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### **Lexical Borrowing as Code Alternation Strategy in Gender Discourse**

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#### **Abstract**

Code alternation is one of the unavoidable consequences of communication between different language varieties that has lingered on, in discussion of various studies, both in theory and practice for several decades. These studies have neither examined code alternation strategies utilised in a language variety nor concentrated on communication of such (language variety) in gender discourse. Also, most of the studies are conducted by using face-to-face conversations or written materials occurring in the real world. This paper fills this gap by classifying the structure of lexical borrowing as code alternation strategy in gender discourse, together with their functions. Twelve extracts involving borrowed items were selected from four novels written by Nigerian writers to illustrate how lexical borrowing has being used in

defining the actions of various genders in a social context. The data were analysed using insights from Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai 2001) of code-switching, specifically the rationality notion, and Butler (1990)'s social constructionist theory of gender. It observes that the code-switched items in form of borrowing in gender discourse function as clarification, euphemism and humour. The structural form of the items ranges from intra-sentential to inter-sentential. The paper concludes that such alterations express deference or its opposite to the ideal/repulsive qualities expected from or exhibited by each gender in various occasions.

### **Introduction**

Gender, in broad terms, refers to “the sex-role identity used by humans to emphasise the distinctions between males and females” (Adegbite 2009: 12). It can be seen as the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male and female become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity. This is to say that beyond biological differences, all other differences between men and women are socially constructed and have no logical relationships with their biological compositions.

Although the term ‘code’ could mean different things in various fields, it simply refers to language in communication. Boztepe (2003) sees code as a linguistic variety. In this paper therefore, “code” implies the Standard English, its registers, Standard Indigenous Languages alongside their dialects and varieties, and “code alternation” connotes the use of these codes in variation. Moreover, codes used by characters during interactions, and by a writer during the cause of explanation that do not signify any interaction between/among characters are within the range of the present paper. Realizing that the pulse of the world; social, cultural, economic and political relations have been greatly shaped by oral and written literature, this paper explores some of the possibilities which through novel may further allow the harmonious integration of disparate gender of the world through lexical borrowing. The literature on code alternation is abundant in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, etc. However, linguists probe this phenomenon from different views such as sociolinguists, psycholinguistics, conversation analysis, pragmatics, etc.

There is no doubt that a lot has been done on gender, both internationally and locally. For instance, most early post-colonial writings are ascribed masculine interpretations. West, Lazar, and Kramarae (1997) use dominance

approach in constructing gender asymmetries within specific socio-historical contexts. Some researches on language and gender seek to describe the linguistic means by which men dominate women in interaction (Lakoff 1975; Coates, 1986). On the other hand, studies like (Cameron 1998) has established that sex or gender-based binary opposition cannot be rapidly dismissed. Some researchers only look at women's issue in some fictions; for instance, Acholonu (1995) portrays the feminist perspectives of family love in Nigerian fiction while Fashina (2009) is a new reconstruction of gender meanings on Gabriel Okara's post-colonial African fiction, *The Voice*. Fashina (2009) just like the present study posits a radically balanced gender ideology anchored on co-sexual liberation. Therefore, it can be safely argued that the prevalent confusion about gender issues in contemporary African societies, Nigeria inclusive – a process which has partly influenced a balanced presentation in the societal life of the bi-gender is a recent phenomenon.

Unlike previous studies, this study intends taking gender studies a step further, examining from the view of code alternation how the fluctuation of borrowed items perform certain functions which portray rational relationship between genders in Nigerian novels. It does not promote or degrade any gender. As novel is an important part of social discourse; this study enhances not only the interpretation of the texts involved but also indicates the organisation of social interaction among characters.

### **Code Alternation and Borrowing**

Code alternation has been associated with various terms by language scholars: “code-switching”, “code-mixing”, and “language mixing” (Gumperz 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1999; Poplack, 1993; Auer, 2009). All these terms, according to Odebumi (2010) describe the position of codes in discourses in as systematic a way as the contextual uses of the codes have permitted. Many researchers have studied the relationship between code-switching and borrowing (e.g. Pahta, 2004; Crespo and Moskowich 2006) and point out the distinctions between them. Pahta (2004) holds that code-switching comes before borrowing, and borrowing has more constraints on its use. He further states that “switching involves the use of two languages in one utterance, whereas the term, ‘borrowing’ is the use of embedded elements that have been integrated into the host language” (Pahta, 2004: 79). Crespo and Moskowich (2006) argue that code-switching requires speakers to be bilingual while borrowing does not have such a requirement.

