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A Pragmatic Analysis of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing in the Nigerian and Russian Educational Systems: A Comparative Sociopragmatic Study

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Abstract

Multilingual classrooms are sites of constant negotiation between languages, identities, and pedagogical goals. This paper undertakes a pragmatic, comparative analysis of code-switching (CS) and code-mixing (CM) within two structurally different but functionally comparable multilingual educational systems: Nigeria, an English-official, indigenous-language-rich postcolonial state, and the Russian Federation, a Russian-dominant federation containing numerous titular and minority languages within its republics. Drawing on the Gricean Cooperative Principle, Gumperz's interactional sociolinguistics, and Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, the study classifies the discourse functions of CS/CM observed in classroom interaction, textbook discourse, and informal student talk reported in the existing literature, including clarification, affective stance-marking, identity negotiation, pedagogical

scaffolding, and gap-filling for lexical or conceptual gaps. The analysis shows that despite radically different macro-level language policies, English-medium code alternation in Nigeria and English/heritage-language alternation in Russian republics serve strikingly similar pragmatic ends, while diverging in social meaning: in Nigeria, CS/CM indexes bilingual competence and social mobility within a horizontally multilingual society, whereas in Russia, CS/CM is shaped by an asymmetric, vertically structured bilingualism in which Russian retains institutional dominance over titular and heritage languages. The paper concludes that pragmatic, function-based analysis offers a more productive frame for educational language policy than deficit models that treat CS/CM as interference, and it proposes pedagogical and policy implications for both contexts.

Keywords: Code-Switching, Code-Mixing, Pragmatics, Educational Linguistics, Nigeria, Russia, Bilingual Classroom Discourse, Language Policy

1. Introduction

Classrooms in multilingual societies rarely operate in a single linguistic code. Teachers and learners routinely move between a language of instruction and one or more home, community, or heritage languages in order to clarify meaning, manage classroom relationships, perform identity, or simply because a concept is more readily available in one code than another. This alternation has been studied under two closely related labels: code-switching (CS), the alternation between languages across clauses, sentences, or larger discourse units, and code-mixing (CM), the insertion of elements from one language into the morphosyntactic frame of another, typically within a single clause or phrase. Although structurally distinguishable, both phenomena are, from a pragmatic standpoint, strategic communicative choices rather than random or deficient language behaviour.

Nigeria and Russia present an instructive pairing for comparative pragmatic analysis precisely because they are dissimilar in almost every respect except the one that matters here: both are large, populous, multilingual states in which an institutionally dominant language of education (English in Nigeria; Russian in the Russian Federation) coexists with dozens of indigenous or titular languages, and in both systems, classroom and informal student discourse is pervasively bilingual or multilingual in practice even where policy assumes monolingual instruction. Nigeria's federal language policy designates English as the official language and language of instruction from the upper primary level onward, while recognising three major indigenous languages (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo) alongside over 500 other indigenous languages used in early education and informal

school life. The Russian Federation designates Russian as the sole state language of the federation while permitting, within its ethnic republics (such as Tatarstan, Chechnya, and the republics of the North Caucasus and Volga regions), the co-official status and school instruction of titular languages such as Tatar, Chechen, and Ossetian, a status that has been progressively narrowed by federal education reform since 2017.

This paper asks a single guiding question: what communicative work does code-switching and code-mixing actually do in the everyday discourse of these two educational systems, and how far do the answers converge or diverge once macro-level policy differences are set aside? The analysis is pragmatic in the technical sense: it treats CS/CM not as a deviation from a linguistic norm but as a meaningful choice interpretable through principles of cooperative communication, contextualisation, and markedness.

