Human Nature Research Publisher

Original Article   **http://hnpublisher.com**

Computer-Mediated Turn Allocation Technique: A Veritable Tool Employ by Yoruba/English Bilinguals on the Internet

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Yoruba-English bilinguals organize their thoughts to be mutually intelligible in their conversations on the Internet. Specifically, the research investigates how Yoruba-English bilinguals apply *"Turn Allocation Technique"* as a veritable tool that makes conversations on the Internet meaningful which is the essence of communication, and also investigates the occurrences of bilingualism by-products such as, code-mixing and hybridization on Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. The data are obtained from a survey on social media platforms with a view to achieving an adequate understanding of some aspects of *"Turn Allocation Technique"* in the conversations of Yoruba-English bilinguals. Different interactions on the Internet were chosen. Therefore, we examined how the subjects code-switch and code-mix while taking turn to communicate on the Internet. A context-driven sociolinguistic model is employed as our guide in analyzing the data. This is Harold Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology of Language. In employing ethnomethodology of language, we tried to see the conventions of society, and the rules which people use to place themselves and others in social contexts. The study reveals that interlocutors take turn to chat unlike an SMS, they exhibited great dexterity by using the two languages together in a sentence without its meaning being distorted, and the interactants on employ 'Turn Allocation Technique' to organize their conversations so that there would be mutual intelligibility. It is established in this study that the contact between the speakers of English and Yoruba has led to bilingualism which has its consequences. Some of the consequences of bilingualism are code-switching/code-mixing, interference, hybridization, etc.

Keywords: Hybridization, Code-mixing, Ethnomethodology, Turn taking.

Introduction

In all human endeavours, language is very crucial and vital. It is the most important human feature that distinguishes human beings from other animals i.e. it is species-specific. The importance of language to the sustenance and cooperate existence of the human race cannot be over flogged. Overtly or covertly, human language can be used to express anything and everywhere, whether real or imagined (Thorne 2008:47). This view is a marker that exhibits the creative feature of the human communicative process in producing limitless number of sentences.

Meanwhile, language does not exist in vacuum because the existence of a language presupposes the existence of a society using it. Therefore, the most important heritage left behind by the British at the end

of their colonial administration in Nigeria is the English language. The existence of English language in Nigeria is purely a case of Language Contact Situation.

Therefore, code-mixing/code-switching and hybridization are common strategies for communication in a bilingual society. Mayherehoff (2006: 239) asserts that code switching and code mixing are linguistic resources available to people who speak more than one language variety. Therefore, they are traits in the speech pattern of the average bilingual in our world today. Leung (2010:417), in his remarks on the code-switching/code-mixing and phenomena asserts that;

> *'The code-mixing phenomenon cannot be separated from the fact that many people these days are bilingual, trilingual and even multi-lingual. The advancement of transportation and communication increases local diversity and global connectiveness. People of different languages and different cultures come into contact constantly. Managing linguistic and cultural variations has now become vital to our lives. Apparently code-mixing has become socially and communicatively unavoidable and it helps us develop and improve relationships and enable us to adjust and adapt in the environment we are in.'*

From Leung's assertion, it is clear that no language can occur in isolation. There must be a group of people using the language. Therefore, people of different races and languages come into constant contact through trade, inter-marriage, immigration, travels, etc.

Statement of the Problem

Majority of the early works on code alternation are on face-to-face and written communications, while, language alternation on social media like Facebook, WhatsApp is not well researched. Therefore, analytical framework used for the purpose of this study is usually the one developed for spoken language alternation. This serves as a catalyst for these researchers to investigate the conversations on the Internet by Yoruba-English bilinguals.

Aim and Objectives

The main focus of this research is to investigate how Yoruba-English bilinguals use *"Turn Allocation Technique"* to organize their conversations on the Internet. The specific objectives are to:

(i)   identify the changes taking place in the structures of Yoruba and English as a result of their contact, and

(ii)   investigate the linguistic implications of the co-existence of these languages on the Internet users.

