

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing Errors among Swahili-English Bilinguals in Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper reports on errors made by bilingual speakers of Swahili-English in Tanzania. The paper argues that code switching or mixing is not always an indication of insufficient knowledge of grammar, hence, when speakers code-switch or mix always obey the grammar of each language. However, the fact that some Tanzanian speakers have low level of English proficiency is revealed in the analysis. This is because there are errors which appear to affect only those who lack principles and patterns of English language. Among the most pertinent errors affecting Swahili-English bilinguals the paper discusses (i) number concordial inflection (ii) double marking (iii) tense/aspect errors, and (iv) adjectival and adverbial inflection. It is generally argued that among other factors unrelated linguistic structures of L1 and L2 generate ill-formed blendings.

1.0 Swahili-English Bilinguals: The Notions of the Terms

Most Kiswahili speakers in Tanzania seem to have good command of two or more languages. On the basis of daily use of languages, Kiswahili speakers may, generally speaking, be grouped into three groups. The first group includes rural dwellers. This refers to those speakers who reside in the rural areas, most of whom can communicate in two languages, i.e., their local community language plus Kiswahili, although some of them may also use English language. The second group refers to town dwellers. Most of these can speak both Kiswahili and English. The last group refers to migrant speakers. This group includes speakers who have moved from their original places of birth to a new place and they appear to speak three or more languages, i.e., a community language, Kiswahili and English, for example. However, this study does not refute the fact that there are some few speakers who regardless their places of origin, can speak more than one community language. In any case, that point falls outside our focus since our aim here is to examine the use of Kiswahili and English languages.

On the basis of the above classification, this study addresses the last two groups, i.e. the town dwellers and the migrants since they are the ones who can at least communicate in Kiswahili and English in their daily life. The first group (the rural dwellers) is not addressed in this study because it includes ‘dormant bilinguals’, i.e., bilingual individuals who although have knowledge of different languages (such as English to some few speakers) no longer use them in their daily life. However, depending on the rather challenging and controversial interpretations of the term ‘bilingual’ that seem to exist it is sometimes difficult to identify the two groups (town dwellers and migrant speakers) as bilingual speakers of Kiswahili and English language. This difficulty is vested on the assumption that being a speaker of two languages does not necessarily make one to be a

bilingual individual. But, to be a bilingual individual. According to Bloomfield (1933), in order for one to be classified as a bilingual speaker one must have ‘a native-like control of the two languages’. Bloomfield’s notion of bilingualism is rather too strict; it limits the number of individual who can be classified as bilingual speakers. This study, therefore, adopts the definition given by Haugen (1953) which states that; bilinguals are individuals who are fluent in one language (Kiswahili) but who can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language (English, in our case). This definition, although has been challenged by some researchers, it is still considered here as a working definition because it includes individuals who have various degrees of proficiency in both languages.

Code-switching and Code mixing are other terms which are also not agreed-upon by many researchers. Researchers in this field offer a confusing range of notions about code-switching and code-mixing (cf. Clyne, 1987; Milroy & Muysken, 1995). Gardner-Chloros (2009), gives a brief survey of the antagonistic views concerning the studies of code-switching and code-mixing. However, this study will not bring to place such discussion. The current study defines code-switching as the alternative use of two or more languages in a single utterance at sentence or clause boundaries, while code-mixing occurs when a speaker uses two or more languages within a sentence or a clause (cf. Fischer 1972; Li, 2008). Furthermore, in this study, ‘errors’ refer to noticeable deviations from the grammar of a speaker. Hence, errors in code-switching and code-mixing context refer to failure of the speaker to follow the grammatical rules of the code-switched or mixed languages. In most cases, errors made in this context are not questioned by bilingual speakers of languages in question (cf. the term ‘goof’ given out by Dulay & Burt, 1972).

2.0 The Need for the Present Study

In any bilingual or multilingual situation, code-switching (mixing) is more likely to occur in a greater or lesser extent. This may result into the creation of numerous language blendings (or mixed talks) throughout the world, such as, *Kiswahilish* (Kiswahili and English spoken in East Africa), *Tex-mex*, (Spanish and English spoken in South Texas), *Chinglish* (Chinese and English spoken in China) and so on.