2. Statement of the Problem

Educational authorities in both Nigeria and Russia have historically treated classroom code alternation as a problem to be corrected rather than a resource to be understood. In Nigeria, code-mixing and code-switching among students and teachers are frequently framed in policy and teacher-training discourse as evidence of poor English proficiency or inadequate mastery of the indigenous language, despite empirical findings that such alternation often correlates with high bilingual competence rather than its absence. In the Russian Federation, the federal centralisation of language policy since 2017, including the removal of compulsory titular-language instruction in republics such as Tatarstan, has reframed bilingual classroom practice as a question of voluntary parental choice rather than institutional necessity, with the practical effect of narrowing the contexts in which heritage-language code-switching is institutionally supported. In both systems, then, a gap exists between actual classroom communicative practice, which is robustly bilingual, and policy or pedagogical discourse, which frequently treats monolingual norms as the unmarked default. This paper addresses that gap by asking what a discourse-pragmatic account of CS/CM in each system would actually show, and what comparing the two reveals about the relationship between macro-policy and micro-level classroom pragmatics.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and classify the pragmatic functions of code-switching and code-mixing reported in classroom and school-related discourse in Nigeria and in the Russian Federation.
2. To apply Gricean, Gumperzian, and Markedness-Model frameworks to explain why speakers in each system select CS/CM at particular discourse moments.
3. To compare the social meaning that CS/CM indexes in a horizontally multilingual postcolonial system (Nigeria) against a vertically structured, federally asymmetric system (Russia).
4. To draw pedagogical and policy implications for the treatment of bilingual classroom discourse in both contexts.

2.2 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to educational sociolinguistics by

extending pragmatic frameworks developed largely on Western European or East/Southeast Asian bilingual data to two underexamined and structurally distinct multilingual systems. For Nigerian language-in-education policy, the analysis offers evidence-based grounds for treating classroom CS/CM as a pedagogical resource rather than an index of deficiency, in line with emerging scholarship on translanguaging pedagogy. For Russian language policy debates, the analysis situates classroom code alternation within the broader tension between federal centralisation and republican linguistic autonomy, offering a pragmatic, rather than purely political-legal, vantage point on why heritage-language code-switching persists even as institutional support for it narrows.

3. Review of Related Literature

3.1 Conceptual Distinctions: Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Code-switching is generally defined as the alternation of two or more languages within a single conversation, often at clause or sentence boundaries (inter-sentential switching), while code-mixing refers to the embedding of lexical or phrasal elements from one language into the grammatical frame of another, typically within a single sentence or clause (intra-sentential switching). A third, more peripheral category, tag-switching, involves the insertion of a tag, filler, or discourse marker from one language into an utterance otherwise framed in another. Empirical work on Nigerian advertisement discourse, for instance, has documented all three types operating together within the same register, with intra-sentential code-switching being the most frequent pattern, reflecting a high degree of bilingual fluency rather than its absence.

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks

3.2.1 The Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature

Grice's Cooperative Principle holds that conversational participants tacitly cooperate to make their contributions as informative, relevant, truthful, and clear as the purpose of the exchange requires. A switch or mix of code can be read as an implicature-generating move: when a teacher switches from English to a local or heritage language to explain a difficult concept, the switch itself communicates, beyond its propositional content, that the speaker judges the addressee's comprehension to be at risk in the matrix language, and that clarification is being offered cooperatively rather than as a digression.

3.2.2 Gumperz's Interactional Sociolinguistics and Contextualisation Cues

Gumperz treats code-switching as a contextualisation cue, a signal that frames how an utterance is to be interpreted relative to the surrounding discourse. Switches mark shifts in footing, such as from formal instruction to personal aside, from public to private register, or from authoritative to affiliative stance. This framework explains why, in both Nigerian and Russian classroom data, switches frequently co-occur with shifts from lesson content to classroom management, discipline, or rapport-building talk.

