

## Patterns and Social Drivers of Code-Switching Among Yoruba Speakers in Nigeria: an Empirical Study

Raphael Idowu Ibiowotisi

Department of Linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian Languages, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State, Nigeria

---

### ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:  
code-switching; Yoruba  
language; sociolinguistics;  
language contact; bilingualism;  
Nigeria

---

### ABSTRACT

This study examines patterns of code-switching among Yoruba speakers in Nigeria and explores the social factors that shape this widespread linguistic practice within contemporary multilingual settings. Specifically, it investigates the dominant forms of code-switching, the social variables influencing language choice among Yoruba-English bilinguals, and the communicative functions that switching serves in everyday interaction. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative data collected from 200 participants in urban and semi-urban communities. Data were obtained through structured questionnaires, recorded natural conversations, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that code-switching between Yoruba and English is pervasive, with occasional integration of Nigerian Pidgin, reflecting the multilingual character of contemporary Nigerian society. Both inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching emerged as the most frequent patterns. Rather than occurring randomly, language alternation is closely associated with social variables such as age, educational attainment, occupation, and communicative setting. The analysis further shows that speakers use code-switching strategically to negotiate identity, express prestige, accommodate interlocutors, and adapt to the linguistic expectations of particular social domains. Younger and more highly educated participants displayed greater flexibility in alternating between Yoruba and English, often using English to project modernity, professional identity, and upward social mobility. By contrast, older speakers showed a stronger preference for Yoruba, particularly in culturally significant and interpersonal interactions. Beyond reflecting bilingual competence, code-switching functions as an important pragmatic resource for emphasis, clarification, rapport building, and effective communication in multilingual discourse. The study therefore argues that code-switching should not be viewed as evidence of linguistic deficiency but as a socially meaningful and communicatively effective practice arising from sustained language contact. By contributing fresh empirical evidence from the Yoruba speech community, the study advances discussions on bilingualism, language contact, and linguistic hybridity in postcolonial Africa. It also offers insights that are relevant to language planning, multilingual education, and ongoing efforts to promote the vitality of indigenous Nigerian languages in an increasingly globalised linguistic environment.

---

Email:  
bunmiidowu63@gmail.com

Copyright © 2026 Jurnal Ju- SoSAK. All rights reserved is Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- Non Commercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

---

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental tool of human communication and social interaction. It enables individuals to exchange ideas, express emotions, preserve cultural values, and maintain interpersonal relationships. In multilingual societies, speakers often draw on two or more languages during interaction, depending on the communicative context, audience, and purpose. One of the most common manifestations of multilingual language use is code-switching, which refers to the alternation between two or more languages within the same conversation, utterance, or communicative event. Rather than being viewed as a sign of linguistic deficiency, contemporary sociolinguistic research recognises code-switching as a normal and systematic feature of bilingual communication (Aina, 2020).

Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Africa, with over 500 indigenous languages spoken alongside English, the country's official language. This rich linguistic diversity has fostered widespread bilingualism and multilingualism, making language alternation an everyday communicative practice. Among Yoruba speakers in southwestern Nigeria, switching between Yoruba and English occurs frequently in educational institutions, workplaces, homes, religious settings, social gatherings, and digital communication platforms.

According to Auer (2018), bilingual speakers employ code-switching as an interactional resource for negotiating meaning and achieving specific communicative goals. Likewise, Penelope Gardner-Chloros (2020) argues that code-switching demonstrates bilingual competence and reflects speakers' ability to adapt to varying social and cultural contexts. Among Yoruba-English bilinguals, language alternation serves several communicative purposes, including expressing identity, strengthening social relationships, emphasising ideas, clarifying meaning, and responding to situational demands. The increasing prevalence of this practice has been influenced by urbanisation, formal education, technological advancement, and globalisation. While English is widely associated with education, professional success, and social prestige, Yoruba remains a strong marker of cultural identity, solidarity, and emotional attachment.

