

# **The Prevalence and Forms of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing in Readers' Comments on Selected News Articles in the Herald Online**

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## **Abstract**

The study investigated the prevalence and forms of code-switching and code-mixing in readers' comments on selected news articles in the online version of The Herald, one of the leading daily newspapers in Zimbabwe. The sample was purposive in that the inquiry focused on the paper's 'most read and commented' stories per edition for seven (7) consecutive days, from 13 September to 20 September 2011. Data were, thus, collected through content analysis. The research unearthed that there was a proliferation of code-switching and code-mixing in the readers' comments. Switching and mixing primarily involved English, which is an official language in Zimbabwe but to the majority is a second language, and Shona, the most widely spoken indigenous language in Zimbabwe and is also one of the official languages. The number of comments in which the phenomena (code-switching and code-mixing) appeared per article ranged from 16.7% to 62.2%. The study further established that code-switching and code-mixing in the comments under investigation occurred at intra-word, intra-sentential (tag-switching), and inter-sentential levels. The researchers conclude that this manifestly prevalent code-switching and code-mixing could be symptomatic of what is obtaining in the wider bilingual and multi-lingual Zimbabwean society. The paper also suggests the possible factors that could be motivating The Herald online readers to code-switch and code-mix in their comments.

## **Introduction**

Code-switching refers to a universal language contact phenomenon reflecting the grammars of two languages working simultaneously. It occurs wherever there are groups of bilinguals who speak the same two languages ( Fromkin and Rodman, 1998). It is a situation where "a person... speaks two or more languages and has to choose which one to use... pieces of one language are used while one is basically using another language" ( Fasold, 1997:180). Hudson (1991)

conceptualizes code-switching as a situation whereby a single speaker uses different language varieties at different times, a consequence of the existence of registers. In the same vein, Akmajien, Demer, Farmer and Harmish (2010:305) define code-switching as “a situation in which a speaker uses a mixture of distinct language varieties as discourse proceeds.” Generally, code-switching plays the role of facilitating communication and understanding between speakers (Eastman in Dube and Cleghorn, 1999). While Eastman in Dube and Cleghorn (1999) believes it is futile to try and distinguish code-switching from code-mixing and borrowing, Fasold (1996:182) attempts to draw a distinction between code-switching and code-mixing thus: “... if a person uses a word or phrase from another language, he has mixed, not switched. But if one clause has the grammatical structure of one language and the next is constructed according to the grammar of another, a switch has occurred. Code-switching can be intra-word, intra-sentential (tag), or inter-sentential switching. Intra-word switching occurs within a word itself, for instance at morpheme boundary. Intra-sentential switching occurs within the boundaries of a sentence or clause, while inter-sentential switch occurs outside the sentence or clause level, that is, at clause boundaries (Romaine, 1994).

Several factors influence code-switching. Crystal (1997) cites a speaker’s language deficiency as one of the contributing factors, whereby a speaker, upon failing to express him or herself adequately in one language, switches to the other language to make good the deficiency. Crystal also identifies the need to express solidarity with a social group as another factor. Such a switch may also be used to exclude from the social group other people who are not conversant with the language. This is what Fasold (1997) refers to as Herman’s overlapping situations, whereby in a situation, a speaker may feel being pulled in different directions by his or her personal desire to speak the language he or she knows best and the language expected of him or her by an immediate (present) social group. Conversely, the speaker may want to be seen as a member of some ‘background’ group or social group that is not present, or may want to dissociate him or herself from that group, so code-switches. Crystal (1997) argues that code-switching may also be influenced by the speaker’s attitude towards the listener, which attitude may range from being friendly, irritated, distant, ironic, jocular, emphasis, to displeasure. To Edwards (1983) code-switching is instigated by a raft of psychological factors that include hesitation, and sociological variables such as topic, audience and context.

While literature on code-switching and code-mixing suggests that they occur in speech or conversations, we have noted, with interest, that in Zimbabwe the phenomena has extended to writing, as readers of online newspapers comment on news stories. It was this realization that motivated this study on the prevalence and forms of code-switching and code-mixing in selected stories in *The Herald online*. One notable earlier study on code-switching in Zimbabwe was done by Dube and Cleghorn (1999), who investigated the use of code-switching in primary school Mathematics lessons and established that code-switching is common and occurs for a number of reasons in these lessons. The current study decided to focus on a different forum – the media. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- (a) How prevalent are code-switching and code-mixing in readers’ comments in *The Herald online*?

- (b) In what forms do the readers code-switch and code-mix in their comments?  
 (c) What factors could be motivating *The Herald online* readers to code-switch and code-mix in their comments?

