

# Language, Culture and Identity: A Sociolinguistic Study of Bilingual Speech in Central Lagos

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## **Abstract**

*This paper explores the dynamics of bilingual speech in the Lagos Island speech community in Central Lagos. Against the background of the unique social motivations for bilingual behaviour in this cosmopolitan community, this study explores the various sociolinguistic acts utilized by the Yoruba-English bilinguals in the expression of their indigenous socio-cultural identity. These devices include the use of slang, code-switching and code-mixing. Based on the premise that language acts are acts of identity (Le page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985), it is argued that individual and social identities are mediated by language and are generally exhibited in the form of language attitudes. This study thus examines a corpus of naturally-occurring data in the explication of these sociolinguistic features of language use in a non-native English environment.*

**Keywords:** bilingual behaviour, slang, code-switching, code-mixing, social identities.

## **Introduction**

An undisputable fact of human language is the inseparability of speakers' identity from the language they speak. People are identified, and identify themselves, within the spatial configurations of the society in which they exist; and within different social groups to which they belong – institutional, professional, religious or filial (Clyne, 1997). This paper explores the various ways in which the Yoruba-English bilinguals of the Lagos Island speech community in Central Lagos create, sustain and negotiate their identities through their language practices. Based on the premise that language and

culture are the paths through which identity performance can be observed and interpreted, this study presents sociolinguistic data on the varying patterns of social identification, which define the unique character of bilingual behaviour in this cosmopolitan community.

This study relies on a corpus of naturalistic data which displays how language functions not only as a behavioural attribute of its speakers, but also represents the different ways in which language supplies the terms by which identities are expressed. This study explores the social dynamics occasioned by the alternations between English, the official language, and Yoruba, the indigenous language of Central Lagos, in terms of the sociolinguistic impact of the two languages on the bilingual behaviour of the speakers.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

This study is based on a purely sociolinguistic perspective, which views language as a social phenomenon (Weinreich, 1963; Labov, 1972, 1991; Chambers, 1995; Romaine, 1993; J. Milroy 1992; J. Milroy and L. Milroy, 1978, 1996; L. Milroy, 1987; Akere, 1977, 1984, 1987) and posits that the study of language behaviour is naturally domiciled within a society. Sociolinguistics thus views the society or 'context' as the appropriate domain for any investigation of language. The sociolinguistic study of bilingual speech in this research is however not restricted to the formal characterization of code alternation by Yoruba-English bilinguals. The social dimension of differential speech usage in a second language environment also constitutes an integral part of the study of code-switching and code-mixing in the Lagos Island speech community. To this end, the sociolinguistic perspective of this study will be complemented by the Variation Theory (Fischer, 1958; Bailey, 1972; Labov, 1972; Chambers, 1995) which employs the variability concept in the exploration of the patterns of systematic co-variation of sociological and linguistic features of speech usage.

Against the background of the need to address the issue of individual and group differential language performance, leading to variation in the bilingual production of youths and adult bilinguals in this community, this study operates on the premise that variation in inter

and intra-group bilingual performance can be examined in terms of the variable features of speech (Jacobson, 1990; Hymes, 1964, 1974; D. Sankoff, 1978). These differences are determined by group dynamics, speech style, gender differentiation as well as interpersonal and socio-cultural motivations.

A comprehensive description and analysis of these variability patterns is therefore necessary for a systematic exploration of bilingual behaviour in this community. This is particularly important in view of the significance of the social dimension to language, which constitutes the thrust of this study.

### **Methodology**

Sociolinguistic research relies on naturalistic data from the speech community. The sociolinguistic evidence for this study is thus derived from a language survey comprising questionnaire administration, interviews, observation and field recordings. The data gathering procedure for this study was carried out in two stages – the pilot study and the main study. The two stages of the fieldwork involved the survey method which took the research team to the five constituent neighbourhoods of this community namely: Olówógbowó, Campos (Pópó Agùdà), Láfiàjí, Okoofáji and Epètèdó.

Using a multi-level sampling process, a representative sample of 225 respondents was selected from the five broad sections of the community through a combination of probabilistic and social network methods. The research instrument, a 40-item questionnaire was designed to elicit both statistical and ethnographic data on bilingual speech in Central Lagos.

### **Yoruba-English Bilingualism in Lagos Island Sociolinguistic Dimensions**

Bilingual behaviour in Lagos Island is essentially a function of communal belonging. From as far back as the colonial period, Yoruba English bilingualism has remained the dominant speech norm in this community. This is a direct consequence of the community's colonial history as well as its unique history of

linguistic acculturation and mother-tongue diversity occasioned by the assemblage of numerous Nigerian ethnic groups in the Lagos cosmopolitan setting. Bilingual behaviour in Lagos Island is thus characteristically marked by the use of an urban variety of Yoruba known as Eko or Lagos Yoruba mixed with English. The frequent mixing of Yoruba with English as occasions demand is thus a dominant feature of language behaviour in this community. This pattern of speech usage cuts across generational, spatial and situational boundaries as a unifying index of communal belonging. Yoruba-English bilingualism in Central Lagos can therefore be described as a distinctive code which signifies the unmarked language choice (Myers-Scotton, 1988, 1993) of most bilinguals in this community.

