



The extent of code switching on the mastery of English-speaking skills in selected schools in Mbooni west sub-county

Kereu Kwamboka Robina^{1*}, Dr. Evelyn E. Simiyu², Dr. Florence Mmbwanga²

¹Department of Languages and Linguistics, School of Humanities and Social sciences, Machakos University, Kenya

² Lecturer, Department of Linguistics and Languages, Machakos University.

*Corresponding Author

Kereu Kwamboka Robina

Department of Languages and Linguistics, School of Humanities and Social sciences, Machakos University, Kenya.

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to establish the extent of code switching in the mastery of English language in secondary schools in Mbooni West sub county. The extent of code switching is based on language use by both the teachers and the students in the classroom setup. The study applied Communication Accommodation Theory developed by Giles and Coupland. The study adopted a descriptive Survey Research design. The area of study was 15 selected schools in Mbooni west Sub County. The methods of collecting data were: an observation schedule, teachers and students' questionnaires. The target population for this study was the teachers and students in 41 public schools in Mbooni West Sub County. The sample size of the study was 300 students and 60 teachers of English from 15 schools that were sampled through purposive and simple random sampling methods. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied in the analysis of the data. The findings of the study revealed that code switching enhances the teaching/learning of English-speaking skills. The teachers use code switching for curriculum access, for classroom management discourse and for interpersonal relationships. Learners used code switching as a communicative strategy, for affective functions and for socio pragmatic functions.

Keywords: Code Switching, Extent of Code Switching, English Language.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, English is taught as a compulsory subject and is also used as Medium of instructions (MOI). Learning English involves all four language skills which are fundamental to speak and understand a language. These four skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. In fact, Brown (2000) notes that to become proficient in the English language, learners must acquire an adequate understanding and ability for the four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, (2000) note that among these language skills, writing is the most difficult because it requires a higher level of productive language control. In these vain teachers use pedagogical practices, such as chorus teaching, repetition, rote-learning, code-switching and safe talk, this undermines the teachers' effort to teach and the students' effort to learn. Furthermore, teachers tend to do most of the talking, while the students remain silent or passive, during most of the classroom interactions. Probyn (2001 & 2005) suggests that students may feel alienated from the subject content, when it is not expressed in their mother tongue or a language familiar to them. Since Mbooni west provides a setting for English teaching with learners with diverse linguistic competence, it is expected that teachers develop strategies of teaching language skills. The objectives of teaching English in schools is to enable the learners to communicate fluently, independently and accurately in English Language in everyday life. However, that has not been fully realised as most learners lack speaking skills as they get used to code switching thus impeding their fluency and independency in language. This implies that when they leave secondary school for

higher learning institutions, they lack the skills that are needed in academic discourse and writing. It implies that Secondary school learners join higher institutions of learning without the competence required in the English language. This problem is attributed to inadequate mastery of linguistic skills and incomplete acquisition of English language.

2. Theoretical framework

The study applied Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) developed by Giles and Coupland (1991). The theory is about convergence and divergence in accommodation, and states that communicators are likely to accommodate the person they are speaking with by adopting their mode of communication. Accommodation is performed for seeking approval, inclusion, affiliation, or interpersonal goals," while non-accommodation serves to highlight differences between people (Soliz, Thorson, and Rittenour, 2009). Myers-Scotton (1999) states that the phenomenon of code-switching persists because interlocutors are required to play more than one role, participate in more than one single social relationship at any one time, and also because they belong to more than one single group within the society itself. Therefore, in the case of the classroom the interlocutors are able to regulate the relations among themselves through the use of code-switching and different code choices. This then implies that CS is rule- governed and, therefore, it is not "a deficit to be stigmatized nor is it a sign of semilingualism. Moreover, there are linguistic constraints that govern the notion of CS, and legitimize its existence, such as the equivalence constraint compounded (cf. Poplack, 1981), whereby the switch is observed to occur at a point

in the sentence where it does not violate the grammar of either language. The linguistic constraints suggest that CS is not a sign of interference, while recent sociolinguistic evidence suggests that it is a meaningful conversational resource used to define social relations and to enhance communication. It is against this observation that the proposed study looks at CS in a neutral perspective.

3. Research methodology

The study area for this study was Mbooni West sub-county. Mbooni west Sub County is an area located in Makueni County. Mbooni West sub-county is near many ethnic communities that use different languages; schools from this region also admit students of different ethnic backgrounds who speak different languages. It is thus supposed that these students do code switch due to their different first languages. The study adopted descriptive survey design merges both qualitative and quantitative methods. Descriptive survey research as a primarily exploratory research is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations (Cresswell, 2012, 2013). This design was appropriate in this study because it allowed collection and examination of in-depth data on the issue of CS in language classes and its influence on the teaching and learning of English. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were applied in the collection of data on teachers and learners perception on CS. The target population is the larger group to which the researcher hopes to generalize the findings. The target population for this study was the teachers and students of English in secondary schools in Mbooni West Sub County. Mbooni West Sub-County has a total of forty five (45) secondary schools. These comprises of four (4) private schools and forty one (41) public schools (MOE, Mbooni West Sub County). This study targeted teachers of English and students in all the forty one (41) public secondary schools. 300 students and 60 teachers of English from 15 schools of the 41 schools were sampled through purposive and simple random sampling methods. The researcher developed questionnaires for both the teachers and students together with the observation schedule which eased the data collection process.

4. Findings and discussion

The study sought to find out the extent of code switching on the mastery of English language spoken skills in selected schools in Mbooni West sub-county, Kenya.

