CODE-SWITCHING IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN SONGS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the phenomenon of code-switching and also the types of code-switching that occur in gospel songs. Therefore, using purposive random sampling and Poplack’s (1980) model, the excerpts of from ten gospel songs are collected and analysed. Findings reveal that the most dominant type of codeswitching that occurs in Christian music is inter-sentential code switching while others like intra-switching and tag switching occur rather sparingly. Also, the English language and Pidgin, according to the findings, remain the most dominant language being code switched with indigenous languages. To this end, it can be asserted that code-switching is not only a recurring decimal in Christian songs but also a manifestation of a brand of music that can be labelled Nigerian gospel music.

Introduction

The Nigerian music industry today is swarming with different kinds of artistes, each with different kind of songs and lyrics. One peculiar features of the Nigerian music industry however is the tendency to use English alongside several other languages- a recurrent decimal that has become all too obvious to many lovers of Nigerian music today. While this may be considered as mere entertainment in some quarters; to linguists, this trend can be investigated linguistically, but then since music itself is meant to communicate something, an idea, a culture, a belief, a doctrine etc. through language.

In the Nigerian context, many languages exist and are used for different communication purposes, and are often designated foreign language (e.g. English, French, and German etc.) or indigenous languages (e.g. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba among several others). Some scholars even classify them into indigenous, exogenous and indi-exogenous language like Pidgin.

The implication of this linguistic pluralism is that terms like bilingualism, borrowing, code switching and code mixing have recurrent linguistic features over time; and as such, speakers of a given language will have a wide variety to make deliberate or conscious linguistic choices given the different linguistic codes at their disposal; however, the language aptitude and attitude of the language users among other linguistic parameters often come to bear. Nevertheless, this linguistic reality which is a clear manifestation of languages in contact has its pros and cons. Be that as it may, Nigerian musicians or artistes have benefited from this linguistic pluralism highlighted thus far, producing songs that have a blend of many Nigerian languages much to the delight of many numerous fans across the country and beyond. In the North where Hausa is the dominant lingua franca, there is a tendency for many music artistes there to adopt English language as well as Hausa in their songs, and this situation is expected to in other regions. To this end, some Christian songs are not left out of this trend. Consequently, these songs will serve as a case in point to justify the prevalence of code-switching in Christian songs.

Statement of the Problem

While code-switching is not a recent phenomenon in the lyric and study of secular music or non-religious songs, very little or no work has been written on this linguistic occurrence in Christian religious songs. Moreover, while it appears that many papers like Babalola (2009), Olarunfemi (2009) and Guerrero (2009) among others seem to stress the impact or prevalence of code switching in hip hop and traditional music respectively, this paper is concerned with the linguistic content of religious songs with a view to finding cases of code-switching in them.

Basic Assumptions of this Paper

This paper rests on the following assumptions:

* That code-switching occurs in Christian music or non-secular music
* That there is a preponderance of inter-sentential code-switching in gospel songs than any other type of code switching
* That intra-sentential code-switching only occurs minimally in the

Christian songs compared to inter-sentential code switching

* That tag switching hardly occurs or occurs minimally in Christian songs
* That code-switching does not occur between a lexical stem and a bound morpheme but on “utterance construction level” and
* That this “utterance construction level” is used as a reference to the lyrics in the lines of Christian songs dismissed as “excerpts” in this paper

Methodology

Using ten (10) songs form Christian artistes or gospel musicians, this paper seeks to unveil the advent of code switching in Christian songs. Using two (2) excerpts only from these songs, this paper attempts to justify the existence of the following type of code switching:

1. Inter-sentential code switching
2. Intra-sentential code switching
3. Tag switching
4. Word switching

Inter-sentential switching occurs outside the sentence or the clause (i.e. at the sentence or the clause boundaries). It is sometimes called “extra-sentential”. Intraswitching on the other hand occurs within a sentence or a clause. Also, tag switching is the switching of either a tag phrase or word, or both, from one language to another (Mclure, 2001, p.166).

