

A Broadcast Code Switching Framework: English-Swahili Alternation in Kenyan Local Radio and the Limits of Conversational Models

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Abstract- The dominant frameworks for analysing code switching — Gumperz's conversational functions model, Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, and Auer's sequential approach — were each developed through the analysis of face-to-face interaction. When applied individually to broadcast code switching, they produce incomplete analyses because they depend on interactional conditions that radio speech does not satisfy: a singular, co-present interlocutor; real-time feedback; and a stable unmarked code shared between speaker and hearer. English-Swahili code switching in Kenyan local radio violates all three conditions at once, and analyses that extend conversational frameworks to the broadcast context without accounting for these violations risk misreading both the functions and the motivations of language alternation in that context. This paper proposes a Broadcast Code Switching Framework (BCSF) that draws the three conversational models together into a single analytical instrument calibrated to the conditions of radio broadcasting. The BCSF organises its analysis around three interacting dimensions — the audience-structural, the indexical, and the ideological — and argues that a complete account of English-Swahili alternation in Kenyan radio cannot be produced from any one of them alone. The paper concludes that broadcast code switching is a theoretically distinct phenomenon from conversational code switching, with implications for sociolinguistic theory and for language policy in multilingual broadcasting contexts.

Index Terms- code switching, broadcast speech, English, Swahili, Kenya, radio, Markedness Model, audience design, sociolinguistics

I. INTRODUCTION

Code switching research has produced a rich theoretical literature over the past five decades, with frameworks that illuminate the conversational functions, grammatical structures, and social motivations of language alternation across a wide range of multilingual communities. The three

frameworks that have achieved the widest analytical currency — Gumperz's (1982) conversational functions model, Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, and Auer's (1995, 1998) sequential approach — share an empirical base: all were developed through close analysis of face-to-face conversation between identifiable, co-present interlocutors. That empirical base has shaped the theoretical assumptions embedded in each framework, often implicitly, in ways that go unexamined when the frameworks are extended to non-conversational contexts.

Radio broadcasting tests those assumptions directly. The presenter speaks to an audience that is absent, heterogeneous, and unable to provide real-time feedback. The listener is not a singular addressee but one of many, with varying language backgrounds, competencies, and preferences. The presenter cannot know whether a code switch has been understood as intended, welcomed, or resented. There is no single unmarked code that holds across the whole audience: the code that is unmarked for an educated bilingual listener in Nakuru may be marked for a Swahili-dominant listener in Nyahururu, and the presenter must navigate that difference without being able to observe it. These are structural features of the broadcast context, not incidental complications, and they alter the conditions under which code switching occurs in ways that conversational models are not designed to handle.

Each of the three frameworks captures something real about broadcast code switching but cannot, on its own, produce a complete account. Gumperz's model captures the utterance-level functions of individual switches but cannot account for the audience-structural conditions that shape those switches in the first place. The Markedness Model captures the

indexical logic of language choice but presupposes a shared, stable system of language norms that a heterogeneous broadcast audience does not provide. Auer's sequential approach depends on the turn-by-turn organisation of conversation, which broadcast monologue does not have. A complete analysis of English-Swahili code switching in Kenyan local radio requires not the application of these frameworks in sequence but their synthesis into a single instrument fitted to the broadcast context.

The Broadcast Code Switching Framework (BCSF) developed here provides that synthesis. The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 examines each source framework and identifies the conversational conditions it presupposes; Section 3 characterises the specific features of Kenyan local radio that those conditions fail to accommodate; Section 4 develops the BCSF through a systematic synthesis of the three frameworks; Section 5 discusses the implications; and Section 6 concludes.

II. THE CONVERSATIONAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF CODE- SWITCHING THEORY

2.1 Gumperz's Conversational Functions Model

Gumperz's (1982) foundational contribution was to show that bilingual speakers use language alternation as a contextualisation cue — a signal that reframes the interactional meaning of an utterance without changing its propositional content. His taxonomy of functions — quotation, addressee specification, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, and personalisation versus objectivisation — was derived from recordings of naturally occurring face-to-face interaction in bilingual communities in Norway, the United States, and South Asia. The analytical power of the framework depends on access to sequential, turn-by-turn data in which the relationship between a code switch and its interactional consequences can be directly observed.

