

REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLES OF CODE-SWITCHING AND CODE-MIXING AS INNOVATION FACILITATORS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Code-switching and code-mixing are common phenomena found in multilingual societies, such as Nigeria. These phenomena usually occur when multilinguals and bilinguals need to communicate effectively through a foreign language. This is to say that code-mixing and code-switching are effective communication tools, which can, directly and indirectly, facilitate innovations. The objective of this paper is to analyse the impacts of these linguistic phenomena and to reflect on how it can influence Nigerians to become more innovative. The study anchored its analysis on Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis of Linguistic Relativity and Rogers' Innovation Diffusion Theory to reveal how communicating with people's language could aid innovation. The researchers, thereby, concluded that since Nigeria is a multilingual nation, where a foreign language – English – is the only unifying factor, code-switching and code-mixing should be adopted for effective communication between innovators and the prospective adopters of their innovations.

Keywords: Innovation, Code-Switching, Code-Mixing, Communication

Introduction

Innovation is a phenomenon that is appreciated and celebrated all over the world. Countries are evaluated yearly to discover their innovative capabilities. Different organisations release their innovation indexes to capture the countries that are considered more innovative than the others. One of the organisations that do this is Bloomberg, which has recently released its list of the most innovative countries in the year 2020 (Damm, 2020). The Bloomberg Innovation Index presented the result of the evaluation it conducted on sixty nations, which were assessed based on their investment in research and development, manufacturing capability, and concentration of high-tech companies (Damm, 2020). According to this innovation index, the ten most innovative countries are Germany (1st), South Korea (2nd), Singapore (3rd), Switzerland (4th), Sweden (5th), Israel (6th), Finland (7th), Denmark (8th), the United States (9th), and France (10th). No African country made it to the top ten.

Another innovation index that is worth mentioning is that of the Global Innovation Index for the year 2020. Here, one hundred and thirty-one (131) countries were assessed and Switzerland ranked the best innovative country. The other countries that made it to the top five were Sweden (2nd), the United States (3rd), the United Kingdom (4th), and the Netherlands (5th). The first African country to make the list is South Africa, which was ranked the 60th in the list. Nigeria took the 117th position.

Innovation does not happen in a vacuum. Something has to motivate and influence it. This is to say that there are factors that must exist before innovation can take place. Among these factors are education, government policies, markets, and a positive social environment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). Each of these factors can either mar or enhance innovation, depending on how they featured. For instance, market here includes the availability of customers, suppliers, competition, and workers. If an innovator is unable to find viable markets, he will be unable to sell his invention. This will discourage him from creating new things in the future. Furthermore, people living in a positive social environment will be willing to accept the changes brought by innovation. However, for the social environment to become positive, innovators have to maintain constant communication with its members. Failure to do so could cause them to reject change.

For a person to communicate effectively, he needs to use the language that is understood by the parties involved in the communication event. Using a foreign language can lead to the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the message, which will, in turn, elicit negative responses (Taiwo, 2014). Hence, for an

innovator to interact with the prospective users or adopters of his invention and be able to convince them to accept change, he needs to use the language they are conversant with.

Coincidentally, the five most innovative countries, as depicted by the Bloomberg Innovation Index and the Global Innovation Index, adopted one or more of their native languages as their official and/or national language(s). For instance, in Switzerland, which is a multilingual nation, German (Swiss German), French, Italian, and Romansh are the country's official languages (Swiss Info, 2019). In Sweden, the official language is Svenska (Britannica, 2013). And in Germany, German serves the purpose (BBC, 2014). Since these countries adopted their official languages, innovation will be easier to achieve because the people are communicated to in the languages they are conversant with. This, however, cannot be said about countries, such as Nigeria, where English, a non-native language, is used as the official language that bridges the communication gap caused by multilingualism. This is to say that Nigerians need to find a way to accommodate the English language so that it can perform its communicative functions without hindrance.

