# CODE SWITCHING IN 'CHURCHILL LIVE' IN NATION TELEVISION NETWORK (NTV), KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

Code switching has not been the language mode in any serious work of art and most artistic works have been produced in a single language. However, code switching phenomenon has been used as a single language in 'Churchill Live' Show. No in-depth studies have been conducted to establish the structure and patterns of this phenomenon. This study sought to find out the patterns of code switching that carry the punch line in 'Churchill Live' aired by NTV in Kenya. This research was informed by two theories: The Matrix Language Frame Model and Raskin's Linguistic Theory of Humour. The study adopted a phenomenological qualitative research design. The data was drawn from significant episodes of the show through purposive sampling. The data was analyzed descriptively. The transcribed data was studied to identify points at which patterns of switches occurred resulting to the punch line. The instruments of data collection were video recording, structured observation and interviews. The study's findings indicated that the patterns of code switching that carried the punch line included tag switching, inter-sentential code and intra- sentential code switching which was superimposed through the matrix language and the embedded language. The research is expected to benefit researchers in sociolinguistics, buddying artists and the general public.

**Keywords:** Code switching, matrix language, embedded language, punch line, Churchill Live, comedy

## INTRODUCTION

A code is any particular language or dialect one chooses to use at any one occasion. It is a system used in communication between two or more parties. It is usual for speakers to have a command of one code consistently. Since multilingualism is the norm for people the world over, people are usually forced to prefer a particular code to another or even to mix codes. Hymes (1977) broadly defines code switching as a 'common term for alternate use of two or more languages. Varieties of a language or even a speech style, register, voice, whether in a spoken or written can be included in the broad definition of code switching. Code switching is used for bilingual word

play directed at multilingual audiences. Thus, code switching can create comic or humorous effect.

Comedy as a popular meaning is any humorous discourse generally intended to amuse especially in television, film, and standup comedy. Standup comedy routines are at first glance, quite simple performative events. Typically, a lone comedian stands on a stage with a microphone and talks to an audience that has paid to be present. The official purpose of the performance is for the comedian to make the audience laugh thereby entertain them.

Comedy is associated with humorous behavior, word play, pleasurable feeling, release of tension, and laughter. Imbued with a playful spirit, comic entertainment frequently exposes incongruous, ridiculous, or grotesque aspects of human nature. Of all dramatic genres, comedies are the most widely performed. The elements and techniques of comedy are diverse and differ from culture to culture. Comic entertainment is controlled by social conventions that define the boundaries of acceptable humour and topics that are taboo or off-limits for humour. What is considered funny in one place and time may be forbidden culturally or viewed as infantile or in poor taste in another. Virtually every component of human behavior is a subject of comic treatment. This include bodily functions, manners, fashion, eating, family quarrels, courtship, the procurement of money, and social position, religious piety, vain presentation of self, physical shortcomings, cheating and lying, gender reversal, and abnormal fear of aging and death. The array of comic techniques and devices in performance are immense. Over the top exaggeration and caricature appear at the end of the spectrum, and simple observation and understatement at the other. Typically, comic productions take advantage of several techniques both physical and aural. The mainstays of popular comedy are incongruity (mismatch or illogical placement or juxtaposition), mechanization or bestiality of human behavior, witty repartee, mutual misunderstanding, and slapstick violence, methodical exposure or deception.

Most Kenyans are multilingual. Due to this, code switching is a common linguistic phenomenon. Previous researches have shown that this mode of language is prevalent in churches, at home, in school, mass media and the market situations. This indicates that code switching is an important area of study that calls for more research to find out how language is used effectively to communicate ideas among multilingual speakers. This study looks at code switching in comedy from a sociolinguistic perspective. Various reasons can be unearthed for code switching as a serious mode of communication in comedy.

Since comedy appears to have a ready audience as supported by the adage that laughter is the best medicine, this study will help people develop a positive attitude towards code switching as Milroy and Muysken (1995) points out that use of several languages by bilinguals does not indicate lack of competence on the part of the speakers in any of the languages involved but

results from bilingual skills. Furthermore, comedy can be used to achieve a variety of goals including to ridicule, entertain, correct and as a source of income.