### Methodology

The study employed the Content Analysis technique, a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Borg and Gall, 1989). The technique also enables researchers to study human behavior indirectly, through analyzing their communications (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996).

Of the three major dailies in Zimbabwe that have online editions, namely *The Herald, Newsday and Daily News*, the researchers purposively sampled *The Herald* by virtue of its being the oldest and arguably the most widely read. Fourteen (14) articles from the paper were further purposively sampled for seven (7) consecutive issues for analysis of readers' comments. The fourteen articles were purposively sampled because they were the 'most widely read and commented'.

### Results

The table below shows the prevalence of code-switching and code-mixing in *The Herald online's* 'most read and commented' articles from 13 September 2011 to 20 September 2011.

Issue	Article title	No. of comments	No. of code-switched comments	Percentage
13.09.11	<b>Grandpa (81) caught pants down</b>	45	23	51.1
13.09.11	<b>Showdown looms over Mashakada estate</b>	24	11	45.8
14.09.11	<b>Sulu exposed as a copycat</b>	30	14	46.7
15.09.11	<b>Is Dhewa's new song, dance a plea for help?</b>	22	7	31.8
15.09.11	<b>Pasuja's positive headache</b>	7	4	57.1
15.09.11	<b>Businessman</b>	25	7	28.0

	<b>shot dead while tracking robbers</b>			
16.09.11	<b>Illegal DZ houses face demolition</b>	23	12	52.2
16.09.11	<b>Gutu gets Euro deal</b>	20	4	16.7
17.09.11	<b>Airzim fails to attract passengers</b>	14	6	42.9
17.09.11	<b>Four suspects speed off in police car</b>	38	16	42.1
19.09.11	<b>Breakaway Methodist church launched</b>	37	23	62.2
19.09.11	<b>Prisoner bolts, rapes six women</b>	18	9	50.0
20.09.11	<b>Airzim flies empty</b>	57	19	33.3
20.09.11	<b>Tuku's new-look Black Spirits</b>	13	8	25.8
<b>Totals</b>		373	147	39.4

The table shows that the percentage of code-switched and code-mixed comments per news article ranged from 16.7% on 16.09.11 under the article **Gutu gets Euro deal**, to 62.2% on 19.09.11 under the article **Breakaway Methodist church launched**. The table further shows that 39.4% of the comments manifested code-switching and code-mixing.

The excerpts below show the types of code-switching and code-mixing that were unearthed in *The Herald online* readers' comments from 13.09.11 to 20.09.11:

**13.09.11 Grandpa (81) caught pants down**

*"Shame on you old man, apa mutemo ndopausingavhariri munhu wezera iri."*

*"Sekuru munonyadzisa. You are a disgrace to mankind."*

*"My word. Ko zvichidai pavakuru ko vadiki vozodii? Respect vazukuru ava!"*

**13.09.11 Showdown looms over Mashakada estate**

*"A woman's worst enemy is another woman. Seyi vakadzi musingadi kusapotana HEEE!!!"*

*"... kasi varume venyu havagone kutsvaka mari here? I feel pity for the gentlemen who are married to you or who are going to marry you..."*

*"Memory and Miriam this kind of pfuma haina ropafadzo cause its not rightful(ly) yours..."*

**14.09.11 Sulu exposed as a copycat**

“When listened to this Kenyan song after hearing yours, I thought you could have copied but who cares. *Hazvina basa izvo!*”

“I discovered this three months back *vakuru kana makopera bvumaiwo tinayo song yacho yaLes Wanyika.*”

“This is common practice with our much less creative singers these days. *Dai Leonard Dembo achipo atiimbira zvake.*”

**15.09.11 Is Dhewa’s new song, dance a plea for help?**

“Pakanaka Moyondizvo, *keep the fire burning. We support u (you) all the way.*”

“Dhewa usavanda *nedance*, unoda rubatsiro iwe...”

“Useless journalist. *Unomakisa.*”

**15.09.11 Pasuwa’s positive headache**

“Go Dembare go! *Nemumvura tese.*”

“... I feel sorry for FC Platinum. *Heyo Kepekepe kuMandava, hokoyo!*”

**15.09.11 Businessman shot dead while trailing robbers**

“ichokwadi here ichi? Herald hamuchatrustike. Chatinoziva chamunotaura chokwadi papepa penyu *idate, day*, zita renyu *nemaclassifieds*, pamwe nesport zvayo. Zvimwe zvese *iopposite the truth*. Tichazvinzwa.”

