

## **Code-switching: Amharic-English**

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Contents	Page
Abbreviations .....	3
Abstract .....	4
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Intra-sentential code-switching.....	5
3. Inter-sentential code-switching.....	7
4. English noun + Amharic plural marker .....	8
5. English noun + Amharic article .....	9
6. English noun + Amharic verb .....	10
7. Adverb level switching .....	10
8. Adjective level switching.....	11
9. Reiteration.....	11
10. Interjection .....	12
11. The matrix language .....	13
References.....	15

## **Abbreviations**

Acc.	Accusative
Adj.	Adjective
Art.	Article
Aux.	Auxiliary
Conj.	Conjunction
Neg.	Negative
Nom.	Nominalizer
Obj.	Object
PL	Plural
Pp.	Preposition
Prog.	Progressive
1S	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular
2MS	2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular
3FS	3 <sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular
3MS	3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular

## **Abstract**

This paper addresses different issues in related with Amharic-English code-switching. Amharic is SOV language, whereas English is SVO language.

Since Ethiopia is a multilingual country, code-switching is obviously known between different language speakers. Especially the educated people is mostly switch a code to English while speaking Amharic. And Amharic is serving as a lingua franca and the working language of the federal government for this multilingual nation-Ethiopia. Therefore, some linguistic issues in Amharic-English code-switching are raised in this paper.

## **Key words:**

Interjection

Inter-sentential code-switching

Intra-sentential code-switching

Reiteration

The matrix language

## **1. Introduction**

The aim of this article is to give some information about Amharic-English code-switching. Code-switching is switching a language between bilingual or multilingual speakers in a single conversation. This may occur when bilingual or multilingual speakers substitute a word or phrase from one language with a phrase or word from another language. “Code switching is defined as the practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction.” (Nilep, 2006:1)

Code-switching is commonly practiced in bilingual and multilingual communities. This is because when languages are in contact they may influence one another. This switching may occur in syntax, phonology and morphology. “Code switching can be described as a means of communication which involves a speaker alternating between one language and the other in communicating events.” (Taiwo & Taiwo, 2009:2). According to Kiranmayi, N.C (2010) code-switching is mixing more than one language by bilinguals or multilinguals in a discourse. Code-switching is existing between two or more bilingual or multilingual speakers. When they are speaking together they may use different languages in alternative way. Someone may code-switches using two different languages (Interlingua) or different dialects of the same language (intra-lingua) interchangeably in a single communication.

Code-switching may occur in different linguistic aspects in both conversational functions and structural aspects like to indicate a direct quotation, reported speech, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, referential and idiomatic expressions, content and system morpheme distinction, syntactic categories and frequency of switched segments, universal constraints, etc. Some of them are as follows:

## **2. Intra-sentential code-switching**

In intra-sentential code-switching, speakers switch from one language to another within the same sentence. (Kebeya, 2013; Boztepe, 2003; Kesraoui, A.B, 2016-17). In intra-sentential code-switching we can't make a clear boundary between sentences of the two different languages, because the two languages are mixed in every place of the sentence. Look at the following examples for a better understanding about it:

1. “bet wəst' oromɲna wətʃtʃ k3-gʷadd3ɲɲ-otʃtʃ-e gar mənəmən  
house in Affan-Oromo out with-friend-PL-my with something  
d3mmo ‘mix’ b3-m-adr3g ‘especially’ ʔamarɲna-n ənna  
whereas mix by-to-do especially Amharic-Acc. and  
oromɲna-n n3w s-t't'3k'k'3m j3-n3bb3r-3w”  
Afan Oromo-Acc. is Prog.-use-1S that-was-Obj.

‘At home, I spoke in Afan-Oromo while I communicate with my friends outside of home, I use especially Afan- Oromo and Amharic by mixing.’

2. ‘university’ sə-ttəmmar ‘academic’ rasu ‘influence’ j-ad3rg-h-all  
University that-learn-2MS academic itself influence 3MS-do-2MS-Aux.  
‘When you are learning in a University, the academic activity itself influences you.’

3. l3-k'wəŋk'wa ‘expose’ əŋdətə-hon j-ad3rg-all  
to-language expose 2MS-being 3MS-do-Aux.

‘It makes you be exposed to the language.’