A Speaker can code-switch (mix) for various discursal reasons. This implies that a bilingual speaker code-switches (mixes) to convey both social and linguistic meanings. Such are communicative functions like the ones observed by Gumperz (1982) which including; *lack of felicity or register, mood of the speaker, emphasis of a point, habitual experience, semantic significance* and etc.

Various researches on code-switching (mixing) constraints analyze mixed talks focused more on the three processes/models of linguistic constraints: (1) the Equivalence of Structure, (2) the Size of Constituent and (3) the Free Morpheme. Poplack and Meechan (1998) and Liu (2006) observed that, ‘the equivalence of structure’ constraint occurs at

the syntactic level, where the code-switching is allowed if both languages have common syntactic constructions. This entails that code-switching will not occur if the structures of the mixed talks are dissimilar. ‘The size of constituent’ constraint focused on the higher constituent such as *sentences* and *clauses* rather than *nouns*, *verbs*, *adjectives* and *adverbs* which are lower constituents. On the other hand, Sankoff and Poplack (1981) as cited in Redouane (2005) observe that ‘the free morpheme’ constraint forbids the code-switching between a bound morpheme and lexical form.

Many studies discuss the three code-switching (mixing) constraints in a very broad sense without contextualizing them to the individual languages (mixed talks). Also, other researchers investigate the validity of these models on two or three mixed talks (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Berk-selligson, 1986; Redouane, 2005). However, results from findings have showed that the three suggested constraints have been found unable to cross cut all code-switched structure patterns from various languages (cf. Berk-Seligson, 1986; Bokamba, 1990; Kamwangamalu, 1994; Macswan, 1999).

This study does not try to find out if the three code-switching constraints are realized in mixed talk of Swahili-English; rather this is confirmed by the fact that code-switching and code-mixing do not indicate insufficient language competence, i.e., mixing of two languages without following the canonical patterns of each language (cf. Milroy & Muysken 1995). Bilingual speakers should code-switch following the grammars of the two languages in use. Yet, this is not observed by the majority of bilingual Swahili-English speakers in Tanzania. Therefore, by using prescriptive/pedagogical grammar as a theoretical framework, the present study seeks to address the grammatical errors made by Swahili-English bilinguals within a sentence or a clause (intra-sentential switching) and within a word itself (intra-word switching).

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This study employs one of the grammatical theories called Prescriptive or Pedagogical grammar. This theory holds that there appears to be a right (possible) and a wrong (impossible) way of code-switching or mixing (cf. Gardner-Chloros, 2009). This means then by analyzing code-switched speech, we can find out which combinations of morphemes or words can easily be comprehended and which ones are more restricted. Given this view, the study uses the prescriptive grammar approach to identify the Swahili-English nonsensical constructions in terms of morphology (word-structure), syntax (sentence structure) and semantics (meaning).

4.0 Methodology

The researcher obtained data from the spontaneous contexts where Swahili-English bilingual speakers are not aware with grammatical errors occurring in their speeches. This is because speakers are more likely to make grammatical errors if the context of language use is not formalized.

4.1 Informant

The data were collected from bilingual speakers who have a good command of both Kiswahili and English. These speakers can be categorized into two: Those who are familiar with the rules that govern language in general and those who are not language specialists (linguists). The data were obtained from three universities: (i) Mkwawa University College of Education, (ii) Ruaha University College and (iii) Archbishop James University College. These areas were selected based on two reasons: (i) Speakers with good command of Kiswahili and English are largely found and (ii) The researcher is familiar with the research areas because he has taught there for quite some time.

4.2 Data Collection Procedures

In order to get reliable data, the researcher formed group discussions of 10 to 15 students. Each group was given a question for discussions. Questions were related with a particular course taught in a given university. Each group was required to present its findings to the instructor and make a short discussion about the question. All students in a group were allowed to use any of the two languages (Kiswahili and English). However, because many students (in Tanzania) feel uncomfortable speaking in the presence of their teacher, particularly when it comes to using English, the researcher (lecturer) was a good example in the use of code-switched Kiswahili and English. This made them feel comfortable to speak any of language they liked. The researcher recorded the discussion with a tape-recorder and other code-switched constructions were directly written down. University students serve as informants who are language specialists (linguists).