The objective of this study, hence, is to find out the impact of language on innovation. Specifically, the study aims to ascertain if code-switching and code-mixing can aid innovation in multilingual nations, such as Nigeria. The study will reflect on Roger's Innovation Diffusion Theory and Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis on Linguistic Relativity to determine if language aids innovation.

Literature Review

Meaning of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Code-switching and code-mixing are two phenomena that occur in many multilingual societies. The concepts exist as a result of multilingualism and bilingualism (Gardner-Chloros & Weston, 2015). This is to say that people that have the ability to communicate or use two or more languages are most likely going to code-switch and code-mix at one particular time or the other. Code-switching simply means switching or moving from one language to another during communication events. According to Taiwo (2014), the concept is a linguistic phenomenon that occurs when people "use two languages simultaneously or interchangeably in a communication" (p. 99). This switching, he states, occurs at the sentential level of a discourse or at the major constituent level of a sentence.

But then, code-switching does not only occur when people use more than a language, interchangeably, during a communication event. According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), code-switching also refers to situations, whereby an individual uses different languages or language varieties at different occasions. They state that individuals that speak more than one language usually choose the right language or language variety that suits specific occasions or situations. The need to use the most appropriate language for an occasion, Akindele and Adegbite opine, could be as a result of the need to accommodate participants in the communication, meet the occasion's language demand, and/or be able to discuss the topic involved. A good example of this description can be found when an individual speaks English in the office, pidgin in the market, and vernacular at home. In this case, he or she has code-switched because he switched from one language to another at the three different occasions.

Code-mixing, on the other hand, involves the use of more than one language during communication but the alternation is found at the minor constituent level of a sentence. This concept involves the juxtaposition of different languages within a single sentence, almost at the word-to-word level (Meyerhoff, 2006; Akindele & Adegbite, 1999). Hence, when bilinguals and multilinguals introduce words or phrases from other languages into a sentence, the outcome is known as code-mixing. For instance, in the sentence, "*Mechie* that door when you leave," *mechie*, which is Igbo for 'close', is a word from a different language, which the speaker introduced into a sentence constructed in English.

Reasons for Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Code-switching and code-mixing are, in most cases, unconsciously adopted by bilinguals and multilinguals during conversations. Nevertheless, there are situations, whereby these devices are used consciously with the intension of creating desired effects on the listeners. For instance, in political speeches, classroom lectures, church sermons, seminars, and literary writings, people may adopt code-switching and code-mixing as tools for communicating effectively to their audience. In other words, the reasons for code-switching and code-mixing are embedded in the functions the devices perform for their users.

One of the major reasons code-switching and code-mixing are adopted during communication is to accommodate participants. Holmes (2013) opines that people code-switch and code-mix in order to bridge the communication gap

between them and their audience. She also states that the devices can be used to widen the gap. For instance, an English scholar may decide to speak in vernacular in an event because there are uneducated persons in attendance. This is her way of accommodating them. But when the scholar decides to exclude those persons, she will widen the communication gap by speaking to the audience in Standard British English or in another language they are not familiar with. Nevertheless, some linguists, such as Hudson (2001), argue that code-switching and code-mixing are mostly used when addressers opt for the language the addressees will understand. However, since code-switching and code-mixing can be used to accommodate participants, they can play vital roles in reducing and eradicating misunderstanding and misinformation.

Another good reason people code-switch and code-mix is to solve linguistic needs during communication. Sometimes, second language users forget or are unaware of the name some concepts bear in the target language. At other times, the concepts or items in question may not have names in the target language because they do not exist in the culture of its owners (Hudson 2001). When these second language users find themselves at loss with the right words to use, they may have to use code-switching and code-mixing to fill the gap. This saves them from the discomfort they may feel if they stopped in their speeches to think of the right words to use. Furthermore, Taiwo (2014) reveals that by making it easier for pauses in conversations to be filled, code-switching and code-mixing help in preventing the loss of interest of the audience. What this means, in essence, is that, through code-switching and code-mixing, concepts that have no name in a second language can be described with their names in the speaker's native language. This does not only aid flow of communication but also aids comprehension and attentiveness.

