbuna ga-eweta nkewa <i>should be avoided.</i>	A ga-ezeli ihe ọbuna ga-eweta nkewa.	Anything that will cause disunity/division should be avoided.
2. <i>Unity bu strength, division bu evil.</i>	Igwe bu ike, nkewa bu alu.	Unity is strength, division is evil.
3. <i>Our interest in them bu ka Chineke mee ka whatever they do dili ha nma.</i>	Ebum n'obi anyi bu ka Chineke mee ka ihe ọbula ha mere dili ha nma.	Our wish for them is that God will bless whatever they do.
4. Dika a na-agwa anyi maka stations of the cross.	Dika a na-agwa anyi maka ngarube nke ọbe.	As we are told about the Stations of the Cross.
5. Iso Chukwu di better than itinye uche na mmadu.	Iso Chukwu ka nma kalia itinye uche na mmadu.	It is better to follow/trust God than to put one's hope in man.
6. Maka ndi na pamper umu ha too much.	Maka ndi na-azuto umu ha nnukwu.	For those who over-pamper their children.
7. Nke Okenye na-alu, na-eje ozi without complaint.	Nke Okenye na-alu na-eje ozi na-enweghi mkpesa.	The elder son works hard and carries out his duties without complaint.
8. <i>Upon the freedom niine e nyelu ya bu nwatakiri.</i>	Na-agbanyeghi ohere niine e nyelu nwatakiri a ime ihe solu ya.	In spite of all the privileges given to that child to do whatever he wanted.
9. O kwa regret na remorse bu ebe a na-agbakwasi ukwu welu agbaghalu njo.	O kwa obi loghalu elogha na obi mgbawa maka njo bu ebe a na-agbakwasi ukwu welu agbaghalu njo.	Forgiveness of sin comes through repentance and remorse of conscience.

10. <i>Automatically</i> Chukwu na-agbaghalu anyi ozigbo.	N'atufulu oge Chukwu na-agbaghalu anyi ozigbo.	God's forgiveness is automatic and instant.
11. <i>The best thing bu to send the Ark back to ndi nwe ya.</i>	Ihe kachasi nma bu ibuchighalu ndi nwe Ugbu ogbugba ndu, ugbu ogbugba ndu ha.	The best thing is to send the Ark back to its owner.
12. N'akwukwo Exodus to be precise.	N'akwukwo Exodus, na-igbu okwu nkenke.	Precisely, from the book of Exodus.
13. Mkpọ a ka Moses kulu n'ime orimili, o tonua to blood.	Mkpọ a ka Moses kulu n'ime orimili, o gholo obara.	It was this rod that Moses hit on the river and it turned to blood.
14. <i>The day e dedicate-lu ya bu temple.</i>	Mbosi e runyere ya bu unọ nsọ.	The day the temple was dedicated.
15. Paul di aso na-agwa anyi that Christ is the head of the church.	Paul di aso na-agwa anyi na Christ bu onye isi nke nzuko.	St. Paul tells us that Christ is the head of the church.
16. Na ihe kwesili anyi bu onwu because the glory of God has de parted from us.	Na Ihe kwesili anyi bu onwu n'ihi na ebube nke Chukwu arapugo anyi.	That what we deserve is death because the glory of God has departed from us.
17. O bulu na i meela ya bu mistake, gbaa mbọ yoo, Chukwu ga-enyere gi aka.	O bulu na i mehela gbaa mbọ yoo, Chukwu ga-enyere gi aka.	If you have made a mistake, endeavour to ask God for forgiveness and he will help you.
18. <i>Everything that you are, i ga-eji ya hu Osebuluwa Chukwu n'anya.</i>	Ihe obuna i bu, i ga-eji ya hu Osebuluwa Chukwu n'anya.	You must love the Lord God with everything you have and are.
19. Oge onye ode akwukwo julụ Jesu iwu kachasi iwu, Jesu weę gaa to the scriptures.	Oge onye ode akwukwo julụ Jesu iwu kachasi iwu, Jesu weę gaa n'akwukwo nsọ.	When the scribe asked Jesus the greatest of the commandments, Jesus went to the scriptures.
20. <i>The greatest law of God, nke mbu, ifunanya ka a na-achọ, nke ibua ifunanya ka a na-achọ.</i>	Iwu kachasi n'iwu Chukwu, nke mbu, ifunanya ka a na-achọ, nke ibua ifunanya ka a na-achọ.	The first and the greatest of God's laws is love. The second is like the first and it is also love.
21. Muo nsọ ahụ riviifilu	Muo nsọ ahụ gwalu	The same Holy Spirit that

