

# How Code-Switching Explains the World

*The following is an excerpt explaining the phenomenon of code-switching from the National Public Radio blog Code Switch:*

So you're at work one day and you're talking to your colleagues in that professional, polite, kind of buttoned-up voice that people use when they're doing professional work stuff.

Your mom or your friend or your partner calls on the phone and you answer. And without thinking, you start talking to them in an entirely different voice— still distinctly *your voice*, but a certain kind of *your voice* less suited for the office. You drop the g's at the end of your verbs. Your previous undetectable accent— your easy Southern drawl or your sign-songy Caribbean lilt or your Spanish-inflected vowels or your New Yorker— is suddenly turned way, way up. You rush your mom or whomever off the phone in some less formal syntax (“Yo, I'mma holler at you later”), hang up and get back to work.

Then you look up and you see your co-workers looking at you and wondering who the heck you'd morphed into for the last few minutes. That right there? That's what it means to code-switch.

. . . [M] any of us, subtly, reflexively change the way we express ourselves all the time. We're hop-scotching between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities— sometimes within a single interaction.

When you're attuned to the phenomenon of code-switching, you start to see it everywhere, and you begin to see the way race, ethnicity and culture plays out all over the place.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Demby, “How Code-Switching Explains the World,” *Code Switch*, April 8, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2013/04/08/176064688/how-code-switching-explains-the-world>.