The Use of Code Switching/Code Mixing on Olúṣégun Mímíkò’s Political Billboards, Ondó State, South-West Nigeria

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![ CITATION ]

**Abstract**

In a multilingual society as Ondó State where each language uniquely fulfill certain roles and represents different identities, code switching and code mixing are common phenomena used to meet the complex communicative demands of the majority of the people whose competency in English language is relatively low. Some politicians in the State who are aware of this fact resort to the use of code switching and code mixing in political advertising on the billboards. This paper, therefore, examines the use of code switching and code mixing on Olúṣégun Mimiko’s political billboards during the electioneering period of the just concluded October 20, 2012 Governorship election in Ondó State. The paper shows that none of his political billboards is anti-opposition, rather, they are used to eulogize him. The study found among other communicative intents, the use of code switching and code mixing in Olúṣégun Mimiko’s political billboards, the need to sell his candidacy and also educating the electorate on where to thumbprint on the ballot paper.

**Key words:** Code switching; Code mixing; Political billboards; Olúṣégun Mimiko; Ondó State

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

General election in Nigeria is scheduled to hold every four years. This is when the presidential, governorship, national and state assemblies elections are conducted. However, there is no total adherence to this practice in the country due to election petitions and litigations. In the present democratic dispensations, Governorship, National and State Assemblies elections are staggered. One of such staggered elections is the governorship election in Ondó State, south-west, Nigeria, the last of the six governorship election held in 2012, while three more – Ékìtì, Anambra and Ọ̀ṣun States governorship election will hold before the next general Election in 2015.

Ondó State {also known as Sunshine State} was created on 3 February 1976 from the former Western State of Nigeria. It originally included what is now Ekiti State which was split off in 1996. Presently, Ondó State covers an area total 15,500km² with a total population of 3,440,000[1]. Àkurę̀ is the State capital. The ethnic composition of Ondó State is largely Yorùbá subgroups of Àkókó, Àkúrẹ̀, Ìkálẹ̀, Ìlàjẹ, Ondó and Ọ̀wọ̀ with Ijaw as minority group. The State contains eighteen local government areas and it is divided into three senatorial districts: Ondó South, Central and Ondó North. Ondó State is basically a multilingual society where Yorùbá language holds sway as mother tongue and lingual – Franca. English remains the official language. Also, each Yorùbá subgroups has its dialect which is used for oral communication alongside English and Yorùbá languages.

On 20 October 2012, Ondó State electorate went to the polls to choose their sixth Executive Governor as the incumbent’s {Olúṣégun Mimiko} term ends in February 2013. However, few months to the governorship election, the political landscape of the State witnessed intense maneuverings and machinations. The political Goliaths...
and Lilliputians alike doing their all to woo the electorate in a bid to win the election. The nations electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) cleared thirteen candidates for the election, prominent on the list are the incumbent Governor, Dr Olúṣégun Mimiko of the Labour Party. Mr. Olúwárótímí Akrédólú of Action Congress of Nigeria and Chief Olúṣégun Òkè of the Peoples Democratic Party. Other candidates are Tàyè Àdèûtú {Allied Congress Party}, Àdèyèmi Bólárinwà {All Nigerians Peoples Party}, Oládímẹjì Àdègòròyè {African Political System}, Oláṣẹgiri Festus {Better Nigeria Progressive Party}, Òmọyélé Olórówà {Change Advocacy Party}, Olúṣolá Èhinlawó {Congress for Progressive Change}, Òládípò Lawrence {National Conscience Party}, Àbíkanlú Olúṣolá {National Solidarity Democratic Party}, Victor Àdètúsùn {People for Democratic Change}, and Òmọríghà Olátùnji {Progressive People Alliance}. Among the lot however, only three foremost political parties; the ruling Labour Party (LP); the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are not leaving anyone in doubt that the political stakes are extremely high. The remaining aspirants are hardly known in public reckoning, while their political platform lack visibility and structures in the state.

