

# Code Switching in Selected Catholic Bishops' Lenten Pastoral Letters in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha, Nigeria

Virginia C. Okafor

*Department of General Studies, The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, chikkrisokafor@yahoo.com*

**ABSTRACT:** Language serves its users both as a means of communication and as an index of their culture and identity. The speaker not only communicates his ideas but also expresses his belonging to a group. Sometimes, this comes naturally and sometimes intentionally to achieve a particular purpose in a discourse. Catholic bishops in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha have prominently employed code switching in their pastoral letters. The objective of this paper is to examine the bishops' deployment of code switching in the letters with the aim of determining its discourse functions. The study is based on Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory in combination with Aristotle's theory of persuasion, with particular emphasis on pathos and ethos. Data are obtained from selected pastoral letters ranging between 20 and 104 pages and published between 2000 and 2010 by the Catholic bishops in the ecclesiastical province of Onitsha, Nigeria. These are subjected to discourse analysis, which reveals that the bishops have deployed code switching from English to Igbo in order to accommodate to the audience to achieve solidarity and enlist their support, and from English to Latin in order to show off learning, maintain social status and present themselves positively to elicit admiration, all for the ultimate purpose of persuading the faithful to comply with their messages.

**KEYWORDS:** Catholic bishops, code switching, discourse functions, pastoral letters, ecclesiastical province of Onitsha

## Introduction

Language is a system of arbitrary symbols employed by members of a speech community for the purpose of communication. As a means of communication, language is used to transmit information from the speaker/writer to the listener/reader, and this is effectively done through adequate development of the basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. As a sociocultural phenomenon, language also serves its users other functions apart from communication of ideas. It is a social practice which serves as an index and carrier of a people's culture, embodying their traditions, customs, beliefs, norms and values, and which enables its users to construct and reconstruct their various identities. The role that language is performing in a discourse often manifests in the user's linguistic choices.

Roman Catholic bishops' Lenten Pastoral letters in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha are open letters (usually written in English) addressed to the faithful by the bishops during the season of Lent. They are aimed at promoting the Roman Catholic faith and persuading the faithful to live good Christian lives. Since the Lenten period is a period when Christians are expected to reflect on their lives as followers of Christ, the bishops through their Lenten pastoral letters provide the faithful with subjects to reflect on for the season, especially in the face of social, cultural, religious, and political challenges. Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha is one of the nine Ecclesiastical Provinces in Nigeria. It comprises Abakaliki, Awgu, Awka, Ekwulobia, Enugu, Nnewi and Nsukka dioceses which are situated in Anambra, Enugu, and Ebonyi states in the South Eastern Region; these are predominantly Igbo societies. The practice of Roman Catholicism in the province is, to a large extent, affected by the culture of the people. Cultural practices which pose challenges to the Christian faith, especially the Roman Catholic faith, are addressed in the Lenten pastoral letters.

Code switching, a prominent linguistic device deployed in the bishops' Lenten Pastorals, is a language contact phenomenon whereby bilinguals or multi-linguals shift from one language to another in a particular speech situation. It is "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange

of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz 1982, 9). Muysken (1995, 7), who defines code switching as “the alternate use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation,” distinguishes between intra-sentential (switches within a sentence) and inter-sentential code switching (switches between sentences). Myers-Scotton (1995, 2) reserves the term code-mixing for the former, and the term code-switching for the latter. Blom and Gumperz (1972) distinguish between two types of code choice: situational switching and metaphorical switching. The former is code switching occasioned by a change in social setting while the latter is that triggered by changes in topic. They identify participants, setting, and topic as social constraints which affect the code choices of speakers, while Bell (1991) considers the audience as the most critical factor that influences a speaker’s code choice.

This paper seeks to examine the use of code switching in the Roman Catholic bishops’ Lenten pastoral letters in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha in order to determine its discourse functions. Howard Giles’ Communication Accommodation Theory and Aristotle’s theory of persuasion (with particular emphasis on pathos and ethos) are considered relevant as the theoretical framework for the study, since the pastorals constitute a persuasive religious discourse aimed at bringing about attitudinal change in the audience.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a communication theory developed in 1970 by Howard Giles, a Professor of Linguistics and Psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The theory, which has its background in Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT), is about adjustments that people make in their communication in order to accommodate to their audience. It explores the different ways in which we do this, our motivations for doing so, and the consequences (Giles & Ogay 2007).

