Code-Switching, Code-Mixing and Code-Conflicting in *Abeni* by Tunde Kelani

AMOS DAMILARE IYIOLA
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract. Code-mixing is referred to as the mixing of two or more languages or language varieties in speech while code-switching is the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. Previous works have examined code-switching and code-mixing with little attention paid to code-switching and code-mixing of Yoruba and French in the film titled *Abeni* (Part 1 & 2), a Yoruba-French home video produced and directed by Tunde Kelani of Mainframe Productions in Nigeria in 2006. This article, therefore examines code-Switching, code-Mixing and code-conflicting in *Abeni* (Part 1 & 2) with a view to establishing the code-switching and code-mixing in French and Yoruba languages. This movie is worth studying not just because it is a Yoruba–Beninese film but it also has its settings in Yoruba region of Nigeria and Cotonou, a francophone domain of Republic of Benin, a francophone setting. Data were gathered from dialogues in Part 1 and 2 of *Abeni*. Results show deployment of switching and mixing of Yoruba and French codes by the characters in the movie. Also, the study added the concepts of code-conflicting and gesticulation as solutions to conflict, switching and mixing of codes.

Keywords: Abeni (Part 1 & 2), bilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing, code-conflicting, Gesticulation

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to depict manifestations of code-switching and code-mixing of Yoruba and French through dialogues of some characters in *Abeni* (Part 1&2), a franco-yoruba home video produced and directed by Tunde Kelani of Mainframe Productions in Nigeria in 2006. This study is largely based on our careful observations of the film's casting. This study, however, focuses on the prime elements of bilingual vocalization namely shifting between two languages, otherwise known as code-switching and mixing of components of one code/speech with another, which is known as code-mixing. Before delving into the study, the terms "bilingualism" and "bilingual speakers" should be examined.

2. Bilingualism

Bilingualism as the nomenclature implies, explicates itself. In other words, one needs not be a linguist to have an understanding of it at least at the denotative level. Generally, a bilingual is expected to speak two languages. In this case, we do not refer to those who do not regularly make use of one language or the other or those who have abandoned the use of the language for a long time. Linguists refer to the latter as dormant bilinguals (Treffers-Daller: 2019). Also, it is important to say at this juncture that humans or people who have acquired a significant level of competence in a foreign language without the ability to express it are not in the category of bilinguals. In addition, there are people, for instance, who could read a language yet have not acquired speaking or

writing competences. Grosso modo, the definition above does not say anything about the proficiency level to be attained before speakers could be referred to as bilinguals (Eloi et al 2018).

Linguists, over the years, have engaged in the research of the phenomenon. It is worthy of note to take into cognizance germane communicative situations in the performance of bilingual or multilingual speakers. One could be tempted to ask if there is a valid criterion to say that a person is a bilingual speaker. Scholars with deep knowledge and experience in linguistics have not arrived at a conclusion on a correct definition of bilingualism (Kroll: 2008). Also, one could ask to what extent, for example, is the notion of bilingual? For instance, what do we say in the case of a researcher who can flawlessly read and write scholarly works in French yet not able to vocalize the language. What about a Nigerian with a considerable level of competence to understand a language but ignorant of how to write it. Which of the two is a better bilingual? What do we say in a case of children whose parents have separate native languages, which should make the children gain proficiency in such languages, but in the end becomes more competent or skillful in one than the other? (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams: 2013). How can one measure competence? Is it by considering those various factors and circumstances that cannot be separated from language learning and manifestations? The above complicated questions usually preoccupy the minds of linguists or any researcher trying to decipher the concept of bilingualism. Providing responses to the complex questions are most times in the ambiguous (Berthold, Mangubhai & Bartorowicz: 1997).

