

# MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION AND INTERFERENCE: WRITTEN UNGRAMMATICAL TAG-SWITCHING AMONG PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Oscar Ndayizeye

*Higher Teacher Training School (Ecole Normale Supérieure du Burundi, ENS)*

## ABSTRACT

*This research aims to: (1) show the ungrammaticality of pre-service teachers' (Bachelor III students') written tag-switching models and this is disapproving since these subjects are English teachers-to-be. (2) It also tracks tokens of interference of Kirundi, French, Kiswahili and English languages in the Bachelor III students' written tag-switching examples as a result of the Burundian multilingual education system. The study refers to the observation and Testing as suggested respectively by Cohen et al. (2006) and Hughes (2003). The researcher's unstructured observation participated in his review of observational data before suggesting any explanation for the phenomena being observed. The test given helped measure on the one hand those pre-service teachers' achievements of the course objectives and diagnose their strengths and weaknesses on the other hand. The subjects of the study consisted of thirty-six (36) students whose preference was tag-switching in an Exam of Sociolinguistics with the question framed as follows: "Among the different code switching types, choose one and exemplify it with three examples." The Kuder-Richardson formula 20 (KR-20) and Standard Error Measure (SEM), provided helpful information when having to take decisions about individuals on the basis of their performance in a test such as the one given during this research, (Hughes, *ibid*:224). The research findings reveal a mismatching between the subjects' level of study and the written tag-switching examples that they gave: after correction done diligently and skilfully, ungrammaticality is a case and it includes the subjects' wrong tense use at the tag level and the occurrence of wrong choice of tenses, aspects and mood (either in Kirundi, French and Kiswahili) in the part before tag level. The cause of these erroneous tag-switching examples is revealed to take source in the multilingual education system operational in Burundi.*

**Keywords:** *Educational multilingualism, interference, tag-switching and ungrammaticality*

### I. General introduction

"How good and grammatical are polyglots languages used at home, workplace or at the market?" may appear a simple question but deserves a thoughtful mind to be answered. Even though it may be a practice in our daily life, it is equally hardly grasped whether these languages, if used by one person, are spoken with the same easiness: language of one's ethnic/tribe group used additionally to one's education language and then lastly added to a language used for wider communication in such contexts like when in a market-place, or with outsiders such tourists, Holmes (1992:79).

English as a second/foreign language may be learned just in the settings mentioned above. Some research findings shared an interview where non-native English Teachers (non-NESTs) admitted that they are poor listeners, speakers, readers and writers.[...] when asked to identify the major source of diffi-

culty, most non-NESTs interviewed mentioned vocabulary, together with idiomatic and appropriate use of English, (Celce-Murcia, 2001:431-434).

### II. The problem

Higher Teacher Training School pre-service non-NESTs were studying in an educational system where three foreign languages, i.e French, English and Kiswahili, are highlighted in addition to Kirundi, their mother tongue. The former is the colonial inheritance, the middle their measure and the latter the East African Community one. How these four languages interfere and the grammaticality of the code-switched utterances in these languages is the *pièce de résistance* in this study.

### III. Delimitation of the study

This case study displays the impact of multilingual education on language learning

as far as interference and ungrammaticality of tag-switching utterances are concerned. The setting is Ecole Normale Supérieure du Burundi

(ENS, Higher Teacher Training School), Department of Languages and Social Sciences, and the case concerns written tag-switching utterances produced by teachers-to-be (students in Bachelor III) in the Section of English language, Academic year 2013-2014.

#### IV. Guide Questions and Hypotheses

The following are guide/research questions in this study:

- Are Bachelor III students written tag-switching models grammatical?
- Are there any tokens of interference of Kirundi, French, Kiswahili and English languages in the Bachelor III students written tag-switching models?
- Are the Bachelor III students ungrammatical tag-switching examples a negative impact of the multilingual education operational in Burundi?

The study sought to verify if the following assumptions could be confirmed or disapproved:

1. Bachelor III students in the section of English language still write ungrammatical tag-switching models.

2. There are tokens of interference of Kirundi, French, Kiswahili and English languages in the Bachelor III students written tag switching models as a result of multilingual education.

#### V. Review of the Related Literature

##### (i) Multilingualism

Multilingualism is at least as old as our earliest written record, Paulston (1994). Multilingualism should be seen as a complex of specific semiotic resources, some of which belong to a conventionally defined „language , while others belong to another „language. For instance, one or more languages at home, there might also be a language for education, another in the village, still for some there might be a language for trade purposes, and then with another for outside wider social or political settings, (Weber, 2012; Holmes, ibid)

In most cases, multilingualism is unavoidable since many factors (historical and contemporary) favour it among which

language promotion and internationalization, (Hoffmann, 1991:156-163). That is why in Europe a group of intellectuals researched about how multilingualism is / or can be connected to Intercultural Dialogue. Those Intellectuals reported the outcome of their considerations in a compilation entitled *A Rewarding Challenge: How a Multiplicity of language can Strengthen Europe* (Maalouf, 2008

in Jennifer et al., 2009:18).