Lexical borrowing is the adoption of individual words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language, register or dialect. Borrowings are both linguistic and cultural phenomena. One reason for borrowing is the need to find a term for an unfamiliar thing, or cultural device. Another reason for lexical borrowing might also be the question of identity. This is especially the case with bilingual speakers who, by using a foreign element in their speech, make a statement about their own self-perception (cf. Katamba, 1994). In this context, code-switching also plays an important role. This paper sees lexical borrowing as a strategy for code-alternation. It does not distinguish between code mixing and code switching because the distinction is not relevant to its focus. Both concepts refer to the same phenomena of code shifting. Moreover, they are produced simultaneously in most cases. Since code-alternation (mixing/switching) seems to be common among people in Nigerian society, it interests this paper to see how this practice which involves language borrowing operates in gender communication of a literary background.

### Synopsis of the Novels

*Everything Good Will Come* is Sefi Atta's first novel set in Nigeria (Lagos). It most importantly represents the fate of two African girls; Enitan and Sheri. The novel portrays Enitan Taiwo's resistance on the familial and political systems. Sherifat, on the other hand, tries to manipulate the traditional system. She remains a spinster after being raped and impregnated as a teenager. Atta's novel is laden with pun and experimentation with a large range of cultural and universal allusions revealing the dynamic diversity within the city, the differences across class, generation, gender, tradition and faith.

Helon Habila who hails from Gombe State published *Measuring Time* in 2008. The writer presently teaches creative writing at George Mason University, Washington DC. *Measuring Time* involves the story of a family and community in northern Nigeria woven into a wider sociopolitical narrative, touching on gender, and the colonial inheritance. There are cases of widows and women been dehumanized in the novel. Zara also received a great dose of such treatment from her husband and mother. The widows were continually visiting the elusive Lemang for attention. Tabita loses her senses after the death of her husband.

*Trafficked* dramatizes the story of a teenage girl, Nneoma, who under the pretext of working abroad in the United Kingdom as a teacher, is taken to

Europe alongside five other girls for the international sex trade. She is later deported to Lagos and taken to a Non-Governmental organization known as 'Oasis Youth Centre for Skills Development' (OASIS). Nneoma learns tailoring, later gets admission into the University, coincidentally re-uniting with Dr. Okehi, and, her estranged lover and husband-in-waiting, Ofomata. The author, Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo hails from the Eastern part of the country. Presently, she is a professor of English and lectures at the Department of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria.

Liwu Betiang published his first novel, *Beneath the Rubble* in 2009. He hails from Bebuabie village in Obudu, northern Cross River State. He currently lectures in the Department of Theatre & Media Arts, University of Calabar. The novel is set in the allegorical village of Agigah in Bebuabie clan. It depicts some social issues like love, hatred, gender issues and societal rife. There is tussle in the land when Ishabo, the prince of Agigah, is to be used as the sacrificial lamb to restore peace to the community. He later becomes a free man and reunites with his love, Andornimye despite their virtue of belonging to opposing cults by birth. Their union brings harmony to the community.

### **Methodology**

Only twelve (12) extracts involving borrowed items were randomly selected from four Nigerian novels; Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come (EGWC)*, Helon Habila's *Measuring Time (MT)*, Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo *Trafficked*, and Liwuh Betiang's *Beneath the Rubble (Rubble)*. The sampling procedure, which is purposive, covers the geographical spread of Nigeria. Habila stands for northern Nigeria, Atta represents western Nigeria, Betiang covers southern Nigeria and Adimorah-Ezeigbo depicts the eastern Nigeria. The geographical sampling is motivated by the need to find out if there are linguistic similarities in the code alternation functions among Nigerian writers which the sampled writers represent. Six (6) borrowed extracts are used in depicting each gender, making the data balanced. The data were analysed using insights from Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai 2001) of code-switching specifically the rationality notion, and Butler (1990)'s social constructionist theory of gender.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

This paper adopts the revised Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai 2001) and Butler (1990)'s social constructionist theory of gender as theoretical frameworks.