4. ‘especially’ əŋglizɲna k'wəŋk'wa əŋdətə-w3r-a ‘or’ d3mmo satt-assəb-3w  
especially English language 2MS-talk-2MS or whereas Neg.- think-2MS  
‘knowingly’ ‘or’ ‘unknowingly’ ‘by default’ əŋglizɲna j3-t3-k'3lak'k'3l-3-bb3t  
knowingly or unknowingly by default English that-2MS-mix-3MS-Aux.  
ʔamarɲna n3w j3-mmətt-aw3r-aw  
Amharic is that-2MS-talk-2MS

‘Knowingly or unknowingly, you are talking either in English or in Amharic  
language with mixed English.’

5. ‘basically’ ʔahun ‘indigenous’ sibb-al j3-ras-atʃtʃin j3-hon-3  
basically now indigenous which-says-Aux. who-self-1PL that-be-3MS  
mal3t n3w əne ‘understand’ əŋd3-mma-d3rg-3w  
mean is I understand as-1S-do-Obj.

“Basically, I think indigenous means something which is originating locally.”

6. itiopʲa directly əŋglizɲna speaker ʔajd3ll3tʃtʃim  
Ethiopia directly English speaker is-not-3FS

“Ethiopia is not a direct English speaker country.”

The examples are typical Amharic structure, but the quoted English words are used within the Amharic sentences.

### 3. Inter-sentential code-switching

“Inter-sentential code-switching is switching from one language to another at a sentence boundary.” Anwar (2007:3). As it is shown in the following examples, the two languages are switched inter-sententially, i.e. there is a clear boundary between the two languages.

7. ləkk      həzb              k3-mmi-k'k'3-bb3-l-əh              w3t'a              ja-l-3              n3g3r  
just      people      Pp.-3MS-accept-3MS-Obj.      to-out      that-is-3MS      matter  
mal3t              n3w              ‘it is unacceptable behavior’  
mean              is              it is unacceptable behavior  
‘Just it is unique, which is unacceptable by the community.’
8. m3-k'k'3b3l-əmm              all-3              al3-m3-k'k'3b3l-əmm              all3              ‘it is based on condition’  
to-accept-Conj.              there-is              Neg.-to-accept-Conj.              there-is              ‘it is based on condition’  
‘There is either an acceptance or not, it is based on the condition.’
9. l3mn              ʔamarɲa              j3-mmʔawk'-u-t              oromɲa              aj-awk'-u-m  
Why              Amharic              Pp.-3MS-know-3PL-Obj-3MS              Affan Oromo              Neg.-know-3PL-Neg.  
‘Why don’t they speak Affan Oromo’  
‘Why not Amharic speakers speak Affan Oromo’
10. ʔall3bab-3s-atʃʃin              j3-mərab-awʔan-u              ʔall3bab-3s              j3-bahl  
wearing-Nom.-1PL              of-west-adj.-PL-Art.              wearing-Nom.              of-culture  
t3s'əno              n3w              ‘it is very difficult’  
influence              is              ‘it is very difficult’  
‘Our wearing style is very difficult because of the influence of western culture.’
11. gən              oromɲa              kʷaŋkʷa              gudl3t              j3-lell3-bb-3t              ənna              hassab-e-n  
but              Affan Oromo              language              problem              that-Neg.-has-3MS-Obj.              and              idea-my-Acc.  
mənəm              sal-ʃ3rarr-əf              m3-gl3s'              əŋd3-mmə-tʃl              j-g3b-əŋŋ-all              ‘have no any problem’  
nothing              Neg.-nibble-1S              to-express              as-to-can-1S              which-understand-Aux.              ‘have no any problem’

“But I know that Affan Oromo have no any problem and can express any idea in a good way.”

In the above examples, the switch is at the end of each sentence. According to Taiwo, E. & Taiwo, R. (2009:3), in inter-sentential code-switching the switching occurs after the first language’s

sentence is completed and the next sentence starts with a new language. And also the two languages (Amharic and English) are clearly bounded in a separate way without mixed up each other as shown in all the above examples.

