



Bringing our Cultures Home:
FESTSCHRIFT FOR
BADE AJAYI AT 70

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GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES IN YORÙBÁ-IGBO CODE-SWITCHING

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Abstract

This paper investigates the morphosyntactic features of Yorùbá-Igbo code-switching of multilingual Nigerian Igbo immigrants' children in Yorùbá speaking community. Myers-Scotton's (1993) theory of intra-sentential code-switching referred to as Matrix Language Frame model is used. Yorùbá and Igbo are both Kwa languages spoken mainly in Nigeria. This work reveals that Yorùbá is the matrix language, and Igbo, the embedded language in this code-switching. The data show that Igbo verbs that participate in the code-switch are integrated into Yorùbá morphosyntax, thereby not allowing the past tense suffix on the Igbo verbs. These Igbo verbs usually take Igbo complement noun phrases, where the modifiers in these noun phrases are supplied by Yorùbá. It is also found that the two languages supply the content morphemes in serial verb construction and ditransitive construction.

Key words: Yorùbá, Igbo, code-switching, morpheme

Introduction

Muysken (2000:1) defines code-switching (CS hereafter) as 'the rapid succession of several languages in a single speech event', however, code-mixing refers to all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence. Two types of CS have been recognized by most researchers: Intra-sentential CS used for switches within sentences, and inter-sentential CS for switches between sentences.

Sociolinguistics has been much interested in the syntax of CS in bilingual speeches. Different approaches have been in place to examine the syntactic properties of the languages when used in CS and the constraints that are involved. Various models of Constraints on CS have been proposed and formulated. For instance the free morpheme constraint and the equivalence constraint by Poplack (1980) have attracted much attention and there have been weaknesses when applied to different language pairs (Redouane, 2005; Akinremi, 2011; Quarcoo, 2012).

This study investigates the syntax of CS and the linguistic factors that operate to constrain CS in these typologically similar languages, Igbo and Yorùbá within the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model. A considerable number of studies have been carried out dealing with CS between English and other major Nigerian language, (Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá) (see Akinremi, 2011; Uduma, 2010; Obiamalu and Mbagwu, 2007).

Igbo and Yorùbá are both Kwa languages spoken in Nigeria. Igbo is the major language in the southeastern part of the country while Yorùbá is the major language in the southwest. The two languages are both syntactically similar, having the same constituent order of SVO in basic declarative sentences and similar phrase structure rules,

but there are differences. For instance, Igbo is a language that is considered rich with affixes that carry features such as tense, aspect, mood, etc., which is not so with Yorùbá.

Background of the present study

This study set out to address issues involving syntactic aspects of CS in Yorùbá-Igbo. This study involves Nigerian Igbo multilingual speakers residing in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital, Nigeria. The motivation for choosing this group stems from the fact that the researcher is actually involved in this kind of bilingual speech (Yorùbá-Igbo). These groups of speakers are children of immigrants from Igbo-speaking part of the country who were born and bred in the Yorùbá-speaking communities, and whose parents never stop using the Igbo language with. These children grow with Igbo, their mother tongue, Yorùbá (the language of the immediate environment that is also taught as a school subject), and English (the medium of instruction in schools and government agencies).

The language situation and varieties of speeches within the group involve a lot of CS. Sometimes; the CS is between English and Igbo, which has often been referred to as *Englilbo* (see Uduma, 2010; Obiamalu and Mbagwu, 2007). The CS may also be between Igbo and Yorùbá, which I term as *Yorigbo* and in some cases the CS may involve the three languages.

- (1) a. *Nonsò b́à-rà* yesterday.
Nonso come-PST
'Nonso came yesterday.'
- b. *Ó wà n'ime ite.*
3SG be in inside pot
'It is in the pot.'
- c. *Ó wà n'ime room.*
3SG be in inside
'It is in the room.'

The CS in (1a) is English-Igbo, in (1b) is Igbo-Yorùbá and in (1c) we have the three languages (English-Igbo-Yorùbá).

Ogbonna (1985) observes that CS is more predominant among the Igbo people than any other ethnic group in Nigeria. Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2007) identify factors such as language attitude, subconscious linguistic behavior, cultural disloyalty, lexical gap and low level of competence in Igbo as the socio-psychological and linguistic motivations for CS among the Igbo speakers.

This study is on the Yorùbá-Igbo CS. This is the form of speech used by the group in informal setting when discussing among themselves in which case, they have competence (speaking and listening at least) in the two languages.

