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A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing among Hausa-English Bilinguals in Lafia Main Market, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Buba Ahmed Aminu[1], **Areo David Abraham**[1], **Aondona Charles Amende**[1,*]

[1] *Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria*

Correspondence: charlesamende@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the sociolinguistic patterns of code-switching and code-mixing among Hausa-English bilinguals in Lafia Main Market, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Nigeria's multilingual environment has made bilingualism a common linguistic reality, particularly in commercial settings where speakers from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds interact daily. The study examines the forms of code-switching and code-mixing used by traders and buyers, the sociolinguistic motivations behind these practices, and the constraints that shape their occurrence during commercial transactions. The research uses a qualitative descriptive design grounded in Ethnography of Communication Theory and Variationist Sociolinguistic Theory. Data were collected through participant observation, audio-recorded natural conversations, and informal interviews with Hausa-English bilingual traders and buyers in Lafia Main Market. The findings show that tag-switching, intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and lexical code-mixing are dominant linguistic strategies used in commercial interactions. The study further establishes that code-switching performs important communicative functions such as negotiating prices, expressing solidarity, projecting bilingual identity, clarifying meaning, accommodating interlocutors, and facilitating successful business transactions. However, the research also identifies several limitations, including linguistic incompetence, misunderstanding among monolingual speakers, unequal bilingual proficiency, and occasional communication breakdowns. The study concludes that code-switching and code-mixing are not random linguistic behaviours but systematic sociolinguistic resources that enhance communication in multilingual market environments. It recommends greater recognition of multilingual communication practices in language planning and sociolinguistic research within North-Central Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Code-switching • Code-mixing • Sociolinguistics • Hausa-English bilingualism • Lafia Main Market • Language contact

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1. Introduction

Language remains the primary medium through which people establish social relationships, exchange ideas, negotiate meanings, and conduct economic activities. Every society depends on language as the fundamental instrument for communication, identity formation and cultural transmission (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021; Yule, 2020; O'Grady et al., 2019; Mesthrie et al., 2022; Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Since language exists within society, it continually reflects the social realities of its users. Consequently, the relationship between language and society has become a central concern of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics investigates the interaction between language and social variables such as ethnicity, gender, occupation, education, age, social status, and geographical location. Rather than viewing language as a static system governed solely by grammatical rules, sociolinguists consider language as a dynamic social phenomenon that changes according to communicative situations and social contexts (Holmes, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021; Mesthrie et al., 2022; Meyerhoff, 2019; Llamas & Stockwell, 2020; Schilling, 2018). Speakers constantly adapt their linguistic choices to suit particular audiences, communicative purposes, and social relationships.

Nigeria represents one of the world's most linguistically diverse countries. Current linguistic estimates place the number of indigenous Nigerian languages at well over five hundred, making multilingualism an unavoidable feature of everyday communication (Eberhard et al., 2024). Although English is Nigeria's official language, indigenous languages continue to dominate informal communication across regions (Eberhard et al., 2024; Blench, 2023; Bamgbose, 2011; Igbojinwaekwu, 2020; Eze, 2021; Adegbite, 2022). Consequently, many Nigerians acquire competence in two or more languages, resulting in widespread bilingualism and multilingualism. The coexistence of multiple languages has naturally encouraged extensive language contact. One of the most visible consequences of this contact is code-switching and code-mixing. These linguistic practices occur when bilingual speakers alternate between two or more languages during conversation or incorporate linguistic elements from one language into another. Contrary to earlier assumptions that bilingual speakers switched languages because of linguistic deficiency, contemporary sociolinguistic research demonstrates that code-switching is a deliberate communicative strategy governed by grammatical, social, and pragmatic principles (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

In multilingual societies, language choice often reflects social identity, solidarity, education, cultural affiliation, and interpersonal relationships. Speakers frequently switch codes to accommodate listeners, negotiate social distance, emphasise important information, quote authoritative sources, or express concepts that are more appropriately conveyed in one language than another (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021; Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Bullock & Toribio, 2009). Consequently, code-switching has become a defining characteristic of bilingual communication across Africa (Auer, 1998; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Mesthrie et al., 2022). Northern Nigeria provides an especially rich sociolinguistic environment because Hausa serves as the dominant regional lingua franca across numerous ethnic communities. Alongside Hausa, English occupies official domains such as education, governance, commerce, and formal communication. Daily interactions therefore require many speakers to alternate naturally between Hausa and English depending on the communicative situation.

