

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A STUDY ON CODE SWITCHING AND CODE MIXING IN BILLBOARDS IN SOUTHERN PROVINCE, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The English language has drawn the global recognition and it is considered the link language in Sri Lanka. The Bilingual Sri Lankan community uses code-mixing and code-switching in different linguistic environments. Marketers use this twin phenomenon — mixing and switching to convey message about a product or service effectively. This paper attempts to identify the use of code-mixing and code-switching in billboards in the Southern province of Sri Lanka based on randomly selected eight billboards. The findings have indicated that English is widely used as a language of communication and trade in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Code switching and code mixing, link and national language, trade, billboards

1. Introduction

English is considered a part of the linguistic landscape of modern Sri Lanka. With the advancement of technology, organizations have built up customer loyalty and sustain their retention through advertisements. In the past, products were introduced to people through verbal communication, but nowadays, they have been developed through creative modes of technology. Creators have identified that it is interesting when the language is mixed. Therefore, English has become the dominant language in making it a linking language in bilingual advertisements. "Think global and act local" is a concept that is being used in different contexts. The businessmen use this concept in introducing their brands to the customers. As a result, English is being used as inter-cultural assimilation in advertising. Osundare (1996) claimed that "One of the strategies of advertising is not only to pack maximum information into the fewest possible words but also to evoke the maximum possible response with the few words."

A code can be interpreted as a language, a variety or a style. As stated by Meyerhoff (2006), people who speak more than one language, or who have command over more than one variety of any language, are very sensitive to the differences in the liveliness of languages they use, and they are equally aware that in some contexts one variety serves their needs better than another. In day today communication, people often choose different codes in different situations for their convenience. According to Stockwell (2002:8-9), a code is "a symbol of nationalism that is used by people to speak or communicate in a particular language, or dialect, or register, or accent, or style on different occasions and for different purposes". Most individuals in language, particularly speech, have a repertoire of codes and combine those codes in different ways. In many bi- and multilingual communities, one often comes across a type of language interaction in which two or more languages

in the speakers' repertoire interact to produce a new, 'mixed' code characterized by distinctive formal properties and fulfilling specific functional roles. The people who are competent in more than one language use this twin phenomenon — mixing and switching. Therefore, code-switching and code-mixing are commonly expected phenomena, being the expression of language's communicative need and adaptability, determined by the "bounds of limitless avenues and patterns of social interaction and the unfathomable depth of human creative reservoir" (Adekunle 1990:240).

In the 1940s and 1950s, code-switching was often considered a sub-standard use of language. However, since the 1980s, it has generally been recognized as a natural part of bi- and multilingual language use. Researches have attempted to interpret code-switching and code-mixing as follows, "Code switching" is taken from communication technology in which it is referred to as an "unambiguous transduction of signals between systems" (Gardner-Choloros, 2009:11). Code-switching and code-mixing refer to the altering between two languages in verbal communication. Kachru (1978:28) has stated that code-mixing is "the use of one or more languages for consistent transfer of linguistic units from one language to another." Hymes (1974) has defined code-switching as "a common term for alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of a language or even speech styles". Muysken (2000:11) distinguishes code-switching and code-mixing as code-mixing is under the broader view of code-switching.

Moreover, Muysken (2000) defines code-mixing as cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence. In terms of the definition from Bhatia and Ritchie (2004), code-mixing refers to the mixing of various linguistic units (morphemes, words, modifiers, phrases, clauses and sentences) primarily from two participating grammatical systems within a sentence. Therefore, code-mixing transfers elements of all linguistic levels and units ranging from a lexical item to a sentence. Kachru (1975) discusses code-mixing as a manifestation of language dependency in bi- and multilingual communities such as South Asia, pointing out that code-mixing is a role-dependent and function-dependent mode of linguistic interaction.

Mixing has different connotations based on the context that is being used. Mixing languages is done for various purposes— humour, technology, economics, advertisement, and business. Moreover, it is always the influence of the dominant language on the other languages. Gunasekera, M (2005) stated that

“Hungryvela man giyakota son-gee geta,
Measurekerala paddy deka dunnee mata,
Taking not taking kiyala hituvee mama,
Measure keralada pututa kiri dunnee mama?”

The above rhyme is a mix of colloquial Sinhala and English language, and this was forced to be sung during "rag" at the University of Kelaniya, 1974. The first word in the opening line, "hungryvela", is an English adjective combined with the Sinhalese verb from "becoming". McWhorter (2001) elaborates on the fact that language is changeable, and as Sri Lankans, this change is identifiable with the code-switching and code-mixing prevailing in the Sri Lankan context. This method is used in advertisements to grab attention and to motivate people regarding their products and services.

Androutsopoulos (2007: 207) states that "language mixing is no doubt a part of the symbolic capital" that profit-oriented commercial media "sells to their audiences". Although people have some negative attitudes towards these approaches taken by social media, it was a turning point for private commercial media, carried by fame and publicity, to seek different strategies to attract audiences. According to Mawelle (2017), education is not an important factor in code-mixing. Unlike the ideology and policy of using monolingualism in public media, private communication media use different strategies to drag and retain the customers.