##### (ii) Multilingual Education

Such a denomination stands for a system which uses more than two languages as medium of instruction, (weber and Horner, 2012:108) and there also exists a bilingual educational system referring to a form of education involving only two languages as media of education, (Christian & Genesee, 2001:1).

Cases of language students performance in multilingual education systems have also been a substantial matter in Miller et al. (2008:20) under the „Basque Context heading and in Weber and Horner (ibid: 112), „Luxembourgish Case“.

##### □ □ Basque Context

In the context.....Basque and Spanish are both taught throughout primary, secondary and tertiary education. To make linguistic matters more complex, the teaching of English from an early age has spread to almost every single school, which is why all students enrolled in the Basque educational system have to tackle three languages from the age of four onwards. If the students are of immigrant origin and their first language (L1) does not coincide with any of the aforementioned three languages, then their linguistic background is made up of at least four languages from this early age. This obviously presents quite a challenge, especially if the three languages used at school are different from the one(s) spoken at home

##### □ □ Luxembourgish Case

The fixed trilingual system of education has consequences for many children speak Romance languages at home. They learn Luxembourgish in pre-school, the beginning of primary school they have to go through the same German-language literacy programmes as the autochthonous students, and only afterwards, they learn

French as a foreign language, while German continues to be used as medium of instruction alongside with Luxembourgish

The two cases above reflect a questionable state of affairs: in both situations, students are likely to code-switch if ever we consider factors leading to do so, (see Hoffmann, 1991:116), one would ask themselves how grammatical are utterances produced by such code-switchers.

(iii) Interference

Talking about interference is most of the time relevant when researching in the field of multilingual education. Interference was first defined as a form of deviation, "those instances of deviation from norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e as a result of language contact" or as "the use of features belonging to one language while speaking or writing another," (Weinreich, 1968; Mackey, 1970 in Hoffmann, 1991:95).

Interference can be of phonological, lexical, grammatical and cultural type. The grammatical interference itself underlies more aspects frequently reported than others. Syntax as word order, the use of pronouns and determiners, prepositions, tenses, aspects and mood are with high frequencies of occurrence, (Hoffmann, 1986:98)

(iv) Code-switching, Tag-switching

In this realm, switches occurring at the lexical level of a sentence are termed "intra-sentential switches" while changes over phrases or sentences are "inter-sentential switches;" examples of the latter being tags and exclamations at either end of sentence, (Hoffmann, 1991:111-113).

"Written" code-switching has been less researched. Transiting from written code-switching (Sebba et al., 2012:2), researchers demonstrate how a "text", implicitly written code-switching utterance, is a rich, many-faceted meaningful phenomenon that can be explored in a two-direction perspective: (i) either focus can be laid on the text as an object analysable on its own or (ii) simply focus on a text as an indicator, instrument for finding out something else, Christian (2004: 3).

Concerning question-tags, Swan and Walter (1992: 36) define them as expressions added to a sentence in order to invite the hearer's agreement. Note that a rising intonation indicates that the speaker wants information (it

is a real question) while a falling one means that the speaker is sure of the hearer's agreement. A tag-question is a syntactic device which may express uncertainty, work as a facilitative, be used as a confrontational and coercive device, soften a negative comment or simply strengthen the negative utterance in which it occurs.

Delleman (2008) and Holmes (1995) recall the four principle kinds of question tags as grouped according to their function in spoken discourse:

**Epistemic modal tags:** they express uncertainty and generally have a rising tone ( ) as exemplified below the following situation:

1. A student to another student checking an exam schedule:

The exam s on the 21st isn t it

Facilitative tag is used to encourage another's participation into the conversation. For example:

2. A group of friends discussing going to Japan:

You ve been to Japan haven t you, Dave  
Facilitative tags are generally characterised by a falling tone (indicated by). Softening tags, on the other hand, are largely used to „soften an otherwise negative comment or statement.

3. Older brother to younger brother who has just stepped on the cat's bowl and spilled her milk all over the floor: That was a really dumb thing to do, wasn t it?

The fourth type is known under "the challenging tag"; it is one of the confrontational strategies used to intensify the loss of face and show that the user has greater power over the addressee.

It should be noted that both tag-questions and code-switching are traceable in social circumstances: they have a great function or a related interpretation in our daily spoken or written discourse. Competent hearer(s) or reader(s) can track and feel what a tag used in a given situation is meant for. Equally, people sometimes code-switch for social reasons such as the fact of signalling the speaker's identity and/ or solidarity with the addressee, (Holmes, 1992; Sebba et al., 2012).