Methodology

The methodology employed was to record in form of writing the informal utterances involving Igbo and Yorùbá at different occasions and time. The code-switches are noted as they occur in the spontaneous speeches of the different individuals (including the researcher). Other speakers (informants) are not aware that their speeches were recorded. The informants were both male and female between the ages of 5 and 30 years.

Transcription and translation of data

Orthographic transcriptions are used. The Yorùbá utterances are written in plain type with tone markings while Igbo utterances are italicized and tone markings are used where they are needed for clarification.

An inter-linear gloss (morphological translation) appears on the line below each of the transcribed sentences. The full English paraphrase is given in single quotation marks below the morphological translation.

- (2) *Uka fùn mí ní ncha tí maa fí su akwa.*
Uka give me LK soap that FUT use wash clothe
'Uka gave me (a bar of) soap to use to wash the clothe(s).'

The Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model

The Matrix Language Frame (MLF) Model of Myers-Scotton (1993) views the constraints on CS 'in terms of the structure properties of some base or matrix structure. Here the process of code-mixing is conceived as.... the insertion of an alien lexical or phrasal category into a given structure' (Muysken, 2003:3). According to Herik (2012:131) the MLF 'suggests that at any one point in a conversation, one of the languages acts as the frame into which material from the other language is inserted'. The MLF model is devised to explain intra-sentential CS. It imposes structural constraints on code switched utterances (Holmes, 2008:45).

Matrix Language (ML) - Embedded Language (EL) distinction

When an intra-sentential CS occurs, the distribution of the two or more languages is asymmetrical. The more dominant language is the Matrix Language (ML) and the other one(s) is/are the Embedded Language(s) (EL). ML might be identified as the first language of the speaker or the language in which the morphemes or words are more frequently used in speech. In example (3) below, Yorùbá is the ML and it builds the frame of the mixed constituents and creates a slot in which the Igbo word *bido* is inserted thus indicating that Igbo is the EL.

- (3) *Ìgbáwò ní a maa bido meeting yẹn?*
time which COMP 1PL FUT start meeting DEM
'When will we start that meeting?'

Yorùbá is the language frequently used within the group and this actually contradicts the fact that they pick Igbo which is supposed to be their mother tongue from

the parents. The reason for the Yorùbá now serving as the first language is obvious as there are more sociolinguistic settings of using Yorùbá than (there are for) Igbo.

Myers-Scotton classified two kinds of CS according to the speaker's proficiency. If the speaker is proficient enough to make a sufficient grammatical structure in the ML, it is called classical CS. On the other hand, 'when speakers do not have full access to the grammatical frame of the intended ML, part of the abstract structure comes from one variety and part from another' (Myers-Scotton and Jake, 2001:2). This is known as composite CS. In this paper, it is the case of classical CS, where the multilinguals are proficient in the languages (Yorùbá and Igbo) used.

A CS speech can consist of ML islands which have only ML morphemes; mixed constituents including morphemes from both ML and EL; and EL islands consisting of EL morphemes. ML islands are made up of ML morphemes and are under the control of ML grammar. On the other hand, EL islands are also well-formed by EL grammar but they are inserted into an ML frame. Therefore, EL islands are under the constraint of ML grammar.

- (4) Sé o ti sùò ede yèn?
QM 3SG PERF pound cocoyam DEM
'Have you pounded that cocoyam?'

The Igbo EL island *sùò ede* consists of only EL morphemes. The morphemes are well-formed in Igbo grammar. The verb *sùò* takes the open vowel suffix *ò* that is used in imperative sentences (Emenanjo, 1978; Iloene, 2010). The well-formed verb phrase (VP) is inserted in the ML frame created by Yorùbá.

Content-system morpheme distinction

The morphemes that participate in CS are grouped into two viz., content morpheme and system morpheme. According to Myers-Scotton (2002:15) 'content morphemes are the main elements conveying semantic and pragmatic aspects of message, and system morphemes largely indicate relations between the content morphemes'. This dichotomy can be likened to that of lexical and functional categories in syntax. The distinction between content and system morphemes is crucial in identifying the ML. Content morphemes, e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives and prepositions assign and/or receive thematic roles.

- (5) Chisom fún Uka ní ákwà.
Chisom give Uka LK clothe
'Chisom gave Uka clothe(s).'