The electioneering has been exciting and engaging. It has been a season of intrigues, scheming, accusation and counter accusation, back-stabbing, surprises, mudslinging and betrayals. Several issues have combined to make the governorship election interesting. It is the only state in the South-West geo-political Zone of Nigeria that is not controlled by the ACN. The party has trumpeted the need for economic integration of the South West as a necessity and the need to bring Ondo State into its fold. For LP, the election is more of a test of its might and the need to maintain political invincibility. The election to PDP is an avenue to renew itself and reenact its victories of the past in the state and probably stamped their presence in the South-West Zone of Nigeria. The campaign of the three leading contestants in the election is characterized by long speeches at political rallies and the use of postal, handbills and political billboards.

The use of political billboards as a tool of political advertising has been increasing lately in Nigeria and this has not been the focus of any serious studies. The use of code switching/code mixing on the political billboards of Olúṣégun Mimiko. Our choice is hinged on the fact that Olúṣégun Mimiko is the only candidate whose rallies are characterized by numerous political billboards. Not this alone, it is the only candidate whose supporters have high densities of billboards in places where there are lots of pedestrians/vehicular traffic. Besides, the texts on most of the billboards are carefully written in bilingual sentences.

THE DATA

According to INEC’s schedule, campaign by political parties in public began on July 12 and ended on October 19, 2012. From July, 20 to October 19, 2012 I travelled to the major towns in the three senatorial districts to observe the situation of events at the political rallies of the three major political parties. I collected the data by taking at random, the political messages on the billboards at political rallies and identifying code switching/mixing on the boards at rallies and on highways. This is done with a consideration that the paper is to describe the use of code switching/code mixing on the Olúṣégun Mimiko’s messages on billboards.

Olúṣégun Mimiko (Pronounced as Mimikò)

Olúṣégun Mimiko (Irókò)² was born on October 3, 1954 to Pa and Mrs. Bámídéle Mimiko of Ondo town in Ondo West Local Government area of Ondo State. Olúṣégun Mimiko attended St Joseph’s College Ondo. He later attended Gbólújiji Grammar School, Ìlẹ̀-Olújì for his Higher School Certificate. He gained admission into the University of ìfẹ̀ (now Ogbéfìmí Àwólówò University) in 1972 to study Medicine. In 1976, Olúṣégun Mimiko bagged a degree in Health Sciences and had his MB; CH.B in 1980. Before he ventured into Nigeria Politics, Olúṣégun Mimiko was a very active student politician. After his graduation, he worked in both private and public medical institutions and even established his own private clinic. As a career politician, Olúṣégun Mimiko began his political adventure during the days of Unity Party of Nigeria under the late sage Chief Ogbéfìmí Àwólówò. During that period, he served as the Publicity Secretary of the Ondo Local Government chapter of the party and later served as ex-officio member of the defunct Social Democratic Party Executive Council in the local government. He was appointed Commissioner for Health in Ondo State in 1992. He left office in 1993 as a result of military coup. However at the inception of the present democratic dispensation, he was engaged as Commissioner for Health under Alliance for Democracy led administration between 1999 and 2002. In 2003, he emerged as the Secretary to Ondo State Governor under

² Irókò is a sobriquet his supporters choose for him when he first declared his intention to vie for governorship of Ondo State in 2007. Irókò is a large hardwood tree found mostly in the west coast of tropical Africa. There are so many myths associated with Irókò tree in Yoruba traditions. One of such myths is that Irókò is the most senior of all trees in the forest, as such, any man who cut it down risks devastating misfortune on himself and members of his family.
the Peoples Democratic Party led administration. In July 2005, he was appointed as Minister of Housing and Urban Development. In furtherance of his political ambition, Olúṣégun Mimiko indicated his intentions to vie for governorship of Ondo State in 2006. The leadership of Peoples Democratic Party put pressure on him to put his ambition on hold and allow the incumbent (Dr. Àgàgù) to go for another term. Mimiko ignored entreaties and resigned his appointment as a Minister in December 2006, he dumped the party and chose the platform of a relatively unknown Labour Party four months to the election in 2007. INEC, on April 14, 2007 declared that Olúṣégun Mimiko lost the election to Dr. Àgàgù. He later took his case to the Election petitions tribunal and won. Peoples Democratic Party appealed the decisions of the tribunal at the Court of Appeal in Benin–city, Edo State of Nigeria. On February 23, 2009, the court which was the final arbiter, void the election of Dr. Àgàgù due to irregularities and declared Olúṣégun Mimiko the winner of the election. He was inaugurated as the fifth elected governor of Ondo State in February 2009. Dr Olúṣégun Mimiko is now seeking re-election as Ondo State governor.