To probe further into the definition of bilingualism from proficiency point of view, we can conclude that a bilingual is that individual who vocalizes two languages with the acquisition and achievement of fluency just as the native speaker in the two languages. Though too strong a criterion, there are persons who have perfected their mastery of two languages but those are the outstanding and cannot be taken as the standard or yardstick. It is has been established that many bilinguals do not have the same level of fluency in the two languages. Most of the time, they are rather fluent in one than the other. Sometimes, there is interference of accent of one on the other, or there is preference for one to the other by such bilinguals in certain situations (Carmen: 2014). However, for the sake of accuracy, definitions from various dictionaries of linguistics are better relied upon, and one of such definitions describes bilingualism as the utilization of at least two languages either by an individual or by a set of individuals, such as the natives or occupants of a specific or certain country or a province (Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, J.C. Richards, J. Platt, H. Platt: p 36).

3. Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Code-switching, also referred to as language switching is a linguistic behaviour that could be defined as the ability to have the same language background and the ability to change from one language to another during discussions (Tay: 1989). This language behaviour can frequently be subjected to observations in multilingual circumstances or situations. This capacity to switch from one language depends on many factors such as the speaker's mood, speech production circumstances or the presence of listeners. For instance, a bilingual start in one language and end in another because the bilingual has vocabulary, sentences and phrases at finger tips (Belly 1976; Amuda 1989; Atoye 1994).

According to linguists, there are various factors that bring about the language behavior known as code-switching. In this article, we can only discuss few of such cases when code-switching occurs. For example, a speaker who is unable to communicate effectively enough in a particular language can decide to switch to the other in order to cover up for the inadequacy. This may make the speaker continue in the other language for some time. It has been proven that code-switching of such could occur to a great extent when the speaker is angry, stressed, or in distraction (Cakrawarti:2011). However, a speaker can switch to what is referred to as a

minority language in order to expedite solidarity with a social group and this results into change into signal of the minority tongue of the interlocutor to establish a good relationship with majority language speakers. There are instances where same alteration between languages could happen in order to excommunicate other interlocutors from the discussion who do not have understanding of the language. Another possible scenario is when code-switching is employed as a signal of the speaker's in order to portray being favourable, exasperated, sarcastic or humorous. Monolinguals can display such to depict their formality level, intonation or their speech tone. Bilinguals can talk to each other in a language and can switch to another for the purpose of creating special effect. For instance a father can tell his son to do something in a particular language, and then, if the son disobeys, may decide to switch to the other language for the sake of emphasis or displeasure (Brezjanovic-Shogren: 2011). Interestingly, some matters may be discussed using code, however, using of code adds flavour to the topic of discussion. In such subtle and complex situations, the speakers themselves are unconscious of the extent to which they have code-switched during discussion. Whenever their discussion or conversation is interrupted, they may not be able to remember the language with which they ended the last sentence (Musk: 2010).

These above are few of the sociolinguistic functions of code-switching. Other functions are conveying of unanimity, weariness, and a form of viewpoint of the speaker with regards to the interlocutor. Also, through language shift, speaker's intent and needs are expressed. Moreover, the choice of code by the speaker is a factor of motivation

The other language behaviour that is connected to code-switching is "code-mixing" which habitually manifests when there is a conversant use of both languages at the same time switch between them to the extent that they change from one tongue to another during a sole utterance. Code mixing occurs without a change of topic and can require various degrees of language, namely, phonology, morphology, grammar or lexis (Hymes 1974; Bokamba 1989). Most times, it is difficult to say which language they are speaking at a particular time. The task of sociolinguists for code-mixing is the concentration of portraying two identities at the same time.

Monolinguals are critics of code-mixing. At times, they pejoratively refer to it as 'Franglais' franyoruba, 'Hunglisch', practically every situation where there is coincidence of two languages), and 'Tex-Mex' (English and Mexican Spanish in Texas) (Escudero, Mulak, Fu and Singh: 2016). Due to this, many bilinguals are uncomfortable about their language switch and mix and make efforts to do away with it in formal discussions or situations. Code-mixing goes beyond mixing of two languages due to ignorance or laziness but rather requires speakers to have adequate knowledge of both languages and community norms or what is referred to as linguistic and sociolinguistic baggage. *A vrai dire,* code-mixing and code-switching should be regarded as usual and strong expressive characteristics of casual bilingual interplay, which present linguists with part of their most engrossing and captivating investigative and analytical challenges.

