

# **A Study of Code-Mixing And Code-switching Nigerian HIP HOP RAP Music**

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## ***Abstract***

*This research explored the roles of code switching and mixing in Nigerian hip hop Igbo rap music. It is aimed at extracting the effects such techniques have in the music industry and how they are being appreciated by the target audience. In order to carry out this research, two of Nigerian Igbo rap artistes were selected as they are known to either combine two or more languages in their music. It was discovered that cultural, individual, as well as other sociopolitical and linguistic factors might have necessitated the mixtures and the subsequent appreciation by the audience. In conclusion, it's clear that the code-mixed and code-switched utterances are triggered by some situations that are necessary for the artistes to suit the taste and reach the communicative end of their pleasure-loving target audience.*

## **Introduction**

Rap music is one of the categories of hip hop music; it is a very popular brand of music in Nigeria which is appreciated by both the young and old because of its unique style of presentation, form and context. Omoniyi (2009) observes that "Nigerian hip hop artistes facilitate negotiation and construction of identity through. language choice. Apart from singing in English, these sets of Nigerian artistes use Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and indigenous languages in their lyrics in order to set up what might be constructed as a Pan-Nigerian identity". This research is aimed at discovering why these artistes code mix in their songs. It focuses on some songs in which, Igbo language predominates in the pidginized English medium used. It is also aimed at examining the nature of the code - switching being used, investigating the possible reasons for code- switching and looking at its effects on Nigerian music industry.

Every artiste writes his or her own song and presents it in a particular way that will reflect the artiste's personal style and 'trade mark' as Nigerians would call it. They do this for listeners to be able to identify their songs, for example: "Iyee" is being used by Phyno as an intro in most of his raps, while "O mere ene" is used by slowdogg in most of his.

This study covers some selected songs by Igbo rappers: Phyno and Slow dogg from Nigerian music industry. To achieve the success of this research work, the work is as well limited to the style of code- switching and code-mixing , .

## **Literature Review**

Language is a major means of identifying a set of people, nation or country. It is also a system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people. Daramola (2004) defines language as a patterned, social activity of humans, displaying patterns of substance (phonic and at least potentially graphic) form (grammar and lexis) and context. Obiamalu and Mbagwu identified 5 socio-psychological motivations for code-switching among Igbo - English bilinguals:

Language Attitude: Most Igbo speakers of-English accord more prestige to English. Sometimes, there is conscious display of knowledge of a supposedly more prestigious language by some Igbo-English bilinguals. For example, the utterance in the example below seems to have been motivated by conscious display of the knowledge of English.

"A instructi go m lawyer m ka o sue ya to court" "  
I have instructed my lawyer to sue him to Court"

Obiamulu and Mbagwu (2007) sees the above example as conscious display of the knowledge of English because the "English verbs used in those utterances have readily available equivalents in Igbo". For example, it is more natural for the person that uttered the expression above to have rendered it thus: "A gwago m Lawyer m ka gbayaakwukwona court". The use of the verbs 'instruct' and 'sue' in the example seems to him to have been motivated by a conscious display of the knowledge of English.

### **Subconscious Linguistic Behavior:**

To some Igbo-English bilinguals according to Obiamalu and Mbagwu, code-switching has become a habit and most times Occur subconsciously when speaking with another Igbo speaker whether bilingual or monolingual .such situation may be found in a public address, formal discussion in Igbo and informal conversation with fellow Igbo people. It is subconscious because most people may not be aware that they have switched or be able to utter particular phrases or words.

### **Cultural Disloyalty:**

The desire for foreign things among the Igbo, could also account for the predominance of code-switching. Atigbo (1979) quoted in Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2007) described the Igbo people as those who recklessly abandon their indigenous culture for foreign ones. When compared with the Yourba and the Hausa, it seems that the Igbo man is not proud of his language and culture. A phonological structure of Yoruba is noted, for example:

Bread-bur-di

Pan-paanu ('P' pronounced like Igbo 'KP')

Rice-ir-si

These terms are found in the speech of Yoruba - English bilingual and monolinguals alike. In the case of Igbo the Use of such adapted terms is seen as an indication of lack of competence in English and therefore marks as uneducated. We view this as an indication of lack of love for one's language and therefore a form of cultural disloyalty.