Moreover, the use of Lagos Yoruba (*Ekó*) as an urban variety has sociolinguistic implications for code-switching and code-mixing. Although many linguists have argued (Akere, 1977) that Lagos Yoruba or Eko is the bastardized version of the indigenous Awori dialect, the sociolinguistic essence of Lagos Yoruba is sustained largely by the elite culture of urban Lagos which permeates the social, economic and political spheres of everyday discourse.

In addition, despite the fact that the Eko dialect is the preferred code for the educated elite, its use is however not associated with a loss of the indigenous language and culture, neither is it associated with the incompetence of its users. In other words, the use of the Lagos variety of Yoruba with English indicates that the speakers, while recognizing the importance of English as a prestige marker in most social interactions equally demonstrate solidarity and pride with their indigenous language. Moreover, the cultural facility of the indigenous language is also a strong factor in the maintenance of the L1, since part of the individual and group identities of speakers reside in the constant identification with the indigenous language and culture.

The Yoruba – English bilingual of Lagos Island operates basically from two distinct linguistic platforms to create a single richly expressive code. The Lagos urban speech form usually consists of a

‘matrix’ language, Yoruba, embedded with a wide range of English lexical items (Carol Myers-Scotton, 1990). The frequent insertion of lexical items of English into Yoruba and vice-versa has become a predominant feature of bilingual behaviour in this community such that most speakers believe that to speak pure Yoruba or unadulterated English is indeed a minorner!

Despite being acknowledged as a widespread language phenomenon however, bilingualism in Lagos Island is not necessarily a feature of biculturalism as many Yoruba-English monolinguals who have no exposure to other cultures and have never left the community (thereby displaying features of ‘linguistic isolation’ (Chambers, 1995) also participate in Yoruba-English code-switching and code-mixing. This group of speakers, otherwise called ‘semi-linguals’ (Li Wei, 2000) can be said to display monolingual competence but bilingual performance. A male respondent had summed up the speech norm in Lagos Island in this interesting response during an interview:

*Kò sí ẹnì tí kò gb’òyìnbó l’Eko bá yì. Kódà bí èyàn ò tiè lè fì idí ìgò kò’wé. To bá sọ pé “come, come”, “Wá” lo sọ yen. To bá dẹ sọ pé “Sharraap”, gbènu e dáké ló n jẹ bẹẹ.”*

(Practically everyone speaks English in Lagos now. Even the stark illiterate. If you tell an illiterate ‘come’, he knows what you mean, and if you tell him to ‘shut up’ he understands that too!’)

This study therefore debunks the view (Swigart, 1994) that ‘the use of a vernacular language mixed with a European language marks the speaker as educated, of relatively high socio-economic status, and as someone who values both their indigenous and their more international status’. In the case of the Lagos Island speech community, we observe that the use of Yoruba mixed with English is not an indicator of education or socio-economic status of the speakers. Rather, Yoruba-English code-switching and code-mixing cut across socio-economic indices. This study shows that even speakers with no formal knowledge of English use code-switching

and code mixing strategies as effectively as the educated. This, as we have already established, is a product of the bilingual speech norm: all members of the community draw from the same speech repertoire, hence they all have access to the same vocabulary.

Furthermore, the description of bilingual speech usage in the Lagos Island community in this study has been explored in terms of generational differences in order to show the relevance of the synchronic perspective to the analysis of the morphological, lexical and syntactic characteristics of bilingual behaviour in a cosmopolitan setting. Attempt was also made to examine bilingual behaviour in terms of the dichotomies between traditionalism and modernity and the effects of these on the social categorization of speech. It was interesting to discover that although the cosmopolitan content of Lagos speech can be largely attributed to the sustenance of the Lagos urban culture, the features of traditionalism however remain in the form of institutionalized usages which are mostly confined to the Isàlẹ̀-Ekó speech of the older generation. Thus a significant feature of the bilingual situation in this community is the way speakers have been able to explore the generational factor in maintaining the distinctions between contemporary life and traditional life.

To this end, this study operates on the viewpoint that biculturalism as a consequence of language contact in Lagos Island finds equal expression in the speech of both the young and the older generations alike, with observable differences at the lexical, morphological, semantic and stylistic aspects of language use. These linguistic features and their sociolinguistic implications for the dynamics of language and identity in a non-homogenous environment constitute the thrust of this study.

Essentially, this study shows that bilingual speech in Lagos is characterized by two frequently occurring phenomena:

a). **Code-mixing:** The insertion or embedding of morpho-lexical features of English into Yoruba and vice-versa, as in the examples:

- i. Mo wa ẹ dé **office** ẹ lánàá. (I came looking for you in your office yesterday).
- ii. O yẹ kí Bisi ti dé lati **school** bayii. (Bisi should have returned from school by now).
- iii. Jẹ kí a **discuss** ọ̀rọ̀ yẹn kíákíá. (Let us discuss the issue quickly).
- iv. O ma n wá'bí **frequently**. (He/she comes here frequently).