**Code Switching and Code Mixing**

The terms code-switching and code-mixing are broadly discussed and used in Linguistics and a variety of related fields such as Anthropology, Sociolinguistics, Philosophy and Psycholinguistics. As a matter of fact, works on these phenomena are in-exhaustible. Despite this ubiquity, opinions are polarized on the definition of the terms. Kachru (1978) and Muysken (2000) use the term code mixing as a synonym for code switching – the alternating use by bilingual speakers of two or more different languages within a single utterance. Poplack (1980) defines code mixing as “mixing of two or more languages within a sentence while code switching is the switching between two or more languages at the clause level in a discourse”. Sridhar and Sridhar (1980) opine that code-mixing is the transition from using linguistics units (words, phrases, clauses etc.) of one language to using those of another within a single sentence. While Bhatt (1977) believes that the two terms are used interchangeably, Myers-Scotton (2002) and Poplack (2001) believe, it is not easy to determine whether it is a case of code-switching or code mixing. In contrast, Sridhar and Sridhar (1980) differentiate the two, arguing that code switching has pragmatic or discourse-oriented functions which may be absent in code mixing. Also, Alvarez (1998) argues that code mixing should be treated as distinct from code switching. Whatever the views, code switching and code mixing embodies not only variation, but the link between linguistic form and language use as a social practice.

An importance base for code-switching in Linguistics is Weinreich (1953) where he asserts that the switching of codes by bilingual speakers show the possession of two separate linguistic varieties which they employ on separate occasions. To Vogt (1954), code-switching is not a linguistic phenomenon but rather a psychological one. He explains that all language users experience language contact and that contact phenomena, including language alternation (mixing) are important element of language change. There are three types of code-switching, Poplack (1980). Code-switching can be either inter sentential, intra sentential or Tag-switching. In inter sentential switching, the switch is done at a clause or sentence boundary where each clause or sentence is in one language or another, Romaine (1989). Inter sentential code-switching is also known as mechanical switching because it occurs unconsciously and fills in unknown or unavailable terms on one language. This type of code-switching is referred to as code mixing – the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another (Crystal, 2008, p. 83). This occurs when a speaker momentarily forget a term, but is able to recall it in another language. Intra sentential code switching involves a switch within a clause or sentence boundary, Poplack (1980). This type of switch is known as code-changing. It is characterized by fluent intra sentential shifts from one language to another. Several studies, such as Gumperz and Hernández (1972), Kachru (1978), Poplack (1980) and Sanchez (1983) have shown that intra sentential code switching is a very common phenomenon in communication among bilinguals. In Tag-switching, the insertion of a tag in a language into an utterance in another language (Schiffrin, 1987). From the foregoing, it is apparent that code switching/code mixing cannot be separated from the fact that many people these days are bilingual, trilingual or even multilingual. The choice of either is not caused by a single reason and it is always a blend of several different motives. **Features of Olúṣégun Mimiko’s Political Billboards** Generally, billboards are created to advertise goods and services. They are produced in different shapes and sizes depending on the financial ability of the advertiser. Billboards are usually found alongside highways, high traffic roads, designated market areas and on top or sides of buildings or trucks. Political billboards are erected to advertise political parties and candidates. A good political billboard should possess a message, issues that support the message and an effective campaign slogan. With this in mind, political billboard advertiser has to be creative and innovative in the use of language and images in order to persuade the electorates and possibly increase their appetite for a particular party or candidate.