3.2.3 Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model

The Markedness Model proposes that speakers choose a linguistic code, or alternation between codes, against a background of socially recognised rights-and-obligations sets. An unmarked choice confirms the expected

relationship between interlocutors in a given setting (for example, English as the unmarked code of formal instruction); a marked choice, such as switching to a heritage language, renegotiates that relationship, often to index solidarity, authority, humour, or ethnic identity. This model is particularly useful for explaining why the same switch, for instance from English to Yoruba, or from Russian to Tatar, can carry opposite social meanings depending on who initiates it and in what institutional context.

3.3 Code-Switching and Code-Mixing in Nigerian Education

Nigerian sociolinguistic scholarship has documented code-switching and code-mixing across a wide range of school-related and adjacent discourse domains. Studies of bilingual primary classrooms in South-Western Nigeria report that teachers use code-switching for clarification, cultural expression, and identity negotiation, and argue that such practice supports rather than undermines bilingual education and linguistic diversity.

Work on the pedagogical implications of code-switching as a medium of instruction in Nigerian public primary schools similarly finds that teachers' language choices shape students' learning experiences in ways that argue for recognising code-switching as a legitimate pedagogical tool rather than an obstacle.

At the level of academic achievement, a quasi-experimental study of secondary school mathematics students in Oyo State examined the effect of code-mixing and code-switching on test performance, situating the question squarely within debates about whether bilingual discourse helps or hinders subject-matter learning.

At the level of English-language proficiency specifically, survey-based research on senior secondary school students has examined how code-switching functions in the development of English proficiency in multilingual school settings, framing classroom code alternation through a sociocultural lens of language learning.

Beyond formal classroom interaction, Nigerian English itself has been shown to carry pragmatic markers derived from indigenous languages even within otherwise English-medium discourse. Corpus-based work on bilingual pragmatic markers such as *o*, *sha*, and *abi* in Nigerian English demonstrates that these forms are not random insertions but conventionalised discourse particles carrying specific pragmatic functions, including softening, emphasis, and solidarity marking, and that students themselves describe such forms as ordinary code-mixing rather than as marks of poor education.

3.4 Code-Switching and Code-Mixing in the Russian Educational Context

Russian-context scholarship on code-switching divides broadly into two strands: studies of Russian-English bilingualism (often involving heritage speakers, prestige-motivated English use, or diaspora communities), and studies of Russian-titular-language bilingualism within the republics of the Russian Federation.

On the Russian-English strand, early sociolinguistic work identified three variables shaping Russian-English code-switching: the social context in which each language was learned, the specific communicative function each language customarily serves, and each language's relative efficacy as

a communicative tool in a given social setting. This research also observed that younger bilinguals, particularly those in the fifteen-to-twenty-two age range whose code-switching is closely tied to educational exposure, switch to English more readily than older cohorts, and that English functions in Russian society as a marker of prestige and an instrumental asset for educational and professional advancement.

On the Russian-titular-language strand, the sociolinguistic situation is shaped less by prestige-driven elective bilingualism and more by an asymmetric bilingualism rooted in Soviet and post-Soviet education policy. Tatar-Russian code-switching, for example, has been linked historically to the introduction of Russian-medium schooling and the decline of independent Tatar-medium education after the 1930s, such that urban Tatar speakers frequently lack productive command of Tatar grammatical constructions that have no direct Russian equivalent, and rely on Russian conjunctions and syntactic patterns even when speaking Tatar.

This asymmetry has been reinforced by recent policy developments. Following a 2017 federal statement characterising compulsory instruction in a non-native language as unacceptable, regional reforms removed compulsory Tatar-language instruction from Tatarstan's schools, converting titular-language study into a voluntary 'native language' subject selected by parents. Comparable arrangements, and comparable tensions between regional linguistic autonomy and federal centralisation, exist in other republics, where regional legislation in Tatarstan and Chechnya formally stipulates that the titular language be studied in equal measure with Russian, where Ossetian study is compulsory in North Ossetian schools, and where Dagestan's schools require study of at least one republican language, even as broader federal trends since 2017 have reduced the republics' authority to mandate such instruction. Within this context, classroom and informal student code-switching between Russian and a titular or heritage language functions less as an elective stylistic resource, as it largely does for Russian-English switching, and more as a site where the lived, practical bilingualism of republic populations persists even as the institutional scaffolding supporting it narrows.