Theoretical Framework:

Constraint-Bases Model: Poplack’s (1980)

The major backdrop of this model or theory is that it provides for the classification of code switching that exists and which is deployed in the analysis of data as is the case here. They include inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching and word switching. This theory is predicted on two major constraints: the freemorpheme constraints and the free equivalence constraints. The former rests on the assumption that code-switching cannot occur between lexical stem and bound morphemes. Essentially, this constraint distinguishes code-switching from borrowing. Generally borrowing occurs in the lexicon, while code-switching occurs at either the syntax level or the utterance construction level.

The equivalence constraint predicts that the switches occur only at points where the surface structures of the languages coincide, or between sentence elements that are normally ordered in the same way by each individual grammar. To a large extent therefore, this paper seeks to use this model specifically the “free morpheme constraint” as a yardstick to test the validity or otherwise of the major propositions of this theory. Therefore, code-switching, in this context, will not occur between a lexical stem and a bound morpheme but on “utterance construction level” investigated using excerpts from Christian songs.

Code-switching

In linguistics, code-switching is the concurrent use of more than one language variety in a conversation. Code-switching can occur between sentences (intersentential). Wardhaugh (2006) is however of the view that code switching is the same thing as code mixing: “code switching (also called mixing) can occur in conversation between speakers’ turns or within a single speaker’s turn” (p.101). To him, “code-switching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights or obligations”. The term “code switching” is preferred to “language shift” in order to accommodate other kinds of varieties, dialects and registers (Hudson 2005, pp.51-52).

Code-switching also function to announce specific identities, create certain meanings and facilitate particular and interpersonal relationships (Johnson 2000, p.184). Similarly, according to Wardhaugh (2006, p.101), it is unusual for a speaker to have command of, use only one such code system. He said that most speakers command several varieties of language they speak, and bilingualism, even multilingualism, is a norm among many people throughout the world than “monolingualism”. He emphasizes that there are two kinds of code switching: situational and metaphorical. Gumpez and Hymes (19986) make a distinction between the two thus:

An important distinction is made from situational and metaphorical codeswitching. Situational code-switching is where alternation between varieties redefines a situation, being a change in governing norms. Metaphorical switching is when alternation enriches a situation, allowing for allusion to more than one social relationship within the situation. In metaphorical code-switching, the context of the conversation is undisturbed but rather the changes adhere to the social context including the roles of those involved in the conversation

It can therefore be argued that Nigeria is a typical example of code switching and code mixing situations. This is because there are over 400 hundred languages in Nigeria but English is often used for official purposes while Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are regarded as the language of the majority.

 In another submission, Martin and Nakayama (2007) concur that “code-switching is a technical term in communication that refers to the phenomenon of changing languages, dialects, or even accents. People code switch for several reasons: (1) to accommodate the other speakers, (2) to avoid accommodating others, or (3) to express another aspect of their cultural identity (p.241).

Code switching occurs frequently in almost all conversations, in professional setting and even in music because of the existence of the multiple languages in the country. There is also the mixing of English and tribal languages. Code mixing between indigenous languages is rare. However, Wardhaugh (2006, p.102) summarizes the issue of code switching succinctly below:

Most speakers command several varieties of any language they speak, and bilingualism even multilingualism is the norm rather than unilingualism. People, then, are usually required to select a particular code whenever they choose to speak, and they may also decide to switch from one code to another or to mix codes even within s ometimes very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process known as code switching Having explained the linguistic concept of code-switching, the next step, in this paper, is to explain how this term occurs in the Gospel songs of Nigerian musicians. to this effect, the data is given and analysed below.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section examines the issue of code switching in Nigerian gospel or Christian songs, and the songs have been numbered accordingly:

Excerpt One: “OniseIyanu” (Song) by NATHANIEL BASSEY

In song one, two major languages are code switched: English language and Yoruba. The type of code switching evident in this song can be described as partial and total code switching. The examples of partial code switching are given below:

OniseIyanu

You are the God of awesome wonders

I have tasted of your power

OniseIyanu

You have shown me so much mercy

Much more than deserve

My eyes have seen

My ears of have heard…

A few of these words, from the English and Yoruba language, are highlighted below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English Words  | Yoruba Words  |
| You  | Onise  |
| Awesome  | Iyanu  |
| Eyes  |   |
| Mercy  |   |
| Deserve  |   |
| Ears  |   |
| Heard  |   |
| Seen  |   |
| Shown  |   |
|   |   |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English Sentences  | Yoruba Sentences (Repeated)  |
| You are the God of awesome wonder  | OniseIyanu  |
| I have tasted of your power  | OniseIyanu  |
| You have shown me so much mercy…  | OniseIyanu  |
| My eyes have seen  |   |
| My ears have heard  |   |
| Creation bow in awe of you  |   |
| The words you speak turn things around  |   |
| Your outstretched hands has lifted me  |   |

Other examples in sentences:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nouns  | Verbs  | Adjectives  | Adverbs  |
| God  | Are  | Awesome  | So  |
| Power  | Tasted  | Outstretched  | Much  |
| Mercy  | Have  |   |   |
| Wonders  | Shown  |   |   |
| Praise  | Seen  |   |   |
| Creations  | Heard  |   |   |
| Words  | Bow  |   |   |
| Chains  | Speak  |   |   |
| Colts  | Turn  |   |   |
| Things  | Lifted  |   |   |
| Arm  |   |   |   |

Excerpt Two: “Mai Girma” (Song) by SOLOMON LANGE

In the second song, the two major languages being code switched are English and Hausa as seen in the first two lines of the song below:

I will lift up my voice and sing

Of the mercies of the Lord

Mai girma

Mai girma ne kai

Mai mulkialmasihu

Babu wanikamar da kai

Babu wanikamar da kai

Mai girmamaigirma ne kai

Karbasujada

Karbadaukaka

Karbayabo o uba

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English Words  | Hausa Words  |
| I  | Mai  |
| Will  | Girma  |
| Lift  | Ne kai  |
| My  | Mai  |
| Voice  | Mulki  |
| Sing  | Babu  |
| Setting  | Wani  |
| Mercies  | Kamar  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nouns  | Verbs  | Adjectives  | Adverb  |
| Sun  | Rising  | Nil  | Nil  |
| Voice  | Setting  |   |   |
| Mercies  | Will  |   |   |
| Lord  | Lift  |   |   |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English Sentence(s)  | Hausa Sentences  |
| I will lift  | Babu wanikamar kai  |
|   | Karbasujada  |
|   | Karbadaukaka  |
|   | Karbayaboyau  |
|   | Karbasujadayau  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Prepositional phrases  | Preposition  |
| From the rising of the sun  | From, of  |
| To the setting of the same  | To, of  |

Excerpt Three: “My Trust is in You” (song) by DAVID, G.

In the third song, there are four languages that have been switched notably, English, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba:

My trust is in you

Oyigiyigi

My trust is in you

Serikiduniya

My trust is in you

I put them on you My trust is in you

Kabiyeosi o

My trust is in

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| English words  | Igbo Words  | Hausa words  | Yoruba Words  |
| My  | Isi  | Seriki  | Kabiyeosi  |
| Trust  | Iyi  | Duniya  | Oyigi  |
| Put  | Nke  |   | Yigi  |
| Them  | Du  |   |   |
| On  |   |   |   |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nouns  | Verbs  | Adjectives  | Adverbs  |
| Lion  | Is  | Ancient  | Nil  |
| Judge  | Am  | Miracle  | Nil  |
| Days  | Put  |   |   |
| Valley  |   |   |   |
| Lilly  |   |   |   |
| Master  |   |   |   |
| Universe  |   |   |   |
| King  |   |   |   |
| Father  |   |   |   |
| Worker  |   |   |   |

Excerpt Four: “ArugboOjo” (song) by MINISTER KENN

In the fourth song, also, two languages have been code switched. Consider the extracts below:

The heavens declare your power and royalty

Lord you reign

King of all ages

You are the ancient of days

Lord you reign

Your throne is established justice and righteousness

Lord you reign

Great are you lord and greatly to be praised

Lord you reign

ArugboOjo (2x)

(The Ancient of Days)

Iwo l’aseda, l’awoneda, l’ameda oh!

