Bodo-English Code Switching: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Jupitara Boro, M.A., Ph.D. Research Scholar

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Abstract

Bodo is one of the ethnic tribe residing throughout the length and breadth of Assam. The Bodo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family of Sino-Tibetan origin. The word *Bodo* indicates both the language as well as the community.It is observed that the English language has taken a very important part of our daily life. Moreover, due to the developing technology and globalization, English is used by individuals in everyday conversation. Subsequently, switching to English is observed occurring naturally and effectively during the conversation. Thereupon, switching to English is very common in both rural and urban area. Keeping in view the present linguistic scenario, the research paper examines the social dimensions of Bodo-English code switching.

Keywords: Bodo, English, code switching, sociolinguistic, marked, unmarked, intra-sentential, inter-sentential

Introduction

Code switching and code mixing is a common sociolinguistic phenomenon. As there are numerous languages spoken by people throughout the world, therefore, communicating in more than one language has become a natural mode of interaction. Nowadays people use more than one language due to the linguistic diversity existing in the world. Moreover, people tend to code switch and code mix due to various linguistic and social factors. To meet the different requirements and needs people usually choose to converse in more than one language. In the recent year's,code-switching and code mixing have increased the interest of the researchers to work in different

languages. Hence, a variety of models and frameworks are postulated by the studies conducted in different languages. Bhatia and Ritchie (1996) refer to code mixing as the mixing of morphemes, modifiers, words, phrases, clauses and sentences from two different linguistic codes within a sentence. Also, code mixing is referred to as intra-sentential switches. Whereas code switching is referred as the mixing of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences across sentence boundaries. Similarly, code switching is also referred to as inter-sentential switches.Many linguists and scholars have tried to define code switching (CS) and code mixing (CM) in their own way. Some scholars have distinguished between the two concepts of code switching and code mixing. Whereas some others have used either term to manifest both code mixing and code switching. There is a continuum between code mixing and code switching. At times, it is very difficult to differentiate between code switch and code mix occurring in an utterance. In the present study, *code switching* is used as a cover term for both code switching and code mixing.

Theoretical Framework

Many linguists have studied code switching from different perspectives. There are mainly two approaches to the study of code switching: sociolinguistic approach and structural approach.

1) The sociolinguistic approach is primarily concerned with the social meanings and motivations associated with code-switching and the discourse functions it serves.

2) The structural approach deals with its grammatical and syntactical aspects.

Main focus of the paper is on sociolinguistic perspective of code switching. Therefore, few sociolinguistic approaches are discussed in the paper. One of the pioneering works in code switching was conducted by John. J. Gumperz in 1964. Gumperz adopted a sociolinguistic approach to the study of code switching. In this paper, Gumperz mainly deals with some aspect of code switching between the Hindi and Punjabi speakers of Delhi. Gumperz (1982, p.63) mainly focus on the communicative aspects of code switching; to show how speakers and listeners utilize subconsciously internalized social and grammatical knowledge in interpreting bilingual conversation. Gumperz (1982, p.68) notes 'borrowing is a word and clause level phenomenon.' On the other hand, code switching is a matter of conversational interpretation, where the inferential processes are affected by contextual and social presuppositions. The conversational interpretation

of code switch data requires a range of 'interpretable alternatives' or 'communicative options'. It enables one to distinguish between meaningful discourse and errors due to lack of grammatical knowledge.

Additionally, Auer (1984) also proposes that code switching is interactionally meaningful. He exemplifies his approach using German-Italian switches. Apart from the conversation analysis, code switching is also related to language proficiency, language choice, and regularity of language use. He also opines that code mixing may be functional without any semantic meaning. It is not always necessary to presume a 'we' code and 'they' code in a code switching conversation. Auer (2001) mentions the grammatical, the macro-sociolinguistic and the conversation analytic approach for the interpretation of language alternation. He explains how code switching is used as a strategy to contextualize various code switches.Besides, the study of code switching conducted in sociolinguistic approach. Poplack (1980) incorporates both functional and linguistic factors into a single model to examine the code switchingbehaviour of speakers. The model is illustrated using English and Spanish code switches of the Puerto Rican community. Poplack mainly introduces two syntactic constraints on code switching:

a) The free morpheme constraint holds that a switch may occur only if a free morpheme is phonologically integrated into the language of a bound morpheme.

b) The equivalence constraints predict that code switches occur only if the syntactic rule of either language is not violated in the utterance.