Lafia Main Market represents one of the largest commercial centres in Nasarawa State. The market attracts traders and customers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Hausa, Alago, Eggon, Tiv, Fulfulde, Gwandara, Jukun, Koro, Barebari and several other Nigerian ethnic groups. Within this multilingual environment, bilingual speakers constantly negotiate meaning by alternating between Hausa and English while engaging in buying and selling activities. However, commercial interactions differ significantly from ordinary conversations because they involve persuasion, bargaining, negotiation, relationship management, and customer satisfaction. Traders therefore exploit linguistic resources strategically to attract customers, establish trust, facilitate transactions, and maintain long-term commercial relationships. Code-switching consequently becomes an important communicative tool rather than merely a linguistic phenomenon (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Auer, 1998; Holmes & Wilson, 2017; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021).

Despite increasing scholarly interest in bilingualism and multilingual communication across Nigeria, empirical studies focusing specifically on Hausa-English bilingual interactions within Northern Nigerian market settings remain relatively limited. Existing studies have concentrated largely on urban centres in Southern Nigeria, particularly Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, and Enugu. Consequently, there remains insufficient documentation of bilingual communication patterns in markets located within North-Central Nigeria. This study addresses that gap by providing a sociolinguistic investigation of code-switching and code-mixing among Hausa-English bilingual traders and buyers in Lafia Main Market. It examines the structural patterns of switching, the communicative functions they perform, and the social factors motivating bilingual speakers to alternate between Hausa and English during commercial interactions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Bilingualism

Bilingualism refers to an individual's ability to communicate effectively in two languages. Although scholars differ regarding the degree of proficiency required before an individual can be described as bilingual, there is general agreement that bilingual competence involves the regular use of two linguistic systems for communication (Grosjean, 2013; Butler, 2013; De Groot, 2011; Wei, 2020; Schmid & Köpke, 2017). Bloomfield (1933) originally defined bilingualism as native-like control of two languages. However, contemporary scholars have challenged this restrictive definition, arguing that bilingual competence exists along a continuum because speakers rarely possess identical levels of proficiency or use in both languages. Grosjean (2013) emphasises regular language use rather than native-like proficiency, while Butler (2013), Schmid and Köpke (2017), and Surrain and Luk (2019) recognise bilingualism as a multidimensional phenomenon characterised by considerable variation in language proficiency, use, and experience. Grosjean (2013) therefore describes bilinguals as individuals who use two or more languages regularly for different communicative purposes. Nigeria presents a highly multilingual and bilingual sociolinguistic environment in which English coexists with hundreds of indigenous languages. For many Nigerians, an indigenous language functions as the first or home language, while English is acquired subsequently through formal education and other institutional and social domains (Bamgbose, 2011; Akere, 1981; Danladi, 2013). Empirical evidence supports the widespread coexistence and use of indigenous languages and English among Nigerians. For instance, Uwen et al. (2020), in a study of school-age children in Calabar, found that 63% of respondents were bilingual or multilingual in indigenous language(s) and English and could switch or mix codes. Similarly, studies of Nigerian educational settings have documented the simultaneous use of indigenous languages and English, particularly in bilingual classroom practices (Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2019; Asiyanbola & Ademilokun, 2015). More recent evidence from northern Nigeria also demonstrates the interaction between Hausa as an L1 and English as an L2 among young learners, with both languages contributing to literacy development (Humble et al., 2025). Consequently, bilingualism can be regarded as a natural outcome of Nigeria's multilingual social environment and its educational system, although the sequence and degree of proficiency in the two languages vary considerably among individuals and communities (Are, 2021; Tooley et al., 2005).

In commercial environments, bilingual competence provides significant communicative advantages. Traders frequently interact with customers from diverse ethnic backgrounds and therefore employ multiple languages to facilitate successful business transactions. Hausa-English bilingualism is particularly widespread across Northern Nigeria, where Hausa functions as the regional lingua franca while English occupies official and educational domains. Studies of language use in Northern Nigeria have shown that Hausa serves important communicative functions across ethnic and linguistic boundaries, particularly in markets, transportation, interpersonal communication, and other informal domains, while English remains prominent in formal education, administration, and professional communication (Bamgbose, 2011; Danladi, 2013; Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2019; Blench, 2023; Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2010). The coexistence of these languages creates opportunities for speakers to alternate between Hausa and English according to the participants, topic, setting, and communicative purpose. In commercial interactions, such

bilingual competence enables traders to accommodate customers linguistically, establish rapport, negotiate prices, persuade buyers, clarify information, and maintain social relationships, thereby making language choice an important component of successful marketplace communication (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Auer, 1998; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Studies have established that bilingual speakers do not simply possess two separate linguistic systems but instead draw flexibly from their entire linguistic repertoire depending on communicative needs (Wei, 2018; Grosjean, 2013; Muysken, 2000; Gardner-Chloros, 2009). This flexibility helps explain the frequent occurrence of code-switching and code-mixing in everyday interactions.