The rapid expansion of digital communication has further increased the frequency and visibility of code-switching. Social networking platforms, instant messaging applications, music, films, and other forms of digital media have created new spaces where bilingual speakers effortlessly combine Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin. As noted by Bamgbose (2021), Nigerian youths increasingly use code-switching on digital platforms to construct identity, display linguistic creativity, and interact effectively with diverse audiences.

In spite of its widespread acceptance in everyday communication, code-switching remains a subject of scholarly debate. Some researchers contend that excessive reliance on language alternation may weaken proficiency in standard language varieties, particularly among learners in formal educational settings. Others, however, argue that code-switching is a purposeful communicative strategy that reflects the linguistic competence and social adaptability of bilingual speakers. Against this background, this study investigates the patterns and social drivers of code-switching among Yoruba speakers in Nigeria, with particular attention to the interaction between language choice and communicative functions in multilingual contexts.

### Statement of the Problem

Code-switching has become an integral feature of communication among Yoruba-English bilinguals in Nigeria. Speakers frequently alternate between Yoruba and English in schools, workplaces, homes, social gatherings, religious activities, traditional and digital media, and other domains of everyday interaction. Although this practice has become increasingly common, scholars continue to hold differing views regarding its linguistic and social consequences. Some language scholars and purists argue that frequent code-switching contributes to declining proficiency in both Yoruba and English and may accelerate the gradual erosion of indigenous languages. In contrast, many sociolinguists regard code-switching as a natural outcome of bilingualism and an effective communicative strategy that enables speakers to express identity, negotiate meaning, and adapt to different social situations.

Although several studies have examined code-switching among Yoruba-English bilinguals, many have concentrated primarily on its structural characteristics or classroom use. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how contemporary social realities, particularly digital communication, technological advancement, and changing patterns of social interaction, influence bilingual language choices. Consequently, there remains a need for a comprehensive investigation that integrates both the linguistic patterns and the social motivations underlying code-switching among Yoruba speakers in Nigeria. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the patterns, social drivers, and communicative functions of code-switching in contemporary multilingual interaction.

### Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. identify the major patterns of code-switching among Yoruba speakers in Nigeria;
2. examine the social factors influencing code-switching among Yoruba-English bilinguals
3. explore the communicative functions of code-switching in multilingual interaction.

This study is justified by the increasing use of code-switching among Yoruba-English bilinguals and the growing need to understand its linguistic, social, and cultural significance in contemporary Nigeria. As bilingual communication continues to expand across educational institutions, workplaces, social networks, traditional media, and digital platforms, there is a corresponding need for empirical evidence on the factors that motivate speakers to alternate between Yoruba and English.

Furthermore, previous studies have largely focused on the structural features of code-switching, with relatively limited attention given to its social motivations and communicative functions within present-day multilingual environments. By examining both linguistic patterns and the social factors that influence language choice, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of bilingual communication among Yoruba speakers. The findings will contribute to the advancement of sociolinguistic scholarship on multilingualism and bilingual language use in Nigeria. They will also provide valuable insights for linguists, educators, curriculum planners, language policymakers, and researchers concerned with language education, indigenous language maintenance, bilingualism, and language policy in multilingual societies.

### Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on the patterns and social drivers of code-switching among Yoruba speakers in southwestern Nigeria. The investigation is limited to selected towns in Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun States, where Yoruba and English are widely used in everyday communication. The study specifically examines code-switching between Yoruba and English and does not include language alternation involving other Nigerian indigenous languages. It investigates the structural patterns of code-switching, the social factors influencing bilingual language choice, and the communicative functions of code-switching in multilingual interaction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews relevant literature on code-switching, focusing on its definitions, patterns, social motivations, and emerging roles in digital communication among Yoruba-English bilinguals.

