

Communicative Functions of Code-Switching in Selected Radio Broadcast Stations in Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to examine the use of code-switching as a device to achieve the communicative functions in Fante-English radio discourse in Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana. The population of the study included all the fifty-five (55) radio presenters in four (4) radio stations in Twin-City Sekondi-Takoradi. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the four (4) Frequency Modulation (FM) stations. The instruments employed for collecting data were audio-tape recording and questionnaire. The study established that radio presenters code-switch when there is topic shift, because sometimes they find it difficult in translating a word, an idea or a concept from English to Fante. Again, radio broadcasters code-switch because sometimes they forget the required word to be used in Fante.

Keywords:

Grammatical Features, Code-Switching, Radio Stations, Media

1. Introduction

This paper is structured into four (4) main sections namely; the introduction, materials and methods, results and discussions and the conclusion. The first section introduces the structure of the paper, the context and aims and objectives of the paper. The materials and methods section presents a broad description of the methodology and procedures adopted in the conduct of the study on communicative functions of code-switching in selected Radio Broadcast stations. Results and discussions resulting from the study are presented and discussed in the section following the methodology and conclusions were drawn from the discussion.

Ho (2007) investigated the linguistic form of Cantonese-English intra-sentential code-switch and explored its socio-cultural meaning in Hong Kong, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In her work, eighteen hours of recordings

covering a wide range of situations, topics and interlocutors were selected and studied in detail. The study reveals that Cantonese – the native language of the majority – plays an important role in maintaining cross-generation and cross-class cohesion in society [1]. Cantonese-English code-switch plays a paradoxical role of alienating and integrating group members, depending on differences in educational level and English competence.

In bilingual and multilingual communities, sometimes the situation determines the choice of code. In this instance, interlocutors, for that matter, radio presenters, speak one language in one situation and another in a different situation. However, communicatively, people always faced with choosing a code when they speak and they may switch from one code to another or mix-codes [2]. Being part of a linguistic community, radio stations use mixture of different codes in their presentations; be it news, panel discussions, interviews, talks or adverts. It is not uncommon to hear presenters say “Afie na yebestarte programme no”, (meaning, ‘We are yet to start the programme’), or “Call dem number yi do na kyere w’adwen”, (meaning, ‘Call on this number and express your views’). In their contributions to radio discussions in Ghanaian language programmes, commentators and phone-in participants rarely use solely Ghanaian language as the medium. The medium of expression is largely a mixture of Fante (a Ghanaian language) and English, particularly in the discussion of current affairs [3].

While the nature of code-switching is spontaneous and subconscious, studies have reported that it is actually used as a communicative device, depending on the switcher’s communicative intents. At the same time, it follows specific grammatical patterns guided by constraints [4,5]. In Ghana, for example, radio broadcasting is heard from all corners of the country. The advent of FM stations after the liberalisation of airwaves in 1992 and accessibility of portable radio sets have contributed immensely to the explosion of radio broadcast. To date, almost every district in Ghana has one or more FM station(s), not to mention numerous ones found in the regional capitals. In addition, many people have access to radio broadcasts through radio phones and computer-mediated broadcast [6].

Most attempts to analyse the language of the mass media have concentrated on finding out mistakes committed with a critical view. Books like *Malayaalam* *Malayaaliyoolam* have adopted such a prescriptive approach to the language of media [7]. These criticisms view broadcast language or the language of mass media as a formal system – a grammar. But language can also be seen as a functional system – a system in use, that is, a discourse system. The case of understanding and analysing media language outside the traditional framework of grammatical or linguistic structures has also been pointed out that to think of radio or television programmes as texts and audiences as readers mistake the communicative character of much of the output of radio and television. In particular, it fails to recognise the liveliness of radio and television, their embeddedness in the here and now (their particularity) and the cardinal importance of context and audiences. All programmes have an audience-oriented communicative intentionality which is embodied in the organisation of their setting (context) down to the smallest detail: there is nothing in the discourses of radio and television that is not motivated, that is not intended to generate inferences about what is being said by virtue of how it is being said. Most importantly, all broadcast output is, knowingly, wittingly, public. That is, it is a self-conscious, self-reflexive performance produced for audiences who are situated elsewhere [8]. From the above

discussion, the language of radio broadcast has been seen as a self-conscious and speaker's intents communicative discourse.

