Original Paper

Bilingual Verbs in Nigerian Pidgin—English Code Mixing

Macaulay Mowarin[1*]

[1] Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

[*] Macaulay Mowarin, E-mail: mamowarin@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This paper discusses bilingual verbs, which are intermediate forms that cannot be fully identified with neither Nigerian pidgin nor English, in Nigerian pidgin- English code mixed utterances. The process involved in the derivation of bilingual or hybrid verbs is analogous to hybrid forms in biology. The conceptual framework of this study is Myers-Scotton (1993, 2002). Matrix language frame and the types of hybrid verbs discussed in this study include, the insertion of bare verbs from English to Nigerian pidgin; the adjoinment of auxiliary /helping verbs, as well as the negative particle, in Nigerian pidgin to inserted main verbs from English which is the embedded language. Lastly, is the presence of hybrid verbs in Nigerian pidgin's serial verb constructions. The essay concludes that bilingual/hybrid verbs constitute an integral part of the grammatical approach to code switching.

Keywords

bilingual verbs, code- switching, code-mixing, Nigerian pidgin, English, grammatical approaches and multilingualism

1. Introduction

Contact linguistics studies the outcome of language contact and it is the bedrock on which bilingual studies hinge. Migration and colonialism are the causes of language contact and the latter is the notable cause of the close- knit relationship between some European languages, like English and French, and African languages. One of the outcomes of balanced bilingualism is code switching. Bullock and Toribio (2012:1) define code switching as "the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate effortlessly between their two languages".

Although there are three different approaches to the study of code switching, this study focuses on the grammatical/ structural approach. Muysken (2005:1) states that this method "seek to discover the underlying mechanisms which define matters of grammaticality for all constituents in any language pair." Matrix Language Frame (henceforth referred to as MLF) by Myers-Scotton (2002) is one of the theories under the grammatical approach and it is the theoretical frame work of this study. One of the salient features of the sociological aspect of code switching is the "*we code*" "*they code*" dichotomy (Myers-Scotton, 1993). While Nigerian pidgin, (hereinafter referred to as NP) which is the language of

informal communication mostly in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is the '*we code*' language, English, which is the language of formal communication is the "*they code*".

The objectives of this study are to determine the grammatical rules that underlie the formation of bilingual verbs. It is also meant to analyze the type of hybrid verbs that occur in NP-English code switching. The bilingual verbs include 'bare' verbs from the embedded language, an admixture of helping verbs from the matrix language and the main verb from the embedded language.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework on which this study is based is Myers- Scotton's Matrix Language Frame espoused in her (1993b, 2002) publications. This theory's basic proposal is that any code switched utterance has a dominant language called matrix language and a secondary language called the embedded language. There is asymmetry between the two languages. Gardner-Chloros (2011:8) describes the matrix language as "a grammatical template which can usually be identified with a particular language". The matrix language supplies the system morphemes while the embedded language provides the content morphemes based on "the 4 M model" by Myers-Scotton (2002: 194-196).

Muysken (2005) states that Myers – Scotton employed Chomsky's projection principle of his X- Bar theory in Chomsky (1986). Since it is the matrix language that determines where each governing element (verb, preposition and auxiliary) creates a maximal projection. So, all functional constituents are from the matrix language. MLF contains constraints known as embedded language islands which highlight the fact that code switching is a structured phenomenon and not a random one. This theory is adopted for this study because it suits the analysis of the data collected and it highlights the asymmetry relationship between the two languages is code mixed sentences. Chomsky's X-bar theory which is also relevant in the Minimalist Program where the head of a phrase is projected and merged with a complement or a specifier is also relevant to this study.

2. Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from competent NP and English bilinguals under naturalistic and informal setting on the campus of Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria and in Effurrun/Warri metropolis. Questionnaires were then administered in order to identify the bio-data of the resource persons. However, most of the code-mixed sentences in this study were by undergraduate students of Delta State University. They used the acrolectal sociolect of NP. The bilingual verbs in the code-switched utterances were identified and were coded for morphological and lexical information. The quantitative method was adopted for data collection.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

The literature of code mixing and code switching abounds with numerous research studies. Weinreich's (1953/1963) is the publication that blazed the trail in the study of contact linguistics in general and of code switching in particular. Other articles that were published on this distinct field of linguistic in the

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1970s and 1980s include: Labov (1972); Gumperz (1976/1982); Poplack (1978/1981) and Lance (1975) while Gumperz (1972) opines that code-switching is "perhaps the central issue of bilingualism research".