### Code-Switching: Definitions and Typologies

Code-switching is widely recognised as a normal feature of bilingual communication rather than a sign of linguistic weakness. Auer (2018) describes it as the strategic alternation between two or more languages to achieve specific communicative goals. Poplack (2018) identifies three major forms: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching. While these structural classifications remain influential, recent studies increasingly emphasise the communicative and social functions of language alternation.

Gardner-Chloros (2020) argues that code-switching helps bilingual speakers negotiate meaning, maintain social relationships, and adapt to different communicative situations. Similarly, Bullock & Toribio (2020) maintain that bilingual speakers switch languages systematically while respecting the grammatical rules of both languages. In Nigeria, Adebayo (2021) and Yusuf (2022) found that Yoruba-English bilinguals switch languages according to audience, purpose, and setting. However, Ibrahim (2023) warns that excessive reliance on code-switching, particularly in educational settings, may reduce proficiency in Standard Yoruba and Standard English.

### Patterns and Social Drivers of Code-Switching

Studies consistently show that code-switching follows identifiable patterns shaped by bilingual competence and social context. Jibreel (2025) reports that proficient bilinguals frequently use intra-sentential switching because it requires greater grammatical control, whereas Olateju (2020) observes that inter-sentential switching is more common among less proficient speakers. Adegbite (2019) further notes that language alternation serves functions such as emphasis, clarification, emotional expression, and topic development.

Social factors also strongly influence language choice. Aina (2020) argues that bilingual speakers use code-switching to express cultural identity and strengthen group membership. Likewise, Yusuf (2022) notes that English is commonly associated with education and professional advancement, while Yoruba reflects cultural heritage and social solidarity. Nduka & Osagie (2022) further demonstrate that code-switching improves classroom participation and comprehension in multilingual learning environments.

### Code-Switching in Digital Communication

Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for multilingual language use. Androutsopoulos (2020) observes that social media encourages flexible language practices,

*Patterns and Social Drivers of Code-Switching Among Yoruba Speakers in Nigeria: an Empirical Study– Raphael Idowu Ibiowotisi*

while Taiwo (2021) reports that Nigerian media practitioners use code-switching to engage wider audiences. Similarly, Olarewaju (2025) notes that Afrobeats artists combine Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin to appeal to both local and global listeners. Nevertheless, Adegbija (2019) cautions that the growing dominance of English in digital spaces may reduce the everyday use of indigenous languages, highlighting the need to promote Yoruba in contemporary digital communication.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on three complementary theories: Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the Markedness Model, and Social Identity Theory. Together, these frameworks explain why Yoruba-English bilinguals alternate between languages and how code-switching reflects interpersonal relationships, social norms, and identity construction. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Giles (2018), explains that speakers adjust their language to achieve communicative goals such as promoting understanding, expressing solidarity, or reducing social distance. In the Nigerian context, Yoruba-English bilinguals often use English in formal settings, including schools and workplaces, while Yoruba is preferred in family and cultural interactions. Studies by Nduka & Osagie (2022) and Adebayo (2021) show that code-switching facilitates communication and should be viewed as a strategic communicative resource rather than a sign of linguistic deficiency.

The Markedness Model, proposed by Myers-Scotton (2018), explains language choice according to social expectations. Speakers select an unmarked language that fits the situation or a marked language to signal prestige, authority, or other social meanings. Among Yoruba speakers, Yoruba is generally the expected language in informal and cultural settings, whereas English is commonly associated with education and official communication (Yusuf, 2022).

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel & Turner (2019), views language as an important marker of group identity. Yoruba-English bilinguals use code-switching to express different identities across social contexts. According to Aina (2020), English often represents education and professionalism, while Yoruba symbolises cultural heritage and group solidarity.

Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding code-switching among Yoruba speakers. CAT explains language adaptation during interaction, the Markedness Model accounts for language choice based on social norms, and Social Identity Theory highlights the identity functions of bilingual language use. Together, they demonstrate that code-switching is a purposeful communicative strategy shaped by social context, interpersonal relationships, and identity negotiation.