Shana Poplack (1980) introduced three types of language mixing: inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching. In inter-sentential code-switching, the language switch is applied to the end of the sentences, "eka thamai mage Shop eka". In intra-sentential code-switching, the language switch

will be applied in the middle of the sentence. For instance, people tend to say, "eka honda Shop ekak dan". There is either interruption, hesitation, or pauses that cannot be noticed in this shift. In tag switching, instead of here, isn't it, ok, right bilingual community in Sri Lanka uses meh, neda,...

Example: you will be there tomorrow neh?, She behaves like that neh..

The impact of code-switching and code-mixing practices on notions of linguistic identity and language purity cannot be neglected because each language has a link to particular kinds of people or situations. Thus the notions, code-switching, code-mixing are important based on the relations of language to the society. At the same time human beings are always involved in numerous efforts to make language a more effective tool of communication as a trade language.

2. Methodology

2.1 Objective:

This study aims to identify the noticeable use of English as a language of communication in trade billboards in the Sri Lankan context.

2.2 Study design:

This study utilized an observational approach to identify the use of English in landscapes as the trade language in Southern province, Sri Lanka.

2.3 Sample:

This study was carried out in the Southern province due to the ease of accessibility for the researchers. Billboards were selected representing different categories of trade. Due to the current pandemic situation, the researchers had to limit their samples to eight billboards. These billboards were selected from urban areas that were easily reachable.

3. Results and Discussions

It was evident that the status and function of English in Sri Lankan billboards had played a significant role in trade. In the business environment, it has become a 'marketing tool' or a 'weapon'. Below taken billboards portrayed English language usage was a noteworthy increase due to the socio-economic conditions in the country. Due to the high demand and excessive usage of English, accuracy and relevancy are not considered in trades. Thereby, the language has been viewed differently in Sri Lanka according to the region and users' needs.



Figure 1. Karadaraless

The above image was a billboard about Lankabell, and it drew the attraction of the people because of its size and the creativity through its linguistic element. CDMA technology is considered one of the pioneers of a fixed wireless telephone in Sri Lanka. This billboard is noted for its tremendous and constant language mixing and a celebrity as a trademark. The billboard with the slogan "less" consisted of linguistic variations, including creativity. A well-known personality was taken as a marketing strategy to make an impact on the customers to purchase the product. From a linguistic perspective, the marketers have used hybridization as an effective morphological process

in advertisements considering bilingualism. According to Kachru (1975)'s explanations, a word is formed by joining two elements, at least one from the native language and the other from the English language. The direct translation of the word "Karadara" refers to "Problems", and it is being combined with the English derivational suffix "less", forming the word "Karadaraless", which initially means trouble less connection in association with the product. Due to the influence of the Sinhala language, there is a high inclination to switch between Sinhala and English, making it Singlish to express their ideas though it is considered an error by the Standard Sri Lankan English speakers.

Based on this advertisement, it was evident that English is a dominant marketing language due to its high recognition as a global language. This integration of English suffixes into Sinhala words is commonly found in advertising in contemporary Sri Lanka.



Figure 2. AIA Insurance

As a health insurance company, AIA has created its advertisement focusing on the health of the people. The study found that the use of the word "chance" has played a significant role in the billboard making the people aware of their health precautions and at the same time informing the general not to take any risk regarding their health. Both the literate and illiterate public can easily understand the message conveyed in the billboard because they are familiar with the word "chance" in different contexts in their daily conversations such as dan mage Chance eka (now it is my chance), eka oyata honda chance eka (it is a good chance for you). The above two utterances connote a positive meaning though the word "chance" in the advertisement conveys a negative meaning. Accordingly, the marketers have contextualized the word "chance" based on their company objective.



Figure 3. Kottu Mee

Cricket is a world-famous sport that draws the attention of everyone despite any age differences. This commercial billboard takes a good step to address the cricket lovers as most of the community is

Sinhalese. As stated by Landry and Bourhis (1997), “Linguistic landscape refers to the visibility and salience of language on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region. It is proposed that the linguistic landscape may serve important informational and symbolic functions as a marker of the relative power and the status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory”. In order to give the real sense, the marketers have consciously used the words cricket. The word fever has various registers and, in the above advertisement, is considered as an obsession towards cricket and whether the others felt it. The word “fever” is written in Sinhala. Fever is considered an illness in the general context. The billboard is created through which the most loved game, cricket, is interlinked with a food item named “HOT N’ SPICY”. The marketers try to build up a connection between these two. Moreover, they have used two celebrities in the field of music. These two famous personalities are used to grab the attention of the customers. This is a very tricky method that is being used to draw attention. A persuasive message is being conveyed through a minimum number of words and letters. The marketers show immense skill and expertise in mastering the language. The use of “n” is significant because the complete word “and” is not used. The message that is conveyed become effective as it can address a larger audience through these eye-catching personalities.