Code-mixing may also involve other strategies such as Yoruba-English compounding as in the sequence Noun + Noun e.g.:

- v. Kíló dé tí o ra aago lówó **omọ go-slow?**

(Why would you buy a watch from a street trader?) ;

As well as the infusion of local flavour exemplified by these Nigerian English expressions:

- vi. Kò tî je Chairman, ó n ẹ **bigmanism**.  
(He has not been elected chairman, yet he engages in rank-pulling)
- vii. Ọmọ yẹn **wapacious**.! (That lady is good-looking / gorgeous!)

The above instances exemplify some notable linguistic components of Yoruba-English code-mixed expressions and their different sociolinguistic patterns of lexical usage. While examples (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) involve the insertion of English borrowed words: office, school discuss and frequently into Yoruba expressions; examples (v) and (vi), and (vii) exemplify some complex morphological processes involving the addition of local flavor in code-mixed expressions. Thus, example (v) shows that code-mixing can take the form of Yoruba-English simple compounding comprising two nominal elements: **omọ**(child/person)+**go-slow**(traffic jam); sentence (vi) is an example of a Nigerian English (NE) c ofompound 'big man' inflected with the affix 'ism' (**bigman** +**ism**) which creates a Nigerian English expression equivalent (in this context) to Standard English 'rank-pulling'. Example (vii) involves the use of an urbanized slang word comprising combination of Yoruba *wa pa* (slang for 'good looking', 'gorgeous') as a verbal constituent and an English inflectional morpheme 'ious' to create an urban slang

*'wapacious.'* (to be good-looking, gorgeous'). Usages such as (i) to (iv) usually express more formality than the latter (v) – (vii).

Code-mixing may also involve phonological integration of some lexical items as in the examples:

- viii. Aburo **kánsù** (council) **shiaman** (chairman) *nìyen*.  
(He/she is the younger sibling of the council chairman)
- ix. Awon **tíshà** (teachers) *tun ti* **sraik** (strike).  
(Teachers are on strike again).

The examples (xiii) and (ix) depict the common process of lexical borrowing where core-borrowed English words have become phonologically assimilated into bilingual speech patterns. Hence the words 'council' and 'chairman' are pronounced 'kansu' and 'shiaman'; Similarly, 'teacher' becomes 'tisa' and the /t/ in 'strike' becomes elided, thus it is pronounced 'sraik'. This is more common in the articulatory habits of semi-linguals. (Li Wei, 2000).

b). **Code-switching:** This involves a shift from Yoruba to English or vice versa within a stretch of utterance, e.g.

- i. Yoruba to English: A *máa mú èyí tí a fẹ* **from the list provided**.  
(We shall make a selection from the list provided).
- ii. English to Yoruba: **There must be a good reason** *fun iwà ti o hù yen*. (There must be a good reason for your behavior.)

The phenomenon of code-switching is equally productive and interesting, often exhibiting a wide range of discursive potentials in interpersonal communication. In the first place, the question of who switches from which language to the other and in what context is an overriding consideration in the explication of code-switching in Lagos Island.

In this regard, a switch from Yoruba to English in many interactive situations is considered a more elitist, urban way of speaking than the other way round. A switch from Yoruba to English often marks the speaker as enlightened and sophisticated while a switch from English to Yoruba is generally more acceptable for culture-specific



communication such as a speaker's desire to express indigenous thought as in the use of proverbs or local idioms. Thus most adult bilinguals especially the educated, normally switch from the indigenous Yoruba to English unconsciously as an unmarked choice. (cf. Swigart 1994:176; Myers-Scotton 1993).

The switch from Yoruba to English becomes 'marked' in situations where the contextual setting favours pure Yoruba speech (e.g. traditional events) but a speaker chooses to speak English. In such situations, the speaker gives the impression of unnecessary showmanship and often attracts disdain or subtle reprimand from his audience. Such bilingual behaviour is usually rebuked with sharp interjections like: "E wálé", or "E padà sílé" (interpreted literally as 'return home') meaning 'revert to your mother tongue'; 'come down to our level', etc), often to the speaker's embarrassment.

However, despite the strong assertiveness of traditional linguistic roots in cultural communication, it is quite curious to observe that the same people who stress the dominance of Yoruba in specific contexts can hardly speak Yoruba without infusing English words and expressions when they find themselves in more 'urban' speech situations! In such situations, the imperatives of converging to a prestige norm (i.e. Yoruba mixed with English) overrides the indigenous value of speech. Common patterns of code-switching among adults thus include beginning a sentence in Yoruba and switching to English such as:

- iii. Nkan to sele ni wipe *we cannot afford to lose the election.*  
(The point is that we cannot afford to lose this election).
- iv. Ni asiko taa wa yii, *there is no time to waste.*  
(Right now, there is no time to waste).
- v. Ki lo *mean by that statement?*  
(What do you mean by that statement?)