Verbs are said to assign thematic roles to their argument NPs. The verb *fún* 'give' in (5) above is trivalent, requiring three arguments. The subject NP *Chisom* receives the thematic role AGENT, while the direct object *Uka* and the indirect object *ákwà* receive the thematic roles of BENEFICIARY and PATIENT respectively.

System morphemes are function words and inflections such as number, aspect, person, determiner, etc. do not assign or receive thematic roles. They are essential in

building grammatical frames. The model specifies that it is the ML that supplies all the system morphemes in an ML + EL (or mixed) constituent.

- (6) Dinma ti bacha ji yèn.
Dinma PERF peel yam DEM
'Dinma has peeled that yam.'

Yorùbá supplies all the system morphemes needed to indicate the relationship between the content morphemes. It has contributed the aspectual marker *ti* and the determiner *yèn* 'that'. In example (7) below which is a sentence in the EL and using the EL grammar, the aspectual marker *-la* is a suffix attached to the verb stem.

- (7) Dinma abacha-la ji ahụ.
Dinma peel-PERF yam DEM
'Dinma has peeled that yam.'

System morphemes are employed only from the ML and the content morphemes are taken from both ML and EL. Myers-Scotton proposed two principles to identify the ML during CS using a content-system morpheme distinction. These principles are the *Morpheme Order Principle* and the *System Morpheme Principle*. The Morpheme Order Principle states that 'in ML + EL constituents consisting of singly-occurring EL lexemes and any number of ML morphemes, surface morpheme order...will be that of ML' (Myers-Scotton, 1993:83).

- (8) Bá mi mú ncha kan wá nínú ilé.
help me take soap one come inside house
'Bring (a bar of) soap for me from the room.'

The ML + EL constituent in example (8) above is made up of a single EL morpheme *ncha* 'soap', the surface syntactic relations came from the ML, Yorùbá. The object NP *ncha kan* that occur between the verbs in the serial construction *mú...wá* 'bring (lit. take...come)' observes the head initial word order of Yorùbá¹. The System Morpheme Principle states that 'in ML + EL constituents, all system morphemes which have grammatical relations external to their head constituent...will come from the ML' (Myers-Scotton, 1993:83).

Analysis of the morphosyntactic configuration of Yorùbá-Igbo code-switching

¹Igbo is also a head initial language but in an NP with the numeral one, the numeral occurs before the head noun, e.g. *otu ncha* 'a (bar of) soap' but other numerals occur postnominally, *ncha abuo* 'two (bars of) soap'. There are also few other modifiers that behaves like the numeral one (see Obasi, 2011; Emenanjo, 1978).

Tense and aspect constraints on Igbo verbs

Verbs in Igbo have attracted the attention of a good number of scholars (Green & Igwe, 1963; Carell, 1970; Okonkwo, 1974; Lord, 1975; Emenanjo, 1978; Nwachukwu, 1983; Uwalaka, 1997). Amongst the Kwa languages, Igbo has exceptionally rich inflectional morphology (Déchaine, 1993:456), and this is often inflected on the verb. This makes verbs the most complex category of expression in the language.

The simple past tense is expressed by placing a trill /r/ and a copy of the last vowel of the verb root together as a suffix to the verb root. This is often referred to as the *rV* suffix. The future is marked with *ga-* which is hyphenated to the verb root.

- (9) a. *ga + rV = gara*
'go' 'went'
- b. *de + rV = dere*
'write' 'wrote'
- c. *si + rV = siri*
'cook' 'cooked'
- d. *ga-aga* 'will go'
FUT-go
- e. *ga-edede* 'will write'
FUT-write

In the case of aspect, the perfective is marked with the suffix *-la/-le* and the progressive is marked with *na-*.

- (10) a. *rie-le* 'has eaten'
- b. *daa-la* 'has fallen'
- c. *na-eri* 'is eating'
- d. *na-ada* 'is falling'

With regard to verbs in Yorùbá, they are not inflected for tense (Lamidi, 2009). The future is indicated with the words *máa*, *á*, and *yóò*. The perfective aspect marker is *tí* and the progressive is *ní* (Yusuf, 2010:264). They are usually found before the main verbs.

- (11) a. *Mo tí ẹ́ é.*
1SG PERF do EXP
'I have done it.'
- b. *Olú n gbàdúrà.*
Olu PROG pray
'Olu is praying.'

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- c. *Sadé máa/á/yóò wá.*
Sade FUT come
'Sade will come.'

These tense and aspect markers are supplied by the ML, Yorùbá. Consider the following code-switched utterances.