The language used in some of the programmes in radio stations in Sekondi-Takoradi is a mixture of different codes. It is realised that code-switching is functionally motivated and that it is not a random phenomenon. The communicative functions of code-switching are primarily tied to the foreknowledge of linguistic repertoire available to the interlocutors. If code-switching is functionally motivated, a study that investigates the functions of code-switching occurring in radio stations in Sekondi-Takoradi would, therefore, be helpful toward the understanding of this phenomenon. The current study, therefore, investigates the use of code-switching as a device to achieve the communicative functions in Fante-English radio discourse. The study intends to answer this research question- What are the communicative functions of Fante-English code-switching in radio broadcasts?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Research Design

The research method chosen for this study was qualitative. This design helped the researchers to examine Fante-English code-switching communicative functions in the context of radio broadcast.

2.2. Population

The population for the study included all the fifty-five (55) programme presenters in the four (4) FM radio stations (Twin-City Radio, Skyy Power, Melody FM and GoodNews FM) in Sekondi-Takoradi – the capital town of Western Region. The choice of the population was appropriate because despite their heterogeneous background, most of them were able to speak Fante and English, the two languages the researchers focused in the study.

2.3. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was used to select Twin-City Radio, Skyy Power, Melody FM and GoodNews FM that transmit their programmes, using 40 percent and 60 percent Fante and English respectively. These stations were chosen because of their popularity and the number of listeners they have. Another reason for choosing these stations is that they all have language policies that favour about 30 – 50 percent use of Fante. The chosen stations are well noted for code-switching in their Fante broadcast sessions. Finally, the choice of the stations is motivated by their proximity and their easy accessibility to the researchers.

2.4. Instruments and Data Collection

The instruments used to collect data were the audio tape recorder and questionnaire. These instruments and how they were administered are described in detail below.

2.4.1. Audio Tape Recording

The researchers used good quality cassettes, Sony Corporation C 90 and Brilliant Cassette B (TDK) brands, for clear recording. The researchers recorded a total of 16 different programmes from presenters in the selected radio stations. These included 5 programmes of Twin-City FM, 4 programmes of Skyy Power FM, 3 programmes of

GoodNews FM and 4 programmes of Melody FM. The unequal numbers of programmes recorded from each station were influenced by the number of presenters of each station and this was done in the ratio 3:1. It should, however, be noted that the 1:3 ratio was slightly modified due to fractions involved. The programmes recorded include Newspaper Review, News in Fante and Sports Highlight.

2.4.2. Questionnaire

This section gathered information about the respondents' motivations for code-switching in radio broadcast. The questionnaires were given to informants through the receptionists of the selected radio stations. The researchers used this strategy because they found it difficult meeting all the presenters personally since most of them did not come to the stations when they are off duty. The questionnaires were given to only the radio programme presenters.

2.5. Analysis of Audio Recording Data

Audio recordings of radio broadcast were used as the tool to answer the research question the study sought to answer. The audio recorded data on CDs were first transcribed, edited and coded into themes. The qualitative data was analysed by the use of the interpretative technique based on the themes arrived at, during the recordings at various radio stations.

3. Results and Discussions on Communicative Functions of Code-switching in Radio Broadcast

Radio presenters use code-switching for various communicative intents. The combined evidence from the data found on the table below and audio tape recording attest to the claim.

Table 1. Reasons for Switching Code by Respondents.

Reasons for code-switching	Frequency	Percentage %
Topic shift	11	20
Translation difficulty	23	42
Momentary forgetting of words	5	9
Avoiding trouble of using many words to explain an idea	5	9
Avoiding using obscene language	11	20

Table 1 shows that respondents' code-switching is motivated by a multiplicity of reasons. As the table indicates, 23 (42%) respondents code-switch because of translation difficulty. 5 (9%) respondents code-switch because they want to avoid the trouble of using many words to explain an idea. 5 (9%) respondents code-switch because they do not want to use certain words they think should not be said 'raw'. The case of understanding and analyzing media language outside the traditional framework of grammatical or linguistic structures has also come into consideration in the present study. All programmes have an audience-oriented communicative intentionality which is embodied in the organisation of their context down to the smallest details: there is nothing in the discourses of radio that is not motivated, that is not intended to generate inferences about what is being said by virtue of how it is being said.