Relatively few studies to date have explored the different ways in which code switching relates to comedy. Several of such studies have questioned to what extent the code switching produces humour in particular situations or if there are other sources of the comic effect. Some studies indicate that the switch itself may be the object of humour. Siegel (1995) studied humour in the Fijian language and notes that when trying to be comical, or to convey humour, speakers switch from Fijian to Hindi. Therefore, comedy here is produced by the change of code rather than by the referential meaning or content of the message. In exploring why the switching to Hindi is funny, Siegel resorts to Raskin (1985) and points out three possible explanations. First, it could be due to incongruity, that is, due to something that deviates from the norm (i.e. Hindi is not normally used among Fijians). Secondly, switching to Hindi can be funny because of the disparagement theories that attribute humour to mockery or ridicule of other people; in this case, fun of the Fiji Indians in Fijian/Hindi code switching. Finally, comedy may arise from the release of tension, stress or repressed feelings; that is, the Fijian/Hindi code switching may allow the releasing of anti- Indian feelings.

Other studies have found code switching as humorous not due to the switch of language itself, but due to the unique and creative use of two languages. An example is that of Catalan/Castilian comedy (Woolard, 1988). In her study of the comedy by the Catalan comedian Eugenio in 1980 in Spain, Woolard describes the creative use of code switching in the following manner:

> There is nothing particularly new about Eugenio's jokes…but one feature of his performances stood out in most people's minds, and they point to it repeatedly to account for Eugenio's distinctive comic appeal. As one newspaper puts it, the most distinctive feature of Eugenio's jokes was his 'promiscuous' mixing of Catalan and Castilian (Woolard, 1998: 56).

Woolard thinks that Eugenio was consciously exploiting the close linguistic relationship between Catalan and Castilian (1988: 62). Another different way Eugenio used two languages in his jokes was switching to Catalan or Castilian to separate the different discourse levels in his narrative. In the mixing of Catalan and Castilian, the code switching used by Eugenio was not used by speakers in Barcelona at that time at all. Nevertheless, code switching serves an important social function. Castilian audiences feel comfortable and identify with one of the two languages in a non-conflicting way. Woolard states that "in Eugenio's performances, code switching is used for boundary levelling rather than boundary maintaining purposes" (1988:70). Another possibility comes from Higgins' (2007) work with Tanzanian speakers. In this context, code switching is not linked to humour in joking situations among Tanzanian speakers who mix Swahili and

English in conversations (Higgins, 2007). Rather humour, is produced by the 'unexpected' in a situation such as talking about men's weight or physique when the norm is to associate men with a serious and male dominated political role in society. In this study, the motivation of shifting from Swahili to English is to connect the younger public when talking about superficial contemporary topics such as body image in Tanzanian women or men.

The objectives of this study were to identify the structure and patterns of code switching in *Churchill Live*; and to examine the social significance of comedy in the Kenyan context.

## METHOD

Six samples drawn from the various episodes of the show were studied. The six episodes were sufficient since studies on linguistic behavior are apparently 'more homogenous than many other types of behavior studied by survey such as for example, dietary, or television programme preferences' (Milroy, 1987: 21). The six episodes were sampled through purposive sampling. The underlying principle behind purposive sampling is that it enables the researcher to identify the required information with the objectives of the study. The main data collection instruments were video recording and observation during the live performances. The participants were informed of the video recordings and their permission was sought for. The phenomenological procedure was adopted in carrying out the research.

