

Correlation between Social Factors and the Occurrence of Code Switching: A Critical Review

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Abstract: *The paper aims to investigate correlation between social factors and code switching in bilingual and/or multilingual societies. The data were taken from two articles discussing the existence of code switching in two countries, one in Brussel, Belgium and the other one in Campus Kiswahili in the University of Dar es Salaam. The data were analyzed by contrasting the two articles in the form of critical review. The study indicates that code switching is correlated to social factors. The first article indicates a negative correlation since code switching occurs in between different groups. The second article indicates a positive correlation since code switching is produced within group. In this group, one of the switched languages has been accepted as matrix language and the other as an embedded language.*

Keywords: code switching, social factor, bilingual society, multilingual society

1. Introduction

The existence of a number of languages in a multilingual society gives an opportunity to the community to make choices in switching from one language to another or mixing the two languages within the same interaction, so it enables the community to interact in different languages.

Community in Brussel, Belgium and Campus Kiswahili in the University of Dar es Salaam are not exception to this phenomenon of switch since people in these two communities are facilitated with more than two languages (French and Dutch in Brussel and English and Swahili in University of Dar es Salaam). This indicates that those communities are bilingual speakers, so it is very frequent that in their daily encounters they sometimes speak more than one language during the ongoing interaction. The questions are “Why does it happen?” and “What is actually the function of language in human life?”

To answer these questions it should be kept in mid that language does not only constitute a means of communication but also mainly functions as a strategy to negotiate interpersonal and social relationship between two interactants. The speaker and listener agree with both the meaning of words (referential meaning) and social values (social meaning) attached to the choice of expression to create an effective communication (Sitoto, 1995 cited in Blom and Gumperz, 1972). As a strategy to negotiate interpersonal and social relationship, code switching is closely related to social factor to see whether the speakers involving in an interaction have a high affinity (solidarity) or low affinity (power/difference) (Hodge and Kress, 1988).

As a language and social phenomenon, code switching is an interesting topic to discuss. Therefore, the writer in this paper is interested in presenting some points on the issues of

the occurrence of code switching in relation to social factors in the form of a critical review by contrasting two articles. The first article is entitled “French-Dutch Code Switching in Brussels: Social Factors Explaining Its Disappearance”. The second one is entitled “Code Switching and Exclusivity of Social Identities: Some Data from Campus Kiswahili”.

2. Discussion

The first article talks about a negative correlation between intra-sentential code switching and social factors, that is, the disappearance of code switching in Brussels is caused by the puristic influence of standard Dutch and the tension of the two major linguistic groups (Dutch and French) in society. The subjects under research are the indigenous inhabitants of Brussels who are reputed for code switching between local varieties of French and Dutch. The data show that there is correlation between intra-sentential code switching and the following factors, i. e. those who (a) have good command of standard Dutch do not mix very often; (b) go to Dutch speaking schools switch significantly less than those who go to French speaking schools; (c) have active proficiency in Dutch switch less than those who have active proficiency in French. All of these factors have a negative influence on intra-sentential code switching between the two groups.

On the other hand, the second article, shows a positive correlation between code switching and social factors, i. e. the existence of code switching in the University of Dar es Salaam is supposed to construct the exclusivity of social identity of its users. The subjects under study are the speakers of English and Swahili, who are the teaching staff members of the University of Dar es Salaam. The study shows that code switching in Campus Kiswahili is different from the other English-interfered Swahili variants because of the grammatical and lexical correctness of English. This proves that the speakers mix intra-sententially two high

variants, that is, good Swahili and good English. Whenever they switch, they mostly use stylistic choice to indicate the exclusivity of their social identity. Such an identity is in relation to the specific social history of the speech community.

To look at the presentation of the first article, the data in this article are based on actual research with particular subjects and certain purpose through certain method which is underlain by different relevant theories. Therefore, such a finding is more reliable and valid. On the other hand, the study in the second article is less reliable and valid because the presented evaluation is not based on actual research. The given examples are neither based on specific subjects with certain purposes nor based on particular method. What the writer did was only to present a description of the phenomenon of codeswitching in Campus Kiswahili which is viewed from different theories. Thus, if it had been relied on the actual research, the term "specific social history" in relation to codeswitching might have been clearer.