The term accommodation is used by Giles to refer to adjustments that individuals make in their communicative behaviour in order to get closer to or move away from their audience. According to him, the two ways an individual tries to accommodate the other in communication are convergence and divergence. Convergence is when an individual speaks and behaves more similarly to the person with whom he is communicating, while divergence is when he speaks and acts differently from the person. Through convergence and divergence strategies, individuals in communication signal their attitudes towards each other and their respective social groups—attitudes of social inclusiveness (convergence) and differentiation (divergence) (Giles & Ogay 2007).

Giles & Ogay (2007, 296) state that the motive for convergence is the “desire to gain approval from one another”, while “divergence strategy is prompted by the desire to signal a salient group distinctiveness so as to reinforce a social identity” (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles 2005, 122). Though convergence may have the disadvantage of possible loss of personal or social identity, one of its advantages is that “increasing similarity in communication behavior increases both speakers’ perceived attractiveness as well as their ability to gain addressees’ compliance” (Buller, LePoire, Aune, & Eloy, 1992, cited in Giles & Ogay 2007, 297). The more similar we are to our conversational partner, the more he or she will like to respect us, and the more social rewards we can get (Giles & Ogay 2007). Another advantage is that convergence improves the effectiveness of communication. Divergence on the other hand has the advantage of maintenance of personal or social identity, but may lead to conflicts and misunderstanding in communication.

Aristotle’s theory of persuasion, a process of communication in which a communicator succeeds in voluntarily forming, sustaining and changing the attitudes or behaviour of the recipient or a group of recipients in accordance with what the communicator intends by his or her message (De Wet 2010), is found in his famous treatise *Rhetoric*. The renowned Greek philosopher identified *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* as three means of achieving persuasion in a public speech. According to him, persuasion through *ethos* consists in the speaker’s personal character (his good sense, good moral, goodwill, knowledgeability, trustworthiness, and considerateness) which presents him as credible before the audience; persuasion through *pathos* is achieved by stirring the emotions (anger, pity, fear, happiness, kindness, shame, indignation, envy, etc.) of the

audience so as to put them in a frame of mind to react favourably to the speaker's speech; while persuasion through logos is achieved through the use of rational arguments to prove a case.

As a religious discourse that is concerned with teaching the Roman Catholic faith and exhorting the faithful to live by it, Catholic bishops' pastoral letters are essentially persuasive. It is therefore justifiable to analyse the discourse within the theoretical framework of Howard Gile's Communication Accommodation Theory and Aristotle's theory of Persuasion (with emphasis on ethos and pathos), which are audience centred theories, in order to determine the function of code switching in the letters.

## Methodology

Data are obtained from six pastoral letters of four Roman Catholic bishops in four dioceses, out of the seven, where Lenten pastorals are regularly written, in Onitsha Province. These are Nnewi, Awka, Enugu, and Awgu dioceses. The letters, ranging between 20 and 104 pages, are purposively selected based on rhetorical content. Data are subjected to discourse analysis. The sampled dioceses and pastoral letters are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Sampled dioceses and pastoral letters

S/N	Diocese	Pastoral letter	Year
1	Diocese of Enugu	Okwukwe Ezi Olu ( <i>OEO</i> )	2010
2.	Diocese of Awka	i. Repent and Believe the Good News ( <i>RBGN</i> ) ii. Call to Conversion ( <i>CTC</i> )	2008 2000
3.	Diocese of Nnewi	i. From Faith to Faith ( <i>FFF</i> ) ii. We Walk by Faith ( <i>WWF</i> )	2004 2003
4.	Diocese of Awgu	i. Living the Faith ( <i>LTF</i> )	2006

## Results and discussions

A careful study of the bishops' letters reveals introduction of Igbo and Latin expressions at various points in the discourse which is delivered in English. This happens both within and across sentences, what (Gumperz, 1982, 9) refers to as intra-sentential and inter-sentential code switching respectively.

### *Use of Igbo expressions*

Igbo Language is the indigenous language of the people in the South-eastern Nigeria, which is the home of the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha. Even though the bishops' pastoral letters are written in English, Igbo words and expressions are found in the discourse within and across sentences. Introduction of these native expressions in the discourse serves three functions simultaneously: a meaning reinforcing strategy, an accommodation strategy of convergence, and a persuasive strategy of arousing ethnic sentiments (pathos appeal), all for the purpose of achieving effective communication and compliance. This is exemplified the following excerpts where an Igbo word (text 1), and an Igbo proverb (text 2) are introduced within sentences.