What the framework requires, in short, is that code switching be responsive. The switch is a move in an ongoing interaction, and its meaning is partly constituted by the reaction it draws from a co-present interlocutor. A switch to the personalised register may invite solidarity; a switch to the objectivised

register may create distance. These consequences are visible in subsequent turns and allow the analyst to confirm or revise their interpretation of the switch. In broadcast monologue, this responsiveness is absent. The presenter switches codes with no subsequent interlocutor turn to anchor the reading. The function of the switch can be inferred from context and textual structure, but it cannot be confirmed through interactional response — which means the model, applied to broadcast data, rests on a weaker evidential basis than its original design assumed.

2.2 Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model

Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model addresses the social motivations for code choice rather than the sequential functions of individual switches. Her central claim is that language choice is a form of rights and obligations negotiation: speakers select codes that index the social relationship and identity they wish to enact, choosing the unmarked code when they wish to conform to situational norms and the marked code when they wish to depart from them. The model is productive because it grounds individual code choices in a structured social logic rather than treating them as random stylistic variation.

The model works because the markedness of a given code is, in the conversational contexts Myers-Scotton analysed, a property of the speech situation that both speaker and hearer share. The unmarked code is unmarked because both parties recognise it as the normative choice for that context. This shared recognition gives the marked code its indexical force: a switch communicates something because both parties know what the norm is and can interpret the departure from it. In broadcast speech addressed to a heterogeneous audience, that shared recognition cannot be assumed. The unmarked code for an urban, English-dominant listener is not necessarily the unmarked code for a rural, Swahili-dominant listener tuned to the same station. The presenter's code switch therefore carries different indexical values for different audience segments simultaneously — a situation the model, built around a unified normative context, is not equipped to handle.

2.3 Auer's Sequential Approach

Auer's (1995, 1998) sequential approach, developed within conversation analysis, treats code switching as locally managed within the turn-by-turn organisation of talk. Auer distinguishes between code switching that is interactionally relevant — where the language alternation itself performs a sequential action, marking a topic boundary or initiating a repair — and language mixing, where alternation is habitual and not interactionally salient. The approach is attentive to the moment-by-moment organisation of bilingual interaction and to the ways in which code choice at one turn constrains and is constrained by code choice in adjacent turns.

Auer's (1995) analyses show consistently that code switches at turn boundaries carry different meanings from switches within turns, and that the sequential environment of a switch — what precedes it and what follows it — is essential to its interpretation. Broadcast monologue is not organised as a sequence of turns in the conversation analytic sense. It is sustained, largely pre-planned solo speech in which the sequential constraints that give conversational code switching its interactional meaning simply do not obtain. Applied to broadcast data, the sequential framework loses the lever on which its analytical productivity depends.

III. THE KENYAN RADIO CONTEXT AND ITS ANALYTICAL DEMANDS

3.1 The Broadcast Speech Situation

Radio broadcasting is what Bell (1984) terms a mass communication situation: a single speaker addresses a large, heterogeneous, and absent audience without the possibility of real-time interactional adjustment. Bell's audience design framework was developed specifically to theorise style shifting in broadcast contexts. Bell distinguishes among four audience roles — addressees, auditors, overhearers, and eavesdroppers — and argues that speakers design their speech primarily for their addressees but remain oriented to the other categories. In broadcast speech, the entire audience occupies the role of ratified auditors rather than direct addressees. The presenter's design choices are consequently more complex: they must orient to an imagined, inferred audience rather than a known, co-present interlocutor.

When a radio presenter switches from Swahili to English mid-sentence, the switch is not directed at a particular individual whose reaction can be monitored. It is projected into an audience space containing listeners with potentially incompatible language norms and preferences. The presenter cannot know in real time whether the switch has registered as solidarity, as a register shift, or as an exclusionary gesture. The switch is therefore a design choice oriented to a probabilistic model of the listener population, not a responsive move in an ongoing exchange — which is a fundamentally different kind of communicative act from what Gumperz, Myers-Scotton, and Auer were analysing.