### **Lexical Gap:**

There are many concepts and expressions that do not have readily available equivalents in Igbo. Igbo speakers in this kind of situation have no choice than to switch to English. The utterance in the example below is a good example:

- E dissolve go board ahu
- "the board has been dissolved"

The equivalent of the verb dissolve 'gbaze' does not capture the intended meaning to dissolve a board: the difficulty in getting an equivalent expression could have motivated the switching

### **Low level of competence in Igbo:**

People who have not acquired enough competence in Igbo to enable them effectively use Igbo for communication. Such people easily resort to code-switching to hide their incompetence. This is common among the younger generation of Igbo speakers; some of whom acquired English as their first language. In their classification. Obiamalu and Mbagwu referred Lexical gap and low level of competence in Igbo as Linguistic motivations for code switching.

### **Implication of Socio-Environmental Influence on Nigerian- Hip Hop Rap Artist**

Some of the current Nigerian hip hop rap artists do not just sing out of mere inspiration rather a lot of things contributed to their style and perception of music especially in rap. The modernized style of

rapping, center mostly, on the socio-environmental factors that motivates the individual rap artists mentally, physically and socially. The communicative rap artist (not those for entertainment) use their rapping songs to mirror their immediate environment and unveil some of the existing social problems such as; poor education, level of social amenities, bad road, poor governance and while some showcase their various parental upbringing and how it affected them. Akas Nicholas affirms that "What we enjoy as rap should go beyond articulated lyrics into understanding the under tone message the artist aims to achieve": (45). It is the various socio-environmental implications and its influence that differentiates one Nigeria hip hop rap artist from other' both in content and form. The various influences of socio-environmental are as follows.

#### **a. Dressing**

The present Nigerian rap artist costume himself to either showcase where he grew up from, to imitate whom he sees as role model and to portray happenings in the hood.

#### **b. Dance Style**

Some of Nigerian rap artist their semiotic-communicative dance style on video at times emerge out of what is generally popularized to be invoke or through the artist aesthetic creative impulse.

#### **c. The Lyric**

This is where code mixing and code switching plays important role. It is the tonal style of the rap that shows his background and tourist experience either to make an impact or attract favours and popularity from the people he is using their tonal language. Based on this, the theme of this paper has really aided in giving Nigerian hip hop rap artist a source of cultural identification, sustainability and as a means of boosting economic status both for the artist and Nigeria as a country. To enumerate further an analysis of some selected songs would be carried out. They are as follows:

#### **Song 1- Chibuzor By Phyno Ft Stormrex**

This song is a mixture of 'Igbo, NPE and English

- From lines 19 to 22

- 19. ebe my guys gwamna one-day
- 20. nga eh blowzi ka i.cwehdevelopue my skillz
- 21. mmuachochonav.c and everyday
- 22; na dinning hall nnaaku beats naneu table

We could see intra and inter-sentential code switching; the intra- sentential switching is seen in line 19

**"Ebe my guys gwamna one day"**

Which translates as "where my guys told me that one day"

What might have necessitated the "my guys" in the line could be that " there is no exact Igbo equivalent for guy, so the singer decided to use the most convenient to express his view, hence; my guys .

In line 20', we observe an intra-lexical code switching in words used by him for instance childhood (line 34) pass (line 51), etc These could have been necessitated by the culture factor i.e. the singer is a strong fanatic of his language and could rarely pass his message without "igbonizing" the English word. From the analysis in this song, it could be pointed out the artiste code switched due to the essence of attaining originality. Cultural value and bridge in the lexical gap brought about the inappropriate translation equivalents.

## **Song 2 Alobam by Phyno**

Phyno in this lead single of his debut album "No Guts No Glory" gives respect to the state which raised him (Enugu). Alobam is how Phyno regards his long time friends and associates who held his back through his come up years.

The word "alobam" which means "ride or die" is a street code which was coined from the words "armed robber" which was a nick name in the early 90's given to someone that does something cleverly without being caught For instance, in a secondary school, if someone comes late and instead of joining other late students in their punishment, he sneaks away, a fellow student having seen his smartness will hail him saying "alobam" it could also mean a "sharp guy,"

In the first line of the chorus,  
***"ha men kpasanaogbejueseiga ...."***

The "men" there which introduces an intra sentential code switch is being used there because of the lack of adequate equivalent in 'the Igbo lexicon. "Men" there means a normal street guy and there is no exact Igbo equivalent for it as words like "nwoke", "nwokemmadu", "nwatanwoke", "okorobia", "okemmadu", "onyeoshi", etc are not the perfect equivalents to portray the intended meaning.