3.5 Summary of the Literature and the Gap Addressed

Across both bodies of literature, a consistent finding emerges: code-switching and code-mixing in school-related discourse correlate with functional communicative goals (clarification, affect, identity, rapport) rather than linguistic deficiency. What is largely absent from the literature, however, is a direct comparative pragmatic analysis that places the Nigerian and Russian cases side by side to ask whether the same pragmatic functions are achieved through structurally different sociolinguistic architectures. This paper addresses that gap.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, library-based comparative discourse-pragmatic design. Rather than collecting new classroom recordings, the analysis synthesises and re-analyses examples, findings, and excerpts reported in published Nigerian and Russian sociolinguistic and educational-linguistics scholarship, applying a consistent pragmatic coding scheme across both data sets. This approach is appropriate for a Scopus-style comparative

paper because it allows triangulation across an existing, peer-reviewed evidence base spanning multiple school levels (primary, secondary) and discourse domains (teacher talk, student talk, informal school-adjacent media) in both countries.

4.1 Data Sources

- Nigeria: published classroom-observation and survey studies of code-switching in primary and secondary education (Oyo, Osun, and Ogun States), together with corpus-based studies of bilingual pragmatic markers in Nigerian English.
- Russia: published sociolinguistic studies of Russian-English code-switching among bilingual youth, together with documentary and legal-linguistic analyses of Tatar-Russian, Chechen-Russian, and other titular-language code-switching in the republics of the Russian Federation.

4.2 Analytical Procedure

Examples and findings drawn from the literature were coded for (a) structural type (inter-sentential CS, intra-sentential CM, or tag-switching), (b) discourse function (clarification, affective stance, identity/solidarity marking, pedagogical scaffolding, lexical-gap filling, or authority negotiation), and (c) the theoretical mechanism, Gricean implicature, Gumperzian contextualisation, or markedness negotiation, that best accounts for the function observed. The coded examples were then organised by educational level and compared across the Nigerian and Russian data sets to identify points of convergence and divergence.

4.3 Limitations

As a literature-synthesis design rather than a primary fieldwork study, this paper cannot claim statistical representativeness for either national context; its claims are best read as theoretically motivated generalisations grounded in, and tested against, the existing empirical record. Variation across Nigeria's more than 500 indigenous languages and across Russia's many republics means that findings reported for specific languages (Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo; Tatar, Chechen, Ossetian) should not be assumed to generalise uniformly across every language community in either country.

5. Pragmatic Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Clarification and Comprehension Repair

The most frequently reported function of CS/CM in both systems is clarification: a switch that repairs an apparent comprehension breakdown. In Nigerian primary classrooms, teachers reported switching from English into Yoruba, Hausa, or Igbo specifically at points where pupils displayed confusion, treating the switch as a cooperative move that maximises the relevance and clarity of the message, consistent with the Gricean maxims of quantity and manner.

(1a) Teacher (English, then Yoruba gloss): "The sum of the angles in a triangle is 180 degrees. Iyẹn ni pe..." ("That means...") [explanation continues in Yoruba]

Example 1a: Inter-sentential code-switching for clarification in a Nigerian mathematics lesson (functionally reconstructed from reported classroom-observation findings).

A structurally parallel pattern appears in Russian-titular-language classroom contexts, where the matrix language of

instruction (Russian) is interspersed with a titular-language gloss or explanation when a concept does not transfer cleanly, particularly in subjects with culturally specific vocabulary (literature, local history, religious or folk content) taught in republics such as Tatarstan.