“... it was the businessman who was shot dead. *Panoda kugadziriswa apa*”

“Zvakaoma zvinoitwa nevamwe vanhu. Inga tange tapedza gore wani. *Rest in peace man!*”

**16.09.11 Illegal DZ houses face demolition**

“Zvatanga futi, Murambatsvina *once again...*”

“... Hameno... *Cry the Beloved Country.*”

“NGAVABVE TANETA NEVANHU VANOVAKA PASIRI PAVO. *IF YOU HAVE A STAND IN HARARE YOU HAVE TO KEEP CLOSE MONITORING OTHERWISE UNOWANA PAVE NEDOUBLE STOREY...*”

**16.09.11 Gutu gets Euro deal**

“Good luck Archie. Keep it up. *Mwari anoziva kwawakabva*. Travel well come Dec.”

“Totenda aenda. *Why wait until December? There is something fishy here...*”

**17.09.11 Airzim fails to attract passengers**

“Ndotonyara kuonekwa ndakamira *pacounter* ye Air Zim. Vanhu vangasati ndaakupenga?”

“But *kana ini handingambodi kufamba airzim* after the ordeal *yakadai*. Ivo veAirzim vanotibata rough *kana zvakanaka...*”

“Chasara kupera *fuel* iri mumhepo. Zvakaoma zvatinoitirwa.”

**17.09.11 Four suspects speed off in police car**

“pane nyaya nokuti vanhu vatatu havaifanirwa kusiya mota ichitinhira nembavha mukati. *What do u (you) expect* pakadaro.”

“How pathetic of the police to leave the car running!!! *Kana fuza chairo* will drive off.”

“Aya ndiwo anonzi madununu chaiwo. *Counting your chickens before they hatch...*”

#### 19.09.1 **Breakaway Methodist church launched**

“Nguva yekuguma kwenyika yoswedera... *GOD HELP.*”

“Pure greed, *hapana kunamata apa...* they should have their own way of naming their church...”

“Well if u (you) are send (sic) by God to do this we shall see that, *nekuti chokwadi hachihwandisi chinobuda.*”

#### 19.09.11 **Prisoner bolts rapes six women**

“Uyu munhu uyu aakungoda *death sentence* kuti abve zvake musociety macho. Haachagadzirisiki pfungwa kuti agare zvakanaka nevamwe musociety zvachose...”

“... Was the door locked. *Vamwe vakadzi ava vanenge vagarisavo here vanzwa parere moyo...*”

“iyi itori mishonga chaiyo *cz (because)* kana kunzwa kuti kuda vakadzi zvake zvanyanya magadhijeri otongwara vanopinza *busy.*”

#### 20.09.11 **Airzim flies empty**

“Airzim haisi *seriouse*” (sic)

“Ko *where are my comments I sent an hour ago?* Marwadziwa here?”

“Even tichibva kuLondon hatikwiri Air Zimbabwe *because its (sic) one very big joke.* Tinozitorera muKenya umu taakuuya kumba.”

#### 20.09.11 **Tuku’s new look Black Spirits**

“VaMutukudzi munodarireiko munhu mukuru dzorai mwoyo vanhu *vadzoke ava zvainakidza varipo* does it mean you will now run away from all those songs with those female voices?”

Chokwadi ndechekuti *music* yaTuku yakashanduka apo akarega kushandisa *lead guitar* achida marimba...”

“Kwaakambowana vaakadzinga munokuziva here *he picked the best in the industry do not forget that he is called THE SUPER STAR.*”

## **Discussion**

The excerpts above show that *The Herald online* readers switch and mix English and Shona, thus both code-switching and code-mixing occur in their comments. Fasold (1997) contends that mere use of a word or phrase from another language constitutes code-mixing. An example is “Chasara kupera *fuel* iri mumhepo. Zvakaoma zvatinoitirwa (*The Herald online*, 17.09.11). Here, the comment is primarily in Shona but the reader has used only one English word, ‘fuel’, so code-mixing has occurred. Another example is “How pathetic of the police to leave the car running!!! *Kana fuza chairo* will drive off” (*The Herald online*, 17.09.11). This comment is primarily in English but the reader has used a Shona phrase *kana fuza chairo*. So, again, mixing has occurred.