4. Bilingualism in *Abeni* 1&2

As a matter of fact, the main objective of the present paper is to show the manifestations of code switching and code mixing in *Abeni* (Part 1 & 2). *Abeni* is a franyoruba play, in the sense that it portrays two cultures (Yoruba and French), two nations (Anglophone-Nigeria and Francophone-Benin Republic) and two languages (Yoruba and French) in which the two languages are spoken by the characters manifesting the concept of code switching and code mixing. The term 'bilingualism' relates to the situation in the play. The subject of bilingualism, as examined within the play, brings into the mind of the layperson that the two countries as the setting of the movie, recognize Yoruba and French languages. The play *Abeni* starts with a conversation in Lagos (Nigeria) between the boy protagonist (Akanni) and his mother encouraging him to attend Abeni's birthday. Akanni replies by saying

"Maman, ko wumi lati lọ si ibi anniversaire yẹn" meaning mum, I would not like to attend the birthday. Here we could see Akanni inserting French words "maman and anniversaire" into Yoruba language because of his background as a francophone though living in Lagos. This is the first manifestation of code mixing in the play.

Due to a sack received by Akanni's father as a gateman, Akanni's father decided to take Akanni back to their home-town Cotonou in Bénin Republic to stimulate the acquisition of educational skills and perfect competence in French. Thus, Akanni grows up as a fluent speaker of Yoruba and French languages in Cotonou. In Abeni, we discovered that couples, where the husband or the wife is from the majority language community, are exposed to the impact of two languages more intensively and thereby becoming bilingual speakers (though frequently to different degrees) of the two languages. This was justified during conversation among Akanni's mother, Akanni and Awa on the wedding preparation between Akanni and Awa, a beninesse. Akanni's mother says "Gele rose clair la mu, ko si rose foncé lọja mọ" meaning we have chosen light pink head gear because dark pink head gear is no longer available in the market. Here, Akanni's mother code mixes. Akanni's mother uses qualifying adjectives and what the French would refer to as adjectives of colour for description. Another instance of code mixing in *Abeni* occurs at the night club where Awa noticed that Akanni is being carried away by the look of Abeni. Awa says "Akanni j'ai remarqué qu'ati gba ti a ti joko lateẹkan ni o ti n wo awọn ọmọbirin ti wọn wa lọọkan yẹn" meaning "I noticed that you have been staring at those girls since we sat here". Elision could be observed from this example: the "e" in the relative pronoun "que" gave way to the "a" in the adverb "atigba" meaning "since" which also occurs in French language. Also, we noticed the manifestation of code mixing when Akanni's mother was thanking God for the release of his son from prison by saying "Merci Seigneur, Ọlọhun mo dupe lọwọ rẹ" meaning thank you Lord. In this instance, we could see the use of code mixing as an instrument of repetition and emphasis because both the French and the Yoruba expressions in the sentence have the same meaning. Another interesting example of code mixing is portrayed when Awa was asking whether Akanni promises to marry her or not. Awa said: Ṣe o ṣe promesse fun mi pe emi ni wa marier?" meaning "Do you promise to marry me? Other example is at the police station where Akanni was rendering help to bail Awa's brother Lakou and her fiancée Ogagu. Akanni exclaimed: Quoi! Awa! Sọ pe ki i ṣe tori awọn ti mo fi wa sihin niyi! which means What! Awa! Tell me that I have not come here because of these criminals!

