How Code Mixing and Code Switching Affect the Study of English Language

Juma Elisha Odhiambo

Department of Linguistic, Rongo University

Abstract: Code-mixing and code-switching allude to alternating between two or more languages. Any Kenyan student undergoing an 8-4-4 system of education attests to getting exposed to at least two languages—English and Kiswahili languages. While the English language is the primary language of instruction in Kenyan secondary schools, using the Kiswahili language between English-based lessons prevails. For Kenyans, the English language is best used where foreigners are involved, limiting using local languages to address. In that line, teachers and students often alternated between English and Kiswahili during learning to enhance clarity and participation. Because Kenyan parents want the best out of their children's education, any teacher who is strict about using the English language during instruction is regarded as role model teacher by both students and parents. In schools where alternating between English language and Kiswahili language permeated while learning the English language as a subject, students experienced limited exposure to linguistic repertoires in the English language. On the other hand, schools that primarily use English for instruction have their students advancing their vocabularies in the English language. That is why the paper examines the effects of code-mixing and code-switching on the study of the English language, a case for Homa- Bay County. In other words, the study evaluates influencers to language alternation, suppose code-mixing and code-switching contribute to students' failure or success, and remedy to the educational gap. A qualitative approach was utilized during data collection, analysis, and presentation. The researcher realized that code-mixing and code-switching directly influenced students' failure to pass the English language as a subject. Regardless, it also led to a lack of confidence during a conversation and retarded mastery of linguistic repertoires. It is therefore recommended that regular interventions such as internships and development programs for both teachers and students would enhance the English language study significantly.

Keywords: Code-mixing, Code-Switching, English language, Kiswahili language, Language alternation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In most multilingual countries in the World, a key feature in them is that consumers tend to activate two or more languages at the same time. This results into a sociolinguistic phenomenon known as code-switching. However, Nthiga (2006) observes that even though teachers admit to code-switching and its usefulness in class and the entire school, they had their reservations. Teachers wish to instruct students in English to boost their language competency. Considering the Kenya National Examination Board, English is taught as a compulsory major from the primary level of education and utilized as a medium of instruction in secondary schools. However, a review of English proficiency levels among Kenyan secondary schools reveals a significant dropdown more so in Homa-Bay County. The researcher further observed that Kenyan citizens living for at least thirty-five years could speak and write the English language very well. Their accent is as good as their pronunciation. On the other hand, an interview with teenage students realized that their English ability is degraded substantially—a significant concern due to their young age. Therefore, there is need to come up with workable formula to enhance the study of English language.

In Kenya, a tutor taking on an English language class is likely to use at least thirty percent of the Kiswahili language for instruction, especially during the early stages of secondary education. For that reason, it has become a tendency for teachers and students to exercise code-mixing and code-switching, enhancing communication by alternating between languages—primarily the English language and the Kiswahili language (Boztepe, 2002). Because both Kiswahili and English are used as the medium of instruction in Kenyan secondary schools, teachers and students employ code-mixing and code-switching on a grander scale. A teacher joining students for the English lesson can easily begin with the English language then immediately switches to Kiswahili for clarity. From the researcher's observation, the same situation continues as the lesson progresses, and the students will also foster code-mixing and code-switching while asking questions for clarifications. In support of language alternation between English and Kiswahili, students avail of several opportunities—clarify a point, feel less tensed during a conversation, make friends, and enhances humor (Michieka, 2005). This situation manifests in most Kenyan secondary schools because students speak native languages other than English. Therefore, the student's performance in the English language falls to greater levels due to the limited extent of linguistic repertoires of the English language.

For Kenyan secondary schools, code-switching and code-mixing between English and Kiswahili occur when tutors ask questions, and the students remain silent until the instructor switches to Kiswahili. Sadly, alternating between English and Kiswahili during the English lesson retards the pace of learning the English language. While teachers use code-mixing and code-switching for clarifying a point, they also prevent students from extending their English language—limited linguistic collection in the English language (Memory, 2018). Because examinations are written in the English language, students face a severe challenge understanding the instructions as they are taught using code-mixing and code-switching. On that note, students confess to having lost enthusiasm for mastering fluency in the English language classroom because the entire lesson is taught through alternating between English and Kiswahili. It translates to the degradation of English proficiency among students in Kenyan secondary schools. There is need to investigate the influence of language alternation during English lesson with a view of enhancing the study of English language.