3.2 The Instability of the Unmarked Code in Kenyan Radio

The Kenyan radio landscape presents a segmented audience structure that puts specific pressure on the Markedness Model. National broadcasters such as the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation operate in relatively stable language regimes, with English and Swahili allocated to different programme slots in ways that establish reasonably predictable normative expectations. Local stations serve audiences whose language norms are neither uniform nor stable. A local FM station broadcasting to a peri-urban audience in a Luhya-speaking region of western Kenya serves listeners who may be dominant in Luluyia, functional in Swahili, and variably competent in English. For some, Swahili is the unmarked code for radio; for others, English is the expected register for certain programme types; for others still, the mixed register that characterises much local radio is itself the norm.

Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) note that in multilingual speech communities, language choice norms are frequently contested rather than shared, and that what appears as a unified speech community from the outside may contain multiple normative sub-communities with conflicting expectations. Kenyan local radio is a daily site of this kind of normative contestation. Code switches in Kenyan radio do carry indexical values, and some are clearly marked departures from local norms — the Markedness Model is not irrelevant. What it cannot do, in this context, is assign a single markedness value to a given switch. The switch may be marked for one

segment of the audience and unremarkable for another simultaneously, and the presenter navigates not a single markedness scale but several partially overlapping ones at once.

3.3 English-Swahili Alternation as an Ideological Practice

Beyond the interactional and audience-structural issues, English-Swahili code switching in Kenyan radio is embedded in a sociolinguistic history that shapes the ideological meanings available to it. English was established as the language of colonial administration and formal education in Kenya through a deliberate policy whose consequences Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) and Phillipson (1992) have both analysed as the systematic devaluation of African languages through the privileging of the coloniser's tongue. Swahili, by contrast, was constructed in postcolonial Kenya as a language of national unity and interethnic solidarity, even as it carries its own historical complexity as a language associated with coastal Arab trading culture rather than with the inland communities that now use it as a lingua franca.

English and Swahili in Kenyan radio are therefore not interchangeable codes selected on functional grounds alone. They are historically loaded resources whose alternation engages with constructions of identity, power, and legitimacy that predate and outlast any individual broadcast. Blommaert (2010) argues that in multilingual contexts, language choices are embedded in orders of indexicality — stratified systems of social meaning that assign different values to different ways of speaking, and that are themselves products of historical and political processes. In Kenyan radio, English indexes formal authority, educational prestige, and cosmopolitan modernity; Swahili indexes national solidarity, cultural authenticity, and popular accessibility. Switching between them is an ideological performance, positioning the broadcaster within this value system, whether or not that positioning is conscious or deliberate. The three conversational frameworks reviewed above have no analytical resources for this dimension, which is one reason their individual application to broadcast code switching in this context is insufficient.

IV. THE BROADCAST CODE SWITCHING FRAMEWORK

4.1 Rationale and Design Principles

The BCSF draws the three source frameworks together into a single analytical instrument designed for the broadcast context rather than replacing them. The rationale is that each framework captures one real dimension of broadcast code switching that the others miss. Synthesising them produces an account of the phenomenon that none can produce alone. The framework identifies three dimensions — the audience-structural, the indexical, and the ideological — and treats individual code switches as events that engage all three simultaneously. A complete analysis requires examining not only what a switch does at the utterance level, but who it is designed for among a heterogeneous audience, and what it enacts within the historically constituted language ideology of the broadcast context.

Three principles govern the framework's operation. The broadcast audience is treated as structurally heterogeneous rather than unified, so the single-interlocutor assumption of conversational models is replaced with an audience-differentiated analysis. Markedness is treated as a relational property that varies across audience segments rather than a fixed property of the speech situation. And individual code switches are read as simultaneously carrying utterance-level function, audience-design implication, and ideological positioning — dimensions that interact with and constrain each other rather than operating independently.

4.2 The Audience-Structural Dimension

The audience-structural dimension extends Bell's (1984) audience design framework to account specifically for code switching rather than phonological and lexical style shifting. In this dimension, code switching is a form of audience design: the presenter selects a language or deploys a switch to orient to a particular segment of the audience, to include or implicitly exclude certain listener categories, or to signal a shift in the assumed competency profile of the imagined listener.