As we have observed earlier, only three of the thirteen political parties vied for the governorship election in Ondo State are prominent. The parties are ACN, LP and PDP. Among these, only Olúṣégun mimiko’s LP has numerous political billboards in the state. The political billboards are of different types and sizes. The reason for LP’s numerous political billboards cannot be far fetched.
Olúṣẹ́gun Mimiko is the incumbent governor who is seeking a re-election. Therefore, government agencies, volunteer groups, political associates/aspirants at the local government level, Labour Unions, contractors and the party sponsored the structurally diverse numerous political billboards. Despite its great financial wherewithal, ACN have three types of political billboards only. Two of these billboards are bilingual. A bilingual billboard is written in mixed languages. The ACN’s political billboards are sparsely erected alongside major highways in the state. The PDP has one type and its monolingual (one language). It is also erected alongside major highways in the state.

A common feature of Olúṣẹ́gun Mimiko political billboards is that none is anti-opposition. Unlike the two bilingual ACN’s political billboards which are anti-LP. (See Figure 1 and 2)

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 1 is code-mixed while Figure 2 is code-switched. Figure 1 reads “... *Time for *iṣẹ́ *gidigidi* ‘time for genuine work’ while Figure 2 reads “Gbá *won dànù* Patriots Unite... *Time for service* ‘sweep them off/away’. Figure 1 is used to deny the works of Mimiko in the state and also to water down one of his party slogans: *iṣẹ́ *takuntakun ‘real work’. To the ACN, *iṣẹ́ *takuntakun. ‘real work’ may not be a genuine work – *iṣẹ́ *gidigidi. Since, the ACN’s logo is a broom, the party used Figure 2 to advise its members to use their votes to sweep the opposition parties off at the polls. “Gbá *won dànù*” later become the slogan of the party. Although the PDP’s monolingual billboard is not anti-opposition, it is however less creative in the crafting of the party’s campaign message and slogan as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

For easy reading, Figure 3 reads:
“Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) RESCUE 2012. Vote Chief Olusola Oke Governor Ondo State & Hon. Saka Lawal as DEPUTY GOVERNOR”

Most of the political billboards of Olúṣẹ́gun Mimiko are used to eulogize him. Consider extract (1) from a political billboard sponsored by one of the LP stalwart.

(1) Labour Party
We are proud of you
We can see a new Ondo State
Through your caring heart projects
You are indeed the shinning star of our time
God has spoken
2013 *Ipadabo* sure
Ride on my Governor
Vote Dr Olusegun Mimiko
Ondo State governor 20th October
Olusegun Mimiko
-Toyin Aladegbami

Another important feature of Olúṣẹ́gun Mimiko’s political billboards is that most of them are bilingual. This is made possible, partly because his party’s slogan: Gbá *sibẹ̀*: *Kó màa lo bẹ̀ɛ̀!* (Take/accept it, let it continue) is always tied to the campaign message written in English on the billboards. Consider Figure (4a-b) below.

However, a major defect noticed on these billboards is that the writers of the slogan did not follow Yorùbá orthographic conventions (Gbá *sibẹ̀* kó màa lo bẹ̀ɛ̀); hence, there is inconsistency in the way the slogan is written as shown below.

1. Gbâsibe ko ma lobe
2. Gbasibe ko ma lo be
3. Gba sibe ko ma lo bee

The bilingual political billboards are either in English-Yoruba as shown in Figure 4 (a-b) or Yoruba-English as in Figure 5 below.

The language used to package such monolingual political billboards is simple, snappier and carefully crafted with the intention to grab the attention of the electorate.

Most of the political billboards of Olúṣégun Mimiko are designed to be readable in short time with few words in large font with the arresting image of his portrait in bright colours in such a way that catch the attention of the electorate. Consider Figure 7(a-b) below. Figure (7a) was sponsored by Ijapo Business group.
It reads “Dr Olusegun Mimko: Diligent, focused, and organized. The best for enterprise”. While Figure (7b) reads ‘Gbasibe lekan si’ “Take/accept it, one more time”.

Figure 7(b)

The message on each of the billboard in (7) above is short and concise. However, there are other Olúṣégun Mimiko’s political billboards that are wordy as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Such is extracted in (2) below for easy reading.

(2) My vote is for
Mother and child hospital and Mega School
Infrastructural and rural development
Modern market and motor parks
Improved and affordable transportation
Kindhearted and transparent leadership
Outstanding and remarkable performance
-Irókò Volunteers Network
(Powered by centre for professional initiative and practice CENPIP).