Sometimes in code-switching practices, English phrases like 'as long as'; 'in view of'; 'but nevertheless'; and 'in the meantime', etc will serve a connecting function between two or more pure Yoruba expressions, as in:

- vi. O yẹ ki wón sanwó fun **as long as** to ba si nsisé nibè.

(They ought to pay him/her as long as he/she continues to work there).

- vii. Wọ̀n ma dàárú ni **in view of** gbogbo nnkan tó sèlẹ̀.  
(It (the election) will be cancelled, in view of all the happenings).
- vi. Nnkan tó se kò dára, **but nevertheless**, ẹ̀ jẹ́ ká gbàgbé è, àṣìṣe ni.  
(What he/she did is wrong, but nevertheless, let us forget it, it was a mistake).
- vii. Mǎá rí Túndé lóla, **in the meantime**, iwọ̀ náà lè báa sòrò.  
(I will see Tunde tomorrow. In the meantime, you too can speak with him).

Another interesting feature of Yoruba – English code-switching in this community is the common trend of what Kachru (1978) refers to as ‘loan-translation’ where a Yoruba expression is translated into English or vice versa in switched expressions e.g.

**English:** Have a nice day. **Yoruba:** (Ẹ) ní nice day.

**English:** That lady is sweet (nice). **Yoruba** Ọmọ (bínrin) náà dùn.

**English:** You are looking sweet today (well dressed). **Yoruba:** O dùn gan – an léní o.

**English:** The lady and I are going out (dating). **Yoruba:** Emi àti ọmọbínrin yẹn jọ n jáde.

Expressions such as these would naturally sound odd outside the specific contexts of their usage and may even be meaningless at cross-generational levels such as a discussion between a young person and an elderly interlocutor. Such usages as the above are therefore usually restricted to intra-group interactions and some actually fall into the category of restricted code in terms of their semantic implications.

### **A. Lexical Features**

A major feature of the lexical component of bilingual speech in the Lagos Island speech community is the use of loan words and borrowings from the second language, English to the indigenous

language, Yoruba. This language practice is observable in the speech of both adults and young people, an indication that the impact of the bilingual and bicultural environment is a pervasive trend which cuts across generational boundaries. English loan words like *bread, television, radio, refrigerator, gate, glass, meat-pie, biscuit, chocolate, etc* thus abound in the language behavior of these bilingual speakers.

Lexical borrowed forms in Lagos code-switching and mixing discourse are of two types namely;

i. **Core-borrowed lexemes** – These are words taken into the indigenous language, Yoruba, even though the recipient language already has its own lexemes for such concepts and objects. These include lexemes like: *man, kettle and party* as exemplified below:

**Man:** Kí ni *man* (Yoruba: **òkùnrin**) yẹn sọ?: What did that man say?

**Kettle:** Bá mi gbé *kettle* (Yoruba: **àgẹ**) yẹn: Hand me that kettle.

**Party:** A ma ẹ *party lola* (Yoruba: **àpejẹ**) lola: We shall throw a party tomorrow.

ii. **Culture borrowed lexemes:** These stand for objects or concepts which are new or alien to the indigenous Yoruba culture e.g.

**Computer:** Oò se lọ tèè lóri *computer*?: Why don't you type it on a *computer*?

**Refrigerator:** Oúnjẹ wà nínú (re) *fridge* (rator): There is food in the *fridge*.

**Retirement:** Sé ẹ ti *prepare fún retirement*?: Are you prepared for *retirement*?

Other sociolinguistic features of the lexical dimension of bilingual speech usage in this study are:

### **i. Devernacularization**

At the lexical level, the sociolinguistic features of Yoruba-English bilingualism also exhibit a process of devernacularization (Ndiase

Thiam, 1990). This is often exhibited in the form of restricted code usage otherwise known as slang in the speech of the younger generation while such expressions retain the indigenous meaning in the speech of the older generation. Devernacularization occurs when lexical items become disassociated from the values traditionally ascribed to them in the indigenous culture and consequently take on different urbanized values which are reflected partly by innovations in their lexical forms. For example:

## NOUNS

<b>Yoruba Slang</b>	<b>English meaning</b>	<b>Urbanized meaning</b>	<b>Indigenous meaning</b>
	<b>(denotative)</b>	<b>(connotative)</b>	
Ojà1	goods/merchandise	hard drugs	goods/merchandise
Ojà2	market place	illicit business	market place.
Ejè	blood	evil, cruelty	blood.
Ọká	snake	novice	snake.
Iná	fire	terror, chaos	fire.
Ejiré	twins	police	twins.
Ọjọ	daytime / day	police/law enforcement	daytime / day.

## VERBS

<b>Yoruba Slang</b>	<b>English Version</b>	<b>Urbanized Version</b>	<b>Indigenous Version</b>
	<b>(denotative)</b>	<b>(connotative)</b>	
Jábó	to fall / drop	to be lousy, talkative	to fall/drop.
Yapa	to deviate	to proliferate, surplus	to deviate.
Já	to break off, disengage	to run, escape	to break/disengage.

