

## The Influence of Gender on the Use of Code-Switching in the Algerian Context

### تأثير النوع الاجتماعي على استخدام التناوب اللغوي في السياق الجزائري

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#### ملخص:

تسلط هذه الورقة البحثية الضوء على الفروق بين الطّاب والطلّابات عند استخدام اللّغات في إحدى الجامعات الجزائرية؛ وبشكل أكثر تحديداً، فإنها تحاول الإجابة على السؤال: من يميل إلى استعمال التناوب اللغوي أثناء الحديث أكثر، الذكور أم الإناث؟ من أجل التحقق ممّن يقوم بذلك أكثر من الآخر، من المفترض أنه: إذا أرادت المتحدثات إظهار هويتهن في منصب أو موقف مرموق، فإنهن يملنّ إلى استعمال التناوب اللغوي في محادثتهن أكثر من الذكور. ولاختبار صحة هذه الفرضية تم استخدام ثلاث أدوات بحثية. وتمثل هذه الأدوات البحثية في الملاحظة والاستبيان والمقابلة. وبذلك، أظهرت النتائج أن المتحدثات الإناث يقمن بالتناوب بين لغتين أثناء حديثهن أكثر من المتحدثين الذكور. ومن هذه النتيجة، ذكرت المتحدثات أسباباً مختلفة للجوء إلى التناوب اللغوي في حديثهن. ومن أحد أهم أسباب استعمال التناوب اللغوي عند حديثهن أنه وسيلة للحصول على المكانة المرموقة والتباهي؛ ولكن هناك مشاركة واحدة لم تقم باستعمال التناوب اللغوي أثناء محادثة المقابلة غير المباشرة على الرغم من أنها عندما أجابت على الاستبيان، قالت إن استعمال التناوب اللغوي في حديثها هو جزء من حياتها اليومية.

#### الكلمات المفتاحية:

الفروق بين النوعين، الذكور والإناث، الطّاب، التناوب اللغوي.

#### Abstract:

This paper sheds some light on the differences between male and female students in using languages in one of the Algerian universities; more specifically, it tries to answer the question: Who tend to switch the code more, males or females? In order to check who code switches more than the other does, it is hypothesised that: If female speakers want to show their identity in a prestigious position or situation, they tend to code switch in their conversations more than males. To test the validity of this hypothesis, three tools have been utilised. These tools are an observation, questionnaire and interview. The results have shown that female speakers code-switch more than male speakers do. For this result, female speakers have stated different reasons of code-switching in their speech. One of the most important reasons of code-switching is that it is a way of being prestigious and showing off; but there is one participant who did not code-switch during the indirect-interview chatting although when she answers the questionnaire, she says that code-switching is part of her daily life.

**Keywords:** Gender differences, males and females, students, code-switching.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Regarding the long period of French colonisation, Algerians tend to use French in addition to their dialect because French is considered as a second language in Algeria, so it is taught at schools and universities; as a result, it is used in the daily conversations. Moreover, English also has its position in the Algerian society since it is, as well, taught at schools and universities. Hence, in the Algerian conversations, there will be a blend of languages, which make Algerian people code-switch using the three languages. This phenomenon is the concern of this research paper because code-switching is getting spread in the society especially among university students; in addition, it is said that female students code-switch more than males. So this issue will be investigated.

This research paper consists of two parts: literature review and a practical part. The literature review will show the reader the key concepts about code-switching, its types and the current situation in Algeria especially among cultured persons. The practical part is about the main questions, hypothesis and the methodology followed in this piece of research. Other aspects such as findings, implications, limitations and suggestions for further research will be dealt with in detail.

## 2. Code Switching

Anywhere we go around the globe, we hear people speaking; most of them speak multiple languages to either communicate with foreigners or people from the same country because globalisation obliged them to use more than one language. This created a mixing between in speech; we find Algerians for example mixing Arabic and French. This is what we call code-switching; a skill that almost everybody communicates through using it nowadays. Gender is one of the main factors that influence directly code switching. Both males and females share aspects in code-switching and differ in others (Asbiai, 2011).

To start with, both males and females of bilingual background use code-switching more than those of monolingual background (Rabbani and Hammed, 2012). For both the genders, the mixing of codes serves a communicative strategy in their life. In addition to that, the advent of a new mode of communication such as SMS has increased indulgence in code-switching and code mixing among both males and females (Karim and Kanwal, n.d.)