The motivations of code-switching are made manifest in the study. The study revealed that code-switching in the context of radio broadcast is motivated by a shift of topic of discussion, difficulty in translation, momentary forgetting of words,

avoiding the trouble of using many words to explain an idea and to avoiding using what is called ‘raw’ language. A shift in a topic of discussion in itself is a shift of language because it will require a new set of vocabulary. From table 5, 11 (20 %) respondents’ code-switching was motivated by topic shift. Sometimes a change in a topic of discussion may come with change of one of the interlocutors. In a scenario where speaker ‘A’ has a discussion with speaker ‘B’ and ‘C’ interrupts the discussion with a new topic and a new language, either the speaker ‘A’ or ‘B’ or both switch to the new language if the interlocutors are mutually intelligible. Discursive strategy classification mentions topic shift among other strategies on footing. Sometimes a shift in a topic of discussion in radio broadcast will demand switching to another language intelligible to the target audience [9]. In a newspaper review panel discussion programme in Fante at radio station ‘D’ on Friday 25th June, 2010, the host of the programme was given an urgent announcement to make known to the general public. The host switched to English as the extract below demonstrates:

1. *Host: ... εε .. abaguafo wɔmma memfa nkaabɔ yi na
yeatoa do .. attention to the general public .. the
Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) is announcing
to its loyal customers in Sekondi Maxell Road, Baka
Ekyir, Adiembra and Kwekuma that there will be a
break in power supply from 11am to 1pm in order to
maintain some of their machines ... any
inconvenience caused is deeply regretted ...*

Gloss

[Host: ...εε.. panelists, let me take this announcement before we continue]

Topic shift is not uncommon in radio broadcast. During newspaper review, radio presenters discuss many things with their panel members and some of the issues discussed may naturally constrain the speaker to switch code than others. In a morning show programme in one of the Sekondi-Takoradi FM stations, the host had to switch from Fante to English to attend to a phone-in contributor who could not speak Fante well and decided to make his submission in English. Another example was the radio station ‘A’ ‘Sports Panel Discussion’ on Thursday, 8th April, 2010, where all but one of the panels could speak or understand Fante so the programme host had to address him in English.

2. *Host: ...ɔno ankasa so wɔ ha a ɛɛhwe ma ndzembra etum na ɔakɔ
do ... abaguafo mema hom akwaaba...*

Panel: yeɛ enua hmm...

*Host: Honourable welcome...hmm hɛɛhɛɛ (laughs)... εε we
are privileged to have you back ... εε ... Ghana to Ghana...*

Honourable: Yeah...

*Host: Well... let me start from εε... honourable that is chief
executive officer for Sekondi Eleven Wise ... εε in your
absence we had two letters... one was signed by the
P.R.O. of the club... that is Kuntu Blankson ... and the other was signed by
the communications director...*

Gloss

*[Host: ..he himself is here to see that things go on ...
...welcome, panel members...*

Panelists: thank you brother... hmm ...]

Translation difficulty is one of the motivating factors of code-switching in radio broadcast. The spontaneous nature of some of the radio programmes will constrain a presenter to find suitable word in Fante. The data from table 1 reveals that 23 (42 %) respondents code-switch because of translation difficulty. Sometimes presenters are faced with translation difficulty. Part of a news article may bring about translation challenges. There may be no way a presenter can translate some technical words from a source language to the target language. When this happens the presenter has no other choice than to code-switch in order to have the message put across. In support of the study, a book titled *Growing up bilingual: Puerto Rican children in New York* put translation difficulties under clarification strategy [9]. In radio station ‘C’ News at 10am on Thursday 25th March, 2010, the news reader was constrained in translating names of subjects studied in Junior High School and other related words in Fante as it is shown from the data that follows.

3. *ɔno mu no na wɔkyere mu de se ɔkeba no de iyi saso no ntsi
no English, Maths, Science nna Social Studies no enntum
enntwa no yie a nna woepiampia w’aggregate no
...gyama iyi saso ntsi ka ho bi nna ɔnam do ma afei mu
BECE nsɔhwɛ no esuafo a wɔkɛkyerewee no wɔammbɔ
hɔn...*
Gloss

[It is explained that if a student did not obtain good grades in any of the core subjects – English, Maths, Science and Social Studies – it makes the student obtain low aggregate... this probably accounts for low performance of students in this year’s BECE examinations.]

The data gives evidence that the speaker faced difficulties in finding the right names of subjects such as ‘Maths’, ‘English’, ‘Science’ and ‘Social Studies’. Other words – ‘aggregate’ and ‘BECE’ – were still in English, obviously due to translation difficulty. This finding is in line with a similar code-switching in Conversation among Malaysian bilingual speakers. Ariffin’s (2009) postulates that Bahasa Melayu-English bilinguals code-switch to obviate difficulties in finding the correct referential term in Bahasa Melayu [10].