Figure 4. Hot Hot Roti Shop

In the given billboard, the repetitive word “hot hot” is a direct translation from the Sinhala language as “unu unu” is being used instead of “very hot”, which can be taken as an adverb of degree in English. The word “Roti” is a food item of the Tamil community that takes the shape of a round flatbread. This billboard was captured in Galle, which is considered a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural area that draws the attention of the local and foreign community. Thereby, it can be assumed that these eye-catching wordings are being derived from immediate context to grab the attention of the visitors with the use of Sinhala, Tamil and English language mixing.



Figure 5. Kottu Factory

The display board in this restaurant places a strong emphasis on the English language. The restaurant’s name is derived from the combination of two languages, resulting in the significant and eye-catching Sri Lankan English word "The Kottu Factory." The word "kottu" is a Tamil word for chopped roti that has been quickly assimilated into Sri Lankan English and is remembered for its

loud and rhyming sound. The word 'factory' refers to a place where goods are manufactured. As a result, the two words are combined to form the shop's name, implying that the shop produces a lot of Kottu. The use of code-mixing demonstrates the innovative use of language. Because there are several ethnic groups and tourists in these places, English is employed as a link language for communication. The menu is written in both Sinhala and English to appeal to the broadest possible audience. The menu items are listed in English, but the headers such as kottu, rice (fried rice), beema (drinks), and mega bits (bites/snacks other than main meals) are only in Sinhala. This was done to grab the viewer's attention and provide an overview of the food products, especially for those with limited English skills. The adjective "mega" refers to anything exceptionally huge, and the noun "bite" refers to a little food/snack eaten separately from meals in the noun phrase "mega bite". However, to arouse interest, the two words with opposing meanings are merged. All of the terminology mentioned above are examples of Sri Lankan English, and these linguistic terms are utilized as marketing methods to attract both tourists and local residents.



Figure 6. Nippon Paint

The billboard in the image above advertises a paint brand in Sri Lanka. In the form of code-mixing, both Sinhala and English words are provided. The English plural word "stars" is combined with the Sinhala plural marker "la" to create the unique term "starsla" in Sri Lankan English (SLE). Such developments are made in the sphere of advertising to capture the market.

In general, stars are fixed bright and luminous objects in the night sky that millions of people admire. In the Sri Lankan setting, several reality shows are viral among people from all walks of life, and they all begin with the word "star" followed by an adjective or noun such as "Dream Star," "Super Star," "Dancing Star," "Little Star," "Hiru Star," and so on.

Similarly, "Paint Star" with a similar logo can be an excellent marketing technique since it effectively conveys the message. Even someone with a basic understanding of English can deduce this billboard because the phrases and symbols are not unfamiliar in the Sri Lankan context. The word "Nippolac" appears both in English and Sinhala to affect the majority of the area; Sinhalese conveys the message effectively.

The above billboard of a very famous restaurant advertised the available breakfast foods. The advertisement included both Sinhala and English versions of the words relevant to several culinary items popular in Sri Lanka.

Even though all of the words are in English, it is difficult to understand the meaning of all of the food products described on this billboard at a glance. The term "Kola Kenda," which refers



Figure 7. P S

to a drink produced from several types of green leaves, is well-known in Sri Lanka. "Kiribath," a rice-based traditional Sri Lankan dish, is immensely popular. Even though "milk rice" is a phrase for "Kiribath," the billboard uses the SLE word "Kiribath" to grab attention.

Furthermore, "Pol Rotty" refers to a flat round coconut bread fried on a griddle. In English, "Kadala" refers to another popular food item known as "chickpeas." The SLE words used in this board are also common in other parts of the country. As a result, the use of English in Sri Lankan society has grown through time, and SLE now stands as a distinct, identical variant.



Figure 8. Surf Eka Café

The above billboard prioritizes the English language; however, the message can be easily understood even by those with limited English skills. On the other hand, the English used here is simple and common to all types of communities in Sri Lanka. The term "surf" is related to the sea and refers to a mass or line of foam created by waves crashing on a beach or reef. Even though the entire billboard is written in English, the name has importance. The term "Surf eka café" is a direct translation of Sri Lankan English. Because the word "surf" is followed by the Sinhala nominalizer "eka," which means "one," the process of nominalization in SLE may be identified here. This type

of code mixer was employed to familiarize the name and grab the attention of the majority of Sri Lankans. However, this is also aimed at foreigners, so the entire billboard is written in English.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, our findings demonstrated that English is widely used in Sri Lankan society. The English language is considered the "Link Language," while Sinhala and Tamil are considered "Official Languages". Despite its constitutional status as the link language, the increased use of English is notable since it is widely used as a language of communication and trade, particularly in urban areas. Therefore, the need for English in Sri Lankan society is increasing day by day.

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