Code Switching: Exploring the Delicate Balance of Language, Culture, Values and Professionalism
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3 Ways to Speak English | Jamila Lyiscott

From: TED

Jamila Lyiscott is a "tri-tongued orator," and this powerful spoken-word essay celebrates — and challenges — the three distinct flavors of English she speaks with her friends, in the classroom and with her parents. As she explores the complicated history and present-day identity that each language represents, she unpacks what it means to be "articulate".

Source: https://www.youtube.com/v/k9fmJ5xQ_mc
Agenda

• Definitions & Historical Perspective
• Understanding ‘Code Switching’ & ‘Identity Salience’
• Strategies for Creating an Inclusive Environment
• Case Study
• Questions & Resources
Definitions & Historical Perspective
Getting on the Same Page

Ethnicity¹

Noun

Ancestry, family of origin, more geographically-located, a carrier of culture. i.e Ethiopian, South African
Getting on the Same Page

Culture (iceberg)

Objective - The artifacts and institutions created by a group of people, reflected in such areas as art, architecture, literature, dance, holidays, collective history.

Subjective - Patterns and interpretations (values, beliefs, perceptions) and behavior learned from one’s group that guide individual and group activity.
“Race is not biological, It is a social construct. There is no gene, or cluster of genes common to all Blacks or all Whites. Were race “real” in the genetic sense, racial classifications for individuals would remain constant across boundaries.”

Angela Onwuachi, Professor of Law, University of Iowa (2016)
Getting on the Same Page

**Privilege**

Noun

In critical race theory, a way of conceptualizing racial inequalities that focuses as much on the advantages that white people accrue from society as on the disadvantages that non-white people experience.
Examples of Privilege

Examples 4:

• When I cut my finger and go to my school or office’s first aid kit, the flesh-colored band-aid generally matches my skin tone.
• When I stay in a hotel, the complimentary shampoo generally works with the texture of my hair.
• When I run to the store to buy pantyhose at the last minute, the ‘nude’ color generally appears nude on my legs.
• I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group
• If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
• My accent will not affect my chances at obtaining a job
• My business suit is considered acceptable for a job interview
Consider:

We live in a white-privileged society, thus everything we do is in the context of “Whiteness.”

...Including how we communicate

Inadvertently we may judge or make assumptions on those who do not operate under those set of norms and values. (ex: in an interview setting)
Understanding Code Switching & Identity Salience
Code Switching: Defined

*Code Switching* ⁵
*Noun*

The practice of changing one’s language, dialect or speaking style to better fit one’s environment.
What Does Code Switching Look Like?

Key & Peele | Comedy Central
“Phone Call”

This is a hyperbolic example of how code switching can manifest in our daily lives.

Source:
https://www.youtube.com/embed/JzprLDmdRlc
Code Switching & Identity Salience

Identity Salience
Noun
Prominent or conspicuous; the salience of particular aspects of our identity varies when we move between different contexts and environments, and at different moments in our lives.

A person's salient identity is the identity that comes into play in a specific situation.
"Performing" Our Identities

"...the salience we attach to our identities influences how much effort we put into each role and how well we perform in each role."

(Desrochers & Thompson) 7

"Identity salience is conceptualized (and operationalized) as the likelihood that the identity will be invoked in diverse situations"

(p. 257). (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). 7
“Performing” Our Identities

President Obama Visits Team USA Men’s Basketball (2012)

President Obama’s differential handshake is a profound example of how identity salience can manifest seamlessly.

Source:
http://cdn.niketalk.com/9/94/500x1000px-LL-94c5c2e6_Multicultural-Obama-handshakes.gif
Why Do We Code Switch?

Identity Negotiation:
- **Buffering**: psychologically shielding oneself from threats to one’s identity.
- **Bonding**: community-building with those who share a common identity/experience.
- **Bridging**: connecting with those who have different identities/experiences
Why Do We Code Switch?

“Gender, approximate age, race/ethnicity, and social class can be projected through dialect choice (insomuch as dialect can be a choice); thus, language serves as a marker of identity and allegiance.”

- Yesenia Vargas (2016)"
Why Do We Code Switch?

This practice mitigates the consequences of **Stereotype Threat**.

– *Stereotype threat* refers to **being at risk of confirming**, as a self-characteristic, **a negative stereotype about one's social group.** (Steele & Aronson, 1995). ¹⁰
Why Do We Code Switch?

• We often ‘default’ to patterns of our first/natural dialect & behavior.
• It is how we effectively connect to and blend into different environments.
Strategies for Creating an Inclusive Environment
New Ways of Talking About ‘Professional’ Language & Behavior:  
*From ‘Neutralize’ to ‘Adaption’*  

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Case Study
Questions & Resources
Resources:

1. The Intercultural Development Inventory® IDI®