## RESULTS

Transcribed data was threefold. The first one was topical issues cohorts which included religion, relationships, education, crime (piracy), culture (clash) and beliefs and social foibles. The second was observations which comprised of paralinguistic features like gestures, laughter from the audience and the comedians and body language. Lastly, the interview chats which had perceptions of people on various issues and age of the participants.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study established that the performers and sometimes the audience used various patterns of code switching. The study identified three linguistic patterns that carried the punch line in the show. These are tag switches where the performer inserts a tag in one language into an utterance that is in a different language. Intersentential switching is a switch at the clause or sentence boundary where each clause or sentence is in one language or another while conforming to the rules of both languages. Intra sentential switching involves switches within the clause or sentence boundary resulting in an inflection from another language. The data below illustrates this:

> **Churchill:** You know most of us *nimakobe, hatukufunga* (are hypocrites, we did not fast during the Holy Month of Ramadhan when all Muslims are expected to fast) *lakini kusheherekeatuu* (but when it comes to celebrating after the fasting we are not left behind.) especially those Kambas and Luos who went to Mombasa and they got a muslim name: Omondi Abdallaama (or) Mutiso Kimundio Muhammed.

The comedian (Churchill) is talking about religious hypocrisy. There is intersentential switching in this extract. English is the matrix language whereas Kiswahili is the embedded language. The matrix language provides more morphemes in an interaction type and an embedded language which is essentially a part of code switching but to a lesser extent (Myres-Scotton, 1993a.) The comedian starts off with an English clause ' you know most of us' – he identifies himself as one of the Muslim adherents – and changes to the Kiswahili clause *'nimakobe, hatukufunga'* ( are hypocrites, we did not fast.) This is the punch line. The irony that comes out bring the audience to their knees with laughter because devoted Muslims are supposed to fast during this particular time unless with a justifiable reason like sickness can one be exempted. When the performer states that they are hypocrites, the audience is reduced to laughter because that is an eventuality that is likely to happen. The performer then switches to an English clause 'especially those Kambas and Luos who went to Mombasa and they got a Muslim names: Omondi Abdalla.' This again triggers the laughter because according to the comedian, it is quite ridiculous for people from upcountry purporting to be converted to Islam but still retain their surnames which reveal their ethnicity. Islam is mostly associated with the coastal tribes and Arabs and therefore, when an individual from upcountry embraces the faith with almost a fanatical following as the comedian alludes, the audience cannot resist the temptation of laughter.

In the example below, the comedian comments about immorality in a very subtle manner to the amusement of the audience.

> **Churchill:** Welcome one and all *wale wamekuja kwa mara ya kwanza* (those who have come for the first time.) I mean this is Carnivore. *Wale wamezoea kupelekwa* (those accustomed to being taken to) Roosters after two beers *unaambiwa* (you are told) *enda uningojee* (go and wait for me) room 120.

> **Audience:** Hah hahhah

The first statement in the above extract is an English clause 'welcome one and all' and it ends with a Kiswahili clause translated loosely as ' those that frequent dingy restaurants' and as a result triggers the comic effect as the performer appears to ridicule those used to low life. The third statement is a replica of the first one in that there is intersentential switching. The first third statement is in Kiswahili '*wale wamezoea kupelekwa* Roosters (those that are normally taken to Roosters)– a supposedly cheap restaurant as compared to Carnivore Restaurant, a predominantly

upper class hotel) then it switches to an English phrase '*unaambiwa enda uningojee* ( you are told 'go and wait for me' ) and finally the English phrase 'room 120' which is the punch line as it dawns of the audience what those who frequent 'cheap' restaurants indulge in behind the four walls – immorality. It is apparent here that the embedded language – Kiswahili – is the carrier of the punch line while the matrix language – English – supplement in the smooth flow of information that culminates to humour.

In the following example, the comedian makes some observation about the residents of a certain city estate:

> **Churchill:** *Watu wa* (residents of) Zimmerman *hoyee!* Zimmerman *na* (and) Nyayo High Rise. *Wapigie makofi watu wa* (clap for the residents of) Zimmerman. Welcome! Let me tell you why. *Hawa watu wanaibiana* (they steal from one another) aerials.

> **Audience:** Hah hahhah

In this extract, the comedian starts off with a Kiswahili clause '*watu wa* Zimmerman (residents of Zimmerman) followed by an English clause 'let me tell you why' and then to a Kiswahili clause and an English word that is evidently the punch line *'hawa watu wanaibiana* (these residents steal from each other ) aerials. In this instance, Kiswahili is the embedded language and English is the matrix language. It is a laughter provoking thought to imagine these residents stealing aerials from one another bearing in mind where aerials are often hoisted – at the roof top – and the fact that it is an item that is cheap hence even sharing it should not arise.