### **The Markedness Model**

The revised Markedness model centers on one premise (the markedness evaluator), two principles (the negotiation principle and the indexicality principle), and one heart (the rationality). It presupposes that every speaker has a markedness evaluator (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai 2001) which is an innate capacity of human beings. Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai (2001:9) assumes that the markedness evaluator is a “deductive device” and what it offers is “a process evaluating potential options”. Myers-Scotton (1998) argues that various codes that speakers choose to express themselves also bear indexicality. She thinks that any linguistic choice speakers make indexes a desired set of Rights and Obligations. On the other hand, the principle of negotiation establishes the goal of conversation in the model (Myers-Scotton 2002). Myers-Scotton (2002: 206) argues that “speakers almost always have multiple identities. A linguistic choice reflects the presentation of one identity rather than another, possibly an identity that is not established, but whose realization is being negotiated by the code choice”. Therefore, code-alternation is an important way for speakers to negotiate their identities or Rights and Obligations.

The rationality which constitutes the Rational Choice approach accounts for the speakers' own ‘subjective motivations and their objective opportunities’ (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, 2001: 5) in their language choice. It assumes that speakers' choice of one language over another is individual decision which is rationally based. By speaking a particular language, a participant signals his/her understanding of the current situation and particularly his/her relevant role within the context. Rationality also suggests that speakers are rational actors when they switch codes. The linguistic choices they make reflect their goals to “enhance interpersonal relations and/or material or psychological rewards, to minimize costs” (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai 2001:6). Rationality explains why speakers make choice and at the same time is a mechanism which leads them to make decision. Although a clearly list of steps make decision-making look more objective, Myers-Scotton (2002: 208) argues that it is still subjective, as the decision is made in relation to specific situations and speaker's different understandings of “the best choice”. This

paper concerns itself only with the rationality notion of the revised Markedness Model as it incorporates the premise and the principles.

### **The Social Constructionist Theory**

Theorists in language and gender have recently turned their attention to the notion of gender as a performative social construct, following Butler's (1990) innovative work. She maintained that femininity and masculinity are not what we are nor traits we have, but effects we produce by way of particular things we do. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) citing Butler (1990: 25) states, "... there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its result." Therefore, to be a man or woman is not something one accomplishes once, and for all at an early stage of life. Gender is constantly re-affirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms, which defines masculinity and femininity.

In this approach, gender is understood as an indirectly developed category of social identity, integrated into other identity of categories. It stresses that one may be born male but one becomes the kind of social being one's society defines as a 'woman' (Cameron, 1997: 22). This theory also stresses that "regardless of our intentions, the consequences of our behaviour must always be seen in the context of the society that defines gender" (Uchida, 1999: 290). Therefore, gender roles are produced, reproduced and actualised through context-specific (gender-distinct) activities in communication. In addition to the biological labels (male and female) that we are born with, society does its marking by 'dressing and addressing individuals as men and women.' The roles that the society performs (dressing and addressing) build the repertoire from which men and women draw from to construct their gendered person, whether to maintain or change the established norms. Consequently, gender scholars have proposed that individuals would be described as performing masculinity and femininity rather than being male or female. This implies that it is the very act of performing gender that constitutes who we are.

## Analysis and Findings

### Lexical Borrowing as Code Alternation strategy

Lexical borrowing in this context means a word, phrase or an idea that is taken from another language or registers of the same language, and is used in another to create an effect. Such linguistic codes are instances of creativity generated by Nigeria's peculiar social, historical and political opinions on gender. Below are tables that represent gender related borrowed items from the sampled texts, their interpretations, sources, specific gender category and page references (PR).