In relation to the background of codeswitching in both articles, the writer agrees that understanding on the existence of codeswitching should be related to social history. This is supported by Heller (1988) that the nature and meaning of codeswitching is only derived from our understanding of the larger social context and of the exact nature of the social situation and social relationship. In relation to code switching and social context in Brussels, it is said that in general Brussel and Belgium have been bilingual since 1960s in which both French and Dutch were used not only as official languages but also as the languages used in administration, schools, and public services. However, the two languages compete one another to be more dominant (but Dutch is in a better position). This is because they are spoken by two different groups. Moreover, historically, none of them is as an indigenous language, so each of them wants to be a standard language which then can function as the matrix language" (Myers-Scotton 1993). Such a case is potential to affect socio-political situation which prevents the communities switching from one language to another. Thus, these two communities tend to have a low affinity (Hodge and Kress, 1988) since they compete each other to be more dominant and powerful. Consequently, they tend to create differences and maximum social distance in daily encounter.

The above case is different from the one happening in the University of Dar es Salaam. In this campus, the community is not only bilingual (English and Swahili) but also multilingual (English, Swahili and ethnic/native languages) in which Campus Kiswahili is only spoken in informal talk among staff members. Although both Swahili and English are also official languages, they do not compete each other as French and Dutch do in Brussels instead of being in a complementary distribution. This is simply because Swahili has been accepted as the "matrix language", while English is the "embedded language" (Myers-Scotton 1993). Those two languages are spoken simultaneously within group (in-group) among people who are good at both languages. This is simply because code switching in this context is only produced by particular highly educated community, that is, educated people who have a higher level knowledge of

English (grammatically and lexically). This context enables them to produce code switching easily in order to create a good interpersonal and social relationship which makes this small-scale community have a high affinity (Hodge and Kress, 1988) since social distance is minimal, so solidarity is easy to build up. Such a phenomenon is different from other English-variants of Swahili which is mostly spoken by people who have a lower level knowledge of English.

In dealing with the existence of intra-sentential code switching in Brussels, the unmarked choice (that is, the identification of more than one social identity in a speech community in which each identity is identified by different codes) is unpredicted since the situation as bilingual communities here is not quite stable anymore. This is because each group shows strong attachment to a single group (Myers-Scotton 1993). In such a situation, it is difficult for the speakers in Brussels to identify themselves in more than one social identity because they only try to encode their identity in one standard variety (either Dutch or French). In other words, unmarked choice is rejected as far as it is seen to constitute a claim on co-membership (Heller 1988). The same thing also happens to marked choice (that is, to switch in order to negotiate different rights and obligations balance) in which it might be inapplicable, since such a code can increase either social distance if it encodes anger or willingness to make a power differential prominent (Scotton 1988).

On the contrary, the unmarked choice in the University of Dar es Salaam can easily occur among the university staff members. This is because it is produced within-group in the community which is bilingually and/or multilingually stable. They use unmarked choice in order to identify themselves in more than one social identity in the current exchange, that is, to show their ability to use high level of English and to affirm an "African" national in Swahili. This is supported by Myers Scotton (1993) that the speakers use unmarked choice when they have social profiles encompassing the identities associated with two languages and has curiosity to signal these identities. Marked choice might also be applicable in this context because it decreases social distance since it is indexical of a relationship of solidarity, given the normative matrix of associations between varieties and social meanings within the community (Scotton 1988).

3. Conclusion

Both articles emphasizes that code switching is strongly correlated to social factors. The first article shows a negative correlation since code switching occurs between two different groups (inter-group) in the unstable bilingual communities. Both groups compete to make their language to be a standard language. Each of them wants to be more prestigious than the other, so such a competition potentially creates conflicts. Thus, neither unmarked nor marked choice is predicted. On the other hand, the second article shows a positive correlation since code switching is produced within group (in-group), among highly educated people in a stable bilingual and/or multilingual community. These two communities have accepted one of these languages as the "matrix language" (Swahili) and the other as the "embedded language" (English), so they do not compete to create any

conflicts. This situation enables the community to produce both unmarked and marked choices in order to show exclusivity of their social identities. In short, to understand the existence of code switching in those communities, it needs to understand the social context and social relationship in relation to the languages they speak.

4. Future Scope

The topic of this study covers the area of sociolinguistic, pragmatic, or linguistic approach. Sociolinguistic approach investigates the occurrence of code switching and or code mixing based on the change of factors such as setting, participants, and topics; pragmatic approach tries to explore the active role of the speaker in choosing the way he/she wants his/her discourse to be situated in order to create certain effects on the listener, and linguistic approach might be taken into account if the data create issue on syntactic constraints. Thus, the future researchers can focus on one of these three areas of interest to do research on code switching as a communication strategy used by interactants such as communication either among students at schools and universities or among people in a certain community.

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