Another instance of intersentential switching is given in the extract below.

> **Churchill:** *Iko habari* (there are news) for real. Let me talk about something I love personally. One of the shows I like watching on TV is *aaaaah* (pause) *nikiwa nimejificha* (while hiding). The Wedding Show!

> **Audience:** Hah hahhah

In the case above, Kiswahili is the embedded language and English the matrix language. The comedian begins with a Kiswahili phrase *'ikohabari'* (there are news) then an English phrase 'for real' followed by another English clause after which the Kiswahili phrase *'nikiwanimejificha'* (while hiding.) The humour is elicited because the performer indicates that he really likes watching that particular programme while hiding. The audience fills in the gap of the intended meaning and burst into laughter as it portrays the comedian as a person who watches shows that he does not believe in or is quite uncomfortable with. It is quite humorous for one to hide while watching a programme yet they are not under duress.

Intrasentential switching was also noted in the study as illustrated by the data that follows:

> **Churchill:** You remember chrome? *Haweki hiyo, dereva na arewind hizi  na  anachonga veve* (they don't play that one, the driver rewinds the tape    while  driving  and  chewing khat.)

> **Audience:** Hah hahhah.

There is intersentential switching as well as intrasentential switching in the example above. The statement begins with an English interrogative clause 'you remember chrome?' which causes laughter from the audience because the comparison between what was fashionable sometimes back is beyond imagination. The audience burst into a bout of laughter as they imagine that they were quite 'primitive' as compared to the latest music software in the market. The sentence that follows is a Kiswahili one with instances of intrasentential switching involving the English / Kiswahili phrase 'anarewind.' 'Ana' is a Kiswahili prefix that denotes an action being done while 'rewind' is an English word meaning 'to wind something such as a video or audio tape back on its original spool or back to the earlier point.' The humour comes to the fore when the audience imagines what the driver is doing – rewinding an audio tape while still driving and chewing khat( twigs believed to cause mild intoxication and hallucination.) The looming disaster is so evident that its mere imagination by the audience induces the comic effect.

Other examples of intrasentential switching that composed the punch line were noted in data as the example below will illustrate.

> **Churchill:** Did you see him? *Uliona* Thambo Mbeki *akiongea* South Africa? (did you see Thambo Mbeki talking in South Africa?) I couldn't believe it! *Nikama ile* news *inakuja* seven o'clock *ya* Kibaki *akisema ameresign, ameitwa na* PNU (it is like the seven o'clock news bulletin where the president has said that he has resigned, he has been recalled by PNU, the party that nominated him to contest the presidency.)

> **Audience:** Hah hahhah

In the extract above the comedian makes some reference to the retired president of South Africa. The word *'ameresign'* is a mixture of English and Kiswahili. *'Ame-'* is a Kiswahili prefix denoting an action that has been done while 'resign' is an English word which means to give up a paid or unpaid position voluntarily. Therefore, in this particular case the issue is that the president has resigned after pressure from the party to do so. This word triggers the comic effect because it is virtually common knowledge that African presidents are not known to relinquish power that easily. The content of the message and the code switched elements make the audience to realize the irony of the situation and cannot help but laugh loudly.

In the example below, the comedian comments about social status.

> **James:** *Mtu ako na pesa aakulete* **Carni** *m*dance Tony Nyadu….(date a wealthy man who'll bring you to Carnivore Restaurant so that you can dance together to the rhythm of the popular Ohangla musician by the name Tony Nyadu…….)

> **Audience:** Ndo. Hah hahhah.

**'Carni'** is Sheng which is synonymous to Carnivore Restaurant. The punch line is evident since the comedian tries to make the audience believe that this particular restaurant has its unique status and the audience laugh because they feel flattered by the performer – since the show takes place at that restaurant and they are in attendance. '*M*dance' is an intrasentential switch. In this case *'m'* is a Kiswahili prefix meaning 'you' followed by the English verb 'dance'. The intrasentential switch triggers the comic effect since the audience feel that being taken for an outing to such a restaurant might not be proof that the person taking them there is affluent. In this example, Kiswahili is the matrix language and English the embedded language.