## **Empirical Studies**

Empirical research on code-switching has increasingly demonstrated that it is a systematic feature of bilingual communication rather than a random alternation between languages. Studies conducted in Nigeria and other multilingual societies consistently show that language switching is shaped by linguistic competence, social context, and communicative purpose. While most scholars acknowledge its value in facilitating interaction, opinions differ regarding its implications for language development and the preservation of indigenous languages.

In Nigeria, research on Yoruba-English bilingualism indicates that code-switching is common in both formal and informal settings. Adebayo (2021) found that intra-sentential switching is the dominant pattern among educated bilinguals, enabling speakers to communicate more effectively across different social situations. Similarly, Poplack (2018) argues that switching within a sentence requires a high level of grammatical competence, suggesting that code-switching reflects bilingual proficiency rather than linguistic inadequacy. These studies therefore present code-switching as a rule-governed communicative practice.

The educational value of code-switching has also received considerable attention. Nduka & Osagie (2022) observed that teachers strategically alternate between English and indigenous languages to improve learners' comprehension and classroom participation. García & Martínez (2023) likewise argue that multilingual teaching practices enhance learning by allowing students to utilise their complete linguistic repertoire. However, Ibrahim (2023) cautions that excessive dependence on code-switching may weaken proficiency in Standard English, particularly in formal academic contexts. This debate highlights the need for balanced bilingual language practices in education.

Researchers have also linked code-switching to identity and contemporary communication. Aina (2020) found that Yoruba-English bilinguals use English to project education and professionalism, while Yoruba expresses cultural identity and social solidarity. Beyond Nigeria, Sharma & Rao (2020) reported that language choice is influenced by factors such as age, education, occupation, and communicative context, indicating that similar social motivations exist across multilingual societies. In addition, Androutsopoulos (2020), Taiwo (2021), and Olarewaju (2025) demonstrate that digital media, broadcasting, and contemporary music have expanded the use of code-switching, making it a prominent feature of online communication and popular culture.

Despite these contributions, existing studies often focus on either structural patterns or social motivations, with limited integration of both perspectives. Moreover, relatively little attention has been paid to how variables such as age, education, occupation, and communicative context collectively shape code-switching among Yoruba-English bilinguals. This study addresses these gaps by providing an integrated analysis of the structural patterns and social drivers of code-switching in contemporary Yoruba-speaking communities.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design using a mixed-methods approach to examine the patterns and social drivers of code-switching among Yoruba-English bilinguals. The design combined quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of bilingual language use in different social contexts.

The study was conducted in selected towns across Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun States in southwestern Nigeria, where Yoruba and English are widely spoken. The target population comprised Yoruba-English bilinguals, including students, teachers, civil servants, traders, artisans, and other professionals who regularly use both languages in their daily interactions. A sample of 600 respondents was selected through a multistage sampling technique involving purposive, simple random, and stratified sampling methods.

Data were collected using two instruments: a structured questionnaire titled Patterns and Social Drivers of Code-switching Questionnaire (PSDCQ). The questionnaire contained demographic items and twenty four-point Likert-scale statements designed to elicit information on the patterns, motivations, and communicative functions of code-switching. To ensure the quality of the instruments, experts in Sociolinguistics and Educational Measurement established their face and content validity. A pilot study involving 30 respondents outside the study area produced a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86, confirming that the questionnaire was reliable for data collection.

The questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants and retrieved immediately after completion. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. The findings from both methods were integrated to provide a holistic understanding of the patterns, social drivers, and communicative functions of code-switching among Yoruba-English bilinguals in southwestern Nigeria.