The analytical task in this dimension is to identify what the BCSF terms the target audience composite

— the implicit model of the listener population that a given code switch is designed for. A presenter who switches from Swahili to English to explain a technical concept implies a target composite of listeners with sufficient English proficiency to benefit from the switch. A switch from English to Swahili for a humorous aside implies a composite for whom Swahili carries familiarity and cultural warmth. Mapping these implied composites across a programme segment reveals the cumulative audience-structural logic of the presenter's code switching pattern.

This dimension also picks up the commercial dimension of local radio that conversational models ignore entirely. Local stations operate in a market where audience loyalty matters, and language choice is part of competitive positioning. A station whose presenters predominantly use English signals itself as serving an educated, upwardly mobile audience; one whose presenters use a predominantly mixed or Swahili register signals accessibility and local cultural embeddedness. Coupland (2007) argues that media language use is always partly calibrated to audience expectations of what the medium should sound like. The BCSF makes that calibration available for analysis.

4.3 The Indexical Dimension

The indexical dimension draws on Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, but with its central assumption revised. In the BCSF, markedness is audience-differentiated: a switch that is unmarked — normatively expected and indexically neutral — for one audience segment may be marked — a departure from expectation carrying specific social meaning — for another. The analyst cannot assign a single markedness value to a switch but must specify its value relative to each identifiable segment of the audience.

The consequence is that a single code switch in a Kenyan radio broadcast can simultaneously perform multiple indexical functions. A switch to English during Swahili-dominant sports commentary may index authority and formality for listeners who associate English with institutional prestige; it may feel momentarily excluding to listeners with limited English; and it may go entirely unremarked by

habitual code switchers for whom the mixed register is already the norm. The BCSF requires the analyst to hold these multiple values in view rather than collapsing them into a single interpretation — which is the risk the Markedness Model runs when applied without modification to broadcast data.

The indexical dimension also reframes Gumperz's (1982) conversational functions for the broadcast context. The functions of quotation, reiteration, and message qualification are recoverable from the propositional and prosodic structure of an utterance even without interactional response data. What the BCSF adds is the requirement that those utterance-level functions be interpreted in relation to the audience-structural context: a switch functioning as reiteration for one listener may function as a clarificatory address specification for another. Function and audience position are read together.

4.4 The Ideological Dimension

The ideological dimension draws on Blommaert's (2010) orders of indexicality and situates individual code switching decisions within the broader historical and political economy of language in Kenya. The questions this dimension addresses are ones neither conversational models nor audience design frameworks were built to answer: why do English and Swahili carry the specific indexical values they carry in Kenyan radio, where did those values come from, and what does the habitual deployment of English-Swahili alternation as a broadcast register produce at the level of language ideology over time? Makoni and Pennycook (2007) argue that named languages are social constructions whose boundaries and values are produced and reproduced through language ideological work. From this perspective, every instance of English-Swahili code switching in Kenyan radio is a micro-level enactment of the macro-level construction of these languages as distinct, differently valued systems. The presenter who switches to English for technical content and to Swahili for expressions of solidarity is reproducing the association of English with cognitive authority and Swahili with communal warmth — an association with a specific colonial history and continuing political consequences.

Coupland (2007) complicates this picture usefully. Stylistic choices in media contexts can reproduce dominant language ideologies while simultaneously naturalising multilingual competence as a valued social resource in ways that potentially unsettle monolingual norms. English-Swahili code switching in Kenyan radio participates in both processes at once: it reproduces the prestige hierarchy between the two languages and normalises bilingualism as the unmarked condition of educated Kenyan identity. The analyst working in this dimension needs to hold both processes in view, since reducing the ideological reading to either reproduction or resistance will misrepresent what is actually happening.

4.5 Integrating the Three Dimensions

The analytical value of the BCSF rests in the integration of its three dimensions. To illustrate, take a representative switch sequence: a Kenyan radio presenter, interviewing a local community leader in Swahili, switches to English to explain the legal implications of a land dispute, then returns to Swahili to invite the listener's response. Applied individually, each source framework yields a partial account. Gumperz's model reads the switch to English as a message qualification marking the technical register of legal content, and the return to Swahili as a personalisation move re-establishing audience intimacy. The Markedness Model reads the English switch as marked within the predominantly Swahili context, indexing institutional authority and a degree of distance from the populist register of the programme. Auer's sequential model offers nothing in the absence of turn sequences.