There are several opinions on the distinction between code-mixing and code-switching in the literature. Muysken (2005:304) summarizes the opinion of linguists on these terminologies thus:

> Some authors have used the term code-switching when describing alternation between larger units like clauses and code-mixing when discussing alternation internal to the utterance or clause.

The three distinct processes of intra-sentential code-mixing identified in the literature include insertion, alternation and congruent lexication. These three processes are discussed in detail in Muysken (2005) and Gardner-Chloros (2011).

Three approaches have been identified to the study of code switching due to the complexity of this field of study; they are; sociolinguistic/ethnographic description of code-switching situation; pragmatic/conversation analytic approaches; and grammatical or structural approaches. The last instance will be discussed in detail since the essay focuses on this perspective of code-switching.

The grammatical perspectives of research on code-switching are linguistic theory and typology. While linguistic theory focuses on linguistic constraints upon code-switching, typology discusses the effect of typological differences between languages on code-switches. The three aspects of the constraints upon code-switching are first, the Varionist approaches proposed by Poplack (1980) and Sankoff and Poplack (1981). This perspective focuses on the universal constraints of where code switching could occur in a sentence and the two theories of the proponents are the "Equivalence Constraints" and "the Free Morpheme Constraint". Counter examples have been highlighted which faulted the two theories. The second is the generative approaches which are patterned after Chomsky's (1986) and (1995) theories. The proponents and their theories include: Belazi, Rubin and Toribio (1994) "Functional Head Constraint"; and MacSwan (1999) "Null theory" which is a lexicalist approach based on Chomsky's Minimalist Program. Finally, the production approaches which focus on the psycholinguistic aspect of code-switchingis Myers-Scotton's "Matrix Language Frame" (1993b, 2002).The theory also incorporates Chomsky's generative approaches. Unfortunately, generative and psycholinguistic approaches are contradicted with counter examples. The inability to propound an exact grammatical theory for code-switching is partially attributed to typological differences among languages and what Boeschotan (1998) calls many unpredictable factors that affect the outcome of language contact Gardner-Chloros (2011) projects that future research on the grammatical approach to code-switching will focus on the creative abilities of bilinguals who attempts to overcome problem they encounter

while combining two grammars. The creativity of speakers manifest in the innovations with regards to the verbal systems of the two languages in contact as shown in this study.

2.2 Inserted Verbs from English to NP

As a prelude to the analysis of bare verbs, it is pertinent to discuss the following aspects of the verbal in NP. They are tense, the structure of the invariant of bare verbs and concord. The two approaches to the study of tense in the literature are the grammatical and semantic. If tense is viewed as a grammatical concept, languages of the world are divided into three types and they are: absolute, relative and tenselessness. While English is in the first category, NP is a member of the last since tense is not grammaticalised in the language. There is no grammatical difference between non past and past. This why people in the Western world erroneously believe that tenseless languages have no concept of time. Comrie (1985:4) debunks the above misconception thus:

> The claim that a certain culture lacks any
> concept of time, or have a radically different
> concept of time is based on the fact that the
> language in question has no grammatical
> device for expressing location in time i.e.
> has no tense.

Based on the interpretation of tense as a semantic category of time, NP has three tenses and they are present, past and future. These tenses are denoted in three ways thus: the types of context of NP invariant verbs, the use of free syntactic pre-verbal particles and post verbal time deictic adverbial.

On the issue of the structure of when a dynamic verb occurs as the only verb in the VP as far as invariant or bare verbs are concerned in NP, it has a convert past tense marker within it. If the verb is stative, it is in the present tense. Faraclas (1996:188) aptly sums up how unmarked verbs are marked for past or present tense thus:

> If a nonstative (active) verb is not otherwise
> marked for tense, aspect, modality it will be
> by default marked for past tense, completive
> aspect and irrealis modality. If a stative verb
> is not otherwise marked for tense, aspect,
> modality, it will by default be marked for
> present tense, incompletive aspect and realis
> modality.

In NP, concord/agreement is not a grammatical category. Based on morphological typology, NP is an analytic language which English is an inflecting one.

The insertion of 'bare' verbs from English to NP constitutes the first set of bilingual verbs analyzed in this study. Since NP is the matrix language and English the embedded language, the bare verbs from the embedded language are bound to conform to the grammatical structure of the matrix language. Below are some examples,

1

(a) Gọvernment *abrogate* skull fisfọ Delta stet yẹstade.

Government *abrogate* school fees for Delta State yesterday.

Government *has abrogated* school fees in Delta State yesterday.

(b) Mai pọpsi gbese *accumulate* las mọnt.