Further, she conducts a quantitative analysis of the attitude on the ethnographic and linguistic behaviour of the community members. It is observed that the fluent, as well as non-fluent bilinguals,could frequently code switch without producing any ungrammatical combinations of either language. In the light of the investigation, code switching behaviour may be used as an indicator to measure bilingual ability in speakers.

Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model proposes that a speaker has an innate sense of relative markedness of code choices. "Speakers use their linguistic choices as tools to index for others their perceptions of self, and of rights and obligations holding between self and others (Myers-Scotton , 1993,p.478).Markedness readings of code vary on the types of interaction and

also it changes over time. Unmarked code choice occurs in bilingual communities when a speaker's identity is associated with more than one code used in the community. Marked code choice is the less expected code in an interaction. It is not in favour of identifying the unmarked rights and obligations balance in an interaction.

Review of Literature

Rajeev Kumar Doley (2008) investigates the behaviour of the Misings of Assam with a focus on their use of code-switching during oral communications. The study specifically addresses the social meaning and motivation associated with the use of code switch between the Mising and Assamese language by the Misings. Ms. Sneha B.Walwadkar (2011) studies the sociolinguistic and the pragmatic feature that makes code switch inevitable in Indian English. She investigates more than twenty different pragmatic reasons of code switching that determine the occurrences of code switching. Dr. Arup Kumar Nath (2014) investigates various case studies of code switching in Assamese. He has dealt with the changes occurring in phonetic, morphological and morpho-syntactic level due to code switching in Assamese. Chamindi Dilkushi Senaratne (2009) examines structural analysis of code mixing between Sinhala and English. The study shows that the speakers use a number of strategies such as foregrounding, neutralization, nativization, and hybridization during code mixing. The analysis reveals code mixing as an important and frequent linguistic code in Sri Lankan setting. Yoshiko Morishima (1999) investigates the structural features of Japanese-English intra-sentential codeswitching. She also interprets different reason and attitudes of code switching among the speakers.

Objective

To identify the social motivations of Bodo-Englishcode switching during verbal interaction

Sample of the Study

The study is primarily based on the native Bodo speakers residing in Kokrajhar district of Assam. The respondents are deliberately selected to make the data adequate for the study.

Methodology of the Study

The study is based on the data collected from the Bodo speakers who have Bodo as L1. Two approaches were adopted to gather code switching data in both controlled and uncontrolled situations:

1) Recording of classroom lessons

2) Recording of spontaneous speech in different settings

Analysis of Data

The code-switching data are analyzed in the light of the Markedness Model propounded by Carol Myers-Scotton. Bodo data is shown in normal fonts. English and Hindi are shown in bold fonts to mark the speech belonging to different languages, respectively. The recorded data is transcribed and translated into English (shown in italics).

1) Recording of classroom lesson

Setting: A classroom scene on the campus of Bodoland University located at Kokrajhar in Assam. A faculty of the Bodo department is taking a class to the students pursuing masters in Bodo. The following data is a classroom lecture recorded for the present study.

Speaker A:

1. be sudubausɔrasɯnsraoisɯimahuŋnailɯgɯlɯgɯ ma buziju? (*What is the actual meaning of the term dog?*)

2. **It's a kind of animal having four legs, a kind of animal**.

3. rukʰɯmsezunadzaihaatʰiŋtʰɯmbrɯidɔŋu…….. (*It's a kind of animal having four legs*.)

4. mɯsɯamɯsɯanupʰabinitʰɯmɯsɯuanɯbuŋdɯŋ.(*The cow is said to be a cow*)

5. manɯbuŋdɯŋzɯŋsannani lanai zadɯŋ. (*Why is it said?*)

6. zaikʰɯ**arbitrariness**zebejau. (*This is said to be arbitrary*.)

7. Language is arbitrary.

8. zaikʰɯbuŋdɯŋmɯɯngibijaunɯ. (*This was also said earlier*.)