5.2 Affective Stance and Rapport

Both literatures report that switches frequently coincide with a shift from an instructional footing to an affective or relational one. In Nigerian secondary-school and informal discourse, the use of indigenous-language pragmatic markers and interjections, such as the bilingual interjections analysed in corpus-based Nigerian English research, allows speakers to register surprise, exasperation, or solidarity in a way that a purely English utterance would not achieve as economically. This matches Gumperz's account of code-switching as a contextualisation cue marking a shift in footing from formal to affiliative register.

In Russian-English bilingual youth discourse, code-switching has likewise been linked to affect: bilinguals reportedly switch codes when becoming emotional, suggesting that the embedded language carries an affective load not fully available in the matrix language, a pattern that converges closely with the Nigerian interjection data despite the entirely different language pair involved.

5.3 Identity and Solidarity Marking

Markedness-based analysis explains a further convergence: in both contexts, an unexpected switch can renegotiate the relationship between speakers. Nigerian university and secondary-school students report that the use of forms such as *abi*, drawn from Yoruba but embedded in English-medium talk, requires and signals intimacy, being judged inappropriate for use with someone just met, while also marking a distinctly Nigerian identity within English-medium discourse. This is a textbook case of a marked code choice that renegotiates social distance rather than simply transferring propositional content.

An analogous, though socio-politically heavier, identity function attaches to Tatar-Russian and other titular-Russian switching. Because the relevant code (Tatar, Chechen, Ossetian) is also a co-official or titular language tied to ethnic and regional identity, a switch into it among students can index ethnic solidarity or resistance to linguistic centralisation, particularly in the period following the 2017 reform that removed compulsory titular-language instruction and reframed such language maintenance as a matter of individual or family choice. Where the Nigerian marked switch primarily negotiates interpersonal solidarity within a broadly stable multilingual hierarchy, the Russian titular-language switch carries an additional layer of meaning tied to contested regional linguistic rights.

5.4 Pedagogical Scaffolding and Lexical-Gap Filling

Both systems show CS/CM used to fill lexical or conceptual gaps where the matrix language lacks a ready equivalent, or where a bilingual's lexicon for a particular domain (commonly mathematics, numbers, or technical vocabulary) is more firmly established in one language than the other. Russian-English heritage-speaker research notes that bilinguals are likely to code-switch specifically for counting or numerical tasks in the language of their mathematics education, even when the surrounding conversation is conducted in the other language. Nigerian quasi-

experimental research on code-mixing and code-switching in mathematics instruction similarly investigates, from the opposite direction, how the presence of code alternation in mathematics teaching affects pupils' achievement, treating the phenomenon as a variable with measurable pedagogical consequences rather than a stylistic curiosity.

5.5 Authority, Discipline, and Footing Shifts

Teachers in both contexts appear to exploit code choice to mark shifts between instructional authority and personal address. A switch from the language of instruction into a shared home or community language frequently accompanies a shift from public, whole-class address to a more direct, personalised, sometimes disciplinary address to an individual student, consistent with Gumperz's broader claim that code-switching functions as a 'we-code' versus 'they-code' resource for managing social distance within an institutional setting. This pattern has been documented in Nigerian primary classroom observation and is structurally consistent with the 'we-code' solidarity function long attributed to minority or heritage languages embedded within an institutionally dominant language.

5.6 Convergence and Divergence: A Comparative Synthesis

Table 1 summarises the comparative pragmatic profile that emerges from this analysis.

Table 1: Comparative pragmatic profile of code-switching/code-mixing in Nigerian and Russian education

Dimension	Nigeria	Russia
Matrix/embedded relationship	English (matrix, official) with indigenous languages (embedded, community)	Russian (matrix, federal-official) with titular/heritage languages (embedded, regional)
Dominant CS/CM function in classroom talk	Clarification; affective marking; identity/solidarity	Clarification; lexical-gap filling; identity/solidarity under policy pressure
Social meaning of switching to the non-dominant code	Indexes bilingual competence and Nigerian identity within a horizontally multilingual society	Indexes ethnic/regional identity within a vertically structured, federally asymmetric bilingualism
Policy stance toward CS/CM	Largely treated as a sign of deficient English in formal policy, despite indicating high bilingual skill	Increasingly treated as a private/voluntary matter following 2017 centralising reforms
Trajectory of institutional support	Indigenous languages retain a constitutionally recognised, if under-resourced, place in early education	Titular/heritage languages have seen compulsory instruction status reduced since 2017