- (12) a. *Kò tii sa efere.*
NEG PERF wash plate
'He/she has not washed the plate(s).'
- b. *Ada ya nwaanyi ti chie sista.*
First daughter 3SG woman PERF crown Reverend Sister
'His/her first daughter has become a Reverend Sister.'
- c. *Mo fọ onugbu ní àná.*
1SG wash bitterleaf LK yesterday
'I washed bitterleaf yesterday.'
- d. *Máa mee garri yẹn.*
FUT prepare with hot water garri DEM
'I will prepare the garri.'

In examples (12a&b), the aspectual markers were supplied by the ML. The ML does not allow the inflection of the *rV* suffix for past tense on the verb in example (12c), with the fact that the action was in the past. This is because past is not inflected on the ML verbs. The verb in (12c) look very much like the verb *fọ* 'wash' in the ML, but this verb subcategorize for the complement *asọ* 'clothe' in the ML. Consider the use of the verb and similar verbs in both ML and EL in the sentences below:

- Yorùbá (13) a. *Ó fọ asọ.*
3SG wash clothe
'He/She washed (some) clothes.'
- b. *Ó gbo ewúro.*
3SG wash bitterleaf
'He/She washed the bitterleaf.'

- Igbo (14) a. *Q sọ-rọ ákwá.*
3SG wash-PST clothe
'He/She washed (some) clothes.'
- b. *Q fọ-rọ onugbu.*
3SG wash-PST bitterleaf
'He/She washed the bitterleaf.'

Negative structures

The simple and common negative morpheme in Igbo is the suffix *-ghi* which is attached to the verb root. The negative marker is supplied by the ML. The basic form of the negative in the Yorùbá language is *kò*.

- (15) a. *Kò tii sa efere.*
NEG PERF wash plate
'He/She has not washed the plate.'

- b. *Mi ò le fọ onugbu.*
1SG NEG fit wash bitterleaf
'I cannot wash the bitterleaf.'

The negators *kò* and *ò* in the examples (15a&b) are variants of the negative morpheme in Yorùbá, the ML. With these morphemes of negation, the negative suffix in Igbo, the EL is no longer possible. This explains why the structure below is not a well-formed one.

- (16) **Kò tii sa-ghi efere.*
NEG PERF wash-NEG plate

Having two negative markers or disjoint negative particles is neither a feature of the ML or the EL. Only a single negative marker is acceptable in sentential negation as shown in example (15a) above.

Imperative structures

Imperative structures are marked with the open vowel suffix (OVS) on the verb in Igbo. This is illustrated in the following examples.

- (17) a. *ga-a = gaa*
go-OVS 'Go!'
- b. *sụ-ọ = sụọ*
ponud-OVS 'Pound!'
- c. *ri-e = rie*
eat-OVS 'Eat!'

The ML gives the frame for imperatives in the CS. In the ML, imperatives are indicated with the use of prosody, which is the case of intonation. The system morpheme for the imperative structures is supplied by Igbo in the EL island. Consider the examples below:

- (18) a. *Sụọ ede yẹn kí n tó dé!*
pound cocoyam DEM ? PROG before arrive
'Pound that cocoyam before I come back!'

- b. *Lọ dee àkwà mummy!*
go iron clothe
'Go and iron mummy's clothe!'

The verb phrases supplied by the EL are the major elements that show the imperative mood in the utterances in (18) above. This is indicated with the OVS on the verbs. In example (18b) the structure contains two verbs, the first supplied by the ML, and the second by the EL. We shall consider structures with more than one verb in one of the subsections below.

Phrase and clause structure

The ML and the EL are similar languages in terms of the order of constituents in phrasal categories. They are both head initial languages. In the examples below, the head nouns are from EL and the modifiers, occurring post-nominally are from the ML.

- (19) a. *Fún mi ní ncha kan.*
give me LK soap one
'Give me a (bar of) soap.'
- b. *Sé o ti bachaji yẹn tán.*
QM 2SG PERF peel yam DEM finish
'Have you finished peeling the yam?'

The clause structure for both languages is SVO. Yorùbá can project a slot for an Igbo verb. In a mixed transitive verb construction, the subject can precede the Igbo verb and the object follows it in accordance with Yorùbá constituent order as predicted by the Morpheme Order Principle. The Igbo verb which is a content morpheme usually subcategorizes for an Igbo object complement and can assign thematic roles to Yorùbá subjects and objects.