(You are the creator of all creatures, He who knows the created)

ArugboOjo (2x)

Iwo l’oniiyin, kaabo, kaabo

(He who knows the created)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English Words  | Yoruba Words  |
| Heavens  | Iwo  |
| You  | L’aseda  |
| Reign  | Anugbo  |
| Lord  | Kaabo  |
| Ages  |   |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nouns  | Verbs  | Adjectives  | Adverbs  |
| Heavens  | Praised  | Holy  | greatly  |
| Power  | Declare  | Righteousness  |   |
| Royalty  | Reign  | Justice  |   |
| King  | Are  | Majesty  |   |
| Lord  | Is  |   |   |
| Throne  | Established  |   |   |
| God  | Cry  |   |   |
| Place  | Fill  |   |   |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English Sentences  | Yoruba sentences  |
| He who all praise belongs to, we welcome you in   | Iwo l’oniiyin, kaabo, kaabo   |
| You are the creator of all creatures, He who knows the created   | Iwo l’aseda, l’awoneda, l’ameda oh!   |
| He who knows the created   | Iwo l’oniiyin, kaabo, kaabo   |

Excerpt five: “Who am I” (song) by NOELLA

The fifth songcontains the three languages: English, Idoma and Hausa: You will not suffer my foot to be moved I carry your presence everywhere!

Who am I?

Your mind is so full of me!

Mortal man, Awesome God

Ondu me Adah

Omachalla

Onye le b’awa Omanchala Nmor eh no!

Oyor eh no! (2x)

Ban san maiyasa

Kana sauna

Ubangijiyayesu

Ina wan day a kai ka yesu

Ban ganiba, masoyina

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| English words  | Hausa words  | Idoma words  |
| Hold  | Kai  | Ondu  |
| Close  | Ka  | Me  |
| Feel  | Masoyina  | Ada  |
| You  | Kana  | Omachalla  |
| Presence  | Ubangiji  |   |
| Everywhere  |   |   |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nouns  | Verbs  | Adjectives  | Adverbs  |
| Foot  | Hold  | Mortal  | So  |
| Presence  | Feel  | Awesome  | Graced  |
| Mind  | Said  | Divine  | Blessed  |
| Man  | Will  |   |   |
| Friend  | Leave  |   |   |
| Clay  | Suffer  |   |   |
| Rock  | Carry  |   |   |
| Jesus  | Am  |   |   |
| God  | Is  |   |   |
| Breath  | Took  |   |   |

In the last part of the song, English is code switched with Hausa:

Just when I thought I knew your ways

That’s when you come to make me see

That all I knew was just a glimpse of you

Lord, you are more than my mind could ever think

It is you, yes it is you I hunger for

Yesu kai kaidai ne ke so

Yesu kai kaidai ne ke so

Yesu kai kaidainake so koyaushe

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English words  | Hausa words  |
| When  | Yesu  |
| Thought  | Kai kai de  |
| Come  | Neke so  |
| Make  | Koyaushe  |
| Me  |   |
| You  |   |
| More  |   |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nouns  | Verbs  | Adjectives  | Adverbs  |
| Ways  | Thought  | Enough  | Nil  |
| Glimpse  | Knew  | More  |   |
| Lord  | Come  |   |   |
| Mind  | Make  |   |   |
|   | See  |   |   |
|   | Are  |   |   |
|   | Hunger  |   |   |
|   | Cannot  |   |   |
|   | Have  |   |   |

