Code Switching and Code Mixing

'Code-switching' is a linguistics term denoting the concurrent use of more than one language, or language variety, in conversation. People who speak more than one language, sometimes use elements of multiple languages in conversing with each other. It, thus, refers to alternating between one or more languages or dialects. Code-switching takes place because people use different forms of expression depending on the person they are speaking to and where they are speaking to that person. Though it may sometimes be conscious, people do not make too much of a conscious decision about this. It more often than not just happens. In most people's lives, code-switching is a necessity as an unconscious linguistic communication which they may use with ease and sophistication.

Thus, two people conducting business in Tanzania might suddenly switch to Swahili or, if they are fellow-members of the same ethnic and linguistic subgroup, they may switch to a local vernacular, when the topic of conversation changes to more personal matters. The same kind of code-switching is noted in many bilingual communities including as in India between English and Hindi / Urdu, Bengali, Tamil or one of the many other local languages.

Code mixing is a thematically related term, but the usage of the terms code-switching and code-mixing varies. Some scholars use either term to denote the same practice. But, there are others who apply code-mixing to denote the formal linguistic properties of the concerned language-contact phenomena, and code-switching to denote the actual, spoken usages by language users.