Mary na ọ ga-adi ime, revealikwalu Elizabeth na Mary di ime.	Mary na ọ ga-adi ime, gwakwuazili Elizabeth na Mary di ime.	revealed to Mary that she would be pregnant also revealed to Elizabeth that Mary was pregnant.
22. <i>Tell me, is it wrong that na anyi ga-ayọ nwaanyi a ayiyo.</i>	Gwa m ma ọ bu na ọ diri mma na anyi ga-ayọ nwaanyi a ayiyo.	Tell me whether it is wrong for us to pray through this woman.
23. Uka wee tinyezie the other part of Ekene Maria.	Uka wee tinyezie akuku Ekene Maria nke ọzo.	The church then put the other part of the Hail Mary.
24. Ọ wee nwee courage gwa Jesu, ha enwerozikwa mmanya.	Ọ wee kaa obi gwa Jesu na ha enwerozikwa mmanya.	And she summoned courage and told Jesus that they had no wine.
25. <i>Joseph of Arimathea garahu Nicodemus because he went to Christ secretly.</i>	Joseph onye nke Arimathea ga hu Nicodemus makana ọ o jekwulu Christ na nzizo.	Joseph of Arimathea went and met Nicodemus because he admired Christ secretly.
26. Ihe m ji na-ekwu ihe a bu na-enwere many such Christians in our midst.	Ihe m ji na-ekwu ihe a bu na-enwere otutu ndi otu Christi di etua n'etiti anyi	I am saying this because there are many such Christians in our midst.
27. <i>Joseph na Nicodemus thought that what will make up for their relationship with Jesus bu ije nie ya.</i>	Joseph na Nicodemus chere na ha ga-edozi okwu di n'etiti ha na Jesu site na ije nie ya.	Joseph and Nicodemus thought that what would help them make up their relationship with Jesus would be to bury him.
28. Ọ buluzia ya bu bridge wechighalu mmadu back to God.	Ọ buluzia ya bu akwa mmili wechighalu mmadu azu ebe Chukwu no.	He then became the bridge that brought man back to God.
29. Makana e nyego anyi criteria of going to heaven.	Makana e nyego anyi usoro e ji eje enuigwe.	Because we have been given the criteria for going to heaven.
30. Ka ọ ghalu ibu anyi nwesia relationship with God mgbe anyi no n'owa.	Ka ọ ghalu ibu anyi na Chukwu nwesia mmekolita mgbe anyi no n'owa...	In order that after our relationship with God on earth.

3.2 Analysis of the data

Having transcribed the corpus and given their Igbo and English equivalents, we will in what follows analyse some of the utterances in order to determine the semantic effects of their English segments on the Igbo audience/listeners. Precisely, we will analyze five utterances as examples:

i) In utterance (1) **ihe ọbuna ga-eweta nkewa**, *should be avoided*, the first segment is in Igbo and the Igbo listeners understood the meaning. The second segment is completely in English and the Igbo monolingual listeners who did not know the meaning of the verbal phrase ‘should be avoided’ were obliged to ask those beside them what that meant. By the time these monolingual listeners were seeking the clarifications from their other co-listeners, the preaching was still going on and this constituted a distraction to the other listeners at the environment.

ii) In utterance (2) *unity bu strength, division bu evil*, it is only the verb *bu* ‘is’ that is in Igbo, every other word is in English. What would be the fate of the Igbo monolingual listeners in the audience who could not decipher the meanings of *unity, strength, division and evil*? They would certainly be lost.

iii) In utterance (3), *our interest in them bu ka Chineke mee ka whatever they do dili ha mma*, the English and Igbo segments are interwoven in the utterance such that an English segment started the speech, followed by an Igbo segment and then again by another Igbo segment. The Igbo monolingual listeners could only understand the Igbo expressions used in the preaching but not the global meaning of the message, because of the English phrases and expressions.

iv) In utterance (15), **Paul di aso na-agwa anyi** *that Christ is the head of the church*, the first segment in Igbo was understood by the Igbo monolinguals in the audience, but not the second segment in English. In this case, there was partial comprehension of the total message by the Igbo monolinguals of the audience.