Text 1: Thus, it is not enough to examine oneself with regard to the first commandment that prohibits the having another god, simply in terms of whether one has ever visited the *dibia* or native doctor but more in terms of whether the covenantal relationship with God is what defines every other thing that one does. (RBGN, p. 26)

Text 2: We want to challenge the faith of our Catholics to rise up as responsible members of our Family of God to bear the responsibility of supporting the Church freely according to one's means. The Igbo adage has it *Oji ego kwaa nne ya, na oburo diokpala gbulu ya!* (FFF, p. 90)

In text 1, the word *dibia* is an Igbo translation of the English noun phrase native doctor, which is connected to it with a coordinating conjunction. The use of this native word enables the bishop to communicate all the cultural meanings associated with it which the English equivalent cannot communicate. *Dibia*, apart from referring to native doctor, connotes idolatry, occult and evil practices. Visiting native doctors is thus considered a sinful practice among the Igbo Catholic Community. The bishop is of the view that the faithful should measure their Christianity in terms of their covenantal relationship with God and not in terms of whether they have ever visited a native doctor or not. Apart from reinforcing meaning, switching to this vernacular word in a language shared by both the bishop and the faithful is an accommodation strategy (of convergence) adopted to show solidarity and togetherness; this way the bishop draws himself closer to the faithful, despite his elevated position as a bishop. The native word also arouses the audience's ethnic and cultural feelings (pathos appeal), thus making them well disposed to the bishop as a fellow tribesman. The overall aim of the bishop is to secure approval, persuasion, and compliance with his message of faith and repentance.

The Igbo proverb introduced in text 2 is not translated. However, its meaning is understood from the context as, "whoever has the means, let him shoulder the financial responsibility of his dead mother's burial; for, it is not the first son that killed her." In the Igbo culture, the financial responsibility of burying a dead father or mother is solely shouldered by the first son (just as he is the one who inherits the father's property after his father's death). Sometimes, however, the first son lacks the means to carry out this responsibility, hence this proverb. The proverb is used to buttress the bishops' point that financial support to the Church should be given in faith according to one's means and not through flat levies. Switching to the Igbo proverb enables the bishop to reinforce ideas and communicate deeper meanings that can best be understood by the faithful in their vernacular. The bishop also uses the native proverb as an accommodation strategy to draw closer to the audience and identify with them in the language he shares with them. By using this proverb in its original Igbo form, rather than in a translated form, he demonstrates linguistic and cultural solidarity with the faithful, who are made to feel at home with the bishop as their own brother. It also creates in them a sense of admiration for the bishop, who, despite his education and priestly vocation, is still knowledgeable in his people's culture. Also, consider the following excerpts showing a switch to Igbo expressions across sentences:

Text 3: It is difficult to convince the African that a sad event is natural. "*Ogbaro aka*." They are not ordinary natural happenings (WWF P.17)

Text 4: We are again offered another "forty days and forty nights", crowned with a sacred paschal week to make our society a true household of God, a Church; for such should be the proper character of a true faith: faith that breeds good brands (Okwukwe Ezi Olu) (*OEO*, p.3)

*Ogbaro aka*, in text 3, is used to reinforce the meaning of the English equivalent, *they are not ordinary happenings*. The native expression encapsulates a typical Igbo man's (or African's) attitude to any bad or unpleasant thing happening to him or around him. It is never ordinary. Some evil forces or evil persons must be behind it. This attitude derives from the traditional religious belief of Igbo people. The Igbo traditional religion, which is hardly separated from the lives of the people, is a religion in which God, the gods, evil spirits and forces have a very close relationship with the human world. The gods are believed to constantly interfere in the affairs of men. Any little offense against them can attract punishment ranging from different kinds of ailments or diseases, to even death, unless they are appeased through sacrifices. So, to the traditional Igbo man nothing bad happens to anyone ordinarily. Unfortunately this attitude is a setback to growth in the Christian faith, and is of a serious concern to the Catholic bishops. By using this Igbo expression in its original form, the bishop is able to communicate this cultural meaning and the ideology behind it in a way that the English equivalent does not, for better

understanding. The Igbo expression is also introduced in order to accommodate to the audience in their ethnic language so as to identify with them and build a rapport and understanding that facilitates acceptance of message. The bishop's appeal to the ethno cultural feelings (pathos) of the faithful through the use of the native word is expected to tailor their minds towards acceptance of his message.