Apart from primary data, the researcher collected secondary data from different television shows and radio programmes such as Mkasi, 5 selekt, Nirvana, Take One, XXL and others. However, in these programmes, attention was paid to presenters (hosts) and interviewees who used both Kiswahili and English. In this particular case their education background were considered. Secondary data represent data from speakers who are non-linguists but rather language speakers.

4.3 Data Analysis Procedures

In the process of data analysis, the researcher listened from the recorded discussion and noted down all the code-switched sentences. The same method was employed from the secondary sources. Data were analyzed using Fragmentation Method. The method enables the researcher to break down the code-switched elements (such as, nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives) into its constituent morphemes as shown in example (1) below. Also, the same method enabled the researcher to write down elements that make up the constituents which are above morphemes (such as, *noun phrase*, *verb phrase*, *adjective phrase*, *adverbial phrase*, etc.) as shown in example (2) below.

1. **Fragments:** *a-me-cognize kosa lake*
Codes: SM-PA-STEM mistake her/his
Gloss: 's/he has recognized his/her mistake'

2. **Fragments:** *kwanza tu-acquar-e lile eneo*
Codes: first we-STEM-M-that plot
Gloss: ‘first, we have to acquire the plot’

5.0 Results and Discussion

The data collected in this study revealed that ungrammaticality of Swahili-English code switched sentences are observed in various ways. These ways are grouped into four: (i) Number Concordial Inflection (ii) Double Marking (iii) Tense/Aspect Errors, and (iv) Adjectival and Adverbial inflection.

5.1 Number Concordial Inflection

Number Concordial Inflection indicates that; the pre-modifier of the noun phrase (particularly, adjective) has to be reflected in the head word (the noun). In other words, the adjectival stem has to be attached with a ¹pronominal concord that will put it in concordial relationship with the noun functioning as head of the whole noun phrase. However, this principle, in most cases, is not observed by many Swahili-English bilinguals. It is always taken for granted that the meaning is understood even though, grammatically the construction is ill-formed. This is exemplified in (3) and (4) below.

3. **U-print copy sita* (Uprint copies sita)
3rd.p.-STEM copy six
‘Print six copies’
4. **Kazi yako i-na-error nyingi sana* (Kazi yako ina errors nyingi sana)
work yours Ncl.-PRES-STEM many too
‘Your work has too many errors’

In examples (3) above, the word *copy* does not agree with the noun it qualifies. This means that an adjective (numeral) *sita* ‘six’ denotes that the head should be in plural and not singular. Hence, the choice of *copy* instead of *copies* leads into an ill-formed form. Also, in example (4), the choice of a noun *error* does not match with the followed dependent *nyingi* ‘many’ which is in plural. On the bases of this evidence, it can therefore be concluded that both singular and plural forms should govern the concord in any syntactic construction.

¹ As for this study, pronominal concord refers to an affix which establishes an agreement between words according to the rules of the grammar. This means that when the head of an NP is plural the pre-modifier has to be plural, for example, *mtu mnene* which means ‘fat person’ – m(u) in *mtu* ‘person’ co-occurs with m(u) in *mnene* ‘fat’ (cf. Kiango, 2000).

5.2 Double Marking

In this study, Double Marking is used to refer to the tendency of using two forms or words of the same meaning (one is Swahili and another is English) in the construction to express a single idea. This error occurs mostly when speakers fail to erase certain items which are not required in the construction because they repeat the meaning which is already said in one of the languages (English or Swahili). However, it should be borne in the mind that double marking in the code-switched or mixed utterances does not seriously deviate from the intended. Consider examples in (5) and (6):

5. **Barabara ya Kilwa road* (*Barabara ya Kilwa* or *Kilwa road*)
road/way prep. Kilwa road
'Kilwa road'
6. **Chuo cha UDOM* (*Chuo cha Dodoma* or *University of Dodoma*)
University prep. UDOM
'University of Dodoma'