Code-switching and code-mixing are also adopted for topics that could not be discussed with the main language of communication. According to Holmes (2013), people that speak more than a language find it easier to discuss some topics in a particular language than in others. For instance, a Nigerian may prefer to narrate the experiences he had within his local environment by using his mother tongue. But that same person may choose English for discussions bordering around science and technology. By doing this, there exist ease of communication and comprehension.

Code-switching and code-mixing are also adopted for several other reasons, such as marking identity and emphasising statements. According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), multilinguals and bilinguals, sometimes, switch languages to

specify their involvements in communication or to mark their group identity. Holmes (2013) agrees with this because she explains that code-switching and code-mixing can come up when a speaker wishes to “signal” group membership and “shared ethnicity with an addressee” (p. 35). Hence, by using the language of the audience, the speaker can create the impression that he is one of them and so win their attention and, sometimes, favour.

Furthermore, Taiwo (2014) states that code-switching and code-mixing can be used to amplify utterances, especially when their usage makes the statement more informative and/or meaningful. In this case, code-switching and code-mixing are used to create the desired effects in the audience and make them respond positively.

Language Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multilingual nation with an estimated range of 200 to over 400 indigenous languages. According to Oyetade (2003), the language situation in Nigeria can be described as being linguistically fragmented. Jowitt (1991) agrees with this because he states that it is almost impossible to determine the exact number of languages indigenous to the country. He further reveals that Nigeria can pass as a good example of a country with individuals, who are bilingual or multilingual. This is to say that almost every Nigerian can speak more than a language.

The causes of multilingualism in Nigeria, according to Ogunwale (2013), can be traced to colonialism and state creation, both of which did not consider the diverse nature of the communities brought together. People from different linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds were brought together as a nation, a state, and a local government. They have to live and interact amongst themselves as one nation, community, and/or society. As a result, the number of the native languages in Nigeria became too numerous to be counted. However, three languages – Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba, have assumed the position of the major native languages because they have native speakers that ran into tens of millions (Jowitt, 1991; Oyetade, 2003) and have major speakers in one or more of the six political zones. These major languages can, sometimes, be used to bridge the communication gap that exists among speakers of the many Nigerian languages.

Among the languages that exist in Nigeria is the English language. English is currently a second language in Nigeria because Nigerians already had their

mother tongue before it came (Ekpe, 2010). The language, though widely used in the country, has not yet assumed the position of a native language. English, when used alone, cannot fully help Nigerians to express their experiences within their local environment (Akindele & Adegbite, 1999; Taiwo, 2014). To solve this problem, many Nigerians have resorted to code-switching and code-mixing as their tools for effective communication in the country.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theories adopted for this study are Roger's Innovation Diffusion Theory and Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis on Linguistic Relativity.

Roger's Innovation Diffusion Theories

The Innovation Diffusion Theory, also referred to as Diffusion of Innovation Theory or Classical Innovation Theory, was propounded by E.M. Rogers in 1958, after he studied the diffusion of agricultural innovations during his doctoral research that ended in 1957 (Bukkabulindi, 2014). This theory considers the conditions that encourage the acceptance and spread of innovations. Rogers postulated that there are three conditions, which could enhance or discourage the adoption of innovation in any society. These are the characteristics of the potential adopter, the adopter's perception of the innovation, and the characteristics of the society the potential adopter lives in (Bukkabulindi, 2014). For an innovator to succeed, he needs to put these three factors into consideration before making his creations.

Concerning the characteristics of the potential innovation adopter, Rogers states that the individual characteristics of a person can determine whether he will accept the change caused by the innovation or not. Here, it is believed that the level of exposure adopters have about the object of change, their age, education, gender, economic class, ability to interact with innovators, and personal experiences can influence their decisions towards innovation (Bukkabulindi, 2014). Rogers was also of the opinion that the way potential adopters perceive new objects can influence their decisions to adopt them or not. In this case, the use of the objects, their advantages over existing products, their compatibility with the potentials' needs, and so on are considered before a decision is reached. Hence, an innovator needs to convince potential adopters to use his products or, better, provide them with what they need.