**Table 1 Gender related Borrowings in *Trafficked***

	Word	Interpretation	Source	Gender	P /R
1	Baba /Papa	Elderly man or one's father	Yoruba/Igbo	M	29
2	Ashawo	Prostitute	Yoruba	F	137
3	Odibo	Slave	Igbo	F	137

**Table 2 Gender related Borrowings in *Rubble***

	Word	Interpretation	Source	Gender	P /R
1	Veritable epicureans	Easily carried away by seeming paradise	Pun/Derogatory	F	52
2	Great Isaac Newton	A great researcher in physics	Science	M	63
3	Eve	The first woman	Bible	F	130



**Table 3 Gender related Borrowings in EGWC**

	Word	Interpretation	Source	Gender	P /R
1	Boy-ology	Biology	Sarcasm/ blending	M	42
2	Portly boy	Heavy/overweight boy	Sarcasm/ compounding	M	65
3	Sugary girl	A lady who sleeps with elderly men	Sarcasm/ neologism	F	157

**Table 4 Gender related Borrowings in MT**

	Word	Interpretation	Source	Gender	P /R
1	Souvenir	Something you keep to remind yourself of a place, occasion, a holiday or vacation	Sarcasm/ neologism	M	105
2	Colourful buba	Bright clothes worn by women	Compounding/ neologism	F	240
3	Big men	Influential/wealthy men	Neologism	M	240

### **Structural Positions of the Types of Borrowing in the Alternated Items**

Structural positions involve the sequential settings of the borrowed items, that is, their arrangement in sentences; initial, middle or ending positions which may either be intra-sentential or inter-sentential. The borrowed items are categorised based on the parts of speech that characterise the alternated items. In the sampled data, we have nouns, noun phrases and adjectival phrases as characterising the codes. The illustration below portrays the 7 nouns, 3 noun phrases, 2 adjectival phrases, and their positions in the sentences they occur.

### Borrowing as Nouns

**Example 1** - A: Just look at this *odibo* (*Trafficked*, 137)

**Example 2** - B: I'm glad I was trafficked as a domestic servant and not a sex slave like you. *Ashawo* (*Trafficked*, 137)

**Example 5** - For a fleeting moment, Andornimye felt like *Eve* when the euphoria of Apple began to wane (*Rubble*, 130)

**Example 6** - Ofomata smiled on remembering that some of the younger students called him *Baba/Papa* making him feel ancient (*Trafficked*, 29)

**Example 7**- A *souvenir* from our last fight (*Measuring Time*, 105)

**Example 8** - Good, because you're not going there to study *boy-ology* (*EGWC*, 42)

**Example 12** - My *great Isaac Newton* (*Rubble*, 63)

### Borrowing as Noun phrases

**Example 3** - Living with Sheri, I saw how she survived a *sugary girl* (*EGWC*, 157)

**Example 10** - The *portly boy* was on top of her (*EGWC*, 65)

**Example 11** - There were women in stiff, towering head scarves and colourful buba standing hand in hand with the pot-bellied, fat-jowled, slit-eyed '*big men*' (*MT*, 240)

### Borrowing as Adjectival phrases

**Example 4** - There were women in stiff, towering head scarves and *colourful buba* standing hand in hand with the pot-bellied, fat-jowled, slit-eyed 'big men' (*MT*, 240)

**Example 9** - He well knew that women are *veritable epicureans* who sometimes got carried away by seeming paradise (*Rubble*, 52)

The examples indicate that none of the items occur in the initial position. A total number of four (4) code-switched nouns (examples 4, 5, 6 and 7) occur in the middle and all of them are narrator oriented, two (2) noun phrases (examples 10 and 11) which occur in the middle are also narrator oriented. The only adjectival phrase which occurs in the middle (examples 9) is used

by the narrator. In the ending position of sentences, we have three code-switched nouns (examples 1, 8 and 12) which are character oriented and one noun phrase (example 3) which is narrator oriented. One borrowed item which functions as a sentence (example 2) is character motivated.

### **Rationality in the Code-Switched Borrowed Items**

This section classifies each code-switched borrowed item in the data using three functions: clarification, euphemism and humour. These functions examine how rationality works in the sampled data. It provides evidence that when code-alternation users switch codes, they simply calculate from which codes they can benefit more, given the objective constraints.