#### **4. English noun + Amharic plural marker**

12. 'style'-otʃtʃ

style-PL

'Styles'

13. 'word'-otʃtʃ

word-PL

'Words'

14. 'meaning'-otʃtʃ

meaning-PL

'Meanings'

15. 'teacher'- otʃtʃ

teacher-PL

'Teachers'

16. 'idea'-wotʃtʃ

idea-PL

'Ideas'

17. 'summary'-wotʃtʃ

Summary-PL

'summaries'

18. 'banana'- wotʃtʃ

banana-PL

'bananas'

In the above examples, the Amharic plural markers (otʃtʃ) and (wotʃtʃ) are attached with the English nouns. In Amharic language, there are two basic plural markers, which are (otʃtʃ) and (wotʃtʃ). If the last symbol is the 6<sup>th</sup> order, the plural marker would be (otʃtʃ) whereas if it is other than the 6<sup>th</sup> order it would be (wotʃtʃ). In (12), (13), (14) and (15), since the last symbols are the 6<sup>th</sup> orders which are (lə), (də), (gə), and (rə) respectively, the plural marker is (otʃtʃ) however in (16), (17) and (18) since the last symbol is not the 6<sup>th</sup> order, i.e. (ja), (ri) and (na) the plural marker is



(wotʃtʃ). In all examples, the switched English morphemes are free morphemes whereas the plural markers of the Amharic morphemes are bound morphemes. In Amharic it is possible to switch a code when the Amharic bound morpheme is attached to an English free morpheme. But it is impossible when an English bound morpheme is attached to the Amharic free morpheme. No Amharic-English bilinguals switch English bound morphemes into the Amharic free morphemes, as the following examples.

19. sɔlt-‘s’

style-PL

‘Styles’

20. k’al-‘s’

word-PL

‘words’

21. fəʃtʃi-‘s’

meaning-PL

‘Meanings’

22. mɜmmhrɔ\_‘s’

teacher –PL

‘teachers’

23. hassab-‘s’

idea-PL

‘Ideas’

24. mat’t’ɜk’alɜja-‘s’

summary-PL

‘summaries’

25. muz-‘s-

banana-PL

‘bananas’

## **5. English noun + Amharic article**

26. ‘word’-u

word-Art.

‘The word’

27. ‘potential’-u  
 potential-Art.  
 ‘The potential’

28. ‘people’-u  
 People-Art  
 ‘The people’

In (26), (27) and (28), the Amharic Def. Art. (u) is attached with the English nouns ‘word’, ‘potential’ and ‘people’.

## 6. English noun + Amharic verb

29. ‘peer pressure’                      all-3  
 Peer pressure                      there-is  
 “There is a peer pressure.”

30. ‘blood relation’                      all-3  
 blood relation                      there-is  
 ‘There is blood relation.’

31. j3-ma-l3t                      ‘probability’                      all-3w  
 which-to-say                      probability                      has-3MS  
 ‘He has the probability to say something.’

32. l3-mənəmm                      ‘purpose’                      ajd3ll3mm  
 for-nothing                      purpose                      is-not  
 ‘It is not for any purpose.’

33. ‘comfort’                      aj-s3t’-əh-əmm  
 comfort                      Neg.-give-2MS-Neg.  
 ‘It doesn’t gives you comfort.’

Here, the English nouns are attached with the Amharic verbs.

## 7. Adverb level switching

34. ‘even’    amerika-wi-jan    j3-ras-atftfin    n3w    lil-u                      jə-tfjil-all-u  
 even    America-Adj.-PL    of-self-1PL                      is    to-say-3MS-3PL    3MS-maybe-Aux.-3PL  
 ‘The Americans even want to take it for themselves.’

35. 'may be'	əne	məŋdənn	nɜw	ma-ssəb-ɜw
maybe	I	what	is	1S-think-Obj.

'Maybe, what I think is.'

36. əne	'personally'	al-adɜrg-əmm
I	personally	Neg.-do-1S-Neg.

'Personally, I don't want to do.'

In the above examples, the English adverbs are attached with the Amharic sentences.

## 8. Adjective level switching

37. hullumm	wɜdɜ	'relative'	jɜ-mɜ-t't'ɜgat	səmmet	all-ɜw
all	to	relative	that-to-close	feeling	has-3MS

'All are closed to relative.'

38. 'fluent'	natʃtʃɜw
fluent	they-are

'They are fluent.'

39. 'expensive'	nɜw
expensive	is

'It is expensive.'

40. 'pure'	jɜ-hon-ɜ	ʔamarɲa	al-a-wɜr-amm
pure	that-be-3MS	Amharic	Neg.-1S-talk-Neg.

'I don't speak pure Amharic.'

"Here, we find English adjectives attached to the Amharic sentences."