Table 1

Code Switching enhances the teaching/learning of English speaking skills

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	38	63
Agree	10	17
Neutral	6	10
Disagree	4	7
Strongly Disagree	2	3
Total	60	100

Table 1 above reveals that majority of the teacher (63%) strongly agree that CS enhances the teaching and learning of English

speaking skills while 17% of the teachers agreed. Cumulatively 70% of the teachers acknowledge that CS enhances the teaching/learning of English speaking skills. These findings were attributed to the teachers themselves who initiate the use of CS in teaching English lessons. Most teachers noted that generally among the skills that are taught, speaking skills are interactive and involve oral presentations thus they promote the use of more than one language in an utterance.

However, the teachers were quick to note that CS is mostly used in the teaching and learning of speaking skills. These findings are however contrary to the language policy in Kenya. The language policy identifies language use as follows: official language- English and Kiswahili, national language- Kiswahili and mother tongue-community language or language of the catchment area. The current findings are in line with Domalewska (2015) who observes that when code switching is used, it is based on the processes of assimilation, accommodation, and developing meaningful cognitive sets. The respondents reported that the use Kiswahili and Kamba in English classrooms was not only for classroom management, but for language analysis, presenting rules that governed grammar, discussing cross-cultural issues, giving instructions or prompts, explaining errors, and checking for comprehension. CS therefore as a resource helps learners to understand and comprehend their lessons, which improves their performance during examinations. It is also a tool that increases learner participation in the classroom, which in turn is a necessary prerequisite for academic achievement and cognitive development.

The results in Table 11 further shows that 6(10%) of the teacher respondents involved in the study were neutral about the statement that code switching enhances teaching/learning of English language. This was attributed to teachers' lack of awareness of the language policy. The findings in Table 11 also shows that 7% of the teachers disagree that CS enhances teaching/learning of English language while 3%. These findings are closely attributed to teachers whose schools focus on the language policy that emphasizes on the use of English language in schools. A group of these teachers argued that CS may lead to corrupting the use of English language; which could eventually lead to code mixing resulting into unstable forms like Sheng'.

The study also sought to investigate whether students use CS during the oral presentations. The respondents were to respond to the statement that "students use CS during oral presentations". Regarding the use of oral presentations, the findings of the study are revealed in table 2:

Table 2

Code switching during oral presentations

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	40	67
Agree	10	17
Neutral	6	10
Disagree	2	3
Strongly Disagree	2	3
Total	60	100

Table 2 reveals that the majority 40(67%) of the teacher respondents strongly agreed that students use code switching during oral presentations. Oral presentations include (debates, interviews, and dialogues among others). The data in table 12 further shows that 10(17%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that students CS during oral presentations. This implies that 50(74%) cumulatively acknowledged the claim that students use CS during oral presentations. The above findings of the study resonate to the fact that CS in a natural phenomenon that is likely to occur in a multilingual setting and for practical use of language both in class and outside class settings. Moreover, learners resort to compensate for their lack of language competence by use of CS. These findings are in line with (Jenkins, 2006) who argues that CS and code mixing can no longer be considered interference errors or fossilization, but as “bilingual resources”.

This finding contradicts with the school language policies that many schools have set. In most schools students are expected to speak English except during Kiswahili lesson. The study therefore observes that as much as it is compulsory to use English as a medium of instruction for all academic programmes, code-switching is still prevalent in the classroom as seen during an oral presentation in English classes. The teachers reported that CS saved time and made students feel more confident and comfortable during oral presentations. Moreover, the use of CS helps students with lower performance to be able to follow the lessons better than using English only. The findings of the study also reveal that CS reduces students’ stress by not worrying about what to say because they could switch to Kiswahili if they did not have an idea of how to say it in English. Moreover, switching to Kiswahili or Kamba helped to effectively manage classrooms and incorporate morality and ethics below.

Table 2 further reveals that 10% of the respondents were neutral about Students use of CS during oral presentations. These were teacher respondents who did not have tangible information about the language in which students interact. The data in schools where the school language policy is upheld the findings reveal that the respondents disagreed (3%) and strongly disagreed (3%) respectively with the assertion that students use CS during oral representations.

The next assertion was directly linked to the teachers as models of English language. The study sought to find out whether secondary school teachers use and enhance the use of code switching during speaking skills to this effect. The findings of the study are revealed in table 3:

Table 3

Code Switching and teachers of English

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Agree	38	63
Agree	12	20
Neutral	6	10
Disagree	2	3
Strongly Disagree	2	3
Total	60	100

Table 3 above reveals that the majority 38 which is 63% of the teacher respondents strongly agreed that they use code switching in their English language classroom while 20% agreed. The findings suggest that the use of CS in English classrooms by teachers directly or indirectly influence students to use the same in their speech. These findings also imply that teachers in some instances utilize CS as a communication strategy. The teachers reported that they use CS especially when teaching speaking skills. This strategy provides students with opportunities to communicate and enhance their understanding however it may undermine the mastery of English language especially in written communication. It may also hamper development of the learner in expressing himself or herself in written communication.

Table 13 also shows that 6(10%) of the respondents were neutral about the fact that teachers of English use CS in their classes. 3% disagreed while other 3% strongly disagreed. These findings were attributed to language policy of some schools.

5. Conclusion

The study was set to establish the impact of code switching on the mastery of the English speaking skills in secondary schools in Mbooni West Sub County, Kenya. The findings of the study indicate that CS is mostly used in the teaching and learning of speaking skills and that code-switching is still prevalent in the classroom. The findings further suggest that the use of CS in English classrooms by teachers directly or indirectly influence students to use the same in their speech. Teachers in some instances utilize CS as a communication strategy. The teachers reported that they use CS especially when teaching speaking skills. This strategy provides students with opportunities to communicate and enhance their understanding however it may undermine the mastery of English language especially in written communication. It may also hamper development of the learner in expressing himself or herself in written communication.

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