

Code-Switching: Trials and Tribulations by Julia Alekseyeva

I am always envious of those who could code-switch easily.

In Poland this summer, I found myself thinking and dreaming in Russian...



*When autumn comes, I bloom anew;
The Russian frost does wonders for my health;
Anew I fall in love with life's routine;
Betimes I'm soothed by dreams, betimes by hunger caught...

But then...



*where did you learn to speak Japanese?
I also speak Korean...

And yet, at a club in Tokyo...



Code-switching also comes into play when translating from the academic to the popular realms. What becomes too heady? What is too dumbed down, too simplified?

For those who are the bridge between worlds, code-switching is constant, and inevitable



Sometimes code-switching is natural, and sometimes full of deep meaning lost to non-native observers

Like when Volodymyr Zelenskyy switches between Russian and Ukrainian on the show *Servant of the People*

His character Vasily Petrovych Goloborodko speaks an emotional, slang-ridden Russian with his family, just like me.

To Eastern European observers, this connotes that despite the character's Ukrainian name, he is likely Jewish.



Vasily Petrovych rants in Russian, loves in Russian, but once he becomes president on the show (just as in real life), he switches to a grave, stately Ukrainian.

Understanding the reasons for code switching clues us into a mood, a political statement, a state of mind.

Or, sometimes we can just acknowledge its fundamental silliness.



Works Referenced:

Alexander Pushkin, "Autumn," 1833, translated by Michael Eastman

TV show *Servant of the People*, accessible on Netflix



*nonsensical baby talk

About the Author

Dr. Julia Alekseyeva is a multi-modal scholar of media, film, and culture, specializing in the interactions between global media and radical leftist politics. She is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, USA and a core faculty member of the Cinema and Media Studies Program (CIMS). She is currently working on her first academic monograph, tentatively entitled *Anti-Fascist Avant-Garde: Radical Documentary in Japan, France, and the USSR*. Alongside her research, Dr. Alekseyeva is a graphic artist specializing in non-fiction graphic narratives, comics journalism, and memoir. Her first full-length graphic novel, a nonfiction historical memoir entitled *Soviet Daughter: A Graphic Revolution*, was published by Microcosm in 2017 and won the VLA Diversity Award. She has published traditional academic articles and critical-creative work in *ARTMargins*, *The Sixties*, *The Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema*, *Sequentials*, *Cine-Files*, *Jewish Currents*, *The Nib*, and several edited collections.