#### **Code-alternation for Clarification**

There are instances where writers need to simplify some messages pertaining to gender for clarification. The writers, with their characters, in communication use some borrowed items from various fields of study to explicate their views. Examples are shown below:

**Example 1 - A:** Just look at this *odibo* (*Trafficked*, 137)

**Example 2 - B:** I'm glad I was trafficked as a domestic servant and not a sex slave like you. *Ashawo* (*Trafficked*, 137)

**Example 3 -** Living with Sheri, I saw how she survived a *sugary girl* (*EGWC*, 157)

**Example 4 -** There were women in stiff, towering head scarves and *colourful buba* standing hand in hand with the pot-bellied, fat-jowled, slit-eyed 'big men' (*MT*, 240)

In **examples 1** and **2**, speaker A is proud of being trafficked as a prostitute just like speaker B is proud of being trafficked as a domestic servant. It is assumed that the use of the word 'odibo' by the first character makes the second character to switch to another variety of language, 'Ashawo' instead of calling her a prostitute. 'Odibo' is an Igbo word for slave while 'Ashawo' is a Nigerian English expression for prostitute. She probably believes that the English translation is mild; she wants to respond roughly the way speaker A addresses her situation. This explains the rationality in their code-switched borrowed items. Although the items clarify the nature of their trafficked experiences, they also explain the writer's prudence in passing across her message clearly: all trafficked ladies are not for prostitution. **Example 3**

plainly illustrates how Sheri limits her involvement in other things just to be 'sugary' to her Brigadier. The item is a compounding and neologism which describes a girl who follows an elderly (married) man who is invariably called 'sugar daddy' in Nigerian context. The code choice is deliberate; it expresses the action of a lady which the society frowns at. Even Sheri and her friend, Enitan, know that such act is spiteful, and that explains why the narrator in form of Enitan describes Sheri with such a vivid borrowed item. Sheri's short-changed emotional and physical experience (rape) probably may have contributed to her being a sugary girl. Moreover, the lexical code in **Example 4** is used to illustrate the attires women put on, the manner and reason behind such attires. 'Buba' for instance, is mainly a Yoruba outfit worn by women but in *Measuring Time*, it is used as the best outfit worn by women who hovered hopefully around men, to get their attention. Perhaps, the writer intends to illustrate the serious likeness attached to 'colourful Buba' outfit by the culture he projects, and this motivates women to put them on.

#### Code-alternation for Euphemism

In every society, there are some words which are culturally unacceptable in certain situations. Bilingual writers have the advantage of avoiding these words by code-switching to another variety. This function explains the use of euphemism: a word or phrase that is less offensive, neutral or indirect to describe something that is offensive. The following examples illustrate how writers euphemistically use code-switching to describe gender issues.

**Example 5** - For a fleeting moment, Andornimye felt like *Eve* when the euphoria of Apple began to wane (*Rubble*, 130)

**Example 6** - Ofomata smiled on remembering that some of the younger students called him *Baba/Papa* making him feel ancient (*Trafficked*, 29)

**Example 7** - A: What happened here? (*MT*, 105)

B: A *souvenir* from our last fight (*MT*, 105)

From the instances above, **Example 5** portrays the guilt feeling meted by a woman after having sex with a man; the feeling is short-lived which ultimately tells us that the two take the blame and guilt. The writer indirectly refers the lady's action to that of the biblical 'Eve', not wanting to mention the act. The writer is also rational by his use of the word 'Eve'; not using it to promote or weaken any gender rather to describe the incident vividly with

biblical experience. **Example 6** uses *Baba/Papa* to describe a man who is still in school while his mates have graduated. The writer switches and makes use of the euphemistic function of code-switching, because she does not want to be raw or states overtly the advanced nature of Ofomata. She passes her message rationally and maintains her decency. In **example 7**, the meaning of an existing word is extended to accommodate another concept. The word, *souvenir* is used to describe a mark which a husband inflicts on his wife's back through a fight. Though the lady seems angry anytime she remembers such mark, she successfully hides her feelings and still maintains politeness. From the statement, one can see that the fight is balanced; 'our last fight' indicating that she is not passive when the man (husband) inflicts the mark on her. Therefore, the example portrays the writers and their characters as rational actors; they are quite purposive when they switch codes.