Code-Switching

Code-switching refers to the alternate use of two or more languages during a single communicative event. According to Poplack (1980), code-switching involves bilingual speakers systematically alternating between languages within or across sentence boundaries. Myers-Scotton (1993) argues that code-switching should not be interpreted as linguistic incompetence but rather as evidence of sophisticated bilingual competence. Speakers intentionally select different linguistic codes according to communicative objectives, audience characteristics, and social circumstances. Contemporary scholarship has expanded the understanding of code-switching beyond the traditional view of simply alternating between two languages. Gardner-Chloros (2020) describes code-switching as a prominent manifestation of language contact and emphasises that it can perform different social meanings, including accommodation, divergence, language maintenance, and language shift. This perspective demonstrates that code-switching is closely connected to the broader social relationships and linguistic practices of multilingual communities. Similarly, Nilep (2020) defines code-switching as the use of more than one language or variety within a single communication event and notes that language choice and switching can communicate information about the structure of an interaction, the social context, and aspects of speakers' identities.

Recent psycholinguistic research has also challenged the assumption that code-switching is random or evidence of inadequate competence. Beatty-Martínez, Navarro-Torres, and Dussias (2020) demonstrate that fluent code-switching reflects the flexibility and creativity of bilingual language use and is subject to linguistic and cognitive constraints. Their work suggests that bilinguals may use code-switching as an opportunistic strategy for managing communication, allowing them to draw on resources from both languages to convey meaning effectively. Thus, code-switching can be understood as a resource that supports bilingual speech production rather than simply as an interruption of one language by another.

Torres-Cacoullos and Travis (2020) similarly argue that code-switching is an orderly phenomenon involving identifiable structural strategies. Their research shows that bilingual speakers develop preferences concerning where and how switching occurs, including syntactic and prosodic strategies. This finding reinforces the view that code-switching is systematic and governed by patterns that emerge from speakers' linguistic experience and participation in bilingual communities.

Deuchar (2020) further highlights the complexity of defining code-switching by examining issues such as the distinction between code-switching and borrowing, grammaticality, and variation in switching patterns. Rather than treating all instances of language alternation as identical, contemporary research recognises that code-switching may take different structural forms and may be influenced by grammatical, cognitive, interactional, and social factors. Yim (2023) also describes code-switching as the spontaneous movement from one language to another within a speech event and notes that the concept has become relevant across sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, social psychology, and bilingualism research.

Three principal forms of code-switching are generally distinguished.

a) Inter-sentential Switching

This occurs when language alternation takes place between complete sentences.

Example: Na je kasuwa jiya. I could not buy the goods.

b) Intra-sentential Switching

This occurs within a single sentence.

Example: Price ɗin nan is too expensive.

c) Tag Switching

This involves inserting discourse markers or tags from another language.

Example: Ka kawo kayan, okay?

These forms occur regularly in multilingual commercial settings because speakers continually adapt their speech according to the linguistic competence of customers.

Code-Mixing

Code-mixing refers to the combination of linguistic elements from two or more languages within a single utterance, sentence, or stretch of discourse. It is a common feature of bilingual and multilingual speech and may involve the incorporation of words, phrases, grammatical structures, or other linguistic elements from one language into another (Muysken, 2000; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Muysken (2000) provides one of the most influential accounts of code-mixing and identifies three major patterns through which bilingual speakers combine linguistic material: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalisation. Insertion involves the incorporation of lexical or phrasal material from one language into the structure of another; alternation involves movement from one grammatical system to another, while congruent lexicalisation occurs when elements from different languages are used within a shared grammatical structure. These patterns show that code-mixing can occur at different structural levels and follows identifiable linguistic patterns rather than being a completely random combination of languages (Muysken, 2000).

Code-mixing therefore refers to the embedding of lexical items, phrases, or grammatical structures from one language into another without changing the overall grammatical framework (Muysken, 2000). Unlike code-switching, which often involves complete alternation between languages, code-mixing typically inserts isolated linguistic units into another language. In other words, while code-switching may span entire sentences or conversational turns, code-mixing operates at a more local level, blending material from two languages within a single clause or phrase. This distinction is important for the present study because Hausa-English bilinguals in Lafia Main Market frequently insert English business and technology vocabulary into otherwise Hausa grammatical frames, producing mixed utterances that remain grammatically coherent in Hausa.

Example: Ka bring receipt ɗin.

Here, the English verb “bring” is inserted into an otherwise Hausa sentence.

Muysken (2000) identifies insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalisation as the three principal structural patterns of code-mixing.