Devernacularization thus serves as a feature of outer marking (Chambers, 1995) or in-group marker which differentiates the speech of the two generational groups of bilingual speakers in terms of social dynamics. Usages typified by devernacularization were introduced into the Yoruba- English vocabulary mostly by Lagosians who frequent the Lagos-London routes and consequently infuse

aspects of London speech norms into the Lagos bilingual repertoire. Some of these slang expressions are motivated by factors like secrecy, in-group solidarity, self-protection and peer influence. They are largely sustained by the Lagos urban culture. However, some of these devernacularized usages are time-based and thus restricted to specific periods of linguistic development. In other words, devernacularized words are susceptible to language change in progress or diachronic influence, as in the examples:

<b>Usages</b>	<b>(Previous)</b> -----	<b>(Present)</b>
money:	‘owó’ -----	‘isu’ ----- ‘gírí’----- ẹran’, ‘erù’,
girlfriend/lover:	‘sisí’-----	omoge ----- ‘omọ’

The arrows indicate stages in the changing uses of the slang word for ‘money’ across generations. The progressive changes in the ascribed slang for the same word is a function of the changing demands of restricted code usage and the dynamics of in-group interactions.

**ii. Relexification**

Members of the younger generation often express their individuality and establish their divergence from adult speech norms through an interesting trend of lexical creativity whereby common concepts, ideas are ascribed special nomenclatures as indicators of in-group assertiveness. This is a common characteristic of slang expressions, a widespread feature of ‘marked’ speech behavior. An interesting feature of these usages is that while still retaining their indigenous vernacular meaning in unmarked (everyday) speech, they are generally characterized by semantic extension otherwise referred and even relexification in specific in-group registers. It can also be argued that as a result of the urbanized nature of these usages, there is considerable uniqueness attached to them since they mark the user as belonging to a restricted group and thus guarantees access to the group register and by implication the social advantages that accompany this kind of social affiliation. Some examples of relexified forms in the speech of Yoruba-English bilinguals of this community include the following:

<b>Adults</b>	<b>youths</b>	<b>adults</b>	<b>youths</b>
bàtà (shoes)	ìtilẹ̀ ('stepping tool')	imúra (dressing up)	iléfọ̀ ('swagger')
àdá (cutlass)	pa'ná ('killing tool')	aago (watch)	ka'jọ́ ('time keeper')

**Source:** Language Survey 2009.

Moreover, while we re-emphasize the fact that sociological features have tremendous influence on linguistic features of bilingual behaviour, it is equally pertinent to acknowledge that the social impact of these extra-linguistic factors can be altered by socio-cultural or socio-political changes, but the impact of age differentiations on language will however remain constant. Secondly, the notion of performance is more relevant to the explication of linguistic processing in a second language situation. This is because performance variations provide invaluable insights not only into the linguistic resources (lexical, morphological, syntactic, etc) available to the speakers at the micro level, but also the myriad of social processes which account for them.

To this end, we can infer that linguistic variability is a reflection of social/historical diversity which has direct influence on lexical variations. Different historical orientations of the various neighbourhoods (Olówógbowó, Campos, Itafáji, etc) are deeply reflected in the patterns of loans and borrowing in bilingual speech.

### **B. Morphological Features:**

This involves the adaptation of English loan words to the morphology of the borrowing language (i.e. Yoruba). For example, the use of Yoruba affixes like: **àì** (not or without); **àìní** (not having, lack of); **oní** (owner of) with English verbs to form new words is a common index of the bilingual speech norm. Some examples:

- i. A kò ní lọ **lái discuss** ọ̀rọ̀ náà. (We shall not leave without discussing the matter).
- ii. **àì maintain** mọ̀tò dáadáa lè fa accident. (poor maintenance of a car may cause accident).
- iii. **àìní confidence** ló n dàá láàmú. (He /she is plagued by lack of confidence).

- iv. Bá mi pe ọmọ **oni pure water** yen. Kindly call the pure water vendor for me.

Code-switching patterns may be indicative of speakers' self-perception in relation to the sociopolitical or cultural values attached to the linguistic varieties used in code-switching (Myers – Scotton, 1997). While code switching patterns tend to be more predictable in the speech of adult bilinguals, the younger generation of bilinguals display such linguistic liberalism characterized by the proliferation of slang and in-group codes as significant components of bilingual speech within this group. Slang for instance occupies a prominent place in the bilingual behaviour of young people, particularly in the quest to assert and maintain individual and group identity. According to Coulmas (1997), when code-switching itself is the main in-group medium, its use is evidence that speakers see both codes as salient indices of the values they incorporate in their identities. Thus while it is common to observe unusual morphological patterning of code-switching in the speech of younger people, such patterns are not common in the speech of adults. Such differences include:

(a) The inflection of Yoruba verbs with English affixes as in slang usages like:

1. O wapacious – he/she is good looking/ gorgeous  
wà pa (verb) Yoruba slang for 'good looking' + 'cious' English affix.
2. O lepacious – she is very slim:  
lẹpa (verb); Yoruba slang for 'being slim'+ 'cious' English affix.
3. O fanimorous – he / she is attractive:  
'fanimóra' (verb); Yoruba word for ' being attractive' + 'ous' English affix.
4. 'Unlawful sogoring' – wrongful head-butting (as in a football match)  
Yoruba 'sọ lóḡọ' (head-butting) + (r) 'ing' English affix.