This paper will not be complete if examples of code-switching are not highlighted in *Abeni*. During Abeni's wedding with Akanni, the registrar conducted the wedding in French language. The registrar asks: Monsieur Akanni, acceptez-vous prendre mademoiselle Abeni comme épouse? Akanni replies: Oui. The registrar proceeded to ask Abeni : Mademoiselle Abeni, acceptez-vous prendre Monsieur Akanni comme époux ? Abeni responds: Oui. Abeni and Akanni who have always discussed in Yoruba because Abeni's mother tongue is Yoruba suddenly code switched to French language at the wedding because French is the lingua franca of the environment where the wedding was conducted. Another example of code-switching occurred when, Akanni's mother was persuading him not to repay evil by evil but to help Ogagu and Lakou out of police custody. Akanni's mother says: "Akanni, ran wọn lọwọ o tori on aura pas le mal pour le mal" which means that Akanni should help them and should not repay evil by evil. In addition to the above examples of code switching manifested when Akanni's lawyer who spoke French inside the police station suddenly switched to English language as Ogagu was thanking him. The lawyer who has French as his mother tongue says: Ogagu, don't thank me. You should thank Mr. Akanni. Also Awa who has been speaking Yoruba language to Ogagu in their living room was forced to ask the French police why they have come to arrest Ogagu. Awa speaks: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? meaning what is the matter?

Here, we would like to point out the fact that bilinguals should successfully build up their vocabulary and master grammatical rules as this

will enable them converse fluently. However, interference is one of the impediments to surmounting foreign language accent challenges. Mastery of foreign language accent is one of the ways through which fluency in second language is measured. The influence of the mother tongue can be so powerful on second language use, for example, the utterance of Yoruba words with typical French intonation. There are even certain French words that some characters in the movie could not pronounce at all. These are mostly the ones containing sounds that are not parts of the Yoruba sound system, such as the [ə] and [Ø]. For instance, Abeni was unable to pronounce "deux" [dØ] but could only pronounce it as [do]. In addition, the way Akanni is being pronounced shows the francophone undertone. Therefore, French has influence on the pronunciation of Akanni as is pronounced /akani/-the French way and not /akãni/-the Yoruba pronunciation. Another instance of this was when Akanni was asking Abeni about her parents. He asks: "awon parent /parãnt/ ẹ nkọ?" This shows the influence of French language as mother tongue on Akanni though having lived in an Anglophone setting.

However, one of the discoveries in *Abeni* is the instance of conflict of codes or language. There were situations where it was difficult for Anglophone Yoruba speakers who found themselves in the francophone setting in the play. Ogagu and Lakou who just arrived from the United States of America went to a restaurant in Cotonou but they were unable to choose from the menu what to eat as the food vendors were asking them: Qu'est-ce que vous voulez? (what should we serve you?). Ogagu responds: Vu vule bawo, kin lo n jẹ bẹẹ?(what does that mean?). The vendors reply: riz (rice)? Ogagu was disturbed by saying: Oh! Riz bawo (what is riz for God's sake?) Then Ogagu asks for chicken and the food vendors became confused too because they don't understand English language. Ogagu was forced to use sign language or gests by crowing to tell them what chicken means and the food vendors understood that Ogagu was asking for "poulet (chicken)" The manifestation of code-conflicting came to climax when the food vendors came back to ask Lakou and Ogagu: Boire? Ogagu exclaimed "Oh! You have come again! Ewo tun ni gbua

tori Ọlọhun (What is gbua (boire) for God's sake!)" the vendors were able to explain by sign language as if they were drinking in order to ask Ogagu and Lakou what they would prefer to drink. Through these examples above, we discover that in addition to code-mixing and code switching, there is also the emergence of code-conflicting and the solution to conflict of code as discovered in this play (*Abeni*) could be sign language.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has emphasized that code-switching, code-mixing and code-conflicting are unique features of dialogues of the characters in Abeni and this has positively affected the popularity and the sale of the movie. Also, it has given the movie wider publicity and acceptability to the francophone and yorubaphone world. The use of code-switching and code-mixing is a proof that indigenous languages can promote and sell foreign languages vice-versa. This article recommends bilingualism to film world in order to promote their productions and for marketability of their productions. In addition, this paper has been able to push bilingualism beyond switching and mixing of codes to conflict of codes as manifested in the dialogues of the characters, Wherever there is conflict of codes, gesticulation is the solution.

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