However, unlike males, as Shufang (2014) states, females use code-switching definitely more than males to discuss about education, entertainment and personal matters. They usually stick to one topic; they also switch more for easiness or convenience, to save time and for creating fun. However, males switch less and discuss a variety of topics, and/or the purpose of better understanding of expression, for the strength and clarity of expression, and sometimes they mix when they do not find te appropriate words in their native language. (Khalid, Ihsan and Xianfa, 2015).

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In many occasions, people use code-switching without being aware of it, especially in their daily conversations. Sometimes, they use it out of habit and sometimes for special purposes, such as telling jokes, strengthening the tone, and so on (Bessam, n.d.). However, we rarely think about it because code-switching happens all the time. In addition, we have already got used to use and hear it so what is the significance of code-switching in our daily life? The term code-switching is broadly discussed and used in linguistics and a variety of related fields. Code-switching is the practice of moving between variations of languages in different contexts (Nelson, n.d.). Everyone who speaks has learned to code-switch depending on the situation and setting. In an educational context, code-switching is defined as the practice of switching between a primary and a secondary language or discourse (Jagero and Kwash, 2011). Code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation. Multilingual speakers of more than one language, sometimes use elements of multiple languages when conversing with each other. Thus, code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a manner consistent with the syntax and phonology of each variety (Honglong, 2010).

Communication strategies or code switching have been defined as strategies which a language user employs in order to achieve his intended meaning on becoming aware of problems arising during the planning phase of an utterance due to linguistic shortcoming (Poullisse, 1990). Female students definitely report different use of strategies compared to male students. The problem investigated in this research is:

Does the difference of this kind bring any effect on their use of code switching? In other words, does gender influence the use of code-switching?

The primary aim of the study is to show the relationship between gender and the use of code switching. It means to show whether females use code switching more than males or not, and to discover if gender has an influence on code-switching use. We also try to analyse the gender difference in code-switching among first year Master students at the Department of Arts and English language, and what makes females code-switch more than their male counterparts.

The researcher believes that the findings of this study will be very helpful for the students of sociolinguistics to explore the further aspects of code-switching. Moreover, this particular research will open new doors for researchers to make advancement in this particular field. This research will also provide a basis for understanding reasons behind code switching.

### **3. Research Questions and Hypothesis**

Do third year female English students code switch more than males? Why?

Does gender have an influence on the use of code switching?

What are the languages used while code-switching, what is the one frequently used and why?

What is their aim behind using this language rather than any other?

In order to answer the previously asked questions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

If female speakers want to show their identity in a prestigious position or situation, they tend to code switch in their conversations more than males.

### **4. Research Method**

The study analysis is concerned with whether gender effects the use of code switching, and to find out if females use code switching more than males in their conversations or not. The population included third year English students at Frères Mentouri Constantine 1 University. The sample constituted of forty students. Twenty females and twenty males were asked to discuss a number of topics related to football and everyday life, without knowing about our research purposes, and then we recorded their conversations. The participants themselves chose the topics they discussed. The records were analysed to see whether females use code-switching differently or more than males or not. After that, they were given a questionnaire and, at the same time, some students were interviewed to clarify some details. Then, the study showed that there are few differences concerning the use of code switching between females and males.

### **5. Tools of Research**

The study used a questionnaire, interview and observation as research tools with thirty-six Algerian university learners who were chosen randomly and composed of eighteen males and eighteen females to find out whether females use code-switching differently or more than males. The task involved both written and spoken production by the subjects. After that, quantitative and qualitative analysis were done, first by simply counting the frequency of code-switching use for each category, then employing the percentage calculation.

The questionnaire is made up of four closed questions that require yes/no answers, and a choice from multiple choice questions where the participants have to tick the appropriate answer and then explain it briefly. Some of these questions are: Do you master the English language? Do you sometimes mix between languages when speaking? In your opinion who code-switches more? Men, women or both? In addition, there are two questions that need an opinion and to list reasons for code-switching.

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The nature of the interview is a short conversation that took place between the researcher and some of the participants, and in the other interview speakers found themselves face to face with creating a discussion about different subjects by themselves. They were given the chance to speak about everyday life topics such as fashion and football to see if female students do code-switch while speaking about football which is a male domain as expected for the fashion topic.