(b). A complex morphological process where code-mixing takes the form of Yoruba-English compounding involving a Nigerian English (NE) nominal component as in the examples:

5. O n' ɕe bi iyàwó **bigman**. (She behaves like a noble's wife).
6. To bá fẹ́ rí isẹ́, *waa lo long leg*. (To get a job, you may have to resort to nepotism).
7. Ijà ma n pò *nile face-me I face-you*. (Fights are frequent in low-income dwellings).

### C. Structural Features:

This involves the borrowing of function words from one language and the use in another e.g.

- i) Kò lè wá **because** ilè ti sù. (He cannot come because it is late).
- ii) Government fé se títi yen **within** osù kan. (Government is committed to the construction of the road within one month).
- iii) Àbúrò rè n gbé ní **around** ilé mi. (His /her younger sibling lives in my neighbourhood).

### Language Attitudes as Indicators of Identity

All research on language and identity generally operate on the premise that identities make sense (Tabouret-Keller, 2007). Thus, every member of a speech community explores different layers of identity at the individual level and proceed to form alliances or networks which can be either sustained or jettisoned for new alliances in the course of one's existence. Since language features often form the binding force between personal and communal identity by providing the terms for expressing it, this study provides evidence on how individual and social identity of the Yoruba-English bilinguals of Lagos Island are mediated by the dominant speech norm. The various facets of this interrelationship are discussed on the basis of the following summative statements.

#### 1. Language attitudes are crucial to the forging of 'local' versus 'foreign' identities:

It was found that language attitudes have considerable influence on the establishment and sustenance of social identity for both generational groups. The prestige status of English as opposed to Yoruba, it is observed, has tremendous influence on speakers' perceptions of 'local' and 'foreign' identities. While English is



viewed as bestowing foreign identity on its speakers, Yoruba is often credited with local or indigenous identity. Consequently, while most bilinguals would readily admit inadequacies in the knowledge of Yoruba vocabulary for instance, they are ever reluctant to admit same for English! As results of speakers' self-assessment test for English and Yoruba below shows, it is socially acceptable to be 'incompetent' in Yoruba, the indigenous language, but it is considered unpardonable to be so found in English.

**Table 1:** Self-Assessment Test for Local and Foreign Identities.

	<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Reading</b>
Yoruba	32.4%	36.0%	25.1%
English	67.6%	64.0%	74.9%

Thus in spite of previous attestation of language solidarity, speakers rate themselves higher in English usage in all three categories and rate themselves relatively lower in Yoruba. The L1 is considered more appropriate for creating local identity while English is the variety for foreign or international recognition. It is pertinent however to state that speakers' self-assessment of performance have limitations in terms of credibility since ideally, judgments of performance reside mostly in the investigator. Moreover, as our own investigation has shown, quite clearly, speakers' self-assessment cannot be relied upon as they always contradict actual observation of language performance

Closely related to this point is the observation that the use of Yoruba-English bilingual speech patterns is a strong indication of speakers' dual identity. Thus, while they acknowledge the indigenous, traditional language characteristics, bilinguals consciously overlay this with a more international or cosmopolitan set of tastes and values as exemplified by English.

## **2. Attitudinal Dispositions of Bilinguals have Implications for Language Behaviour:**

This study has shown, with considerable evidence, that bilingual behavior in this community is largely informed by language attitudes which are exhibited in the following ways:

### **a) Personal Identity:**

Language attitudes often reflect the dynamics of social identity. Thus, language acts are acts of identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985) since the language spoken by a people is often interconnected with their identity. Explaining further on the dynamics of identities in speech communities, Tabouret-Keller (1997) observes that:

At any given time, a person's identity is a heterogeneous set made up of all the names or identities, given to and taken up by her. But, in a life-long process, identity is endlessly created anew, according to very various social constraints.... (316)

Personal or individual identity is thus richly enacted in the naming system which reflects the bilingual norms in the community in the following instances:

**I. Code-mixed names:** The trend was observed, across generations, where people demonstrate a rather interesting compulsion to have an English element attached to their personal names. Thus we have such names as *Taiye Computer, Muyiwa Mechanic, Sidi Vegetable, Tunde Carpenter, Tunji Sensation, Jide Entertainment, Azeez Councillor, Nurudeen Sergeant, Wale Teacher, Musiliu Coach, Tunde Parking, etc* where such nomenclatures refer to professions, vocations or unique mannerisms of individuals.