Finally, Rogers stated that an innovation can only be adopted by users if it resonates with the social system of the society, within which they live and operate. This is to say that if the object of change goes against the culture, values, and belief systems of the potential adopters, it will not be accepted. In other words, an innovator needs to study the community of his adopters before creating something new for them. One way he can do this effectively is by relating directly with them.

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis on Linguistic Relativity

This theory was named after the American linguist, Edward Sapir (1884 - 1939), and his student, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897 - 1941), who propounded it. Sapir investigated the relationship between language, culture and personality. He argued that language is a guide to social reality. Sapir states that the world is unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group (Akindele and Adegbite, 1999). He was of the opinion that people's behaviours and experiences are linked to the language habits of their communities, which predisposes them to certain choices of interpretation. Hence, the knowledge a person possess is limited to the language or languages he knows and uses.

Whorf, while performing further research on Sapir's theory, realised that there is a relationship between language and thought. He believed that an individual's language conditions how he views the world because it influences his mental activities. For instance, he states that people that have past tense markers in their language think about the past more than those that do not have such features in their languages (Akindele and Adegbite, 1999). By this, Whorf extended his master's theory by postulating that people that speak different languages view the world differently. This means that understanding the language of a community can help in determining how they can react to innovations. If innovators bear this in mind, they will have ideas of what communities need as well as how they can convince their members to adopt their new inventions.

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing as Innovation Facilitators in Nigeria

According to Rogers' Innovation Diffusion Theory, prospective adopters must be willing to accept changes before innovation can take place. This can be achieved if the new item is better than the existing ones and conforms to the prospect's social environment. This means that an innovator has to study the lives and

environments of his target adopters before creating his new invention. He can easily do that by interacting with them so he will have first-hand information about their needs.

Furthermore, Sapir-Whorf's Hypothesis of Linguistic Relativity postulates that the best way to understand people's way of life, value systems, beliefs, needs, and knowledge is through their language. According to this theory, a person's language embodies his reality. Hence, to understand the perspectives of these prospective adopters and be able to communicate with them effectively, an innovator needs to speak their language, at least to some extent. This theory also postulates that an individual's language has the ability to condition his mental activities, meaning that the use of his language can influence how he perceives a concept. This can explain why people relate more with those they share the same language with than with people that speak other tongues. An innovator can, therefore, impress his prospects, win their trusts, and convince them to adopt his invention when he communicates to them in their language.

However, in a country such as Nigeria, where many languages exist, it will be impossible for an innovator to learn how to speak about five hundred languages. If such a person wants to have personal touches with his prospects, he will have no other choice than to code-switch and code-mix where and when necessary. These devices will be most important during information dissemination about the new product. For instance, the innovator may have to adopt the local terms for the ingredients and materials used for making the products or what they will be used for. That way, the prospects will identify with the inventor and his creation and may be willing to adopt it.

Another important way code-switching and code-mixing can aid innovation in Nigeria is through education, especially in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Since code-switching and code-mixing aid comprehension, using the local names of some concepts, especially the abstract ones, while teaching about them, could help the students to understand the lessons more. It is possible that many Nigerians are not innovative because they fail to identify the concepts being taught as the objects that exist in their communities. Nevertheless, further research should be conducted to ascertain how code-switching and code-mixing can aid innovation through education.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Code-switching and code-mixing are two phenomena commonly found in multilingual and bilingual societies. They involve the use of more than one language by an individual in a communication event or in separate communication events. These devices perform functions, which ranges from identity markers to comprehension enhancers. Because of the multilingual nature of Nigeria, code-switching and code-mixing are language features of the country. However, the country has not been able to harness their functions to aid innovations. Based on that, the following recommendations are made:

- a. Innovators should employ these devices while introducing their creations to their target markets in different Nigerian communities. They can use them for advertisements, radio and TV interviews, in social media, and so on.
- b. Teachers should be encouraged to code-switch and code-mix while handling topics that may sound abstract to the students.

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