(v) Grammaticality of tag-switches

The questioning about „to what extent of grammaticality code-switched utterances produced by multilinguals/polyglots are is felt as a steady foundation here. It should be noted that grammar eases ideas expression such time and mood; therefore if ever a grammar of a

language does not help a speaker describe certain things, ideas or relationships there are two interpretations: (1) that culture must not perceive them or (2) simply that culture does not consider them important, Jandt (2004:178)

It is felt worth mentioning the previous research on User-based Approach to Japanese Grammar by Kabata and Ono (2014). There was a need to explore how reflexive is the relationship between grammar and social action; the authors examined the cases of joint turn constructions observed in Japanese daily conversations as a means to investigate how grammar and action shape mutually each other in real life language use settings.

## VI. Methodology

This study falls under the umbrella of qualitative method in that the researcher collected written words or sentences and then analysed. It reflects what Mertens (2010: (3)-227) qualifies of qualitative research whereby researchers collect words, pictures and artefacts. The researcher in this study interprets the examples of written tag-switching corrected and then indicated a general tendency.

### 1. Population and subjects

Third Year Class (students), Section of English/ENS, Academic year 2013-2014, makes the population in this work. The subjects are thirty-six (36) students whose choice, in an Exam of Sociolinguistics, under the question "Among the different code switching types, choose one and exemplify it with three examples," chose tag-switching.

### 2. Sampling Method

In this study, the Non-probability Sampling and purposive sampling technique were used since the study was targeted to thirty-six (36) students whose preference, in an Exam of Sociolinguistics, under the question "Among the different code switching types, choose one and exemplify it with three examples," was tag-switching.

### 3. Data collection instruments:

#### i. Observation

At this level, the researcher being a teaching assistant both in the courses of Introduction to Translation and Introduction to Sociolinguistics, he observed/analysed students answers, kind of language made use in translating either from Kirundi into Kiswahili, English into French or vice versa. The type of observation used was

unstructured one, and the latter being hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis testing, (Cohen et. al, 2006:397), helped in drawing some hypotheses. A state of "Error" was observed concerning the wording of sentences subjected to translation and examples given as code-switches.

#### ii. Test

In general, some tests are used to identify learners strengths and weaknesses. They are intended to ascertain what learning still needs to take place, (Hughes, 2003:15). Assuming that the purpose of testing is to measure how successful students have been in achieving the objectives of a course study or to diagnose students strengths and weaknesses, to identify what they know and what they do not know, (Hughes, *ibid*:8), the analysis of the subjects written tag-switching ungrammaticality framed its room under this heading.

## V. Results

### A. Data from Observation

The students examples in both Introduction to Translation and Introduction to Sociolinguistics had something in common:

- The examples during practice were ill-formed
- Tense/mood misuse
- Passivation related-error
- Morphologically-based error

### B. Data from the Test

Student	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Score over 3
1	1	0	0	1
2	1	0	1	2
35	1	0	0	1
36	0	0	0	0
Total	11	0	2	13

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
Number of 1's	11	0	2
Proportion passed (P)	0,3	0	0,05
Proportion failed (q)	0,7	1	0,95
P x q	0,21	0	0,04
p x q	0,25		

Table 2 would help us calculate the "reliability" if ever the test were not to be based on students (subjects) preference, i.e students, being given an alternative of choice between whether to give their own examples on inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switches, "chose to exemplify on tag-switching." With this situation, one dares assume that the preference means "certainty" or "feeling at ease." On the top of that, those subjects had had the same question during formative assessment. All this outcomes in the argument that their failure to give written grammatical tag-switch examples springs not in the content or models/examples they were given during the course of Introduction to Sociolinguistics but in their abilities to handle well the four languages: Kirundi, Kiswahili, French and English.

So it is crucial to transit from the formula Kuder-Richardson formula  $r_{KR20} = ()()$  for reliability to consider the Standard Error Measure (SEM), a stage which provides helpful information when having to take decisions about individuals on the basis of their performance in a test, (Hughes, *ibid*:224).  $SM=0.35$  and this does not have to do with reliability but with the subjects inability to handle the four languages mentioned above. Illustratively, the subjects examples in both languages are erroneous at morphological (in Kirundi and Kiswahili), structure and form, and tense levels. That is why instead having a total score of 1081 s, i.e thirty-six multiplied by three (items that each subject has done), they scored only thirteen (13). To be concrete, the previous lines mean that the Mean/ Average Score over three for each subject is 0.36, i.e 0.36 over 3, which is very low.

#### VI. Discussion of the results

After data analysis and in parallel with findings, it is important to interpret and evaluate their implications. The subjects written tag-switching models were found ungrammatical and there are tokens of interference: Kirundi, French, Kiswahili and English languages mutually interfere when the subjects of study exemplify tag-switches. All these lacunas gain orchestral drive from a multilingual education which makes a great offer of many foreign languages to students; by the end of the day learners master none of the languages. So pre-service teachers in the section of English language/Higher Teacher Training

School still write ungrammatical tag-switching models which are wanting in a number of ways: confusion in using tenses in those languages, ill-formed structures/wordings and passivation. The subjects handling of four languages causes mainly grammatical interference at tense or aspectual use level. So Bachelor III students written tag-switching models ungrammaticality is a negative impact of the multilingual education system in Burundi.

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