In utterance (30), **ka o ghalu ibu anyi nwesia relationship mgbe anyi no n’uwa**, every word in the clause is in Igbo except the word *relationship* which is in English. An Igbo monolingual listener who did not know the meaning of the English word ‘relationship’ could not get the total meaning of the message.

An English monolingual listener who finds him/herself in the type of audience as described above in this paper will experience exactly the same situation as the Igbo monolingual. The only difference is that whereas the English monolingual listener picks English segments and seeks clarifications for Igbo words/expressions, the Igbo monolingual seeks clarifications for English words/expressions. It is only in the fourth figure of Vanoye’s (1973) situation of communication that code-mixing can work effectively because the communicating partners have good command of both codes.

In view of the analyses so far, some of the most striking questions that come to mind are: Are there no Igbo equivalents that can replace the English segments in the corpus? Why do preachers combine English and Igbo in one utterance when equivalents are readily available as exemplified in the corpus analyzed above? However, there are situations that task the competence of the native Igbo speaker (for example, when the right word in Igbo is not readily available as in expressions like):

- ‘pamper’ (in the context of (6) above)
- ‘freedom’ (in the context of (8) above)
- ‘automatically’ (in the context of (10) above)
- ‘precise’ (in the context of (12) above)
- ‘temple’ (in the context of (14) above), etc.

Nevertheless, a well prepared preacher should have organized themselves well in advance and would have found expressions for the seemingly difficult English words/expressions even if it means paraphrasing in Igbo as Jakobson (1973:81-2) rightly posits with respect to the possibility of translating human experience from one language into another that *Toute*

expérience cognitive peut être rendue et classée dans n'importe quelle langue existante. Là où il y a des déficiences, la terminologie sera modifiée et amplifiée par des emprunts, des calques, des néologismes, des déplacements sémantiques, et, finalement, par des circonlocutions. [Every human experience can be expressed and classified in any existing language. Where there are deficiencies, the terminology will be modified and amplified by borrowing, calquing, by neologism, by semantic re-organization and by circumlocution]. {Translation ours}. Fortunately, Igbo linguists and grammarians have come a long way in constituting metalanguage lexical lists and expressions which may be handy and useful to preachers and translators.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

In this paper, we discussed the communicative effectiveness or otherwise of code-mixing by bilingual religious preachers vis-à-vis their rural Igbo mixed audience (literate and non-literate). The code-mixing of words/phrases of Igbo and English in the same utterance by the preachers provoked discordant reactions by the Igbo monolinguals (referred to as non-literate) of the audience who were confused by the cacophonous combination of elements of the two codes by preachers, which made little or no sense to them. This is because for monolinguals, code-mixing truncates communication and hinders the global comprehension of the message of the preachers. From our observation, a preacher code-mixes when they cannot readily find the appropriate words/phrases in the language being used or the appropriate translation for the word/phrase needed. Code-mixing can also occur as a reflex action of bilinguals. This may result in the loss of the non-dominant language.

The paper recommends that preachers should prepare their sermons/homilies with utmost care and well in advance because according to Onumajuru (1998:84), *To speak Igbo without code-switching or mixture of Igbo and English words requires long training and effort akin to those of interpreters, preachers, clergymen and broadcasters.* The preachers should choose the language of the communication and limit their preaching to one language at a time. If it is a mixed audience (literate and non-literate listeners), the preacher should preach in one language and then summarize in the other without necessarily code-mixing elements of the two languages in the same utterance. Igbo linguists should endeavour to encourage native speakers to speak Igbo correctly by providing adequate linguistic information and current dictionaries of the language.

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