In example (5) above, the occurrence of *Barabara* and *road* in the same construction leads to ungrammaticality. This is because both two terms infer to *a long hard surface build for vehicles to travel along*. Also, the reason for the restriction of *Chuo cha UDOM* is, the abbreviated term ²*UDOM* includes the term *Chuo* 'university'. So, the meaning of the phrase *Chuo cha UDOM* can be directly translated as *Chuo cha Chuo cha Dodoma* (in Swahili) or *The University of the University of Dodoma*. However, there are few speakers who conceived *Chuo cha UDOM* and ³*Barabara ya Kilwa road* as constructions which are attractive or pleasant. That is the reason why they appear to get a firm foothold among Swahili speakers.

5.3 Tense/Aspect Errors

Errors that are related to tense and aspect do not affect many Swahili-English bilingual speakers. This is contrary to what would be expected regarding the low level of English literacy among them. Swahili speakers seem to construct code-switched or mixed sentences which are unquestionably well-formed. This situation occurs because the tense and aspect system of Swahili language is not related at all with that of English. In terms of position, Swahili marks both tense and aspect before the root while English marks tense or aspect after the root. This means that Swahili uses prefixes while English uses suffixes. The tense/aspect markers for Swahili language are: {-na-} for present tense (example (7a)) or progressive aspect (example (7b)), {-li-} for past tense (example (7c)), {-me-} for perfective aspect (example (7d)), and {-ta-} for future tense example (7e)). On the other hand, English uses {-s} for simple present (example (8a)), {-ed} for past tense

² UDOM stands for University of Dodoma.

³ To some few speakers *Barabara ya Kilwa* seems incomplete hence, opt for *Barabara ya Kilwa road*.

(example (8b)), {-ing} for progressive aspect (example (8c)), and will/shall for future tense (example (8d)).

7. (a) *Mtoto anacheza* ‘The child plays’
 (b) *Mtoto anacheza sasa ivi* ‘The child is playing now’
 (c) *Mtoto alicheza jana* ‘The child played yesterday’
 (d) *Dada yangu amepika* ‘My sister has arrived’
 (e) *Dada yangu atafika kesho* ‘My sister will/shall cook tomorrow’
- (a) S/he eats / They eat
 (b) S/he played / They played
 (c) S/he is eating / They are eating
 (d) S/he will/shall eat / They will/shall eat

In examples (7) and (8) above there are two things to be noted. First, in Kiswahili, future tense is morphologically marker using {-ta-} while in English is expressed using modals (will/shall). Second, Kiswahili uses {-na-} to show progressive aspect while English uses {-ing} plus an auxiliary verb (BE).

Different ways of marking tense and aspect in Swahili and English inhibit Swahili-English bilinguals in breaking the grammar of either language. Examples (9), (10), (11) and (12) below clarify:

9. **Ni-ta-mu-will assist ku-chagua* (Nitamuassist kuchagua)
 SM-FUT-OM-FUT assist To-ifn.-choose
 ‘I will assist her/him to choose’
10. **Jambo hili li-na-happen-s muda wowote* (Jambo hili linahappen muda wowote)
 matter this Ncl.-PRES-happen-PRES time any
 ‘This matter will happen any time’
11. **Neima a-li-play-ed ile game vizuri sana* (Neima aliplay ile game vizuri sana)
 Neima SM-PAST-play-PAST that game good very
 ‘Neima played that game very good’
12. **Kwakweli, ni-me-enjoy-ed sana* (Kwa kweli nimeenjoy sana)
 to be frankly, SM-PERF-enjoy-PAST a lot’
 ‘To be frankly, I have enjoyed a lot’

The above examples indicate that; double marking of tense in code-switched Kiswahili-English constructions is impossible. However, in some cases, speakers perform this error. This is particularly in English irregular verb forms. Errors of this kind indicate the speaker’s incompetence in English language. See example (13) below:

13. **Jana mwalimu alisent kazi yetu (Jana Mwalimu alisend kazi yetu)*
 yesterday teacher SM-PAST-sent work our
 ‘Yesterday the teacher sent our work’

In example (13) above, *alisent* is ungrammatical because it is inflected for Kiswahili past tense marker {-lie-} and English irregular past tense (sent). Hence, the occurrence of {-li-} preempts irregular past tense *sent*.