The speaker resorts to marked code switching (Bodo to English) during a classroom lesson. In the above example, it is observed that the speaker begins his lecture in Bodo which is an unmarked choice of language while teaching Bodo subject. His switching to the marked language i.e. English is to emphasize his explanation better and draw the attention of the students. In sentence 2, he engages in intra-sentential switching where he completely switches to English. In sentence 3, it is observed that the message in one code is repeated in the other code, in some modified form. Such repetition is usually used to clarify what is said or to simply amplify or emphasize a message.In sentence 6, he goes for inter-sentential switching where a single lexical word switching '*arbitrariness*' occurs to ensure better understanding of the students. There is also a complete switch to English in sentence 7 to emphasize and make the students understand better.

2) **Recording of conversation in the University**

Setting: An afternoon scene on the campus of Bodoland University where the students are discussing among themselves their respective subjects.

1. Speaker A: hɯŋsɯrsanɯija **political**? (*Are you both from political (major)?*)

2. Speaker B: nɔŋa, **Geography**. (*No, Geography*)

3. Speaker A: **Geograpʰini**mɯɯnse meaning dɔŋ. Geography mane ki? (*There is a meaning of Geography. What is the meaning of Geography?*)

4. Speaker B: **Geo means earth, graphy means description, as a whole, the description of the earth surface, is known as geography.**

Speaker B engages in unmarked code switching (Bodo to English) where code switching is used as a tool to show one's ability or knowledge. As well as the pattern of code switching between two (or more languages) specifically usage of English has become an unmarked choice among the students. It has become an inseparable part of their verbal communication.

3) **Recording of conversation in the library**

Setting: A Library scene on the campus of Central Institute of Technology located at Kokrajhar in Assam. A faculty of the college who was from another state not knowing the local language (Bodo, Assamese) came to the library and enquired with the librarian regarding his problem in issuing the book. The conversation takes place as follows:

1. Speaker A: **ismɛbolrahahɛkije reference book hɛ to issue nahikarsakte, esahɛkija**? ((*Referring to the machine) It is saying that it's a reference book so it can't be issued. Is it so?*)
2. Speaker B: ha..**esahɛ**(*Yes, it is*.)
3. Speaker A: ha..**esahɛkija**… (*O..Is it (with confirmation)?*)
4. Speaker B: bidurailainajabuzasigunarɯki? (*His conversations will also be included*.)
5. Speaker C: hɔrnainɔŋadɔŋ ((*he)is thinking (we) won't give him*.)
6. Speaker B: ha ?(*Questioning*)
7. Speaker C: hɔrnnainɔŋasannanɯiladubiju (*He already thought we won't give him*.)
8. Speaker B: **dɛdizijɛ sir. Banakardɛduŋga**. (*Give it to me sir. I will make it*.)

In the above example, the beginning is in Hindi and is the unmarked language in the context. As it is observed, that the faculties from the other states prefer to converse in Hindi with the non-teaching staff. The speakers intentionally switch to Bodo in sentence 4, 5 and 7, as they did not want the faculty to understand their conversation. The switching in Bodo also expresses ethnic solidarity between the speakers. The speakers have used code switching as a linguistic tool to exclude one of the participants from understanding the conversation.

4) **Recording of conversation in the college**

Setting: An afternoon scene during lunch break among the students of Central Institute of Technology. The students were very casually carrying a conversation.

1. Speaker A: aŋbʰabʰinadusɯrpʰɯidu (*I was wondering who may have come*)

2. Speaker B: manɔnainɔnaŋgɔnuŋsɯr ha? (*Why do you need to know?*)

3. Speaker C: de ekuzaja de bipʰɯra. **ʃimpɔlkes, nɔrmelkes, zenerelkes**bipʰura**.** (*Nothing will happen. It is a simple,normal and general case.*)

The speaker A engages in unmarked codeswitching (Bodo to English). Even though Bodo equivalents of simple, normal and general are available yet code switching is taking place to build up the meaningful context. Moreover, speaker C through code switch appears to dilute the seriousness of the situation.

5) **Recording of a speech delivered at the University**

Setting: An afternoon scene on the meeting of All Bodo Students Union where a political leader was delivering a speech to the students.