In the example below the comedian talks about the name Luhya – one of the tribes from the western region of Kenya:

> **Eric:** That's why I'm telling you every tribe in Kenya was given their name because of a reason. *Kama kuna* Luo *au* Kikuyu (like we have the Luo or Kikuyu.) Do you know where the name Luhya came from*? Ni mtu alikuwa anaenda akaulizwa' unaendaluu' akajibu 'yah' apondioilianzia* ( it was a person who was going and was asked 'are you going to the loo?' and he answered 'yah' that's where it started)

> **Audience:** Hah hahhah.

The comedian assumes that the word 'luuyah' is a homophone of the word 'Luhya' and this triggers the laughter from the audience. 'Luu' is a Kiswahili word which is a corruption of the English word 'loo' which is euphemism of the word 'toilet' while 'yah' is an English word meaning 'affirmative.' The humour reaches its peak upon the audience 'realising' from the comedian that the name 'Luhya' comes from such roots, that is, the toilet!

In some instances, the comedian used tag switching from local languages as illustrated below:

> **Churchill:** Thank you and welcome. This is a good day. *Jamaa wa* Mombasa (people from the coastal city of Mombasa) I told you *ndio wanakuja na hizi* are the ones who come up with these) sayings. Not like the ones you find in *matatu za kwenda* Limuru (small public service vehicles plying Limuru route) '**oretua ngombe ukamwo noo'**( you're acting like a cow; who will milk you?)

**Audience:** Hah hahhah

The comedian starts off with an English statement 'thank you and welcome. This is a good day' and then switches to Kiswahili '*jamaa wa* Mombasa hinting that his next remark is about the people of Mombasa. At the end of the statement above, the comedian uses a common saying among the Gikuyu **'oretuangombeukamwonoo?'** loosely translated as 'stop acting silly because you have nothing to offer.' This provokes laughter from the audience since the usage of that saying carries negative connotation about an individual and is rarely used for it is tantamount to an insult.

The joke about the people from the coastal town of Mombasa using a tag switched expression brings about humour as illustrated below:

**Churchill:** No athletics in coast. Because *watakimbia ifike mahali* 'aisee!'
*Hata kama ni* gold medal *naafa nikiona?*(they will run up to a certain limit and then say 'I'm saying even if I'm competing for a gold medal I'm dying while attempting to get it?'

**Audience:** Hah hahhah.

'**Aisee**' is a sheng word derived from the English tag 'I say' uttered as a form of complaint. At this particular point the tag switched word **'aisee'** induces laughter as the comedian makes fun of the coastal people by portraying them as people who love easy life and avoid arduous activities like athletics. This stereotype makes the audience burst into laughter.

It emerged from the study that the comedians' code switched unconsciously despite the fact that they had premeditated the humorous statements. Since all the performers were competent bilinguals, it was observed that they could use several languages within the same frame of the intended humor inducing lines. The linguistic patterns of code switching that triggered the comic effect were also identified. These were patterns like intersentential switching, intrasentential switching and tag switching as observed in the data.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In order for the comic effect to be achieved, there is a shared life experience (however, remote) between the audience and the comedians about the issues under discussion. In a bid to enhance communication with the audience the performers are motivated to use code switching. From this study, it emerged that there is no restriction on the patterns of code switching in *Churchill Live*. The comedians and audience discussed freely in whatever language that met their communicative intent. Code switching is a useful means of communication as noted in the study. There was no instance in the study that communication was hindered because of code switching. Code switching is therefore a mode of language that should be used freely in communication and

not considered an urban street talk. However, in as much as comedy can be used as a source of entertainment, there is the inherent danger of uncensored media and the potentiality of influencing the standard language. This study centered on code switching in *Churchill Live* by the Nation Television Network (NTV). A study on comedy shows aired in other television networks as well as in radio stations would give interesting findings.

According to Kabaji, there is need to study comedy as an ideology not the plain display of what he considered cheap projection of typical stereotypes of our true selves.

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