A review of Related Concepts

Language Alternation

Language alternation (L.A) is well known in linguistics as code alternation. L.A is the alternative use of two languages. In linguistics, L.A occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages in a context (Nordquist, 2019). L.A is a consequence of bilingualism. Therefore, majority of the common linguistic phenomena in bilingualism are code-switching /code-mixing and hybridization which are the major concern of this study.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is simply put as a demonstrated ability of an individual to engage in prolonged discussion concerning activities of daily life in more than one language. It is also plausible to say that bilingualism is the ability to produce complete and meaningful utterances in two languages (Bamisaye 2006).

In addition, it can be seen as a practice of alternatively using two languages. What makes a person become bilingual is usually regular contact with people who speak another language. Dada (2011) says

such contact, for the individual, may come from inter-marriage, immigration, trade, religious conversion, travels, residence in a foreign or bilingual community, naturalisation or even through deliberate learning. While, societal bilingualism is acquired through linguistic super imposition, colonisation, amalgamation, immigration, emigration, religious invasion, political conquest and decree though national policy, among others. (Grosjean, 1982).

Hybridization vs Code-mixing

Code-mixing is technically referred to as alternative use of two codes at the word level (Asghar, 2019), while language hybridization is as a result of constant code-mixing. Often time, the grammar or structure of one language is applied to the vocabulary of another. So when two or more languages are frequently mixed, consequently, a new hybrid variety of language emerged. This new variety to some extent shares the features of the two languages but it has its own independent grammar and vocabulary that may not match any of the mixed languages. The Internet is awash with such grammar and vocabulary by Yoruba-English bilinguals.

In Nigerian context, such third code which is popularly referred to as 'amulumala' while Asghar (2019) says 'verbal salad' is used for English and Yoruba mixing/switching and hybridization.

Theoretical Framework

Harold Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology of Language

The Greek root of Ethnomethodology literally means the methods people use. The approach was developed by Harold Garfinkel who coined the term. It is the study of ordinary members of society in the everyday situation in which they use common sense and knowledge. Basically, it is about human communication in context. Ethnomethodology is based on the belief that human interaction takes place within a consensus, and interaction is not possible without this consensus (i.e. mutual intelligibility through agreement and understanding). The consensus is part of what holds society together and is made up of the norms for behaviours that people carry around with them (Garfinkel, 1967). People using a language are conscious of what norms they use; therefore, ethnomethodology is designed to uncover these norms and behaviours.

Therefore, Garfinkel (2002) suggests that EM and Conversation Analysis (CA) overlap in terms of interests and projects. CA studies must adhere to the foundational principles of EM studies in order to be considered properly ethnomethodological (Psathas, 1995).

Consequently, ethnomethodologists advocate no formal methods of enquiry, insisting that the research method be dictated by the nature of the phenomenon that is being studied (Garfinkel, 2002 and Anne, 2002). Mostly, they rely on Conversation Analysis (CA) to gather data.

Conversation Analysis

Conversation is a talk or speech between two or more people during which people tend to exchange information and ideas. It is an interactive communication especially an informal one. In the light of this, Thornbury and Slade (2006: 25) posit that "conversation is the kind of speech that happens informally, symmetrically, and for the purposes of establishing and maintaining social ties".

 When people engage in conversation, they must adhere strictly to the rules of etiquette/norms guiding conversation in such context. These are certain norms/rules which govern conversation. These rules arise from the cooperative principle. Failure to comply with these rules may lead to communication breakdown.

These norms vary from people to people and culture to culture. The norms are not all universal because people have different cultural background. There are norms about interactions, that is, certain norm relates to the control of the number of people who can talk at once. For instance, when one person is

speaking, others keep quiet in order to comprehend whatever he is passing across. Then, others can take turn to talk thereafter.

Turn Allocation Technique

Turn taking is an organization of discourse/conversation where interactants take turn to chat. Sidnell (2007) says while the structure is universally general, turn-taking conventions vary from culture to culture and from community to community. Turn taking is a veritable tool to organize conversation (Hayashi, 2012:167).