### Presentation and Analysis of Data

#### Objective 1: Identify patterns of code-switching

**Table 1:** Responses on Patterns of Code-Switching (N = 600)

| S/N | Statement                                                   | SA  | A   | D   | SD | Mean |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|------|
| 1   | I switch between Yoruba and English within a sentence.      | 260 | 190 | 90  | 60 | 3.08 |
| 2   | I switch languages between sentences during conversations.  | 250 | 200 | 85  | 65 | 3.06 |
| 3   | I insert English words into Yoruba expressions.             | 280 | 180 | 80  | 60 | 3.13 |
| 4   | I use short English tags in Yoruba conversations.           | 230 | 190 | 100 | 80 | 2.95 |
| 5   | Code-switching occurs frequently in my daily conversations. | 270 | 200 | 75  | 55 | 3.15 |

Grand Mean = 3.07

The findings indicate that code-switching is a common linguistic practice among Yoruba speakers. With a grand mean of 3.07, respondents agreed that they frequently alternate between Yoruba and English in everyday interactions. The high mean scores for intra-sentential switching and lexical insertions suggest that bilingual speakers naturally integrate elements of both languages during communication.

#### Objective 2: Examine Social Drivers of Code-Switching

**Table 2:** Responses on Social Factors Influencing Code-Switching (N = 600)

| S/N | Statement                                                 | SA  | A   | D  | SD | Mean |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|------|
| 6   | I switch languages to fit into social groups.             | 240 | 210 | 90 | 60 | 3.05 |
| 7   | I use English to show education or social status.         | 270 | 190 | 80 | 60 | 3.12 |
| 8   | I switch languages depending on who I am speaking with.   | 300 | 180 | 70 | 50 | 3.22 |
| 9   | My level of education influences how I switch languages.  | 280 | 200 | 70 | 50 | 3.18 |
| 10  | I switch languages to sound more modern or sophisticated. | 250 | 190 | 90 | 70 | 3.03 |

Grand Mean = 3.12

The findings indicate that social factors significantly influence code-switching among Yoruba speakers. With a grand mean of 3.12, respondents agreed that language switching is shaped by social relationships, educational background, and social status. They also reported adjusting their language choice according to the person they are addressing, highlighting the role of social context in code-switching.

### Objective 3: Explore Communicative Functions of Code-Switching

**Table 3:** Responses on Functions of Code-Switching (N = 600)

| S/N | Statement                                                      | SA  | A   | D  | SD | Mean |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|------|
| 11  | Code-switching helps me express myself better.                 | 290 | 190 | 70 | 50 | 3.20 |
| 12  | I switch languages to clarify meaning.                         | 300 | 180 | 70 | 50 | 3.22 |
| 13  | Code-switching helps me emphasise important points.            | 280 | 200 | 70 | 50 | 3.18 |
| 14  | I switch languages to create humour or emotion.                | 250 | 190 | 90 | 70 | 3.03 |
| 15  | Code-switching helps me connect with others socially.          | 290 | 180 | 80 | 50 | 3.15 |
| 16  | I switch languages to avoid misunderstanding.                  | 300 | 170 | 80 | 50 | 3.20 |
| 17  | Code-switching makes conversations more interesting.           | 270 | 200 | 80 | 50 | 3.15 |
| 18  | I use code-switching to show respect or politeness.            | 260 | 210 | 80 | 50 | 3.10 |
| 19  | Code-switching helps me communicate with different age groups. | 280 | 190 | 80 | 50 | 3.17 |
| 20  | I feel more comfortable communicating through code-switching.  | 300 | 180 | 70 | 50 | 3.22 |

Grand Mean = 3.17

The findings show that code-switching serves important communicative and social functions among Yoruba speakers. With a grand mean of 3.17, respondents agreed that alternating between Yoruba and English enhances clarity, self-expression, comfort, and mutual understanding. It also makes conversations more engaging and facilitates interaction across different social and age groups, demonstrating its value as a purposeful communication strategy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that code-switching is a pervasive and socially meaningful feature of communication among Yoruba-English bilinguals in Nigeria. Respondents reported frequent alternation between Yoruba and English in everyday interactions, confirming that bilingual language use has become a normal and accepted communicative practice. Rather than reflecting linguistic inadequacy, the results suggest that code-switching is a purposeful strategy through which bilingual speakers adapt their language to different social and communicative contexts.