My popsi *debt accumulate* last month.

My daddy's *debt accumulated* last month.

(c) Ọyel wẹl *abound* fọ ma kọmuniti.

Oil well *abound* for my community.

Oil wells *abound* in my community.

(d) A *acquire* anoda haus.

A *acquire* another house.

I *have acquired* another house.

(e) Wọk we no de *adumbrate* gbeghe f ọ Delta stet.

Work that not available *adumbrate* gbeghe for Delta State.

Joblessness *adumbrated* anarchy in Delta State.

(f) Polis *eradicate* tiff fọ Delta las mọnt.

Police *eradicate* thief for Delta last month.

Police *eradicated* thieves from Delta State last month.

The verbs in (1a-f) are bilingual since they have gone through the process of hybridization for the following reasons: first, the verbs do not have the morphological features of English ones, second; the English verbs are not in the lexicon of NP; so, they are alien to NP although they fit in perfectly into NP's grammatical structure in conformity with Matrix Language Frame.

Since the morphology of NP is quite poor the inserted English bare verbs in (1a-f) above are grammatical in NP sentence structure in conformity with Myers-Scotton's (1996, 2002) MLF. The sentences above will be ungrammatical if the English tense and agreement inflections are maintained. Since "the grammar of the matrix language determines the overall structure", Muysken, (2005:64). Below are instances of ungrammatical structures

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(a)   Government abrogated skull fis fo Delta stet yestade

(b)   Mai popsi gbese accumulated las mont

(c)   Oye wel abounds ma komuniti

(d)   A acquired anoda haus

(2a-d) are ungrammatical because they violate MLF since they do not conform to the grammatical structure of NP which is the matrix language.

2.3 English Descriptive Adjective As BE Verb + Adjective in NP

Bilingual verbs in NP-English code-mixing are also found in cases where descriptive adjectives in English functions as a stative verb (BE verb and an intensive complement) in NP sentence structure. Below are some examples.

3

(a)   Mai oga *stupid.*

        My master BE stupid.

        My master *is stupid.*

(b)   Dis gel Q*gli.*

        This girl BE ugly.

        This girl is *ugly*.

(c)   Yọ hostel *rọf.*

        Your hostel *rough*.

        Your hostel *is rough.*

(d)   Mai frend *useless.*

        My firend BE useless.

        My friend is useless.

The adjectives in (3a-d) are from English lexicon and they are used by the resource persons because they use the acrolectal variety of NP. If the mesolectal socialist is used, the following NP descriptive adjectives will be used.

4

(a)   Mai ọga *mumu*

        My Master *stupid*

        My boss is *stupid*

(b)   Dis gel *wọwọ.*

This girl ugly.

This girl is ugly.

(c)   Yọ hostẹl jágájagà

Your hostel rough

Your hostel is rough

(d)   Mai sista *yẹyẹ.*

My sister is *useless*.

The BE verb can be extricated from the descriptive adjective through the insertion of the intensifier wẹlwẹl (very/extremely) into the NP sentence structure in (3a-d) above as shown below.

5

(a)   Mai oga *stupid wẹlwẹl.*

My boss/master *BE stupid very*.

My boss *is very stupid.*

(b)   Dis gel *ogli wẹlwẹl.*

This girl *ugly very/extremely.*

This girl *is extremely ugly.*

(c)   Yọ hostel *rọ fwẹlwẹl.*

Your hostel *very/extremely rough.*

Your hostel *is very/extremely rough.*

(d)   Yọ sista *useless wẹlwẹl.*

Your hostel very/extremely.

Your sister very/extremely useless.

Although, the intensifier post modifies the descriptive adjective in conformity with NP grammatical structure, it pre-modifies the adjective in the English translational equivalent; what is more, the intensifier only modifies the adjectives as shown in (4a-d) above.

If on the other hand, the intensifier pre-modifies the descriptive adjective in order to conform with English grammatical structure, the resulting sentences will be ungrammatical since the resulting sentences will violate the MLF which is NP as shown below.

6

(a)   Mai oga *wẹlwẹl stupid.*

(b).   Yọ hostel wẹlwẹl rọf.

(c)   Dis gel *wẹlwẹl ogli.*

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(d)   Yọ sista *wẹlwẹl useless*.

Examples (6a-d) are ungrammatical because they violate the grammatical structure of NP which is the Matrix language. Once NP's grammatical structures conform with the structural patterns of (5a-d) above, the sentences will be correct.