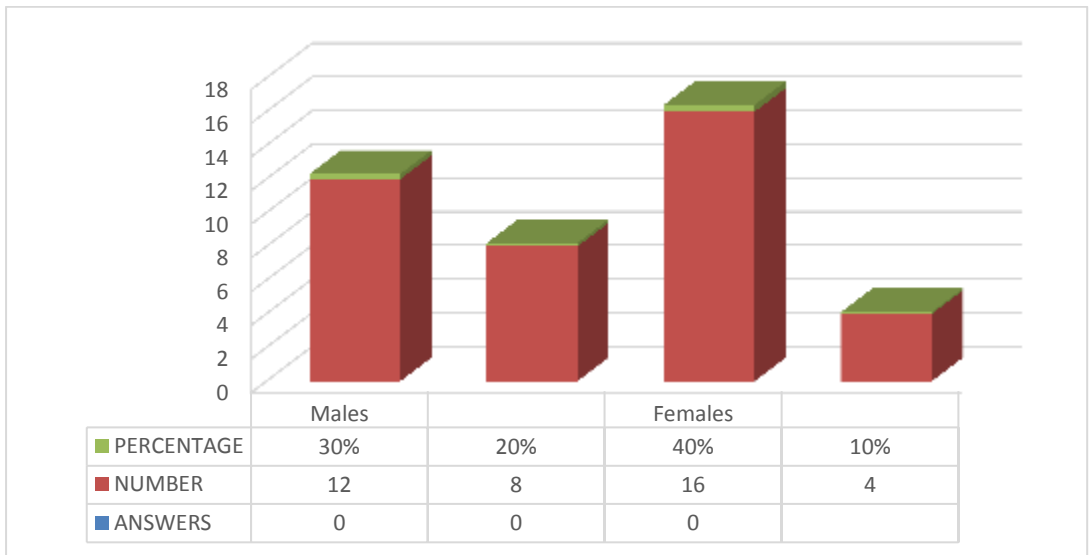
Furthermore, in the audio recordings, the researcher took a group of people, which was divided equally between males and females. This is done to see the codes they used in their conversations taking into account the division of the two groups: in one group, there were only female speakers; in the second one, there were only male speakers and in one group, there were both of them.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the questionnaire are as follows:

**Question 1:** Do you master the English language?

The reason behind asking this question is to figure out whether students of English are self confident about their level in English. This question paves the way to delve into other questions related to code-switching.

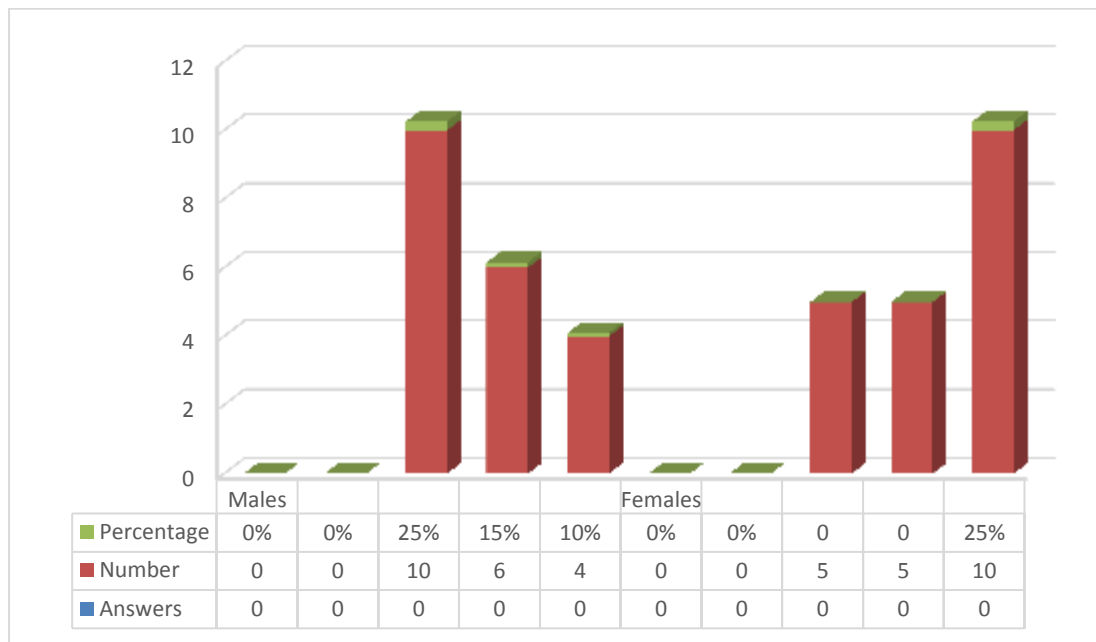


**Figure 1.** Mastery of English among Males and Females

The chart represents the data related to the first question where females master the English language more than males, with 16 females and 12 males. The rest of the sample do not master English; it is 4 females and 8 males.