Presenters do not always write what they want to talk about. In some programmes the greater percentage of what to say emerges as the programmes progress. In this case, the presenters do not pre-choose their words. The nature of radio discourse is such that you cannot stop the programme and go out to ask somebody or find out the how certain words or expressions are said in Fante. Some of the words they want to use in Fante may escape them so this may force them to switch to English word to fill the vacuum. Even in programmes that presenters pre-choose their words by way of writing them down, sometimes the appropriate words to use in Fante may escape a script writer so the person switches to English language to have a befitting equivalent word. As seen from table 1, 5 respondents (9 %) code-switch as a result of momentary forgetfulness of a word. Forgetfulness of words is under crutching strategy and calls it ‘recycling’ or ‘grammatical repairs’ [9]. The data from radio station ‘A’ Sports at 1pm on Thursday, 8th April, 2010 proves this.

4. *Osiande .. ɛɛ .. within a week hen nsa kaa .. ɛɛ .. two press
release anaa two... you know... letters .. kor nna ofi P.R.O. hɔ na
kor so ofi .. ɛɛ .. communications director hɔ ...*
Gloss

[...because.. εε .. within a week we got .. εε .. two press releases or two .. you know letters ... one from P.R.O.'s outfit and the other from .. εε .. communications director ...]

The illustration above is evident that the programme host forgets certain words in Fante and this constrained him to use English. The use of the fillers ‘εε’ in three places, all before English words or expressions, show that he was looking for the right words.

Presenters may also code-switch because they want to avoid using many words to explain an idea. Some of the materials they broadcast are written in English language and later translated into local languages. In this case when a presenter sensed from the translation that he would need many words before an idea is meaningfully translated, the presenter may not translate that idea but rather use the exact word from the source language, English, to the target language – Fante. From table 1, 5 respondents (9 %) said they code-switch as a result of trying to avoid using many words to explain a concept. The presenter does this to avoid using many words to navigate around a single idea. Sometimes, when people code-switch they express ideas and feelings without fear of being misunderstood and without the trouble of circumlocution [1,11]. The data obtained in a panel discussion programme titled ‘Youth Corner’ on radio station ‘D’ on Wednesday 16th June, 2010, confirms this assertion.

5. Guest: ...hen ber yi do dze .. εε .. ndzembra ahorow a yenam do nya nkrato dɔɔ so ɔnam nyansahu na mfiɔ-dwuma mu nkɔɔnyim a yanya no ntsi..

Host: epe de ekyere de information explosion due to science and technology ..

Guest: dem pepeper ... na ɔnam dem information technology ntsi ɔwɔ de awofo hu ndzembra a hɔn mbofra hwɛ wɔ internet do

Gloss

[Guest: These days because of advancement in science and technology we have got many channels of communication ..

Host:.. are you talking about information explosion due to science and technology ..

Guest: Exactly .. and because of information explosion .. parents must monitor what their children watch on internet ..]

The data above shows that the host code-switched the words ‘information explosion’ and ‘science and technology’ because he might think his guest was using too many words for these two expressions. Another word ‘internet’ was also switched to English probably because the guest might have used many words to express this single word if he should use Fante.

There are certain words considered as ‘taboo words’ in Fante. Most of the Fante speakers do not want to use those words because they think using them in plain language is obscene, unpleasant, offensive or foul. When these words come up in radio broadcast involving Fante programmes, the presenters normally use the English equivalence by way of code-switching in order to get away with it. Normally, people find it easier using English to talk about those subjects than using Fante. At least 11 (20 %) respondents code-switch because they do not want to use certain words they think should not be said ‘raw’. Some of these words are names of sex organs and

sexual activity in itself. Another word which is not easily expressed in Fante is human excrement. Presenters, therefore, code-switch to avoid using those words, though, they may know the right words in Fante. A data collected on Tuesday 18th May, 2010 on radio station 'B' no a programme titled, 'Ayikoo, Ekuafu nye Afarfo' is a typical example.