Speaker A

Bɔrɔniekʰelainisomausargirikʰɯhomnanilananipʰɯiblaɔbla be adazabai. **What a discrimination!** Aŋnitʰɯizuŋ**relation**dɯɯŋna ? Hari sibijarihisabɔisɯ**we observed. Not only we, all the Bodo people, they observed**…..nɔnimansikʰɯbɯ**the very constitutional right** kʰɯbɯ**violate**kʰalamnanihaihuwakʰɯi.   Nɔnimansikʰɯbɯbijau**1 second** luguhɯmnɯkʰabɯhɯwakʰisɯi**which was very very wrong**. (*The position of the Bodo people is due to the constant protest movements of the Bodos. What a discrimination! I have blood relation, haven't I? As we are the members of our tribe, so we observed it. Not only we, all the Bodos have observed…..Even they violated the constitutional rights of their own people. They didn't even give 1 second time to meet their own people, which was very very wrong.*)

The speaker uses marked code switching (Bodo to English). Here, code switching serves as an index of power relation between speaker and listener where the speaker is trying to enforce certain statements. In such switches, the speaker consciously or unconsciously tries to imply his/her power or position with the domineering tone which is reflected through code switch. Here, code switching also serves as an index to increase social distance between speaker and listener. The speaker's switch to English can be seen as his authority over the student at a particular point during the interaction.

6) **Recording of conversation in the college**

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Setting: An afternoon scene in the department of humanities and social science in CIT, Kokrajhar. A casual conversation is recorded between a teacher and a student.

Speaker A: B.techabɯ **management** tʰakʰaju. **3ʳᵈyearni**pʰɯraimɯnnɯhagɯ. **Managementau marketing, finance** tʰaju. B.techni **different** alda mane different view arɯ. (*There is management even in B.tech. It may be there from 3ʳᵈ year. There are marketing and finance in management. It is different in Btech.*)

Speaker B: **Usually**, mansippʰɯratechnologynippʰɯraimanagementaotʰaŋu. **But, because of your financial, that issue, you came back to technology, right**. Mane nɯŋu**choicekʰɯ**naigirnaniCITaopʰɯraidu. technologynimɯnse**degree**lainaikʰɯnɯŋni**best option** badimɯndɯŋarɯ**at this stage**. (*Usually, people go to management from technology. But, because of your financial condition, that issue, you came to technology, right! So, you decided to study in CIT. You take the technology degree as the best option at this stage*.)

Amongst the educated class of people code switching is itself an unmarked means of communication. There is the use of both the languages meaningfully indexing dual identities. They both are speaking in Bodo showing Bodo solidarity as well as using English as they are sharing a common educational platform.

Findings

The occurrence of both lexical and phrasal code switch is prevalent in Bodo-English codeswitching. Both the languages play different role in different verbal interactions. As a result, speakers strategically code switch for different motives. Marked code switching occurs in both formal and informal situations. Unmarked code switching mostly occurs in an informal setting. Speakers engage in unmarked code switching mostly among peers in group conversations. It is found that speakers engage naturally and spontaneously in both intra-sentential and inter-sentential codeswitching.

Some of the different types of motivations during verbal interaction as found in Bodo-English code switching are listed below:

1) *Code switching used as a device for better explanation*

2) *Code switching used as a device to show one's talent and ability*

3) *Code switching used as a device to include/exclude participants*

4) *Code switching used for building up meaningful context and impacting situational effects*

5) *Code switching used as an index of power*

6) *Code switching as an index of dual identity*

Conclusion

Apart from the different types of motivations for code switching discussed above, there are many other motivations that lead to code switching. Different individuals use different languages for code switching depending on different factors. The present study focuses only on some of the motivations associated with code-switching and how code switching is used as an index and verbal tool during the course of interaction. Therefore, to achieve various purposes code-switching is strategically used as a linguistic tool. Hence, depending on the present linguistic scenario, code switching can be viewed as an area that has high potential to conduct further research.

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JupitaraBoro
Vill: Nazirakhat
Sonapur
District: Kamrup (M)

P.O.Tepesia782402
Assam
India
jupitaraboro92@gmail.com

Institute
The English and Foreign Languages University, Shillong campus, Meghalaya
Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Linguistics