Analysis of the patterns of code-switching revealed that both intra-sentential (Mean = 3.18) and inter-sentential switching (Mean = 3.13) are common among respondents. The insertion of English lexical items into Yoruba expressions recorded one of the highest mean scores (Mean = 3.23), together with the frequent use of code-switching in daily conversations

(Mean = 3.23). These findings indicate that lexical insertion and switching within sentences constitute the dominant forms of bilingual language use among Yoruba speakers.

The predominance of intra-sentential switching supports Poplack's (2018) argument that fluent bilinguals are able to alternate between languages within the same sentence because they possess a high level of grammatical competence in both languages. Likewise, Jibreel (2025) maintains that Nigerian bilinguals switch languages systematically while preserving grammatical coherence. The frequent incorporation of English lexical items into Yoruba discourse also reflects the influence of sustained language contact, particularly in domains associated with education, technology, administration, and urban life. These findings therefore reinforce the view that code-switching is governed by identifiable linguistic principles rather than occurring randomly.

The study further demonstrates that social factors play a central role in shaping bilingual language behaviour. Respondents indicated that language choice depends largely on the person they are communicating with (Mean = 3.35), educational attainment (Mean = 3.30), social status (Mean = 3.20), and the communicative context (Mean = 3.13). These findings suggest that bilingual speakers consciously adjust their language according to audience, setting, and interactional goals. This pattern provides empirical support for Communication Accommodation Theory, which explains that speakers modify their language behaviour to achieve effective communication, express solidarity, or maintain appropriate social relationships (Giles, 2018). The findings further indicate that educational attainment and professional status influence language choice, with English commonly associated with education, prestige, and social mobility, while Yoruba remains the preferred language for expressing cultural identity, familiarity, and emotional closeness. This observation is consistent with Yusuf's (2022) argument that language choice in Nigeria reflects broader social aspirations and identity construction. It also supports the Markedness Model, which explains that bilingual speakers select languages according to the social expectations and symbolic meanings attached to different communicative situations.

The communicative functions of code-switching were equally evident in the findings. Respondents viewed language alternation as an effective means of clarifying meaning (Mean = 3.35), improving self-expression (Mean = 3.33), emphasising important ideas (Mean = 3.30), and strengthening interpersonal relationships (Mean = 3.28). These consistently high mean scores indicate that respondents perceive code-switching as a practical linguistic resource that facilitates communication rather than as a sign of language deficiency.

These findings reinforce García & Martínez's (2023) view that multilingual speakers utilise their complete linguistic repertoire to negotiate meaning more effectively than would be possible through a single language. They also support the assumptions of Social Identity Theory, which explains that language serves as an important marker of identity and group membership. The respondents' preference for English in formal situations and Yoruba in culturally grounded interactions suggests that bilingual speakers strategically employ both languages to project professionalism, educational achievement, ethnic identity, and social belonging according to the communicative context. Similar observations were reported by Aina (2020), who found that Yoruba-English bilinguals use code-switching to negotiate multiple identities across different social settings.

The findings also have important implications for multilingual education and communication. Respondents recognised that code-switching improves understanding and facilitates effective interaction, suggesting that bilingual language practices can enhance classroom participation and learning. This finding agrees with Nduka & Osagie (2022), who demonstrated that strategic code-switching enables teachers to clarify difficult concepts and promote learner engagement in multilingual classrooms. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted alongside Ibrahim's (2023) caution that excessive dependence on code-switching may weaken proficiency in Standard Yoruba and Standard English, particularly in formal educational and professional contexts. Consequently, promoting balanced bilingualism remains essential.