6. Host: *Mindzi kan membra ... εε ... Apofu hen do, yehu de hom edwuma no ho hia ma ɔman Ghana nyina osiande ...εε... hom ma hen nam ma yedzi. Naaso se ekɔ hen mpoano mpoano a ibohu de toilet sisi hɔ a ɔmma hɔ nnye akɔndɔ koraa, afei obotum ama fi aka nam a yetɔ no. Mepa wo kyew, den na hom reye wo ho?*

Gloss

[Host: *Let me go to the chief fisherman ...we know that your work as fish hunters, is very important to every Ghanaian because you provide the country with fish. However, when you go to our beaches across the country you see a lot of faeces (toilet) all over the place, making the place unhygienic and can also contaminate the fish we buy. Please, what are you doing about it? ...]*

In an another panel discussion with a Child Rights activist in radio station 'B' on Wednesday 14th April, 2010, the guest switched from Fante to English for similar reason. Below is an example from the data:

7. Host: *εε ... madam nna ereka ɔhaw ahorow a mbofra hyia a ɔse de yetsetse dem mbofra yi na se ɔto hɔn a woetum aka ho asem akyerɛ panyin bi anaaso mpo ɔwareport ama policefo .. εε .. mepa wo kyew, kyere hen dem haw yi bi.*

Guest: *Meda ase ..εε .. awofu binom wo hɔ a wogyɛ mbofra no ma hɔn*

neighbours a wonyim hɔn yie na wosi mu ɔ hɔn edwuma .. naaso .. sometimes dem nkorɔfo yi binom dze hɔn nsa hyehye .. mbofra no private parts anaaso mpo ɔnye hɔn have sex .. ntsi ɔse de yetsetse mbofra no na biribi a ɔtse dem to hɔn a ɔwareport mu anaa ɔwareport ama policefo ...

Gloss

[Host: *εε.. madam, you were talking about dangers that children are exposed to and that we should educate them to report these dangers to an elderly person or even to the police .. what are some of these dangers?*

Guest: *thank you...some parents entrust their children in the hand of their neighbours ..but ..Sometimes, these neighbours finger the children's private parts or forcibly have sex with them.. we, therefore, have to educate our children so that they can either shout for help or report them to the police when they encounter these problems...]*

From example 6, the word 'toilet' is rendered in English because the presenter might think it is unpleasant using its Fante equivalent. In example 7, the guest switched from Fante to English with the words 'private parts' and 'have sex' in order to avoid the Fante counterparts which are considered taboo. Presenters, therefore, switch in situations like these for euphemistic purposes.

4. Conclusions

Radio presenters switch code when there is topic shift. Topic shift is not uncommon in radio broadcast. Sometimes, the host of a particular programme has to code-switch because there is a shift in the topic of discussion. A shift of topic of discussion in itself is a shift of language because it will require a new set of vocabulary. Sometimes a change in a topic of discussion comes with change of one of the interlocutors. Even a change in topic of discussion may bring about a switch in the medium of discussion for two interlocutors if they are mutually intelligible in both languages. Sometimes a shift in a topic of discussion will mean switching to another language intelligible to both speakers, but unintelligible to others who may be around, in order to share a secret, gossip about others around or align oneself with a particular group.

Translation difficulty is one of the motivating factors of code-switching in radio broadcast. Sometimes presenters are faced with translation problems. Part of news articles may bring about translation challenges. There may be no way a presenter can translate some technical terms from a source language to the target language without distorting the main idea. When this happens, the presenter has to code-switch in order to the message across.

Forgetfulness of appropriate words may compel presenters to switch code. Due to forgetfulness some of the words presenters want to use in Fante may escape them and this may force them to switch to an English word to fill the vacuum. Radio programmes are time bound and some of them are spontaneous. So when a presenter forgets a word the person cannot excuse his listeners to wait so that s/he goes out and asks a friend to help her/him find the appropriate word. This even happens in programmes that presenters pre-choose their words by way of writing them down. Sometimes, the appropriate words to be used in Fante escape a script writer so the person switches to English language to have a befitting equivalence.

The study also revealed that, radio presenters code-switch because they want to avoid using many words to explain an idea. Some of the materials they broadcast are written in English language and later translated into local languages. In this case, when a presenter realises from the translation that many words will be required before an idea is meaningfully translated the presenter may not translate that idea but rather use the exact word from the source language to the target language. The presenter does this to avoid using many words to navigate around a single idea. Therefore, when presenters code-switch, they are able to express ideas for proper understanding and without the trouble of circumlocutions.

Also, there are certain words considered as ‘taboo’ in Fante. Most Fante speakers do not want to use those words because they think using them in plain language is obscene, unpleasant, offensive or foul. When these words come up in radio broadcast involving Fante programmes, presenters normally switch to the English equivalents in order to avoid them. Generally, people find it easier using English to talk about those things than using Fante. For euphemistic purposes, presenters, therefore, code-switch to avoid using those words.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data is available on request from the corresponding author.

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