Study Objective

To evaluate the influence of code-mixing and code-switching on the study of English language in Homa-Bay County, Kenya.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research took place in Homa-Bay County, Kenya. Homa-Bay is one of the forty-seven counties found in the Western region of Kenya. While there are hundreds of secondary schools within Homa-Bay County, many high school graduates are in the area. However, the researcher focused Homa-Bay County due to low performance in the English language in KCSE. Over the past years, at least forty percent of secondary students within Homa-Bay County fail in their national examination and cannot speak the English language fluently. Five schools were purposefully sampled due to the prevalence of code-mixing and code-switching between English and Kiswahili. Therefore, the researcher utilizes a descriptive study design to finding out why the alternative between English and Kiswahili continued in Homa-Bay County and possible remedies.

Interviews with respondents helped to unfold things that cannot be observed. For the study, the researcher describes interviews between teachers and students to outlay well-informed knowledge about code-mixing and code-switching concepts, especially their influence on teaching the English language. Besides, the interviews fostered flexibility due to follow-up questions that participants are willing to clarify. Open-ended questions generated rich answers as the interviewees were free to express themselves, considering language alternation. Moreover, participants explained their choice of language as either English or Kiswahili to enhance less tension during the interviews. On that note, the researcher witnessed a significant application of code-mixing and code-switching among interviewees (Wawire, 2017). However, these interviewees were selected because their roles directly impacted their knowledge of the English language. Besides picking on a secluded section for the interviews, the recording was also carried out for the respondent's fulfillment.

Observation was based on what an individual has seen, heard, and noticed. For this study, non-participant observation criteria assisted in observing the participants in their natural setting verify what was noted from the interviews. Each of

the five schools experienced at least three classroom observations and the researcher availed of a free desk at the back of the class for note taking. The primary aim for note-taking was to capture the linguistic variations when learning the English language, interactions during the lesson, and how learning continued. However, classroom observations were also conducted with a short interview to ascertain information reported during the interview but were not mentioned.

Data Analysis, Presentation, and Discussion

Classroom observation in school X reveals a teacher who uses the English language only. For the students who spoke ungrammatical English, the teacher rectified it immediately. Because English was the only language that prevails, questions and answers were given in English only. However, different schools Y, Z, and A, teachers and students employed significant code-switching from English to Kiswahili throughout the lesson. This was in line with findings of Wawire (2017). Fundamentally, teachers fostered the concept of code-mixing and code-switching as they started the language alternation. For instance, an observation in school A reveals the following except English lesson:

T1: Aligned with our topic of discussion, ' past participle tense,' can someone give an example in a sentence? (Students remain silent) I'm trying to say that mtumie kushiriki Zamani to construct a sentence.

S1: My family has lived an exciting life.

T 1 That's a commendable answer from you, another sentence, please?

S2: School life is an exciting life.

T1: Usiingie ya mwenzako, and you haven't used kushiriki Zamani. Kuwa mbunifu, please be inquisitive.

Author's translation

Teacher: Make a sentence following the past participle tense.

Student 1: My family has lived a good life.

Teacher: That's a commendable answer from you, another sentence, please?

Student 2: School life is an exciting life.

Teacher: Don't copy from your neighbor's sentence, and your sentence isn't in the past participle. Originality means being inquisitive.

It was noted that teachers and students use both English and Kiswahili during English lessons from the above example. While the teacher fostered switching from English to Kiswahili, students' involvement aided the prevalence of code-mixing and code-switching throughout the class. Besides, interviews between the interviewer and the interviewee reveal a significant application of code-mixing and code-switching among respondents.