Functions of Code-Switching in Market Communication

Previous studies by Gumperz (1982), Myers-Scotton (1993), Auer (1998), Gardner-Chloros (2009), Shodipe (2012), and Jibir-Daura (2018) demonstrate that bilingual speakers employ code-switching for numerous communicative, social, and pragmatic purposes. These include: identity construction, negotiation of solidarity, emphasis, clarification, persuasion, accommodation, quotation, humour, maintaining interpersonal relationships, expressing prestige, and facilitating commercial transactions. Holmes (2022) argues that speakers often switch codes because certain meanings are more effectively expressed in one language than another. Similarly, Gumperz (1982) observes that code-switching signals group membership and reinforces shared social identity.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical studies reviewed below show that bilingual speakers use language alternation as a communicative resource shaped by social, cultural, linguistic, and contextual factors, rather than simply as evidence of linguistic inadequacy. Shodipe (2012), in an empirical investigation of Yoruba-English bilingual speech in central Lagos, examined naturally occurring bilingual discourse and found that speakers used code-switching and code-mixing in ways that were connected to sociocultural identity and bilingual interaction. The study demonstrates that language alternation among Nigerian bilinguals can perform meaningful social functions rather than merely reflecting deficiencies in linguistic competence. Similarly, Jibir-Daura (2018) investigated Hausa-English bilingual speech and examined language alternation across a range of conversational topics and contexts, including education, administration, family experiences, transactions, politics, and technical or scientific discussions. The study found that Hausa-English bilingual speakers alternated between the two languages based on topic and communicative context. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study because it provides empirical evidence of Hausa-English language alternation and includes transactional contexts among the areas in which bilingual language practices occur.

Uwen et al. (2020) also investigated bilingualism and code-switching among school-age children in Calabar, Nigeria. Their study found substantial bilingual and multilingual competence involving English and indigenous Nigerian languages and reported code-switching and code-mixing among participants. The findings demonstrate that language alternation is already embedded in the everyday linguistic practices of Nigerian bilingual speakers and is not restricted to formal institutional settings.

Taken together, these studies on code-switching and code-mixing have consistently demonstrated that bilingual speakers employ language alternation as a communicative strategy shaped by social, cultural, and contextual factors rather than as evidence of linguistic inadequacy. In Nigeria, where multilingualism is a defining sociolinguistic characteristic, research has increasingly focused on how bilingual speakers alternate between indigenous languages and English in educational, social, and professional settings. However, comparatively few studies have investigated these practices within commercial environments, particularly among Hausa-English bilinguals in Northern Nigeria.

Nwokwu, Chukwuokoro, and Ogayi (2021) examined code-switching and code-mixing among Igbo-English undergraduate bilinguals at Ebonyi State University using a descriptive research design. Through observations of students' speech patterns, the researchers found that bilingual students frequently alternated between Igbo and English to overcome lexical limitations, facilitate communication, and express group identity. The study concluded that code-switching and code-mixing are natural consequences of bilingual competence and language contact rather than indicators of poor language proficiency. Although the study provides valuable evidence of bilingual language behaviour in an academic environment, its focus on university students limits its applicability to commercial domains where communicative goals differ significantly. Similarly, Yoosuf (2020) investigated patterns of code-switching and code-mixing among Nupe-English bilinguals in Mokwa, Niger State. Employing recorded conversations and interviews involving sixty respondents, the study analysed bilingual speech using the Matrix Language Frame Model. The findings revealed that speakers alternated between Nupe and English at lexical, phrasal, clausal, and sentential levels. The major motivations for switching included expressing ethnic identity, bridging lexical gaps, and ensuring communicative efficiency. While the research contributes to the understanding of bilingual interaction in North-Central Nigeria, it primarily examined everyday conversations rather than the specialised discourse of market transactions where language is often influenced by persuasion, negotiation, and customer relations.

Ohia (2016) investigated code-switching and code-mixing among Ogba-English bilingual speakers in Rivers State. Using naturally occurring conversational data, the study established that bilingual speakers strategically alternated between Ogba and English to enhance communicative effectiveness, negotiate interpersonal relationships, and express social meanings. The research demonstrated that code-switching functions as a pragmatic resource that enables speakers to manage conversational goals while maintaining social solidarity. Although the findings reinforce the sociolinguistic significance of bilingual

language use, the study was conducted in a southern Nigerian speech community whose linguistic ecology differs considerably from that of Hausa-English bilinguals in Northern Nigeria.

In a broader investigation published in the International Journal of Advanced Academic Research, Abubakar and Bala (2017) examined multilingual communication across different Nigerian speech communities. The study reported that bilingual speakers engage in code-switching because of topic variation, audience characteristics, social identity, and linguistic convenience. It also observed that English exerts considerable influence on indigenous Nigerian languages because of its official status in education, governance, and commerce. The researchers concluded that language alternation reflects speakers' communicative competence and their ability to adapt to multilingual contexts. Nevertheless, the study adopted a general national perspective and did not examine the distinctive interactional dynamics of specific multilingual markets.

Studies of Nigerian university speech communities by Nwokwu, Chukwuokoro, and Ogayi (2021), Adetuyi, Omolola, and Adeniran (2024), and Emeka-Nwobi (2023) have also shown that code-switching and code-mixing are common among students because higher institutions bring together individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. These studies show that bilingual speakers use language alternation to express solidarity, emphasise information, clarify meaning, and negotiate cultural identities. Such findings indicate that bilingual language practices are functional communicative strategies shaped by interactional needs rather than random linguistic behaviour. However, these investigations remain largely confined to educational settings and offer limited insight into bilingual discourse in commercial environments, where language choices directly influence business interactions.