In verse 1, line 24  
***"they ball, abu m onunaekwuluilo"***

There is an obvious code switching necessitated by the gap in the lexicon of Igbo. The word "ball" is used there as slang which means to depart from a particular place. There could be close equivalents like "puo", "naa", etc, but because the song is a street song and therefore requires street slang, it is more apt to use the "ball" which portrays a richer meaning.

It is worthy of note that this song is a code mixture of Igbo, English and Nigerian pidgin English (NPE). The NPE is made obvious in the hook lines. This might have been triggered by the aim to attain the street flair.

In verse 2, line 10-12  
***10 "nehnwammabadakehdi way onye"***  
***11 "kolumutwo, mmunwanko the way"***.  
***12 "guys naafuuzihanaezimdi way"***

"The Way" as used there is slang which means "solution". Igbo equivalents like "uzo; etc cannot portray the intended meaning, " kee the way" just as seen in line 10 is a popular slang used by "street boys." In the eastern part of Nigerian

In line 11, "kolu mu two .... "The "two" as used there is a slang which means "an irrelevant talk" or "rubbish." It could also be spelt ""too".



In line 26 and 27, verse 2:

***"mmunaalobamstna we no dey  
Carry last"***

There is an intra-sentential mixture of Igbo and Nigerian pidgin, both necessitated by the aim to portray the originality of the message.

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In line 31, same verse 2; the reduplication "pinopino" means slang name for a "hot girl". It could also be called a chick

Verse 3, line 18 and 19

**"illblissoga boss, capital team nine bukwa  
alobam, alobam"**

which translates: "Ill bliss the boss, capital team are all sharp guys"

The "oga boss" is used to show respect by the singer just as it is being used by "street boys"

In the last line of the music

***"ijegoteculli"***

There is a mixture of sounds probably due to the dialect of the singer. The mixture was obviously intentional due to the originality and typicality which the singer wishes to attain. This is found in "culli"- /koli/instead of "curry" /kAri/

### **Song 3- Good Die Young By Phyno**

One track that stands out on Phyno's debut album "No Guts No Glory" has to be the reminiscent "Good Die Young."

Phyno had made a quick time for a brief stopover at Hot FM Owerri, where he shared his feelings about the song right before his performance at Star Music Trek on April 26, 2014. 'More than anything, 'Good Die Young' is my personal journey' admits Phyno. 'It's a story of my struggles, my rise and the battles I've had to face on my journey. It's the story of losing wonderful friends like Mc Loph- it's all there, my story, in verse 1 , 2, and 3', The artiste reveals

The song is predominantly written in Igbo, with mixtures of English and additions of slang.

In line 15

*"todikwa holy and osina ode se kwakpoly"*

"Kpoly" there is slang which means Indian hemp. In line 14, poly (IMT) is used because there is obviously no word in Igbo to use to replace it

In line 40,

*'osim brother lay low'*

The code mixing there between English and Igbo was triggered by the reason for attaining originality because the person could not have been using the exact words "brother lay low" the "brother" here reflects the closeness between them which is definitely not consanguineous.

In line 43-45

43. "2011 nnacho e shoot my video

44. enwerom chi chimanaegwumnakpokwana

45. radio"

In 43, the richness of the English vocabulary was explored, as "shoot" was used to express a meaning that Igbo vocabulary CANNOT afford. This was what necessitated the enclitic "e" before "shoot" in order to ATTAIN the Igbo nature.

In line 44, there is a broadening of the Igbo "chi chi"

This could be seen as Igbo-slang borrowed from the English word "shilling" which means a coin formerly used in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Malta, Nigeria and many other common wealth countries. The meaning has now been broadened in Igbo to mean "any money". Hence, in that sentence in line 44 and 45, it is translated as "I've no money, but my song is playing on radio"

The "radio" as used there is to maintain the familiarity with the audience, because so many of them will understand more when radio is used in place of the Igbo equivalent "igweokwu"

Line 47 also portrays another lexical gap in the Igbo vocabulary as "loan" is well because there is no exact equivalent in Igbo.

*In line 52, "ndiorituu down"*

"tuu down" is slang which means a sudden appearance of someone. It's a mixture of Igbo-"tu"(land, as in descend) and English- "down" (ana as in bottom)

In the last verse, line 1, 2,3,4,5 and 6, we can see the code mixing necessitated by the aim to achieve rhythm.