- (20) a. *Màà sikwa ofe.*
FUT warm soup
'I will warm the soup.'
- b. *Wọn ò ní nata oriri this year.*
3PL NEG ? receive food
'They will not receive their first Holy Communion this year.'
- c. *Sé mmiri oku yẹn ti sụ?*
QM water fire DEM PERF boil
'Is the water boiled?'

Example (20b) consists of the three (Yorùbá, Igbo and English) languages. The subject and the negative morpheme are supplied by Yorùbá while the verb phrase is from Igbo, and the temporal adverbial was taken from English. In example (20c), all the content

morphemes are supplied by the EL, Igbo, and the system morphemes by the ML, Yorùbá. This is a typical utterance that cannot be understood by a Yorùbá speaker since the major elements that convey meaning are supplied by Igbo, but the utterance would be clearly understood to be question to the Yorùbá speaker considering the use of the question particle *sé* and other categories from Yorùbá.

Ditransitive verbal construction

To take on required objects, Yorùbá employs the use of the particle *ni* to increase the valence of the verb. We call this particle linker (following Baker & Collins, 2006). According to Yusuf (2010), the *ni* does not seem to have any meaning. It only performs the function of hosting an extra object to the verb in the discourse.

- (21) a. Olú fún Uka *ni akpa* kan.
Olú give Uka LK ~~bag~~ one
'Olú gave Uka a bag.'

- b. *Olú fún Uka *akpa* kan.
Olú give Uka bag one

The structure in (21b) is not well-formed in Yorùbá considering the language as the ML. This is as a result of the omission of the linker. But that is the structure of ditransitives in Igbo, where dative shifting is obligatory. The two objects follow each other with no linker. Consider the following Igbo example.

- (22) Olú nyere Uka *otu akpa*.
Olú give Uka one bag
'Olú gave Uka a bag.'

Serial verbal construction

Aikhenvald (2006:1) defines a serial verb construction is a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker of coordination, subordination or syntactic dependency of any sort. Serial verbal construction is a common verb pattern in the two languages (Bamgbose, 1974; Awoyale, 1988; Ihionu, 1988; Déchaine, 1993; Umeozor, 2012). In this type of construction, the two languages contribute to the series of verbs, as well as objects in the construction.

- (23) a. Lọ *kute ofe* kí a fí *richa* óúnjẹ yí.
go fetch soup COMP 1PL use eat-finish food DEM
'Go and fetch more soup so that we can use it to finish this food.'
- b. Bá mí *kpote awọn ákwà* yẹn wá.
help 1SG pack 3PL colthe DEM come
'Bring those clothes for me.'

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- c. Lọ bu *mmiri aka* wá.
go fetch water hand come
'Go and bring the water for washing hands.'

In serial verbal constructions in Yorùbá and Igbo, all the verbs are marked similarly for tense, aspect and modality. It is observed that serial verb construction is a common feature in Yorùbá-Igbo CS. The initial verb in this construction is usually from Yorùbá while Igbo supply some or none of the verbs as shown in example (23) above.

Conclusion

The MLF has been applied to Yorùbá-Igbo CS in this study. The System Morpheme Principle employed supplied the system morphemes that are used in indicating grammatical relations such as tense, aspect and negation. But it was not able to tamper with the EL imperative structures as exemplified in (18) where the OVS for the imperatives are found on the EL verbs. The verbs in other constructions that participate in the CS from Igbo are integrated into Yorùbá morphosyntax. For instance, the *rV* suffix is not allowed on the Igbo verbs.

The data also show that while obligatory dative shifting is attested in the EL, the ditransitive constructions in the ML make use of the linker *ni*. In the serial verb construction, both the ML and the EL supplies the content morphemes and there are no violations on the construction. The verb phrases which usually subcategorize for object NPs in the code-switched utterances where Igbo supplies the verb, the head nouns are also supplied by Igbo while Yorùbá supply the nominal modifiers.

There is no doubt that CS also takes place among Nigerian indigenous languages. We would suggest that such studies be embarked upon by researchers to enhance the interesting facts in our languages.

Abbreviations

1SG	First person singular	LK	Linker
2SG	Second person singular	NEG	Negative marker
3SG	Third person singular	NP	Noun phrase
1PL	First person plural	PST	Past tense
3PL	Third person plural	PERF	Perfective aspect
COMP	Complementizer	PROG	Progressive aspect
DEM	Demonstrative	QM	Question marker
EXP	Expletive pronoun		
FUT	Future tense		

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