## 9. Reiteration

"Reiteration occurs when a message is repeated in other language. This repetition may serve as a clarification of what has just been said but often it also carries additional meanings in that it strengthens or puts emphasis on the message." Bikila (2008:29). In reiteration, the speaker translates what they have already said in one language in to the other, i.e. the two languages have similar idea. The following examples are switched in that way.

41. wɜt'a	arg-ɜw	nɜw	m'a-ssəb-u-h	'in the deviance'
to-out	do-3PL	is	3PL-consider-3PL-2MS	in the deviance

'They consider you as a deviant.'

42. ləkk həzb k3-mmi-k'k'3-bb3-l-əh w3t'a ja-l-3 n3g3r  
just people Pp.-3MS-accept-3MS-Obj. to-out that-is matter  
mal3t n3w 'it is unacceptable behavior'  
means is-3MS it is unacceptable behavior  
'Just it is unique, which is unacceptable by the community.'
43. b3t'am 'intentional' n3pɲ səmmetawi n3pɲ  
very intentional am intentional am  
'I am very intentional.'
44. l3-əzza n3w 'that is case.'  
for-there is that is case  
'That is the case'
45. s3w əɲdet ja-j3-ɲɲ-all 'how people reflect me.'  
person how who-see-3MS-1S-Aux. how people reflect me  
'How people look and reflect me.'
46. s3w əɲdet ja-j3ɲɲ-all 'how people reflect me.'  
person how who-see-3MS-Aux. how people reflect me  
'How people look and reflect me.'

## 10. Interjection

“Interjection occurs when code-switching is used to mark an interjection or when it serves as sentence filler.” Gumperz (1981) cited in Bikila (2008:27). Interjection is a sound, word or phrase that expresses emotional actions or feelings, as the following examples.

47. 'no' l3mən  
no why  
'No, why!'
48. 'ok!' əne mall3t j3-mmə-f3lləg-3w məɲdənn n3w  
ok I mean that-1S-want-Obj. what is  
'Ok! what I want to say is.'
49. j3-ras-əh bahl j3-mmaj-t'3k'-əm all3 'you see!'  
of-self-2MS culture Neg.-3MS-important-Neg. there-is you see!  
'You see! there is a culture which is useless.'

## 11. The matrix language

“The matrix language is the language that sets the morpheme order or, rather, the overall frame; it is the main language of the speaker (his/her native language or the language he/she knows best.” Eastman (1992:76). In this study the matrix language is Amharic and the embedded language is English. Since the study deals with English into Amharic code-switching, the number of Amharic morphemes is greater than that of English. In addition, the word order is S-O-V, i.e. the Amharic sentence structure and follow the Amharic pattern. The following examples are taken from the previous examples.

50. b3t'am      'intentional'      n3jn

very      intentional      am

'I am very intentional.'

51. 3ne      'personally'      al-ad3rg-3mm

I      personally      Neg.-do-1S-Neg.

'Personally, I don't want to do.'

52. 3nd3-zza      ajn3t      eksper'ajs      j3ll-3jn-imm

as-there      type      experience      neg.-have-neg.

'I haven't such experience like that'

In the above examples, the number of Amharic morphemes is greater than the number of English. The word order is also S-O-V. In (50), and (52) the subject is not clearly stated, but the verb itself indicates the subject, i.e. n3jn 'am (1S)' and j3ll-3jn-imm 'I haven't' (1S) respectively. In (50), the object is the English word 'intentional'. In (51), the subject is 3ne 'I', the object is the English word 'personally' and the verb is al-ad3rg-3mm 'do not do (1S)'.

## 12. Conclusion

This article can be important for the field of linguistics to know how people switch a code in their conversation. Most people especially educated people using Amharic-English code switching in their speech for different purposes. Since non-Amharic native speakers usually face problems to express their thought while they are speaking in Amharic, they usually tend to switch English. Switching a code is considered as a symbol of modernization and intellectuality, as a matter of habit, there is also difficulty of words to express something by Amharic or other indigenous language (s) especially scientific and professional words, lack of common language between the speakers. Besides, English as being the medium of instruction for academic purpose influences the

people. Some people also switch a code when they are emotional because they believe that there are some words that express emotionality in foreign language like English. The other reason is to switch a code gives them good feeling. Peer influence is also another reason i.e. when their friends switch a code, they also do the same as their friends do. There are some words borrowed from foreign languages especially from English language which have not Amharic or other indigenous languages versions like television, internet and others. Those who can speak more than one indigenous language never switch them (the indigenous languages) in conversation rather they switch foreign language (s) especially English.

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