Okunrinmeta (2013) explored bilingual language use in Nigeria and argued that Nigerians creatively utilise their bilingual competence to adapt available linguistic resources to different communicative situations. According to the study, bilingual speakers modify English and indigenous languages to express uniquely Nigerian experiences, resulting in innovative forms of language use that reflect cultural identity and social realities. The study further demonstrated that code-switching contributes to the emergence of localised varieties of English and indigenous languages. Although these findings explain the creative dimensions of bilingual speech, they do not specifically analyse bilingual interactions within multilingual marketplaces where commercial objectives strongly influence language choice. More recent studies have extended empirical evidence to other Nigerian linguistic communities. Adetuyi, Omolola, and Adeniran (2024) found that Yoruba-English bilingual speakers frequently switch codes to exclude outsiders from conversations, demonstrate shared linguistic knowledge, and strengthen group solidarity. Likewise, Emeka-Nwobi (2023) reported that conversational context largely determines language alternation among Igbo-English bilinguals, while Fakeye (2022) observed that speakers' language choices are influenced by participants, physical environment, discourse topic, social status, age, and communicative purpose. These studies collectively affirm that code-switching is a socially motivated behaviour governed by contextual variables rather than accidental language mixing.

The empirical studies reviewed above consistently demonstrate that code-switching and code-mixing perform important communicative, social, and pragmatic functions across multilingual settings. However, most existing research has concentrated on educational institutions, social media interactions, political discourse, or southern Nigerian speech communities. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to Hausa-English bilingual interactions within Northern Nigerian commercial environments, particularly Lafia Main Market. This represents a significant empirical gap because markets constitute unique sociolinguistic spaces where communication is driven by negotiation, persuasion, accommodation, and economic exchange. The present study addresses this gap by providing a detailed sociolinguistic analysis of the forms, functions, and motivations of code-switching and code-mixing among Hausa-English bilingual traders and buyers in Lafia Main Market, Nasarawa State.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary sociolinguistic theories: the Ethnography of Communication Theory and the Variationist Sociolinguistic Theory. Dell Hymes (1974) proposed that language should be analysed within its social and cultural context rather than as isolated grammatical

structures. His Ethnography of Communication Theory explains how speakers choose appropriate linguistic forms according to participants, setting, topic, purpose, and cultural norms. The theory emphasises that successful communication depends not only upon grammatical competence but also upon communicative competence—the ability to use language appropriately within specific social contexts. Within Lafia Main Market, traders continually adjust their linguistic choices according to customers' linguistic backgrounds, age, ethnicity, educational status, and commercial objectives. This makes Hymes' framework particularly appropriate for analysing bilingual market discourse.

Labov's Variationist Theory (1963; 1972) explains systematic linguistic variation across social groups. Rather than treating language variation as random, Labov demonstrates that linguistic choices correlate strongly with social variables including age, occupation, gender, education, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. The theory assumes that every linguistic variation carries social meaning. Consequently, speakers employ particular linguistic forms to express identity, solidarity, prestige, and social affiliation. For this study, the theory provides an effective framework for explaining why Hausa-English bilingual traders alternate between languages during commercial interactions. Language choice is a socially meaningful behaviour shaped by communicative goals and interpersonal relationships.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design because the primary objective was to investigate naturally occurring language behaviour among Hausa-English bilingual speakers in Lafia Main Market. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for sociolinguistic studies because it allows researchers to examine language use within its natural social context rather than under controlled experimental conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The design enabled the researcher to observe authentic communicative interactions and interpret the social meanings attached to bilingual language choices. The study further employed a descriptive sociolinguistic approach to identify and analyse the structural forms of code-switching and code-mixing as well as the communicative functions they perform during commercial transactions.

The research was conducted at Lafia Main Market, located in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Lafia serves as the administrative headquarters of Nasarawa State and has developed into one of the largest commercial centres in North-Central Nigeria. The market attracts traders and customers from numerous ethnic groups including Hausa, Alago, Eggon, Tiv, Fulani, Gwandara, Barebari, Jukun and Koro. Consequently, the market provides a rich multilingual environment where bilingual communication naturally occurs. Since Hausa functions as the regional lingua franca while English serves as the official language of education, commerce, and administration, many traders communicate in both languages during daily business transactions.