**Question 2:** Do you mix between languages when speaking?

This question was asked to know whether third year students of English shift from one language to another while speaking. This question helps to move from general to specific as it leads to the following question which is more specific than the previous one.

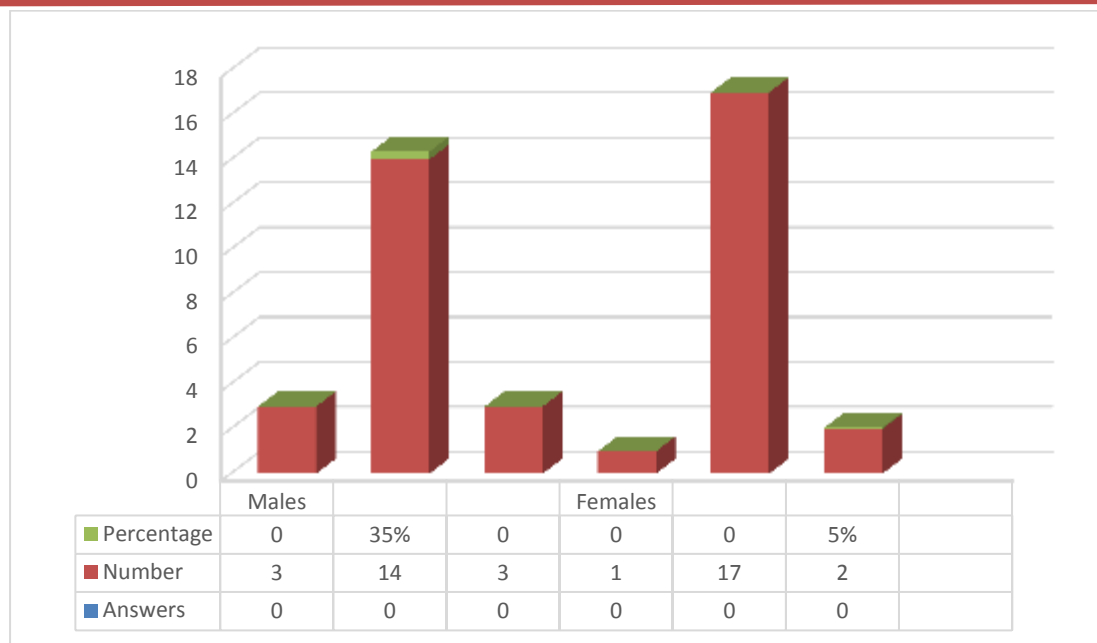


**Figure 2.** Males and Females Code-switching When Using Different Languages

The chart represents the findings inferred from the analysis of the second question. In fact, females do switch the code more than males; 10 males use code-switching in their speech sometimes, 4 use it often and 6 use it always. Nevertheless, 5 females use it sometimes, 5 others use it often and 10 use it always.

**Question 3:** In your opinion, who code-switches more? Men, women or both?

The intent behind this question is to know whom amongst males and females do switch the code more. This question represents the core of the current study.