However, the majority of the comments seem to reflect code-switching, where “one clause has the grammatical structure of one language and the next is constructed in the grammar of another” (Fasold, 1997:182). An example is “Shame on you old man, *apa mutemo*



*ndopausingavhariri munhu wezera iri*" (*The Herald online*, 13.09.11). Another example is "... it was the businessman who was shot dead, *panoda kugadziriswa apa*" (*The Herald online*, 15.09.11). A further example is "Aya ndiwo anonzi madununu chaiwo. *Counting your chickens before they hatch...*" (*The Herald online*, 17.09.11). In these examples, an 'utterance' may begin in English and end in Shona, or begin in Shona and end in English.

The excerpts also show three types of switching/mixing, that is, intra-word, intra-sentential, and inter-sentential. An example of intra-word mixing is "Dhewa usavanda nedance, unoda rubatsiro iwe..." (*The Herald online*, 15.09.11). Another example is "... Chatinoziva chamunotaura chokwadi papepa penyu idate, day, zita renyu nemaclassifieds, pamwe nesport zvayo..." (*The Herald online*, 15.09.11). An example of intra-sentential switching is "But kana ini handingambodi kufamba airzim after the ordeal yakadai..." (*The Herald online*, 17.09.11). Another is "Uyu munhu uyu aakungoda death sentence kuti abve zvake musociety macho..." (*The Herald online*, 19.09.11). Two examples of inter-sentential switching are "Ko where are my comments I sent an hour ago? Marwadziwa here" (*The Herald online*, 20.09.11), and "Aya ndiwo anonzi madununu chaiwo. *Counting your chickens before they hatch...*" (*The Herald online*, 20.09.11).

While *The Herald online* readers could be code-switching and code-mixing unconsciously, it could be possible to conjecture possible motivations for their doing so. One of the possible factors could be language deficiency as suggested by Crystal (1997). An example could be "Dhewa usavanda nedance, unoda rubatsiro iwe" (*The Herald online*, 15.09.11). In this comment which is primarily in Shona, the writer of the comment does not seem to know the Shona word for dance, so he or she has switched to English. Another example could be "Chasara kupera fuel iri mumhepo. Zvakaoma zvatinoitirwa" (*The Herald online*, 17.09.11). Again, this comment is primarily in Shona but the writer appears to be ignorant of the Shona equivalent of fuel so switches to English.

Another possible motivation could be the need to express solidarity with a social group (Crystal, 1997) or Herman's overlapping situations (Fasold, 1997). Examples could include "Aya ndiwo anonzi madununu chaiwo. *Counting your chickens before they hatch...*" (*The Herald online*, 17.09.11), and "kwaakambowana vaakadzinga munokuziva hree he picked the best in the industry do not forget that he is called THE SUPER STAR" (*The Herald online*, 20.09.11). In these two examples, the writers seem to be torn between using Shona, the language they seem to know well, and the need to identify with or express solidarity with *The Herald online's* international readers who do not understand Shona and so expect comments that are written in English. Other examples could be "This is common practice with our much less creative singers these days. *Dai Leonard Dembo achipo atiimbira zvake*" (*The Herald online*, 14.09.11), and "... was the door locked. *Vamwe vakadzi ava vanenge vagarisawo here vanzwa parere moyo...*" (*The Herald online*, 19.09.11). In these two examples, the 'speakers' begin in English, which they seem to know well, but switch to Shona, possibly to express solidarity with Shona speakers, Shona being the most widely spoken indigenous language in Zimbabwe.

The third reason why *The Herald online* readers code-switch and code-mix in their comments, also alluded to by Crystal (1997), could be attitude. An example could be “Ko *where are my comments I sent an hour ago? Marwadziwa here?*” (*The Herald online*, 20.09.11). This writer, who starts in Shona, switches to English and then back to Shona, possibly his or her first language, probably to register his or her displeasure because the comments he or she posted have not been published. Another example could be “Shame on you old man, *apa mutemo ndopausingavhariri munhu wezera iri*” (*The Herald online*, 13.09.11). This writer, who begins in English, seems to switch to Shona, also possibly his or her first language, perhaps to emphasize his or her anger or disbelief or shock or disgust at the law which deliberately fails to punish rapists who are advanced in years.

## **Conclusion**

The study has established that out of the 373 readers’ comments posted and published in the *Herald online*, 13 September to 20 September 2011, 147 (39.4%) reflected code-switching and code-mixing which could be reflective of the fact that the phenomenon has become a prevalent linguistic phenomenon in Zimbabwe, which is a multi-lingual society. *The Herald online* readers primarily switch from English to Shona or from Shona to English. The switching and mixing occurs at intra-word, intra-sentential and inter-sentential levels. The reasons for code-switching and code-mixing could include language deficiency, the need to express solidarity with a social group, and attitude, although the phenomena might sometimes occur unconsciously.

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