The population comprised Hausa-English bilingual traders and buyers operating within Lafia Main Market. These included traders dealing in textiles, food items, electronics, household goods, cosmetics, pharmaceutical products, and agricultural commodities. Only participants who demonstrated communicative competence in both Hausa and English were included in the study. Purposive sampling was adopted because only bilingual speakers capable of switching between Hausa and English could provide the linguistic data required for the study. The researcher selected participants from different market sections to ensure linguistic diversity across trading activities. The study involved 40 participants (25 traders and 15 buyers). Data collection spanned eight weeks, during which 32 naturally occurring commercial interactions were audio-recorded, supplemented by participant observation and informal interviews with each participant.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the data collection process. Before any recording, the researcher obtained informed verbal consent from all participants, explaining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participants were assured of complete anonymity; no names, stall numbers, or other identifying details were recorded, and all recordings were stored securely on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher. Pseudonyms are used in all extracts presented in this study.

Primary data were collected through (i) participant observation, (ii) audio-recorded naturally occurring conversations, (iii) informal interviews, and (iv) field notes. Participant observation enabled the researcher to witness authentic language use without artificially influencing speakers' behaviour. Informal interviews complemented the observational data by providing explanations for participants' language choices. The principal research instruments included (i) a digital voice recorder, (ii) an observation checklist, (iii) an interview guide, and (iv) a field notebook. The audio recorder captured spontaneous conversations during commercial transactions, while field notes documented contextual information such as participants, setting, communicative purpose, and non-verbal behaviour.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The recorded conversations were transcribed orthographically and translated into English where necessary. Data analysis followed thematic discourse analysis. The researcher first identified occurrences of code-switching and code-mixing before classifying them into structural categories including tag switching, intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching and lexical code-mixing. Each example was subsequently analysed using the Ethnography of Communication Theory and Variationist Sociolinguistic Theory to determine its communicative function and sociolinguistic significance.

The following tables present English loanwords that have become established in everyday Hausa usage, particularly in commercial domains. These borrowings illustrate the deep lexical influence of English on Hausa and provide context for the code-mixing patterns observed in the market data. The list is drawn from the researcher's own field notes and existing Hausa-English lexicographical work (Bargery, 1934; Newman, 2007).

Table 4.1: *English Words Frequently Used in Hausa*

English	Hausa	English	Hausa
Ball	Kwallo	Vehicle tyre for Car	Taya
Basin	Kwando	Motorbike	Mashin
Blacksmith	Ma'keri	Needle	Allura
Blanket	Bargo	Net	Raga
Bread	Bredi	News	Labari
Bucket	Bokiti	Paint	Penti
Bullet	Harsashi	Petrol station (Fuel)	Mai fetur
Canoe	Kwale-Kwale	Pen	Alkalami
Carpet	Darduma	Phone	Waya
Caterpillar farm truck	Tarakta	Plaster	Kwaskwarima
Ceiling	Rufi	Pluck	Fulok
Cement	Suminti	Powder	Hoda
Chain	Kacha	Radio	Rediyo
Computer	Na'ura-mai-kwakwalwa	Rake	Minjagara
Condition	Yanayi	Ring	Zobe
Cotton	Auduga	Ruler	Rula
Coffee	Kofi	Sign board	Allon Bango
Detergent	Kilin	Soap	Sabulu
Electric pole	Fal-waya	Socket	Soket
Eraser (cleaner)	Ma-gogi	Stabilizer	Stafilizer
Flower	Fure	Stove	Stof
Fridge	Frigi	Sugar	Sukari
Gallon	Jarka	Tea	Shayi
Grinding engine	Injin-Mar kade	Television	Telebijin
Hammer	Guduma	Tiles	Tiles
Ceiling Fan	Fankar-Sama	Tissue	Bandegi
Indomie	Taliyar Indomi	Torch	Tocila
		Water tank	Tankin-Ruwa
Iron/Metal	Karfe	Window	Windo/Taga

English	Hausa	English	Hausa
Kerosene	Kalanzir	Wire	Wayar-Wuta
Kettle	Buta	Yellow	Ruwan Dorowa
Ladder	Matakala	Zing	Kwano-Rufi
Maclean (toothpaste)	Makilin		
Maggi	Kafi-zabo		
Malt	Maltina		
Melt	Narkewa		

In addition to the established loanwords above, the recorded market conversations contained frequent instances of spontaneous code-switching and code-mixing. The following extracts, drawn from the researcher's own fieldwork data, illustrate how bilingual speakers integrate English lexical items into Hausa discourse while maintaining grammatical coherence:

Extract A — Intra-sentential switching:

Kasa min television in gani.

("Let me see the television.")

Extract B — Tag switching:

Mutumin ka fa, he came jiya.

("The man you mentioned, he came yesterday.")

Extract C — Inter-sentential switching:

Na je gidanku jiya. But it seems like nobody is around.

("I went to your house yesterday. But it seems like nobody is around.")

These fieldwork examples demonstrate that switching is motivated by lexical necessity, emphasis, clarification, and identity construction, thereby supporting the ethnographic and variationist explanations adopted in this study.