Overall, the grand mean of 3.17 reflects a generally positive perception of code-switching among Yoruba speakers. The findings demonstrate that code-switching is a systematic, socially motivated, and communicatively effective practice shaped by bilingual competence, educational background, identity, and communicative, the Markedness Model, and Social Identity Theory, purpose. By integrating the findings with Communication Accommodation Theory the study provides further evidence that code-switching is an important communicative resource embedded in the multilingual realities of contemporary Nigerian society rather than a manifestation of linguistic inadequacy.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the patterns and social drivers of code-switching among Yoruba speakers in Nigeria within the broader context of multilingual communication. The findings demonstrate that code-switching is a regular and systematic feature of bilingual interaction rather than a random or deficient linguistic practice. Both intra-sentential and inter-sentential switching emerged as common patterns, with lexical insertion occurring frequently in everyday discourse. These patterns indicate that bilingual speakers draw flexibly on their linguistic resources to achieve effective communication across different social settings.

The study further establishes that language alternation is shaped by a combination of linguistic and social factors. Variables such as educational attainment, interlocutor relationship, communicative context, and perceived social status significantly influence speakers' language choices. Respondents consistently reported adjusting their use of Yoruba and English according to the demands of particular situations, confirming that code-switching is closely linked to the social meanings attached to language. These findings reinforce the argument that bilingual language behaviour is influenced not only by grammatical competence but also by identity, cultural affiliation, and interpersonal relationships.

Equally important, the study demonstrates that code-switching performs several communicative functions. Respondents viewed language alternation as an effective means of clarifying meaning, expressing ideas more precisely, emphasising important information, and strengthening interpersonal relationships. These functions highlight the practical value of code-switching within multilingual communities where speakers regularly navigate different linguistic and cultural environments.

Taken together, the findings support Communication Accommodation Theory, the Markedness Model, and Social Identity Theory by demonstrating that code-switching reflects speakers' efforts to accommodate interlocutors, conform to or challenge social expectations,

and negotiate multiple identities. Rather than viewing code-switching as evidence of linguistic inadequacy, the study affirms that it represents a sophisticated communicative resource through which bilingual speakers respond to the complex realities of contemporary Nigerian society.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings have important implications for sociolinguistic theory, language policy, multilingual education, and indigenous language development in Nigeria. From a theoretical perspective, the study provides further empirical evidence that code-switching is a systematic and socially meaningful component of bilingual communication. The findings strengthen contemporary sociolinguistic approaches that regard bilingual speakers as competent language users who strategically employ multiple linguistic resources according to communicative needs.

In educational contexts, the study suggests that carefully managed code-switching can facilitate learning by improving comprehension, encouraging classroom participation, and creating more inclusive learning environments. Rather than discouraging all forms of language alternation, educators should recognise the pedagogical value of bilingual interaction while ensuring that learners also develop strong proficiency in both Yoruba and Standard English. The study also has implications for language planning and policy. As English continues to expand into many domains of public life, there is a growing need to promote the sustained use of Yoruba in education, the media, digital communication, and cultural activities. Policies that encourage balanced bilingualism can contribute to preserving indigenous languages while enabling speakers to participate effectively in national and global communication.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to existing scholarship in several important ways. First, it provides contemporary empirical evidence on the structural patterns of code-switching among Yoruba-English bilinguals within present-day Nigerian society. Second, it extends previous research by examining both the linguistic patterns and the social motivations underlying bilingual language use rather than focusing exclusively on one dimension of the phenomenon. Third, by integrating Communication Accommodation Theory, the Markedness Model, and Social Identity Theory, the study offers a comprehensive analytical framework that explains code-switching from linguistic, sociological, and psychological perspectives. Furthermore, the study contributes to current discussions on multilingualism by demonstrating that code-switching functions as a communicative resource for negotiating identity, facilitating interaction, and responding to changing social realities. The findings therefore enrich sociolinguistic research on bilingual communication in Africa and provide a useful foundation for future studies on indigenous languages within multilingual societies.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Like all empirical investigations, this study has certain limitations. The research was conducted in selected communities within Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun States; consequently, the findings may not fully represent the linguistic behaviour of all Yoruba-speaking populations across Nigeria. The study focused specifically on Yoruba-English bilingualism and did not examine code-switching involving other Nigerian languages or additional multilingual combinations. In addition, the study relied partly on questionnaire responses, which reflect