2.4 Helping Verbs in NP and Head Words of Verbal Constituent in English

Another instance of bilingual verbs in NP-English code mixed sentences is a situation where NP helping verbs are adjoined to English main verbs as shown below.

7

(a)   Wọk we no de *don instigate* gbeghe fọWọri.

        Work that does not exist *has instigate* riot in Warri.

        Joblessness *has instigated* riot in Warri.

(b)   Di tif *dọn decapitate* mai fren.

        The thief <u>*has decapitated*</u> my friend.

(c)   Di draivas dọn *compress* ọs fọ dis bọs.

        The drivers *have compressed* us in this bus.

(d)   Di polis go *apprehend* di tif.

        The police *will apprehend* the thief.

(e)   A *go curtail* yọ tu know.

        I *will curtail* your excesses.

The main verbs in (7a-e) are from English and not NP lexicon. The NP counterparts of English verbs are in figure I below.

Table 1.

S/N	English Verb	NP Counterpart
a.	Instigate	C<u>o</u>s (cause)
b.	Decapitate	K<u>ot</u> in hed (cut ones head)
c.	Compress	Tait (tight)
d.	Apprehend	Katch (catch)
e.	Curtail	Stop (stop)

The helping verbs from NP in (7a-c) are the perfect aspect marker dọn (has/have) while those in (7d-f) are the modal auxiliary verb go-(will)

2.5 Negative Marker from Matrix Language (NP) and Main Verb from Embedded Language (English)

A situation where the negative marker, as well as other pre-verbal particles in addition, is from the matrix language and the main verb is from the embedded language constitute another instance of bilingual or hybrid verbs in NP-English code-mixed sentences. Below are some examples.

8

(a)   Delta stet gọvanọ *no reshuffle* in cabinet.

        Delta State governor *not reshuffle* his cabinet.

        Delta State governor *did not reshuffle* his cabinet.

(b)   Mai fren *no beguile* mi.

        My friend *not beguile* me.

        My friend *did not beguile* me.

(c)   Naira *no go depreciate*   tumoro.

        Naira *not will depreciate* tomorrow.

        The value of the naira *will not depreciate* tomorrow.

(d)   Plẹnti mọni *no de fascinate* mi.

        Plenty money *not does fascinate* me.

        So much money *does not fascinate* me.

(e)   Government *no fit eradicate* corruption.

        Government *not can eradicate* corruption.

        Government *cannot eradicate* corruption.

(f)   A *neva extinguish* di faya.

        I *have not extinguish* the fire.

In (8a- f), the pre-verbal particles are from the matrix language. The tense and agreement markers of the embedded language are not reflected in the sentence structures of the six sentences above because they must conform with that of NP.

2.6 Serial Verb Constructions with V1 from Matrix Language and V2 from Embedded Language

Serial verb constructions are grammatical in NP; and in Kwa languages which constitute most of the substrate languages of NP; on the other hand, they are ungrammatical in English which is superstrate language of the only pidgin spoken in Nigeria. In the serial verb constructions below, the first verb (V1) is from the matrix language and it is a stative verb, tek (take) while the second verb, (V2) is from the embedded language.

9

(a) A *tek* pent *refurbish* di ka.

        I *take* paint *refurbish* the car.

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I *refurbished* the car with paint.

(b)   Di polis *tek* gọn *apprehend* di tif.

     The polic e *take* gun *apprehend* the thief.

     The police *apprehended* the thief with a gun.

(c)   Ese *tek* mit *ensnare* the kat.

     Ese *take* meat *ensnare* the cat.

     Ese *ensnared* the cat with a piece meat.

(d)   Di draiva *dọn tek* in moto *crush* the dog.

     The driver *has take* his motor *crush* the dog.

     The driver *crushed* the dog with his car.

(e)   Wi *dọn tek* wọta *extinguish* di faya.

     We *have take* water *extinguish* the fire.

     We *have extinguished* the fire with water.

(f)   Government *go tek* fud *eradicate* poor people.

     Government *will take* food *eradicate* poverty.

     Government *will eradicate* poverty with food.

(g)   Wi *go tek* naïf *slaughter* the goat.

     We *will take* knife *slaughter* the goat.

     We *will slaughter* the goat with a knife.

All the verbs from the embedded language are bare ones and they conform with the grammatical structure of the matrix language. The verbal from the matrix language vary in structure. While the ones in (8a-c) are single verbal, the ones in (8d-g) are complex verb phrases with the perfect aspectal marker (dọn) functioning in (9f&g)as the preverbial constituent in (9d&e) and the future marker (*go*) occurring as the auxiliary/ helping verb in (9f&g). The verbs in English are not in NP lexicon. Below are the NP counterparts of the English verbs in the bilingual verbs phrase in the code- mixed sentences in (8a-g).