Wordy billboards as exemplified in Figure 8 above, erected alongside highways have little or no impact on the commuters whose vehicle is going 80-100 km an hour because it will be awfully hard to read.

Finally, another feature that characterized Olúṣégun Mimiko’s political billboards is that the name and/or portrait image of the sponsor(s) is/are inscribed on the billboards. The reason behind this act is obvious. The reason may be to please either the governor Dr. Olúṣégun Mimiko or the LP or for some other parochial interests.

The Use of Code Switching/Code Mixing on Olúṣégun Mimiko’s Political Billboards

In general characterization of code-switching, scholars such as Weinreich (1953), Bloom and Gumperz (1972), Akéré (1977), Myer-Scotton and Ury (1977), Grosjean (1982), Gumperz (1982), McConvell (1988), Bokamba (1989), Heller (1988, 1992, 1995), Myer-Scotton (1993) and Auer (1995) among others, present a number of possible reasons for switching from one language to another. These reasons include inadequacy in target language; political strategy; a conventional move to reflect a change of topic, participant or setting; rhetoric and stylistic, expression of anger, authority and emphasis.

It is observed that the studies mentioned above are silent on the communicative intents in the use of code switching in writing political message(s) on the billboards. Our concern in this section is to examine the communicative intents of the code switching writers of the political message(s) on Olúṣégun Mimiko political billboards.

In multilingual society as Ondo State, each language uniquely fulfill certain roles and represent different identities. The languages are used to complement one another and to serve “the complex communicative demands of a pluralistic society” (Srídhar, 1996). As mentioned previously, English functions as the official language (language of Administration, Education, Judiciary, Journalism etc.) in Ondo State. Yorùbá language holds sway as the mother tongue and lingua franca. In Ondo State, Yorùbá language essentially served to establish and reinforce the ethnic identities of the people. The Governor, Olúṣégun Mimiko, aware of this, and in order to meet the complex communicative demands of the majority of the people whose competency in English is relatively low, made the new Ondo State logo, a bilingual, with the inscription: Onódó State: Iṣe ọrọgún Iṣe “hard work is the antidote to penury”. This marks the beginning of ―official code-switching‖ in Ondo State since its creation in 1976. Therefore it is not strange seeing the political billboards of the governor for a re-election having code switching messages.

Olúṣégun Mimiko’s political billboards made use of both intersentential and intrasentential code switching. This may be an attempt to reach out to everyone in the language they understand. The use of intersentential code switching in his political billboards is consciously done by the code switchers not because they do not know the words in the other language. English language is widely used in intersentential code switching in Olúṣégun Mimikò’s political billboards. Consider the following
The Use of Code Switching/Code Mixing on Olúṣẹgun Mimikó’s Political Billboards, Ondo State, South-West Nigeria

extract from some political billboards.

3. (a) Re-elect Dr Olúṣẹgun Mimikó
    Ondo State Governor
    Ó worth € (He worth it)

(b) Iroko 2013 Platform
    Market men and women say
    Ipadoso sure (His return is sure)

The mixing of “alien” code into Yorùbá sentence in (3) above is decided very consciously. The mixing code is context-specific. For instance in (3a), the switch is used to justify voter’s persuasion while in (3b), it is used to express the confidence that Ìrókò would be re-elected. Above these, the switch in (3) makes the sentences sound livelier. It also serves as an attention getting device on the billboards.

Like any marketing efforts on the billboards for goods and services, political billboards have products that need to be sold and consumers that need to be persuaded. In politics, the product to be sold is the candidate and the consumers to be persuaded are the voters. One of the tactics to persuade the voters is repetition. Repetition is a good thing in political advertisement. The more time a voter reads the candidate’s name or slogans, the more he or she is to be open to candidate’s message. The LP and its supporters made use of this tactics richly well as it evident in the way the party slogan “Gbà síbẹ̀. Kó máa lọ bẹ́ẹ̀” and the candidate’s sobriquet ‘Ìrókò’ are repeatedly inscribed on the billboards. Consider extract (4) from some political billboards.