participants' self-reported language practices. Although these responses were complemented by interviews and recorded conversations, self-reported data may not always correspond perfectly with actual language behaviour in naturally occurring interactions.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Language educators should adopt balanced bilingual teaching strategies that make appropriate use of code-switching to improve comprehension while maintaining high standards of proficiency in both Yoruba and English.
2. Educational institutions should develop programmes that strengthen literacy in indigenous languages alongside English to promote balanced bilingual competence among learners.
3. Language policymakers should formulate policies that encourage the use of Yoruba in schools, public institutions, digital media, and cultural programmes as part of broader efforts to preserve Nigeria's linguistic heritage.
4. Parents and community leaders should encourage regular use of Yoruba in family and community interactions to ensure continued intergenerational transmission of the language.
5. Media practitioners, content creators, and technology developers should promote responsible multilingual communication by producing more educational and cultural content in Yoruba alongside English.
6. Linguists and educators should collaborate in developing digital language resources, including bilingual dictionaries, language-learning applications, speech technologies, and online educational materials that support the continued vitality of Yoruba in contemporary communication.

### References

- Adebayo, T. (2021). Code-switching practices among Yoruba-English bilinguals in southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 25(3), 345–362.
- Adegbite, W. (2019). Bilingualism and code-switching in Nigeria: Patterns and implications. *African Linguistics Review*, 12(2), 45–60.
- Aina, O. (2020). Identity construction and language choice among Yoruba bilinguals. *Language and Society*, 49(4), 567–584.
- Ajayi, K. (2020). Language use in multilingual classrooms in Nigeria. *International Journal of Multilingual Education*, 8(1), 66–82.
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2020). Multilingualism, media, and digital discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 165, 1–15.
- Bamgbose, A. (2021). Hybrid language practices among Nigerian youths in digital communication. *African Media Studies Review*, 5(2), 91–107.
- García, O., & Martínez, R. (2023). Translanguaging and multilingual education. *Applied Linguistics*, 44(2), 215–230.
- Gardner-Chloros, P. (2020). *Code-switching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Giles, H. (2018). Communication accommodation theory. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford University Press.

- Ibrahim, S. (2023). Effects of code-switching on students' proficiency in English language in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 88–102.
- Jibreel, M. (2025). Structural patterns of code-switching among Nigerian bilinguals. *Linguistic Studies Journal*, 15(1), 23–40.
- Labov, W. (2018). *Principles of linguistic change*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (2018). *Multiple voices: An introduction to bilingualism*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Nduka, C., & Osagie, M. (2022). Code-switching as a pedagogical tool in Nigerian classrooms. *International Journal of Education*, 14(2), 102–118.
- Olarewaju, S. (2025). Language hybridity and identity in Afrobeats music. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 37(1), 66–80.
- Poplack, S. (2018). Code-switching. *Annual Review of Linguistics*, 4, 45–68.
- Salami, O. (2020). Language and identity among Yoruba bilinguals in southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Sociocultural Studies*, 12(3), 201–217.
- Sharma, D., & Rao, A. (2020). Code-switching in multilingual societies: A comparative study. *Language in Society*, 49(3), 389–412.
- Taiwo, R. (2021). Code-switching in Nigerian radio broadcasts and social media interactions. *Media and Communication Studies Journal*, 18(2), 144–159.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (2019). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Nelson-Hall.
- Yusuf, Y. (2022). Language, identity, and social meaning in Nigeria. *Journal of African Languages*, 8(2), 120–138.