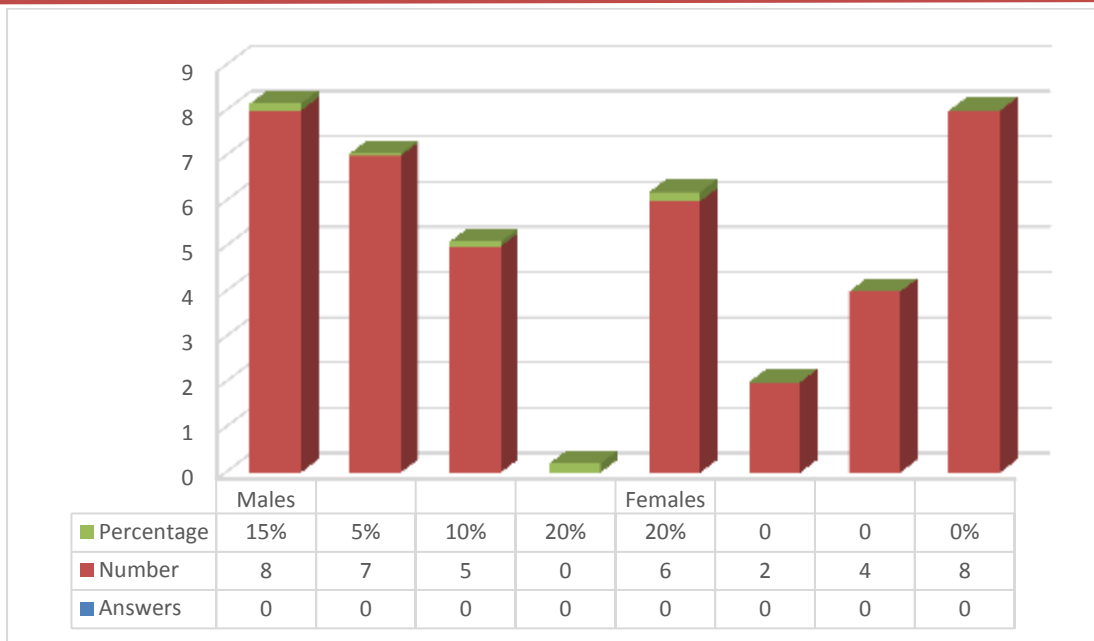


**Figure 3.** Frequency of Code-switching among Males and Females

The chart represents the findings inferred from the analysis of the third question where females do switch the code more than males according to the opinions of both males and females. 14 males said that women are likely to use code switching more than men do. In addition, 17 females affirmed that women use code switching more than males. 3 males said that men do code switch more than women, and 3 said that they code switch equally. Nevertheless, 1 female said that men code switch more than women, and 2 said that both males and females use code switching equally.

**Question 4:** What are the reasons behind code-switching?

The reason behind asking this question is to have an idea about the reasons, which push both genders to code switch from one language to another. In other words, as males and females differ at the level of languages use and other personality aspects, the reasons may differ in relation to the nature of each gender.



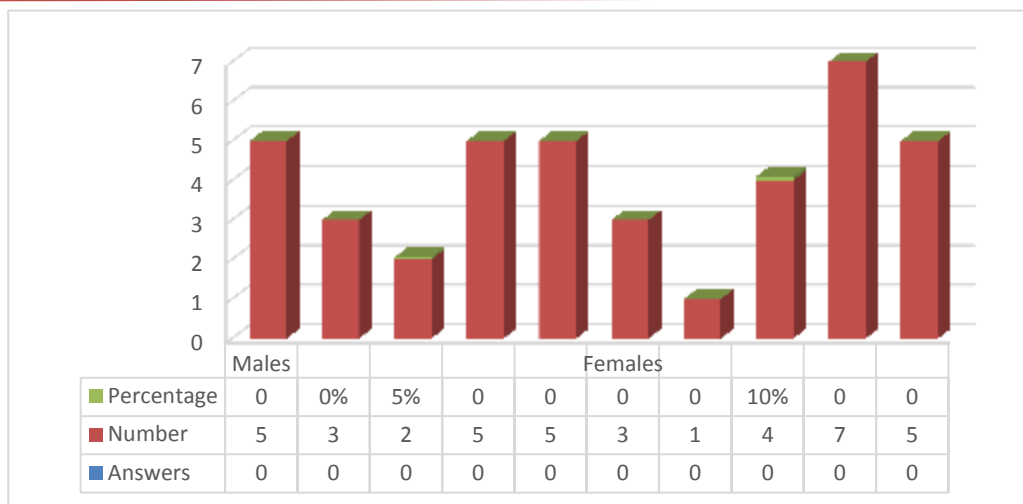
**Figure 4.** Reasons behind Code switching among Males and Females

Figure four shows that the main reasons behind using code switching among males are mainly lack of vocabulary with 8 responses, and to sound prestigious among females with 8 responses. However, 6 females said that they use code switching because of lack of vocabulary in the medium they are using to communicate, and seven males said that they use it to transfer the intended meaning. The rest of the female participants opted for to express oneself better (4 responses), and to transfer the intended meaning (2 responses). Yet, the rest of male participants chose to express oneself better (( responses) and to sound prestigious (é responses) as reasons to use code switching.