In conversation from culture to culture certain procedures follow, i.e. we take turn to talk. There are certain patterns following turn-taking in general. These are:

1. **Speaker-change occurs**: a single speaker does not continuously talk indefinitely; instead, one person talks for a moment and another person takes turn after him. This could either be that the current speaker selects the next speaker or the next speaker self-selects.
2. **One speaker speaks overwhelmingly**: one person talks for a long period of time while others stop talking and turn listeners. For instance, the presidential speech or the pastor's sermon is typical example here.
3. **Overlapping:** However, in spite of this overwhelming tendency, occurrence of more than one speaker at a time is common but brief because it could lead to chaotic situation.
4. Exchanges of **turn with no gap and no overlap** are also common i.e. there might be no gap between speakers and listeners – this enhances the conversation to flow.

By implication, this is relevant to this study because users on the platforms such as; WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. take turn to chat.

Methodology

The Research Design

The data were obtained from a survey on the social media platform (e.g. Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp) with a view to achieving an adequate understanding of some aspects of *"Turn Allocation Technique"* in the conversations of Yoruba-English bilinguals. Different interactions on WhatsApp**,** Facebook, etc will be chosen. The data were gathered for a period of six months for wider coverage, objectivity and reliability. Therefore, the researcher examined code alternation and hybridization, reasons that motivate Yoruba-English bilinguals on the Internet to employ the two phenomena, and how the linguistic context has effect on what the subjects think while communicating on the Internet.

Method of Data Elicitation

Population

Considering the population used for this study, we realized that there are certain norms/rules the interlocutors on the Internet follow in organizing their conversations order to give meanings to words in context in the premise of computer-mediated communication.

Therefore, different forums on the Internet such as political forums, sport forums, family setting, etc were chosen for the purpose of this study. Simple random sampling method was used in selecting the forums for it guaranteed any of the subjects to be chosen without prejudice. The use of language by the selected cyberrats was considered to be reflective of most users who had access to the two languages. In the light of this, they are representative in nature. They generally represent almost all Yoruba-English bilinguals on the Internet.

Research Instrument

Essentially in any society, people are expected to interact with one another. Such interactions form the basis for the instruments used in collecting data. Language is not studied in isolation but within a social

context, as such, language cannot be divorced from the society using that language. In this context, the society is the different forums selected for the investigation. The socio-dynamics of the internet always influence language use on it. The asynchronous and synchronous strategies employed on the Internet were grouped and tagged 'chat 1', 'chat 2', 'chat 3' and so on based on the nature of discussion between/among, as the case may be, the internet users.

Method of Data Analysis

Qualitative method of data analysis was employed in this work. This is where discussion and observation are of great importance. Therefore, this becomes necessary as a result of the data and the nature of the data itself which are series of interactions. A context-driven sociolinguistic model was employed as our guide in analyzing the data. This is Harold Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology of Language. In employing ethnomethodolody of language, we tried to see the conventions of society, and the rules which people use to place themselves and others in social contexts.

Data Analysis

Yoruba-English interlocutors on the Internet employ *"Turn Allocation Technique"* effectively and efficiently on their day-to-day activities as evident in the general patterns of turn-taking below:

Speaker-Change Occurs

This occurs when current speaker selects the next speaker or the next speaker self-selects. The data here is a group discussion on Facebook.

<div align="center">

Chat 1

04 August, 2015
</div>

Admin- happy new year to all members on ds platform.
      Ara re la má a fi ṣ'ọdún náà. (It shall be well with us this year)
      Sec, when is our thanksgiving service

Sec-   **Àmín oooh** (Amen)

    1ˢᵗ Sunday of the year, my admin

In chat 1, the current speaker (i.e. the admin) selects who (i.e. the sec) speaks after him. This serves as a reminder to all members on the platform that their thanksgiving service comes up on the said date.

However, the next speaker can also self-select as illustrated below:

<div align="center">

Chat 2
04 August, 2015
</div>

Admin-   happy new year to all members on ds platform,
      ara re la má a fi ṣ'ọdún náà. (It shall be well with us this year)
      Sec, when is our thanksgiving service
Sec-   **Àmín oooh** "Amen" 1ˢᵗ Sunday of the year, my admin

Tolu-   **Àmín**, **l'órúko Jésù** "Amen, in Jesus' name"

Ade-   Amen
Deni-   thanks admin
Femi- **àmín,** may God keep us till then.
    Iyán la ma jẹ lọ́jọ́ náà o. "It is pounded yam we will eat on the day."

