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English 110

How Many Englishes Can You Speak?

I've spoken three types of 'Englishes' my whole life, one at school, one with my mom, and one with friends. I eventually became accustomed to switching up how I speak based on who I'm speaking to and where I'm at. In the sixth grade, my Read 180 teacher taught me and my little class of students the meaning of code switching, meaning you change the way you act based on your environment. As soon as my mom had my older sister, who is 18 months older than me, her goal was to learn English. She went to school everyday while she was pregnant with me. But eventually stopped when she gave birth to me, then returned. She was dedicated to learning English. I spoke to my mom in broken English my whole life, a mix of English and a mix of my native language, which is Bambara rooted in West Africa. No matter where I'm at I speak to my mom the same way I would when I'm home. Growing up knowing when to switch up how I speak or write things has always been a challenge.

My whole life, I've spoken to my mom in English and a mix of our native language which is Bambara, Originates in West Africa Mali, Bamako. Growing up my mom spoke to me in Bambara, with no type of English until she learned English and began mixing English with our native language. The way I spoke to my mom at home has affected the way I wrote in middle school. My writing wasn't good entering middle school to the point where I ended up in Read 180 instead of a regular writing class.

One day in the sixth grade, my blonde haired Read 180 teacher named Ms. Waters decided to teach my class with about 10 students the meaning and importance of code switching. I

learned the way I act or talk with my friends isn't how I should act or speak when dealing with professional things. From that day forward I kept what my teacher taught me in the back of my mind. Although that was sitting in the back of my head, I always struggled to remember to code switch when speaking to people who I'm supposed to speak properly to. Throughout my middle school years I was always told "You don't know how to speak to people." I always assumed it was because of the tone in my voice but I wasn't speaking properly how I was supposed to be speaking to my teachers and deans. Hearing that throughout my middle school years always made me think .. "Why does everyone say you don't know how to speak to people?" I always thought I was speaking English so how is it that I'm speaking English wrong?

Entering high school, I began to realize how much learning about code switching affected me in my life. I would speak and write to my friends in a different type of English. Formally, it would be called "slang". I would say things like "Yo Wassup" compared to saying "Hi, How are you?" or "Na you getting me dumb tight" compared to saying "You're making me really upset." It was extremely difficult for me to know which ones were appropriate to use in English class and while talking to my teachers. The same way I would communicate with my classmates is the same way I would communicate with my deans and teachers. It wasn't until junior year in high school taking AP Lang with my very monotone speaking teacher named Mr. Antaeo, I began speaking very properly when speaking to my teachers and it also showed a difference in writing in my essays. I would speak the same way I wrote in English class. Seminars were very common in my AP Lang class, so speaking in that class was a part of the grade. I could not use "slang" when in this class, I would surprise myself with all the words I would use in this class that I never used once I stepped out of that classroom.

Now that I'm older, my writing skills grew so much from middle school but so has my speaking skills and ability to code switch. When I'm in school or at work I speak as properly as possible. I don't speak to my managers or professors the same way I would speak to my friends. Looking back to a little lesson I learned in 6th grade about code switching, which at the time I thought wouldn't have any impact on my life, has had a major impact on my writing and ability to speak to others. I speak the English I was taught in school vs the English I used growing up. The English I was taught in school isn't "slang" which is the English I used growing up. I'm glad Ms. Waters decided to teach my little class of sixth graders in read 180 the meaning of code switch, it is greatly appreciated in my life right now.