Excerpt Six: “Wekobiro” (song) by SAMSONG

The data below show cases of inter-sentential code switching thus it begins with English and ends with an indigenous language and vice versa:

You are the present

You are the past

You are the future…

Wekobiro

Agbada buru

Ovie nu tagboru

Wekobiro

English Words Indigenous language

You are present Wekobiro

You are the past Agbada buru

You are the future Ovie nu tagboru

 Wekobiro

Thus from the above, Samasong complete switches from English language to an indigenous language in what can better be described as a case of inter-sentential switching of codes. The extract like the others already sampled above shows the existence of code switching in Christian music. This is also the case in the song below:

Excerpt Seven: “Obezina” (song) by PREYE ODEDE

Tell me why youre giving up on God

Tell me why youre giving up on Him

Tell me why youre giving up on Him

Hold on, change is on the way,

Ebezina, Chukwu non so

Oginibunsobubgi

Ima-naodiadigideh

Nwannemo, jidesi eh ike…

Excerpt Eight: “All the Way” (song) by EBEN

We go dey hail

Hail your name

Day by day

All the Way(2x)

We go dey hail

Hail your name

Day by day

All the way (2x)

All the way

In the song “All the Way” by Eben above, there is an obvious case of intrasentential code switching. This is because the language elements from another language feature in the same sentence where another language already exists:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| English Words  | Intra-Occurrence  | English (continue)  | Words  |
| We go  | dey (Pidgin)  | hail your name  |  |
| We go  | dey (Pidgin)  | hail your name  |  |

 Thus, it is common practice by some Nigerian gospel music to employ intrasentential code switching in their songs, and many reasons could be responsible for this. One of this is the desire to show one’s loyalty or affinity to one’s first language or indigenous language. And in this case, it seems most likely. This linguistic situation is similar to the one in the eight song below by Nosa.

Excerpt Nine: “Pray for you” (song) by NOSA

As all of us dey go our separate ways

Na good tory we go dey tell

When we see again of how God don bless me

And bless you too

I go always pray for you

And even if I far from you

You go always dey my heart

This na true

I just wan let you know say

Whatever I do

I go always pray for you

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| English Words  | Intra-Occurrence  | English Words (continue)  |
| As all of  | Us dey go  | Our separate ways  |
| When we see again  | Of how God don bless me  | And bless you too  |
| And even if  | I far  | from you  |
| This  | Na  | true  |

I just Wan let you know say Whatever I do

I go always Pray for you

Excerpt Ten: “Na you be God” (Song) by TIM GODFREY

This last song could be considered as a example of tag switching in that it has to do with either a tag phrase or a word:

Na you be God

Almighty God

You no be man oh,

You no be man oh,

Nara Ekele Nara Otuto

OmeMma

Nani Gi ka m gaefe

A ga m ajagimma

Si naebighebi, ebighebiruona

Ebighebi (2x)

Pidgin Expressions English Expressions

Na you be God Almighty God

You no be man oh

You no be man oh

The position of this paper however is that if you isolate the individual words in an expression like “Na you be God”, it can be guessed that there are English words as well as Pidgin expression in it thus a case of tag switching. For example, it can be argued that the only Pidgin expression is the found in the Pidgin word “Na” while the rest are English words that have been tagged with it, resulting in the advent of tag switching. The same position is also made in reference to an expression like “you no be man oh” where English words have been tagged with Pidgin to give it a local flavour which is highly intonated.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to investigate aspects of code-switching in Nigerian gospel music. Having examined the excerpts from ten gospel songs, it was discovered that inter-sentential code-switching is the most common type of codeswitching in gospel songs while intra-sentential and tag switching occur only sparingly. The position of this paper therefore is that inter-sentential codeswitching is a welcomed development because through it, languages can maintain their distinct peculiarities while being used to create certain kinds of effect lyrically.

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