The data above shows clearly that it is only the **'sec'** selected by the **'admin'** but all other members on the platform self-select themselves. Self-selecting themselves adds colour and more information to the message passed by the admin. More importantly, most of the conversations on **WhatsApp** platform occur

between two interlocutors. Therefore, the next speaker self-selects without being selected by the current speaker because conversation is not a one-way traffic. e.g.

Chat 3
27 June, 2016

Bímbó	**Adélolá**
Good morning, my good sister	
	Same here dear
Sis, I miss **ur ẹ̀fọ́ rírò** on **ìgbèmọ̀** rice	
(I miss your vegetable soup on a brand of local rice)	
Don't worry, u get them in abundance wen u come 4 hos.	
(Don't worry, you will get them in abundance when you come for holiday)	

One speaker speaks overwhelmingly

This is when one person talks for a long period of time while others stop talking and turn listeners. It is technically referred to as one person continues to talk e.g. sermon, president speech, etc. The data here is a group discussion on **WhatsApp**.

Chat 4

17 January, 2018

Ògúnrótìmí ___ MOUNTAIN TOP LIFE DAILY DEVOTIONAL
SATURDAY, 13 JANUARY 2018
THEME: MAKE YOURSELF A FRIEND OF GOD (1)
FIRE SCRIPTURE: James2:14-23
Memory verse: Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.
Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. James: 4:8
Outline:
God cherishes those who are His friends because
they understand Him through their standing relationship.
Imagine the kind of relationship that Enoch enjoyed with God
that had to take him away in the bodily from earth
to continue to enjoy the relationship in heaven…
God is ready to reveal His secret to His friends
____ **Olúwa á sọ àwa náà di ẹyin ojú rẹ̀**
l'órúkọ Jésù "May God turn us too to apple of His eyes in Jesus' name"

The sermon could come in form of audio/video or could be written, and the length is determined by the speaker. Yoruba-English bilinguals on **WhatsApp** use such messages to exhort themselves, and do not necessarily deserve any response just like in the real life situation.

Overlapping

This is the occurrence of more than one speaker at a time, but it is brief. It may lead to incoherent communication on **WhatsApp**. Therefore, it may fall short of cooperative principle because no sense can be made out of the conversation.

Chat 5

29 April, 2014

Dèjì	**Ògá**
Ògá, money is **d kókó** now, sir	Even the same colour
(Sir, money is now the most important thing).	

Here, the two elliptical messages were sent the same time. Therefore, there is no correlation between the two statements. Dèjì is talking about money that is important while his 'ògá' (master) is talking about colour. One can only deduce that they are discussing something to be bought or made. However, once the speakers recognize this, they make amend to repair the speech flow, and this enhances the conversation to flow again.

<div align="center">

Chat 6

29 April, 2014

</div>

Dèjì	**Ògá**
	I know money is the real thing now but I get my colour preference

Colour **wo lẹ** prefer

(which colour do you prefer)

It is evident from the data above how the Yoruba-English bilinguals on the Internet employed *Turn Allocation Technique* to organize their conversations in order to be meaningful. By employing *Turn Allocation Technique*, they have avoided being chaotic.

Findings

The study reveals that conversation on the Internet is always a dialogue where interlocutors take turn to chat unlike an SMS which its responses are not immediate, and overlapping can occur here unlike SMS.

The interactants on the Internet employ *Turn Allocation Technique* to organize their conversations so that there would be mutual intelligibility. Also, the interlocutors exhibited great skills in using the two codes discussed in this study, i.e. Yoruba and English. They exhibited great dexterity by using the two languages together in a sentence without its meaning being distorted.

In most cases, the interlocutors initiate conversation in English language irrespective of their relationship. Thereby, making English language the matrix-language on the Internet by Yoruba/English bilinguals.

Conclusion

From the data analyzed, the interlocutors switched at will between Yoruba and English. This showed flexibility in the way the interlocutors employed the two languages viz-a-viz Yoruba and English to leave people who do not understand either Yoruba or English out of their conversations. However, students especially should be warned against the danger inherent in switching if they turn it to a habit.

This study is just a tip of what obtains as far as computer-mediated communication is concerned. As a result, further researches are expected to comb the phenomena of code-switching/code-mixing in WhatsApp/Facebook conversations.

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