Teachers tend to employ code-mixing and code-switching primarily for clarity. During one classroom observation in school A, the teacher asks, "Aligned with our topic of discussion' past participle tense' can someone give an example in a sentence?" In response, the students remain silent without reacting. However, when the teacher employs code-switching and says, "I'm trying to say that mtumie kushiriki Zamani to construct a sentence," the students seem active, and at least half the class raise their hands. Although teachers triggered the alternation, they did so whenever they thought students did not understand (Wawire, 2017). Because teachers do not want to use the English language for further explanation or elaboration, they switch to the Kiswahili language. Teachers were mixing and switching between English and Kiswahili help students to understand the subject matter at hand. Therefore, Kiswahili is used to emphasize a point significantly.

Interviews with the students revealed that they supported code-mixing and code-switching because others influence them. However, most schools where the teachers used the English language only, students were conversant with the English language. In schools where students did not like the English language, they regularly switched between English and Kiswahili. This was found to be in line with Spooner (2017) findings. It was found that some specific students love the English language and use the language in their speech and studies. Because teachers believe that students' understanding is limited when English is used for instruction, they tend to alternate from English to Kiswahili. During the research, no

teacher used the English language only when offering assistance to students at personal levels but instead shifted to Kiswahili at some point. Because examinations are set in the English language, students exposed to mixing and switching become troubled in the process. Regardless, the students experience retarded mastery of the English language.

At least thirty-five out of the fifty students supported that the code-mixing and code-switching concept means failure in learning the English language. A student from school X revealed that;

"Suppose our teacher of English uses Kiswahili to explain concepts during lessons, I could not be scoring A's in the English language subject."

On the other hand, fourteen percent of the students revealed that switching from English to Kiswahili fostered their understanding of the content.

"If the teacher doesn't use Kiswahili to explain the subject matter, I'm less likely to get anything out of the lesson," says a school Y student.

From the researcher's analytical outlook, the concept of code-mixing and code-switching is associated with speaking ungrammatical English as experience during interviews. Besides, the five teachers also affirmed that code-mixing and code-switching directly failed to learn the English language (Spooner, 2017). The teachers revealed that a significant difference in grammar exists between English and Kiswahili languages.

"English language vocabulary and Kiswahili language vocabulary differ at greater levels," said one teacher.

In that line, alternating between English and Kiswahili language limits the students' ability to expand their linguistic boundaries of the English language. The students studying English through mixing and switching between languages cannot master grammatical English.

Different ways exist to motivate students. On that note, motivation is a vital aspect of encouraging students' use of the English language. A teacher from school A tells student one," That's a commendable answer from you," as a congratulatory statement about the answer. When students use grammatical English, they can ask others to put their hands together for correct answers. Besides, the teachers can correct grammar mistakes when students speak (Ozdemir, 2015). This allows students to converse freely with their tutor, making them enjoy the lesson and like the English language. From students' perspective, the concept of mixing and switching between languages is avoidable on greater scales. Most respondents supported the fact that more emphasis should be placed on speaking the English language. They suggest that English should have more attention in and out of the classroom, and others encourage reading good storybooks to build on vocabularies.

Most respondents agreed that code-mixing and code-switching could be avoided while teaching the English language. The teachers suggested that students be exposed to the English language from childhood education to foster their mastery of the language. When students understand English from primary schools, they begin their secondary education well-equipped with the English language. As teachers agree that switching between languages retards learning English, they also confess the difficulty in evading the concept. But when teachers insist on using English as the primary language, even the students will abide by their policy. One teacher suggested that tutors should use precise and straightforward English (Ozdemir, 2015). Because teachers and students are reluctant to withdraw from code-mixing and code-switching in English lessons, ungrammatical English is promoted.

3. CONCLUSION

Code-switching between the English language and Kiswahili language prevails during English language lessons for clarity purposes. Besides, teachers get thumbs down for fostering language alternation during lessons because they trigger its cause. In other words, teachers switch from English to Kiswahili language whenever they sense a lack of participation among students. Although some students concur that code-switching enhances their understanding of the subject matter, others deviate from it, for it depicts the failure of the English language. It is therefore recommended that putting more emphasis on the English language both in and out of the classroom will improve English language mastery to greater heights. Besides, exposing students to grammatical English language from childhood education would enhance their mastery of the English language vocabularies.

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