4. (a) “Vote Dr. Olusegun Mimiko Continuity 2012
    E gba sibe ko maa lo bee”
    -Bisi Kolawole Initiative

(b) “Physically Challenged Community in Labour Party
    Support IROKO 2013
    One good run deserve another
    Gba sibe ko ma lobe”

(c) “On behalf of Good people of Akoko North West I endorsed Iroko for 2nd term
    Gbasibe ko ma lo be”
    -Hon Barr. Olotu Aburamaku Fatai

Both the natives and the non-natives resident in Ondo State are so conversant with ‘Ìrókò’ and ‘Gbà sibẹ̀ kó maa lọ bẹ̀’ as synonymous with Olúṣẹgun Mimikó when they talk about politics in the State. In fact, most billboards have either “Ìrókò” or “Gbà sibẹ̀” with his portrait as evident in Figure (6b) and (7b) above. Their use as shown above serves a very specific purpose-selling.

The switch into Igbo language in another billboard as shown in extract (5) is used to show ethnic solidarity to the re-election bid of the governor.

5. “The Oracle has spoken
    O ga – Eje Ozo (He will go again)
    Dr Olúṣẹgun Mimiko for second term”
    -Hon Akachukwu Lawrence

The switch above is also used to mobilize the Igbo people resident in Ondo State to vote for Olúṣẹgun Mimiko. At times, the switch may be dialectal, consider Figure (9).

Figure 9

The switch in Figure (9) above is from English to Òkà dialect of Yorùbá. It reads: ‘uba, iye, at’omo, ohun ema te ni o’ “Thumbprint the logo that has the images of father, mother and child” It is used to educate the electorate in Akoko South West Local Government on the images on the logo of Labour Party. Dialectal billboard was also found in Ìkúrù, the state capital, calling on the people in Ìkúrù dialect to vote for Labour Party. It reads:

Extract (6) ‘Akure ooo!
    Ohun kan lajo fo
    Eye, Aba, Omo
    Ni kin te’ – Eyitayo Jegede

Akure (people)
We agreed on the same issue
Thumbprint the logo that has
Mother, Father, Child

Finally code switching on the political billboards of Olúṣẹgun Mimikó is used to advise the electorate on what they should do when they cast their vote as witness in Extract (7)

Akure Branch N U R T W
Vote Economic Development
Vote Free Health Care
Vote Job, Say No to dirty and Dark Ondo State
Vote Your Conscience
Vote Dr. Olusegun Mimiko for Governor of Ondo State
The Future is bright. The future is Orange
Iroko yi jo! Gbasibe
(This Iroko please Take/Accept it)
Te sibe duro tii (Cast your vote, stand by it)
The billboard, sponsored by the National Union of Road Transport Workers, Akúrẹ branch is placed at the entrance of the newly built modern motor park in Akúrẹ by Dr. Olúṣegun Mimiko’s administration. The switch (last line) is used to advise the electorate to protect their vote at the polling station.

After he was declared winner in the election, LP rolled out several bilingual post election billboards to thank the people of the state for their votes. Some of the billboards were also used to call the people to service as shown in Figure (10) below.

Figure 10

For easy comprehension, it reads:
Extract (8)
‘Thank you
Ondo State
Omo ipinle Ondo
Ise takun-takun ti ya
E gba sibe ko ma lo beee!’

Thank you Ondo State
Ondo indegine
It is time for real work
Take/accept it, let it continue!

CONCLUSION
Political advertizing exits in the different forms and it is not possible to examine the use of code switching and code mixing in all political advertizing situations. That is why, for the purpose of this study, we zero in on the use of code switching/code mixing on the political billboards of Olúṣegun Mimiko. The study shows that the use of code switching/code mixing on his political billboards is consciously and carefully done to get the political message(s) across to the electorate. For instance, none of the Olúṣegun Mimiko’s political billboards is anti-opposition, but rather the billboards are used to eulogize him and propagate his course.

Also, we found that code switching/code mixing on the political billboards is used to educate and advise the electorate on how to vote and protect their votes. The paper also shows that code switching is intentional used to sell the candidacy of Olúṣegun Mimiko to the electorate. It is our hope that this paper has contributes to how code switching/code mixing function as a communicative strategy in political advertizing on billboards.

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