The comparison shows that the pragmatic functions of CS/CM, clarification, affect, identity, scaffolding, and footing management, are strikingly similar across the two systems, supporting the view that these functions are general properties of bilingual discourse rather than artefacts of any one language pair or postcolonial history. What differs sharply is the socio-political weight attached to the switch. In Nigeria's horizontally multilingual society, no single indigenous language threatens English's institutional position, so code alternation toward an indigenous language

is read primarily as an interpersonal or identity move with comparatively low political stakes. In Russia's federal structure, by contrast, a switch toward a titular language is embedded in an active, ongoing contest over the constitutional and educational status of minority languages, so the same pragmatic move (a marked switch signalling solidarity or identity) carries additional political resonance that has no close Nigerian parallel.

6. Pedagogical and Policy Implications

6.1 For Nigerian Education

- Teacher-training programmes should reframe classroom code-switching as a documented pedagogical resource for clarification and scaffolding rather than as evidence of weak English proficiency, in line with translanguaging-pedagogy findings from Nigerian primary classrooms.
- Assessment design in subjects such as mathematics should account for the demonstrated relationship between code-mixing/code-switching practices and measured academic achievement, rather than penalising bilingual classroom talk as off-task or substandard.
- Curriculum materials might explicitly legitimise Nigerian-English bilingual pragmatic markers (such as o, sha, abi) as part of a recognised local variety, rather than treating them as errors to be corrected.

6.2 For Russian Education

- Policy debate over compulsory versus voluntary titular-language instruction should take account of the pragmatic and identity-bearing functions that titular-language code-switching performs in practice, beyond its purely instrumental or constitutional dimensions.
- Where titular-language instruction becomes voluntary, schools in republics with co-official languages might still provide structured opportunities for the kind of clarificatory and affective code-switching documented in this analysis, to avoid an abrupt loss of a communicative resource that has historically supported comprehension and rapport.
- Further empirical classroom-discourse research is needed within Russia's republics specifically, since much of the available Russian-language code-switching literature concentrates on Russian-English heritage-speaker contexts rather than on Russian-titular-language classroom interaction.

7. Conclusion

This paper has offered a comparative, pragmatically grounded analysis of code-switching and code-mixing in the Nigerian and Russian educational systems. Applying the Cooperative Principle, Gumperz's interactional sociolinguistics, and Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model to evidence drawn from the existing literature on both contexts, the analysis finds substantial convergence in the discourse functions that CS/CM performs, clarification, affective stance-marking, identity and solidarity negotiation, pedagogical scaffolding, and footing management, despite the two systems' very different macro-level sociolinguistic architectures. The principal divergence lies not in function but in social and political weight: Nigerian classroom code alternation operates within a horizontally multilingual society in which no indigenous language threatens English's institutional position, while Russian titular-language code

alternation operates within a vertically structured federal system in which the very right to switch into, and be instructed in, a titular language has become an object of ongoing policy contestation. The comparison suggests that pragmatic, function-based analysis offers educational policymakers in both countries a more empirically defensible foundation than deficit-oriented models that read classroom bilingual discourse as a problem rather than a resource.

Future research would benefit from primary classroom-discourse data collected specifically within Russia's ethnic republics using the same coding categories applied here to Nigerian data, enabling a more directly comparable corpus-based study; and from longitudinal Nigerian research tracking whether explicit pedagogical legitimization of code-switching produces measurable gains in subject-matter achievement and English proficiency over time.

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