Integrated through the BCSF, the analysis extends further. At the audience-structural dimension, the switch to English implies a target composite of listeners with legal literacy in that language, while simultaneously signalling to less proficient listeners that formal, authoritative content is in play. The return to Swahili expands the composite back to the full audience and repositions the register as open and participatory. At the indexical dimension, the English switch carries different values for different listeners — authoritative for some, momentarily distancing for others, entirely unremarkable for habitual code switchers — and no single markedness reading captures this. At the ideological dimension, the

sequence reproduces the association of English with formal institutional knowledge and of Swahili with national community, an oscillation between colonial language values and postcolonial solidarity that is characteristic of educated Kenyan public discourse more broadly. The three-dimensional account is more analytically specific than any single-framework reading, and it explains not only what the switches do locally but what their habitual deployment produces at the level of language ideology across a broadcasting culture.

V. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 For Code Switching Theory

The BCSF has theoretical implications that reach beyond the Kenyan radio context. It shows that conversational code switching frameworks carry embedded assumptions — about interlocutor presence, real-time feedback, and shared normative contexts — that limit their applicability to non-conversational speech. Scholars have noted comparable difficulties in applying conversational models to written code switching and digital communication (Androutsopoulos, 2010). The BCSF extends this line of argument to broadcast speech and works out what an adequate framework for non-conversational code switching actually requires.

The revision of markedness from a fixed situational property to a relational, audience-differentiated one is the framework's central theoretical move, and its implications extend to any application of Myers-Scotton's model to public or mass-mediated speech — political oratory, religious broadcasting, digital media. The Markedness Model remains productive as an account of the indexical logic of language choice; what it needs, in these contexts, is the audience-differentiated extension the BCSF provides.

5.2 For Language Policy in Kenyan Broadcasting

The BCSF also bears on language policy in Kenya's broadcasting sector. Current regulatory frameworks approach broadcast language through the lens of language identity and allocation — specifying which languages should be used in which contexts — rather than treating code switching as the sociolinguistically complex practice it is. Regulations framed this way are routinely violated in practice because they do not

account for the audience-structural conditions that make code switching both inevitable and productive in local radio.

A regulatory framework informed by the BCSF would focus on the functions and effects of code switching rather than on its occurrence as such. It would distinguish between switching that serves audience inclusion — addressing the heterogeneous competency profiles of local listeners — and switching that reinforces exclusionary language hierarchies, and develop guidelines calibrated to that distinction rather than to monolingual norms derived from broadcasting traditions that have little to do with Kenyan sociolinguistic reality. Fishman (1991) argues that language policy works best when it is grounded in the actual communicative practices of the communities it governs; the BCSF provides the analytical ground for policy of that kind in the Kenyan broadcasting context.

VI. CONCLUSION

The three dominant frameworks for analysing code switching — Gumperz's conversational functions model, Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, and Auer's sequential approach — were built for face-to-face interaction and carry assumptions about that context that do not transfer to broadcast speech. Applied individually to English-Swahili alternation in Kenyan local radio, they produce partial accounts: each captures one dimension of the phenomenon while leaving two others without analytical tools. The BCSF proposed here brings the three frameworks together into a single instrument with three interacting dimensions — audience-structural, indexical, and ideological — designed to produce a complete account of code switching in broadcast contexts.

The revision of markedness that the BCSF requires is the framework's main theoretical contribution. Treating the markedness of a switch as a relational property that varies across audience segments, rather than as a fixed feature of the speech situation, is what distinguishes a broadcast code switching analysis from a conversational one. A single switch carries different normative and indexical values for different listener segments simultaneously, and recognising

this simultaneity changes what counts as an adequate account.

The BCSF is a theoretical framework, and its claims require empirical validation through corpus-based analysis of Kenyan radio broadcasts. Research should examine how the three dimensions interact across different programme genres — news, sports commentary, talk shows, music programming — and how listener reception of code switching varies across demographic groups with different language backgrounds. Testing the framework against multilingual broadcasting contexts outside Kenya would establish how much of its account is specific to the Kenyan situation and how much applies to broadcast code switching more generally. What this paper has done is lay out the analytical framework that such research requires.

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