1. obiajlliuna one rapper nna e look up to
- 2 first time mfuluya I was so afraid to walk up to
- 3 I know say I want to
- 4 ofu obi asi m not to
- 5 maka then e guba Igbo rappers o so na first
- 6 two

The rhyming scheme is seen in the sound /tu/ brought about by the words 'to' and 'two'; this is also seen in the same verse from verse 7- 13, where the sound/ae/ as seen in words like 'fan','plan','Jam', and 'man'

In same verse, line 22

*"all man ebe"* meaning "everyone cried"

"all man" as used here is slang which means everyone. In the Igbo equivalent, we could have "nwoke nile" "nwoke nanwanyị", "mmadumle" etc, but these may not be enough to portray the exactness of the artist's meaning. Hence, a form of Igbo lexical gap exists.

#### **SONG 4: LOVE UGLY GIRLS BY SLOW DOG**

This is a piece of praise of ugly girls; though no girl would admit that she is ugly because they believe beauty does not only lie in the face, it is within. Notwithstanding their claims, slowdogg believes that ugly (worwor) girls still abound, but he gave them some reasons to smile by stating some factual points about the ugly girls in contrast with the beautiful ones. This music is a mixture of English and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), then a little bit of Igbo. The artist mixed NPE in the first verse in order to soften the formality of the song. The English language in Nigeria is used mainly on formal occasions, and the first line of the song is written in English. The effect of the use of NPE in the second line is to make it less formal. As pointed. Slow dogg is a rapper who adds comedy to his rap. This could be proven by the usage of NPE predominantly in this piece. This explains why he immediately switched over to pidgin in the line 3.

In the 4 lines of the bridge, the singer had to switch to English because of the seriousness of the point he tried to drive home. In line 16, '*Nnaah, the girl choroigbu m with booty*' the Igbo language was used there first and it translates 'man, the girl got me fascinated with her booty'. The mother tongue of the artist was used in order to send the message home and connect to his own root. NPE was predominantly used in this music by the artist in order to widen his impact and reach, as the NPE could be seen as a lingua franca in its own way. NPE identifies with Nigeria as a whole and can be understood by a very high percentage of Nigerians irrespective of their tribe or background, and even some parts of Africa like Ghana, Niger, etc.

### **SONG 5: BANYI BY SLOW DOG FT STORMREX**

The artiste tried to simplify his words to make sure that the target audience gets the message. That is one of the reasons why he used predominantly the Nigerian Pidgin English. He even had to use in his next verse, line 6, the compound word 'half cast' notwithstanding the fact that the word is an offensive word to people of dual origin. The better form is 'mixed blood' but Nigerians understand the 'half cast' more, and most of them do not even know that it is offensive

### **SONG 6: EKWE EKWE BY SLOWDOG FT PHYNO**

It is worthy of note that this particular piece code switches among four languages: English, Igbo, NPE and French. The style of code switching found here was brought about by the lexical gap in the Igbo language the aura of the cultural influence, the deliberate wish to code switch in order to get to the target audience, the different Moods of the artistes, among others.

The lexical gap found in the Igbo language could be found in the first verse by Slow dogg, line 12 and 14 in the words 'immense' and 'florescence' respectively, where there is no Igbo equivalent for them that could suit the singer's choice.

In the same verse, line 4 '*Call me slow, baby*'

The 'baby' used there doesn't just mean a little child, rather the meaning is extended to mean his listeners, i.e. his fans.

**In the lines 31 & 32, we have the French expression**

*31. 'bonjour Amina*

*32. Comment cava'*

**Going further to the next lines of the lyrics, it is noticed that this French mixture was brought about by his comic nature to prove to the girl that he can speak French**

## **SUMMARYANDCONCLUSION**

The data collected in this work shows a lot of code-switching done by two of the Nigerian Igbo rap artistes in their song lyrics. It shows how they use their indigenous languages as well as NPE and English, even French in the composition of their lyrics.

After critically examining the randomly selected songs in the both artistes' music, it has been found out that code mixed utterances could be motivated as a result of language gap, societal factors, stylistics motivations, domain message, intrinsic factors, amidst other motivations. It has also been found out that some morphological processes like semantic shift, contraction and clipping are employed alongside the code mixed utterances.

Finally, the use of pidgin by these artistes helps them cut across to all their audience from different background, leaving no room for anyone to feel left out. NPE is a language that unifies all Nigerians and the use of it helps facilitate closer rapport between users. Therefore, the use of NPE by the artistes creates a form of connection between the artistes and the audience.

From the findings made in the course of this work, it is evident that code mixed utterances is triggered by some motivations. Code mixing shows a language user's dynamism and. competence to creatively compose songs in order to fulfill their goals of satisfying and communicating with the pleasure loving and pleasure seeking audience.

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