The analysis reveals that Hausa-English bilingual speakers employ code-switching and code-mixing systematically rather than randomly. The analysis identified four major structural patterns.

Tag Switching — Tag switching occurred frequently during greetings, bargaining, and expressions of agreement.

Example 1 — Tag Switching (Discourse Marker Insertion)

Trader: Wannan rigar quality ce, okay?

Gloss: Wannan (this) rigar (shirt) quality (quality) ce (is), okay? Translation: "This shirt is of good quality, okay?"

Analysis — Tag Switching: The English discourse marker "okay" is inserted into an otherwise Hausa sentence. Rather than changing the grammatical structure, the tag serves as an interactional device for confirming shared understanding between trader and customer. Its use reflects bilingual familiarity and conversational solidarity.

Example 2 — Tag Switching (Politeness Marker)

Customer: Ka rage price dɨ̀n, please.

Gloss: Ka rage (reduce) price dɨ̀n (the price), please.

Translation: "Reduce the price, please." Analysis — Tag Switching: The English politeness marker please softens the bargaining process. Instead of issuing a direct command, the customer presents the request

politely, thereby increasing the possibility of successful negotiation. This finding agrees with Holmes (2022), who argues that bilingual speakers often switch codes to manage interpersonal relationships.

Intra-Sentential Code-Switching — this category constituted the highest frequency of switching observed during the fieldwork.

Example 3 — Intra-Sentential Switching (Economic Discourse)

Trader: Price ɗin nan is too high saboda dollar ya tashi.

Gloss: Price ɗin nan (this price) is too high saboda (because) dollar (dollar) ya tashi (has risen). Translation: "This price is too high because the dollar has increased."

Analysis — Intra-Sentential Switching: The switch occurs within a single sentence. English is used to express economic concepts while Hausa maintains the grammatical framework. The speaker demonstrates complete bilingual competence rather than linguistic deficiency.

Example 4 — Intra-Sentential Switching (Lexical Retrieval)

Customer: Ina son wannan phone, but bana da enough money.

Gloss: Ina son (I like) wannan (this) phone (phone), but (but) bana da (I do not have) enough money (enough money). Translation: "I like this phone, but I do not have enough money."

Analysis — Intra-Sentential Switching: The customer switches naturally between Hausa and English without interrupting the flow of communication. This type of switching enables the speaker to retrieve lexical items quickly while maintaining conversational fluency.

Inter-Sentential Code-Switching — Inter-sentential switching occurred mainly when speakers wished to emphasize important information.

Example 5 — Inter-Sentential Switching (Quality Assurance)

Trader: Ka duba kayan sosai. Everything is original.

Gloss: Ka duba (inspect) kayan (the goods) sosai (carefully). Everything is original. Translation: "Inspect the goods carefully. Everything is original."

Analysis — Inter-Sentential Switching: The second sentence appears entirely in English. The trader intentionally employs English to increase customer confidence by associating English with credibility and quality assurance.

Example 6 — Inter-Sentential Switching (Transaction Closure)

Customer: Na amince. Let's do business.

Gloss: Na amince (I agree). Let's do business. Translation: "I agree. Let's do business."

Analysis — Inter-Sentential Switching: The shift signals successful negotiation and marks the transition from bargaining to agreement.

Lexical Code-Mixing — Lexical insertions were extremely common.

Example: discount, receipt, transfer, balance, original, customer, quality, business, account, and payment

Example 7 — Lexical Code-Mixing (Banking Terminology): Ka yi transfer yanzu.

Gloss: Ka yi (make) transfer (transfer) yanzu (now). Translation: "Make the transfer now."

Analysis — Lexical Code-Mixing: Although Hausa equivalents exist for some expressions, English business terminology has become conventional in Nigerian commercial discourse. Consequently, bilingual speakers perceive English lexical items as more precise and economically efficient.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that Hausa-English bilingual speakers use code-switching as a strategic communicative resource rather than an indication of linguistic inadequacy. First, bilingual speakers selected languages according to communicative objectives. Hausa predominated during greetings, bargaining, jokes and expressions of solidarity, whereas English occurred more frequently when discussing prices, technology, banking services, product quality and official matters. This confirms Hymes' (1974) argument that language choice depends largely upon communicative context.

Secondly, code-switching strengthened interpersonal relationships between traders and customers. Switching to Hausa created familiarity among Northern Nigerian customers, while switching to English projected education, professionalism and credibility. Similar observations have been reported by Myers-Scotton (1993), who argues that bilingual speakers exploit language choices to negotiate social identities. The analysis further indicates that lexical borrowing has become institutionalised within commercial discourse. Expressions such as transfer, POS, discount, account, balance, and original occur so frequently that many bilingual speakers no longer perceive them as foreign lexical items.