5.4 Adjectival and Adverbial Inflection

Adjectival inflection means that; an adjective has to agree with a noun it qualifies. The same is true an adverb has to co-occur with a verb, adjective or another adverb it modifies. Failure to choose the best form of adjective (adverb) leads into ungrammatical constructions. This kind of error appeared to affect many speakers who lack linguistic background of English language. This is exemplified in (14) and (15) below:

14. **Tanzania ilipata independent 1961 (Tanzania ilipata independence 1961)*
 Tanzania SM-PAST-get indepence 1961
 ‘Tanzania got independencje in 1961’
15. **Mwalimu wetu yuko emotionally sana (Mwalimu wetu yuko emotional sana)*
 Mwalimu our is emotionally too/very
 ‘Our teacher is too/very emotional’

In example (14) above, the noun ‘Tanzania’ does not co-occur with an adjective ‘independent’ which means ‘not ruled’ but it matches with a noun ‘independence’ which means ‘freedom from being ruled (by another country)’. So, the direct translation of ungrammatical construction ‘**Tanzania ilipata independent 1961*’ is ‘*Tanzania got not ruled in 1961’. But, the grammatical sentence should be ‘*Tanzania ilipata independence 1961*’ which simply means ‘Tanzania got freedom from being ruled (by another country) in 1961’. Also, in example (15) above, an adverb ‘emotionally’ does not go with an auxiliary verb *yuko* ‘is’. This is because the ill-formed construction ‘**Mwalimu wetu yuko emotionally sana*’ in English it means ‘*Our teacher is too emotionally’. Then, the well-formed construction should be ‘*Mwalimu wetu yuko emotional sana*’ which means ‘Our teacher is too emotional’.

6.0 Conclusion

The study has exposed the possibility of encountering more grammatical errors in the context of combining two languages from different language families. The expectation is that the errors are minimal if Kiswahili language would be code-switched with other Bantu languages. Hence, the fact given by Poplack (1980), that code-switched constructions may lead into ungrammatical constructions if the rule generated by one

language is not shared by the other as has been well observed in this study. However, it should be understood that the study does not intend to prescribe how people should use language in everyday communication, but it intends to highlight the fact that speakers may use ungrammatical combination of two languages (in our case Kiswahili and English) yet the meaning is comprehended by both interlocutors.

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¹ am using the term skeletal morph to refer to the obligatory morphological structure of a certain word form in Kiswahili. For instance, Kiswahili verbs of Bantu origin must have in any form, inflected or derived, the verb root (R_T) and verb end vowel {-a} (BV_{EV}).

²In this structural frame, the dash enclosed in parentheses marks a place where inflectional affixes are fixed in verb conjugation processes in Kiswahili. The morphs that occupy this position are not obligatory for a Kiswahili verb of Bantu origin to be complete. For instance, the verb *pika* {pik-a} has the structure. {R_TBV_{EV}}; while *pikia* {pik-i-a} its inflected form has {R_T—BV_{EV}}

³ Φ indicates covert morph.

⁴ The word form is polysemous. I have referred to one meaning only.

⁵This oligosynthetic word form is different from the others with regard to what constitutes its morphs. It does not have the noun class marker but has the noun itself which also acts as the stem of the word in which the bound prepositional morph {-ni} is suffixed.

⁶Kiswahili uses prefixes in marking singular and plural forms of nouns and in tagging the nouns across the syntactic structure. However, it uses circumfixes in marking singular and plural forms of demonstratives of furtherness 'that' (relative further distance from the speaker) whose root is {h-o}.

⁷The underlined morphs are fusional.

⁸* Shows alternative way of demarcating morphs.

⁹The underlined morphs are fusional.

¹⁰ *Shows alternative way of demarcating morphs.

¹¹ #shows that the gloss here is the same as the immediate one above.