**Question 5:** What language do you usually use in code-switching?

This question is asked to have an idea about the languages used by both males and females. Mostly, the stereotype about languages used by males and females is that women tend to use French more than other languages; so, the intent is to know whether this is the case among females students as opposed to male students who tend to use dialectal Arabic.





**Figure 5.** The Use of Code-switching According to Different Situations

The chart shows that females do switch the code between Derja (Colloquial Arabic) and French with 7 responses. After that, comes code switching from Derja into English (5 responses), Derja/French/English (4 responses), Derja/Arabic/French/English (3 responses), and Derja/Arabic/French (1 response). On the other hand, males have opted for code switching between Derja/Arabic/French/English, Derja/ French, and Derja/ English with 5 responses each. Only 3 of them have chosen Derja/Arabic/French, and 2 have chosen Derja/French/English. This means that females use code switching in situations, which are different from those where males use code switching. In addition, five males said that they code switch from Derja into French, which did not reflect in the interview. This may be because of the nature of Colloquial Arabic that is composed of a combination of Derja and French.

According to gender, the results were quite different: Concerning the questionnaire, it has been showed that females used code-switching whereas less males used code switching. For females, this is mainly due to considering code-switching a way to show civilisation and prestige and it is the only way to show off during the daily conversations. For the interview, 187 tokens were used by female speakers and just 99 by the male speakers. As for the audio recording methods, on the other hand, 86% of switched items were used by females and only 54% used by males because women tend to show their identity and position in society through a more powerful and prestigious language rather than the mother tongue.

The results show that female speakers code-switch more than male speakers do. For this result, female speakers have stated different reasons of code-switching in their speech. One of the most important reasons of code-switching is that it is a way of being prestigious and showing off, but there is one participant who did not code-switch during the indirect-interview chatting although when she answered the questionnaire, she said that code-switching is part of her daily life.

Unlike female speakers, male speakers have showed less use of code-switching because of two chief factors: (1) they are not knowledgeable in the English language; (2) they think that code-switching is not that important for them. They say that they are proud of their local dialects and their standard varieties. Hence, it is obvious, now, that female speakers do code-switch more than male speakers. Thus, when mixing both males and females, males are supposed to code-switch more than females; however, when they were separated, there were 85 instances of code switching among females and 73 instances used by males. Female students used code switching more than their counterparts because they felt more relaxed when they were alone, and when they were mixed with the opposite gender, males did not switch codes. Thus, women used code-switching to show their opposition to the “male dominance”.

The study shows that there are few differences between female and male students. Female students tend to use more strategies than male ones. No gender significant direct effect was identified on the frequency and types of code-switching, but the gender variable affects the effectiveness of males and females use of code switching.

From the data and their analysis, it is proved that frequency is the marker of gender identity in males and females in SMS language communication. Females code switch most of the time during their discourse.

Most of the females mix English into Algerian Arabic and French and switch from one code to the other to transfer the message easily so that their friends do not face any problem to comprehend the message.

Males mix more in these topics: greetings, jobs, romance, fun, asking for favour, future plans, and travelling. On the other hand, females switch more when discussing topics like education, personal topics and entertainment. Males usually discuss a variety of topics during mobile phone chatting and use short words more as it is proved from this research while females usually stick to one topic discussing personal matters more than any other topic. They also code switch while speaking about their entertainment and maintain a friendly environment according to their nature.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

As a conclusion, we might observe that females use code-switching more than males, but males show more effectiveness of code switching. Therefore, we might observe that females are more likely to code-switch than males. Females tend to code-switch more because they think that it is a way of civilisation and prestige; however, males either use less code-switching than their female counterparts or do not code-switch at all because they like to be the way they are, so the gender of the speaker is an important factor to the code-switching pattern.

In a nutshell, the investigation of this study shows that there are huge gender differences at the level of code-switching. Female students tend to code-switch to show their identity or a position within society; however, male students mostly do not code-switch. As a result, code-switching is a marker of gender differences as females switch more when they feel comfortable, to show off, and to have fun. On the contrary, males switch the code for a better understanding of expression, to express ideas clearly, and sometimes they mix when they do not find the appropriate word in their native language. In addition, they mostly do not use code-switching in other situations rather than the ones mentioned here.

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