**II. Relexicalization:** Another dimension to the naming system is the relexicalization of personal names for anglicized nicknames as in the examples of '**Owo-blow**' for *Owolabi*, '**Shiner**' or '**Shinene**' for *Shina*, '**Murphy**' for *Muftau*, '**Shade**' for *Folashade*, '**Rosco**' or '**Rasqui**' for *Rasaq* and '**Semmy**' for *Semiu*; '**Brymo**' for Ibrahim, '**Femo**' for Femi. Others include relexicalification of personal names in

the form of initializations such as *R.S.K* for *Rasaq*, *B.G.* for *Bode George*, and *A.Y.* for *Ayo*, *S.K.* (or *Eskay*) for *Sikiru*; and *T.J* (or *Tee Jay*) for *Tajudeen* , *S.O.J.* for *Soji* among others.

**III. Acronymization and clipping** are also used in this creative naming pattern. These are commonly found in political discourse where short and catchy nomenclatures are useful for creating slogans. They include personal acronyms like: Samuel Adewale Maja “*SAM*”; Ganiyu Olawale Solomon “*GOS*”; Bushura “*BUSH*”; Olagunju “*GUNJE*”, *etc.* and clipped versions of personal names as in the examples: *Fashola* “*FASH*”, *Aleshinloye* “*ALESH*”; *Olayiwola* “*LAI*”; *Taibat* “*TAI*”, *Obanikoro* “*KORO*”, *Balogun* “*BALO*” *etc.*

#### **b) Group Identity:**

Considerable features of language attitudes are also reflected in group naming practices at the community level. According to Tabouret-Keller (1997: 321), groups, whether formal or informal, naturally display an awareness of the boundary-marking function of language, usually by the naming of their group. Names function in a double capacity by both giving identification to the group as well as establishing a form of affiliation which their members can hold on to. For most young people, joining a group is in itself a very complex process, involving factors which are closely linked to members’ personal history, their social status and experiences. In this regard, the issue of identity has the tendency to reflect these varied allegiances, loyalties, commitments and emotions. Therefore, group naming involves the use of language for boundary marking, exclusion of others as well as to reveal group preoccupations, strengths and weaknesses.

A major observation in this regard is the widespread preference for either monolingual English names such as *Fire I*, *Fire II*, *Fire III*; *The Boys’ Base*, *Sunday Skool* , *Great Campos*, *Pavement Club*, *The Compatibles Club*, *etc* or code-mixed names such as : *Balogun Yuppies*, *Aso Rock Gents*, *Olowogbowo Warriors*, *Ricca Gents*, *Waka Club*, *Eko Club*, *Yoruba Tennis Club*, *Inabiri Ladies*, *Fila Connection*, *etc.* Implicit in all these naming patterns is the principle of social acceptance, group solidarity and neighbourhood pride, all of which

find eloquent expression in the dynamics of bilingual interactions. In these examples, members of the group share an understanding of the contextual implications of these usages as part of the collective linguistic norms of the group.

### **3. Patterns of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing Differ Considerably Across Generations**

It is observed that among the elderly speakers, especially the educated ones, code-switching occurs mostly during Yoruba speech than English. In other words, the elderly mostly switch to English while speaking in Yoruba. Thus, the elderly can be described as Yoruba – dominant bilinguals. When the switch is the other way round, it is usually to express certain information which have cultural, symbolic or metaphorical essence. For instance, an elderly speaker may switch from English to Yoruba in order to insert a proverb or wise saying as in the example:

*‘It is necessary for children to confide in their parents instead of bottling up their emotions. According to the Yoruba saying: **Agbà kùí wà lójà kí orí ọmọ tuntun wọ’**, an elder will always know the right thing to do.’*

Furthermore, the language of the older generation shows more borrowing from other indigenous Nigerian languages than their younger counterparts. This is because while the younger generation tends to diverge away from the social norms of their parents (e.g. conforming to the speech norms of their peers), the older generation keep their roots closer, hence the affinity with the local dialects is far more pronounced in the elderly.

In the case of the youths, however, code-switching usually occurs when the speaker begins a sentence in English and then switches to Yoruba. This is always part of the desire to show competence in English or to demonstrate some form of sophistication especially when a stranger is present.

## Sociolinguistic Functions of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Code-switching and code-mixing have distinct social functions which indicate speakers' disposition to different speech situations. Language mixing is typically confined to informal situations while switches can be made in both formal and informal situations. This is exemplified in the differences in the data from the interview and observation sessions respectively. We observe for instance that the expressions recorded in the observation sessions consist mostly of code-mixed forms due to the informality of the observation situations e.g.