Another significant finding concerns accommodation. Traders regularly adjusted their language according to customers' linguistic competence. When interacting with educated customers, English usage increased substantially. Conversely, interactions involving elderly rural customers contained considerably fewer English expressions. The study also identified several communicative challenges associated with bilingual discourse. These include: misunderstanding by monolingual customers, unequal bilingual proficiency, occasional lexical interference, pronunciation difficulties, grammatical transfer between Hausa and English, and communication breakdown during complex negotiations. Despite these limitations, bilingual speakers generally resolved communication difficulties through repetition, paraphrasing, translation, or additional explanation.

Overall, the findings support previous studies by Poplack (1980), Myers-Scotton (1993), Gardner-Chloros (2009), and Wei (2018), all of whom argue that code-switching represents a highly organised communicative strategy governed by grammatical, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic principles rather than random language alternation. In comparison with earlier work, the present findings both converge with and diverge from previous scholarship. The finding that code-switching is systematic and rule-governed agrees with Poplack's (1980) equivalence constraint and free morpheme constraint, and with Myers-Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language Frame Model, both of which argue that switching is structurally constrained. Similarly, the observation that speakers switch to express solidarity and group membership aligns with Gumperz's (1982) interactional sociolinguistics and Auer's (1998) conversation-analytic approach, which treats code-switching as a contextualisation cue. The dominance of intra-sentential switching in the present data also aligns with Poplack's (1980) finding that fluent bilinguals prefer intra-sentential switches because they demonstrate the highest level of bilingual competence.

However, the findings diverge from earlier deficit-based perspectives. While Bloomfield (1933) and some early twentieth-century scholars associated bilingual language mixing with imperfect competence, the present study supports more recent scholarship (Gardner-Chloros, 2020; Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020) that code-switching marks advanced bilingual ability. Furthermore, whereas studies such as Nwokwu, Chukwuokoro, and Ogayi (2021) and Adetuyi, Omolola, and Adeniran (2024) found that identity expression and group solidarity were the primary motivations for switching among university students, the present study found that transactional efficiency and commercial persuasion were at least equally important motivations in the market context. This suggests that the functional weight of code-switching varies across communicative domains, a point also raised by Torres Cacoullos and Travis (2020), who argue that switching patterns are shaped by the specific interactional practices of the speech community.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the sociolinguistic patterns of code-switching and code-mixing among Hausa-English bilinguals in Lafia Main Market, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that

bilingual language use in the market is systematic, purposeful, and socially motivated rather than random or indicative of linguistic incompetence. Hausa-English bilingual speakers employ code-switching and code-mixing as communicative strategies that facilitate interaction, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and promote effective commercial transactions. The analysis revealed that tag-switching, intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and lexical code-mixing are the dominant structural patterns used by traders and buyers. Among these, intra-sentential switching occurred most frequently, reflecting the speakers' high level of bilingual competence and their ability to move effortlessly between Hausa and English without disrupting communication. The study also found that code-switching serves several important sociolinguistic functions. These include expressing social identity, negotiating solidarity, emphasising information, accommodating interlocutors, simplifying explanations, managing commercial negotiations, and projecting professionalism. English was often associated with education, technology, banking, and product quality, while Hausa remained the preferred language for greetings, bargaining, humour, and expressions of solidarity. These language choices show that bilingual speakers are sensitive to the social meanings attached to each language.

Despite its communicative advantages, the study identified certain constraints affecting bilingual interaction. These include unequal bilingual proficiency, lexical interference, communication breakdown among monolingual speakers, and occasional misunderstanding during transactions. Nevertheless, speakers generally overcame these challenges through repetition, translation, paraphrasing, and contextual explanation. The findings support the Ethnography of Communication Theory and the Variationist Sociolinguistic Theory. Language choice was shown to depend on communicative context, participant relationships, and social variables such as educational background, occupation, and audience. The study therefore concludes that code-switching and code-mixing constitute valuable linguistic resources that promote successful communication in multilingual commercial environments. Finally, this research contributes to the growing body of sociolinguistic scholarship on bilingualism in Nigeria by providing empirical evidence from a Northern Nigerian market context, an area that has received relatively limited scholarly attention.

5.1 Recommendations

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

Language educators should recognise code-switching and code-mixing as natural outcomes of bilingual competence rather than treating them solely as indicators of language deficiency.

Market associations should encourage multilingual communication among traders because bilingual competence can enhance customer relations, facilitate bargaining and negotiation, and improve communication with customers from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Traders should be encouraged to use appropriate language choices to accommodate customers and facilitate successful commercial transactions.

Traders should be encouraged to develop effective communication strategies that enable them to appropriately combine Hausa, English, and other relevant languages during commercial interactions.

ORCID iD

Buba Ahmed Aminu https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6807-1394

Areo David Abraham https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5447-4396

Aondona Charles Amende https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7807-9185

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