### Code-alternation for Humour

Humour plays an important role in literary texts because it is a valuable way of gaining concentration in the work of art. In this piece, humour simply means the quality or content of something such as story, performance or joke that elicits amusement or laughter. The following examples show the power of humor as explicated by code-switched items relating to gender.

**Example 8** - : No chasing of boys when you get there.

B: I don't like boys

A: Good, because you're not going there to study *boy-ology* (EGWC, 42)

**Example 9** - He well knew that women are *veritable epicureans* who sometimes got carried away by seeming paradise (Rubble, 52)

**Example 10** - The *portly boy* was on top of her (EGWC, 65)

**Example 11** - There were women in stiff, towering head scarves and colourful buba standing hand in hand with the pot-bellied, fat-jowled, slit-eyed '*big men*' (MT, 240)

**Example 12** - A: This late?

B: They used to teach us in Physics that any moving objects some equal propelling force behind it.

A: My *great Isaac Newton* (Rubble, 63)

The first illustration in **example 8** uses the word, ‘Boy-ology’ in a sarcastic way. After the first expression in Nigerian English ‘chasing of boys’, speaker B responds in Standard English, yet speaker A switches to another code. In essence, he is rationally creating humour with the subject as he makes his point obvious. In **example 9**, ‘veritable epicureans’ describe women in derogatorily. It portrays the weakness of women in decision making, illustrating their frailty in certain cases. It is used to refer to a woman who follows her fiancé’s close friend because of wealth: the man offers her huge amount of money. The bride leaves the proposed groom because of his friend’s liberal nature or rather wealth which surpasses that of her fiancé. It is a figurative concept; the homourous effect is self-evident because the writer could have used a simple word, having explained the idea in the subsequent expression. It simply implies that women are money conscious. In **example 10**, a compounding is humourously used by the writer to portray an indecent act (rape) engaged by a boy. The derogatory name depicts his filthy act. It projects the writer’s condemnation of such act, thereby making her rational in her choice of code. **Example 11** has many funny adjectives that give details about the code-switched Nigerian expression, ‘big men’. This implies that expressions like ‘pot-bellied, fat-jowled, slit-eyed’ are used to clarify the various characteristics which are apparent in Nigerian’s idea of a wealthy man. The use of ‘big men’ instead of ‘wealthy/rich men’ portrays the writer’s judiciousness of the connotations and identity formation. **Example 12** is satirical and at the same time makes use of quotation in the code-switching. The speaker makes this optimal choice of quoting a scientist, judging from his prior knowledge. She knows that Isaac Newton is an authority in physics and decides to make it known to the man. She therefore uses it precisely to make fun of the man who is trying to woo her, believing that he is unserious.

Meanwhile, the analysis depicts the various functions as neutral in projecting any gender as privileged or disadvantaged. The point is that man and woman have double faces; good and bad. The writers therefore, use any borrowed item that reflects their goals in their reference to any gender, thereby portraying rationality in their discourse.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis suggests that the alterations express deference or its opposite to the ideal qualities expected from each gender in various occasions. While code alternations in gender discourse can serve as clarification, euphemism and humour, they can ultimately function as rational method of explicating

gender issues based on reasoning and principle. Therefore, the major evidence established by the illustrations is that speakers/writers are rational actors. Their code switched borrowed items as observed from the analysis are relatively logical. The structural trend of the code switched items reflects two forms: intra-sentential code-switching and inter-sentential code-switching. The sampled intra-sentential code-alternation items are ten in number while the inter-sentential code-alternation items are only two. Out of the ten items in intra-sentential code alternation, six are word switching while four are phrase switching. Four (4) code-switched nouns, two (2) noun phrases and one adjectival phrase which occur in the middle are narrator oriented. Three code-switched nouns which occur in the ending positions are character oriented and one noun phrase in the same position is narrator oriented. Only one item functions as a sentence (inter-sentential) and it is character motivated. Consequently, intra-sentential code alternation outweighs the inter-sentential code alternation in the data probably because; extensive use of the latter may deprive the creative work an international readership. These features altogether contribute in giving gender studies a new phase. Further studies in code-alternation may concentrate on other specific situations, such as religious or legal discourse.

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