The message expressed in text 4 is that of repentance. The bishop wants the faithful to repent from their sins and live a kind of life that will bring about positive changes in the society, a practical Christian life, in demonstration of their Christian faith. To facilitate understanding and acceptance of this message the bishop switches from the English expression 'faith that breeds good brands' to its Igbo equivalent *okwukwe ezi-olu*, which is given in brackets; the latter reinforces the meaning of the former. The switch to Igbo not only makes the message more understandable but also facilitates its acceptance because of the feeling of solidarity it arouses. A message is, no doubt, better understood and appreciated, and in deed more acceptable, in the real language of the people. By demonstrating that he shares this language with the faithful, the bishop is likely to earn trust, confidence and support from them.

Switching to Igbo words and expressions in the bishops' letters, while reinforcing meaning for better understanding by the audience, is a persuasive strategy adopted by the bishops to reduce the social distance between them and the faithful (through the strategy of convergence) to create friendliness and cooperation. This is in line with the view that "increasing similarity in communication behavior increases both speakers' perceived attractiveness as well as their ability to gain addressees' compliance" (Buller, LePoire, Aune, & Eloy 1992, cited in Giles & Ogay 2007, 297). It is also a way of arousing the ethnic sentiments (pathos appeal) of the faithful as such emotions are likely to influence them to react favourably to the bishops' message; seeing the bishops as fellow tribesmen can elicit approval and support.

#### *Use of Latin expressions*

Latin is the original language of the Roman Catholic Church. However, the need to bring the Gospel closer to the people in their own native language has led to the practice of Catholicism in different languages. The emphasis of the Vatican Council is on adapting Catholicism to the culture of the people. Despite this trend, Roman Catholic bishops' pastoral letters in the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province are marked by introduction of Latin words and expressions within and across sentences. These are placed immediately, before or after the English equivalents. Introduction of Latin in the letters serves two discourse functions simultaneously: accommodation strategy of divergence for maintenance of the bishop's socio religious status, and persuasive strategy (appeal to character and reputation) for positive self-presentation as learned and knowledgeable, so as to appear credible. Consider texts 5 and 6:

Text 5: Plenary indulgence can be obtained by performing the following pious acts: (a) adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least half-hour; (b) pious execution of *Via Crucis* (Stations of the Cross); (c) recitation of the Rosary... (CTC, p.11)

Text 6: Having been assumed into heaven, Mary is no longer on a pilgrimage herself, but continues to be *Stella Maris* ("the star of the sea"), a beacon of light for those of us still on the journey home. (LTF, p. 58)

In text 5, the Latin expression *via crucis* is introduced within the sentence, and is immediately translated into English as 'Stations of the Cross'. It is used in the context of the bishops' discussion of the subject of repentance, and is identified as one of the ways of obtaining plenary indulgence in the Church. The idea of indulgence relates to the Catholic Church belief concerning remission of sins. Though Latin is characteristically the language of the Catholic Church, its use this way, in an English discourse addressed to Igbo-speaking Catholic faithful by an Igbo Catholic bishop in an Igbo sociocultural setting, at a time Catholicism has been adapted

to the culture of the people, is for some discourse purposes. First, it is used as a strategy of positive self-presentation. The bishop desires to flaunt his knowledge of Latin before his audience knowing that they would evaluate him positively. Traditionally Latinism is associated with learnedness. Moreover, Igbo people generally have a flair for foreign things, and would admire the bishop for speaking Latin even when they do not understand a word of it. For the bishop, introducing Latin expressions in an English discourse is a persuasive strategy, an appeal to his character and reputation (ethos) as a learned Catholic priest, for the purpose of building credibility and trust. Secondly, the shift to Latin is an accommodation strategy of divergence aimed at maintaining the bishop's socio religious status and distinctiveness from the audience.