- a. Emi tiẹ **like** awọn **flower boys and girls** yẹn bi wọn ẹ n'jó **excitedly** (Fragment III).
- b. **Instead** kó rọra kó owó ẹ .... ki wọn lọ fún **summer holiday** ni **abroad** (Fragment II)
- c. **Sincerely speaking**, ẹsẹsẹ l'ọmọ Ekó tó lè gbà fún wọn bí wọn kó **billion** sílẹ. (Fragment I)

In the interview sessions however, we observe a more constrained atmosphere where the respondent, being conscious of the presence of the tape recorder, consciously or unconsciously injects considerable formality into their speech. Speakers thus display more tendency to code-switch especially when they feel they are making an important point. This is partly an attempt to impress and sometimes a betrayal of individual complex, that is, a feeling of inadequacy in the presence of a university researcher as in these instances:

- d. **That is what we are saying.** O ti sọ gbogbo adídun yẹn nù. (Fragment V, Interview)
- e. **About five... let's say ten years ago...** ìgbà taa wà ní **primary** yẹn... (Fragment III, Interview.)
- f. **This thing should be grade by grade.** Eni tó ka **primary**, ki wọn wáşẹ fun **at his own level.** **And moreover, maybe** wọn lè **organise symposium to enlighten them...** (Fragment II, Interview).

Code-switching is used to highlight or emphasize aspects of a message (as in the above examples) either through contrast or emphasis in other stylistic effects. This is referred to as conversational code-switching. Sometimes, code-switching is accomplished through repetition of parts of an utterance e.g.

- g. A maa **augment** e fun yin laipe. *A maa fi kun.*
- h. **We cannot do it that way at all.** *A a le se e bee rara ni.*
- i. **There must be a way out.** *A ni lati wa nnkan se si ti a ba fe succeed.*

(The italicised parts of the utterances represent the Yoruba versions of the first statements which are repeated for emphasis or for communicative clarity).

Code-switching and code-mixing carry social meaning. Code-switching can be used to signal a change in setting, activity or participant. This is called situational code-switching as in the example; during a meeting of members of a political party, the secretary begins addressing the audience in English. But when he realizes that there are many Yoruba monolinguals in the audience, he switches to Yoruba mixed with English:

*'Ladies and gentlemen. We need to make a quick decision so that our opponents will not gain an upper hand...nkan ti an so nipe aa gbodo je ki awon opponent wa gba iwaju wa nibi election yii...'*

In the case of code-mixing on the other hand, the words which are frequently inserted in code-mixed expressions usually signal identity and sometimes act as pointers to the socio-cultural history of the speaker as in the following examples:

- i. She holds the titles of *Iyalode* and *Iyalaje* *simultaneously*.
- ii. We had a discussion with the *Kabiyesi* at the *Iga* yesterday on the forthcoming *Eyo* festival.
- iii. She gave the money to the *omo-oniles* for the purchase of the land.

- iv. It is always a delight to watch the *Eyo Adimu* display with their *opambata*.

The italicized words are cultural constituents of the lexicon of the Yoruba-English bilingual and are deeply reflective of the unique communal affinity of the speakers to their indigenous roots. They are thus intricately tied to the speakers' individual and social identities.

### **Conclusion**

This sociolinguistic study of Yoruba-English bilingualism in a cosmopolitan setting has focused on the dynamics of language use among the Yoruba-English bilinguals of Lagos Island, Central Lagos. Specifically, the study explores the sociolinguistic dimensions of code-switching and code-mixing strategies across two generations of bilinguals in this community – youths and adults. Our corpus of naturally- occurring linguistic data has provided insights into the language behavior of two groups of Yoruba-English bilinguals whose daily verbal interactions exhibit variable features of alternative code usage in a wide range of social settings. The investigation of language use in this study has focused on aspects like code choice, language attitudes, language change and possible language loss as well as providing insights into the unique implications of generational differences on language behaviour in this community.

The various sociolinguistic evidence examined in this study have shown that the phenomenon of language shift has been largely curtailed as a result of the relative stability of the Lagos bilingual situation. What has remained dominant is generational shift which is observed in the post-colonial shift from the use of the indigenous language (Yoruba) to English in most formal and official interactions. As a result of the advent of Christianity and the proliferation of European culture and education, everyone aspired to speak English and act English. This was visible in many aspects of living such as food, clothing, architecture, etc. English in colonial Lagos was thus an elitist language which was common among the upper class and the educated. In this regard, it is

pertinent to note that the use of code-switching and code-mixing as bilingual strategies in this community tends to promote different linguistic abilities in bilinguals of different generations.

Secondly, it was observed that lexical variation relies on diachronic influence in both youth and adult use of language. In other words, bilingual behaviour across the two generations is susceptible to language change in progress, and this is mainly a function of socio-cultural, political or ideological changes in and around the community.

A major finding of this study is the fact that the socio-cultural components of the Lagos Island speech community do in fact promote bilingual behaviour. This community derives its uniqueness from its multi-ethnic composition and the attendant multi-lingual tendencies of its inhabitants. Against the background of the unique linguistic composition of Lagos Island, cultural assimilation has, over the years, become entrenched as a major index of socialization in both in-group and inter-group relations. Consequently, Lagos speech is deeply eclectic and deeply enriched by the variety of linguistic components which combine to endow the Lagos vernacular with incredible creativity and vitality. More importantly, this study has revealed the extent to which Lagosians' perception of the *Eko* dialect as a veritable tool for bilingual speech has influenced its contribution to the language repertoire of cosmopolitan Lagos.

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