Table 2.

	English verb	NP Counterpart
(a)	Refurbish	Repie (repair)
(b)	Apprehend	Kash (catch)
(c)	Ensnare	Kash (catch)
(d)	Crush	kil (kill)
(e)	Extinguish	Kuensh (Quench)
(f)	Eradicate	remuv (remove)
(g)	Slaughter	Kil (kill)

In the translational equivalents of the serial verb constructions into English, the first verbal constituent functions as a prepositional phrase with the verb *tek* functioning as the prepositional particle <u>with</u> and the noun playing an instrumental function.

Succinctly put, v_1 in the serial verb constructions introduces the head noun that plays instrumental function while V_2, which is from the embedded language, is the active verb in the serial verb construction.

2.7 NP-Based Bilingual Verbs

It is not the case that all main verbs in the bilingual verbal constituents are from the embedded language. There are instances of hybrid verbs with roots in NP; however, their affixes which are from English are used to determine the categorical status of the constituent.

There are two examples of this set of bilingual verbs. First is the case where the participial suffix-*en* is attached to an adjective through the deviational process to derive a verb. The second instance involves the verbalization of an adjective with the attachment of the derivational suffix-ize. Below are three examples for each of the two morphological processes described above.

10

a) Di tọsh lait *go brighten* di dak rum.

   The torch light *will brighten* the dark room.

b) Dis meresin go *embolden* yu.

   This medicine *will embolden you.*

c) Dat buk dọn *enlighten* mi.

    That book has *enlightened* me.

d) Mai fren dọn *economize* in fud.

    My friend has *economized* his food.

e) Di bọi dọn *reorganize* di rum.

    The boy *has reorganized* the room.

f) Dr. Sunny de *deputize* fọ awa hed of dipatment.

    Dr. Sunny *is deputizing* for our Head of Department.

So, the above examples are instances of NP based bilingual verbs. If one looks at the English translational equivalents of (d- f), one observes that the –ed and –ing suffixes in English counterparts are absent in the cases of NP affixes in its inventory.

Some findings in this study revolve around the resources persons in the tape recorded conversations. Although conversations were taped from senior non-academic, academic staff and undergraduate students of Delta State University, Abraka, code-mixing was found mostly in the utterances of undergraduates. Information from the administered questionnaires reveal that the age range of the undergraduates is between 19 and 26 years while the average age of the staff members is 32. The fact

that undergraduates who are much younger than staff members code mix regularly corroborates, Muysken (2011: 313) assertion that "Extremely frequent code – switching has been reported for age range 12- 25, the age of adolescence and young adulthood." He adds that this is the age when speakers try to establish themselves within age groups. So, code switching decreases in intensity during adulthood.

The "we code" and "they code" dichotomy is also established from the questionnaires since NP is a language of wider communication that is associated with in-group and informal activities while English is associated with formal activities. The issue of 'elite closure' cannot be established from the data collected but it can be inferred since the undergraduates are highly educated and they constitute the future elite of Nigerian society. Myers-Scotton (2002:35) observes that "the elites accomplish elite closure through their non- formalized language use and because they control different linguistic varieties from the masses patterns". So, the use of bilingual/hybrid verbs is part of the linguistic repertoire of undergraduates during informal conversation while they engage in code-mixing is an instance of elite closure.

3. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to describe the hybridization of verbs in NP- English code mixing. The two languages are typologically different with regards to morphology since NP is an isolating language while English is an inflecting one. The ability of the internal constituents of the verbal to hybridize seems to corroborate Chloros' (2011) assertion that code-mixers engage in creative use of language, with focus on the verb phrase, while code mixing. So, hybridization of verbs is one of the outcomes of such creativity of code mixers. The inventiveness of the code- switchers in this study can also be attributed to the fact that apart from the grammars of NP and English there is a third grammar and the bilingual verbs constitute one of the components of the new grammar. However, based on the MLF and 4-M models of Myers-Scotton adopted for this study, there is no need for a special syntax that arises from the mixing of the verbs of NP and English. The predominant issue is the conformity of the mixed verbs to that of the matrix language; if they do not conform, then the entire code-mixed utterances are ungrammatical since the grammatical structure of the matrix language predominates minutes. Finally, linguistic hybridization is an ongoing research and more study is needed on the behavior of balanced bilinguals while code-mixing not only with regards to the structural approach but also with respect to linguistic hybrid forms.

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