In text 6, the Latin expression *Stella Maris* is also introduced within the sentence, and its English translation 'Star of the Sea' is immediately supplied in brackets for intelligibility. The expression is used metaphorically to describe the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, who is highly honoured in the Roman Catholic Church. The choice of the Latin form is motivated by the bishop's desire to demonstrate knowledge of Latin and enlist the admiration and cooperation of the audience who tend to have a flair for Latin language even when they do not understand it. He wants to appear well read and knowledgeable (ethos appeal), so as to gain credibility and support. The choice is also the bishop's strategy of maintaining his privileged socio religious status as distinct from that of the audience. Inter sentential switches in the letters, for similar effects, are exemplified in the following texts:

Text 7: Stand firm on Catholic traditions of belief and worship. "*Lex credendi, lex orandi*"- Faith inspires worship (FFF, P.93)

Text 8: Let our faith be anchored in the Catholic Church, the bulwark and mainstay of truth, the Church founded by Peter: *Ubi Petrus ibi Ecclesia; ubi Ecclesia ibi Christus; ubi Christus ibi Deus!* (where Peter is, there is the church. Where the church is, there is Christ and where Christ is, there is God!) (WWF, p.69)

In text 7, where the Latin expression *Lex credendi, lex orandi* is placed side-by-side its English translation 'Faith inspires worship,' the aim of the bishop is also to impress the audience and present himself positively before them. The Latin expression does not necessarily aid comprehension in an English discourse. So, introducing and immediately translating it is mere display of knowledge of Latin so as to secure admiration and approval from an audience that has a penchant for anything foreign. It is an accommodation strategy of divergence to maintain social prestige, and a persuasive appeal to character and reputation (ethos). To the Igbo Catholic faithful, the use of Latin in a Catholic discourse makes the discourse prestigious and attractive. The bishop is very much aware of this fact and so, occasionally switches to Latin as a rhetorical device to achieve persuasion in the pastoral letters. The text is a directive to the audience to remain loyal to the Roman Catholic faith. It is a popular saying deployed to support the bishop's message of loyalty to the Catholic traditions of beliefs and worship.

Here, in text 8, the Latin slogan introduced is immediately followed by its English translation in brackets, which serves to make it intelligible to the audience. The slogan supports the Church's claim to divine origin and apostolic succession; the Catholic Church teaches that the Church is founded by Jesus Christ and handed over to Apostle Peter, who is succeeded by the Catholic Pope, while its bishops are the successors of the other apostles of Christ. The Catholic Church, thus seen as the continuing presence of Jesus Christ on earth, Christ being the invisible head, the Pope, his Vicar and the visible Head, is therefore considered as a place to be, the only true Church. The bishop chooses the Latin slogan to show, not just how well-versed he is in the knowledge of Roman Catholic faith, but also how knowledgeable he is in Latin (ethos appeal). This tends to increase his reputation and credibility before the audience, and will likely lead to approval and compliance with his message. The switch to Latin also enables him to assert his

socio religious status as a well-read Catholic priest. Introducing a Latin expression in an English discourse only to immediately translate it into English is a linguistic show.

As can be observed in texts 5-8, the bishops have introduced Latin expressions in the pastoral letters for the purpose of displaying their knowledge of Latin and presenting themselves positively before the faithful, as learned and credible. According to Aristotle (2000), persuasion in public speech is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make the audience think the speaker credible; good sense (knowledgeability) is identified as one of the things which inspire confidence in the speaker's character. Switching to Latin expressions in an English discourse is also an accommodation strategy of divergence enabling the bishops to assert their higher socio religious status over the audience to earn respect and cooperation.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that communication involves both exchange of information and management of relationships, and that linguistic choices in a discourse always reveal the speaker's intention and salient personal or group identities. Code switching in Roman Catholic bishops' Lenten pastoral letters, in the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha, is consciously deployed for the purpose persuading the faithful to comply with the bishops' Lenten message. The switches are in form of introduction of Igbo and Latin expressions within and across sentences at various points of the discourse. Switches to Igbo expressions are meant to arouse the faithful's ethno linguistic sentiments (pathos appeal) and predispose them to acceptance of the bishops' message. They are also deployed as an accommodation strategy of convergence aimed at identifying with the audience and establishing a closer tie that would facilitate cooperation and compliance. Switches to Latin are motivated by the bishops' desire to show off learning and knowledgeability (ethos appeal) for positive self-presentation, with the aim of securing admiration and approval. They also serve as an accommodation strategy of divergence adopted by the bishops to assert their distinct personal identity as Catholic bishops and to maintain their socio religious status. This study is a significant addition to rhetorical studies and studies on language and identities.

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