Code-Switching Lessons

Grammar Strategies for Linguistically Diverse Writers

Grade 3–6

by Rebecca Wheeler & Rachel Swords
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Finally, I come to my true heart home, my husband Lou. Thank you for always affirming the significance and trajectory of my work – reaching the often-forgotten children of America. Thank you for putting up with my middle-of-the-night and early-morning writing, and for hanging with me through the ups and downs. Thank you for us, for bringing gardens, whimsy, poetry, Rumi, Hafiz, and long soul explorations into my life. I promise to take more time for mischief and play! Here’s to our life together!

—Rebecca Wheeler
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—Rachel Swords
Introduction

In *Code-Switching Lessons*, we show you how to lay down the red pen and use successful strategies – contrastive analysis and code-switching – for teaching Standard English grammar in linguistically diverse classrooms. You’ll discover that some of what look like errors in your kids’ writing are actually the patterns of their vernacular language. In other words, students often write just as they speak—in the cadences, rhythms, and patterns they’ve used at home and in their neighborhoods from birth through the moment they step into your class. *Code-Switching Lessons* will demonstrate how to find these informal patterns in your kids’ writing and use contrastive analysis to compare community English and formal academic English, helping your students build on their existing grammar knowledge to add new knowledge. Once you’ve equipped your students with explicit awareness of the differences between informal and formal English, we’ll show you how to lead students to code-switch—to choose the language style to fit the setting, the time, place, audience, and purpose they have for communicating.
About Code-Switching

The resource you hold in your hand, *Code-Switching Lessons*, represents the fruits of an ongoing ten-year collaboration between me, a university teacher and educator, and Rachel Swords, an elementary school teacher and literacy specialist. I’m a linguist in the teacher education program at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. Rachel teaches in a Title I school in Tidewater, Virginia.

How did *Code-Switching Lessons* come to be?

As a linguist, I began exploring the needs of language arts teachers in my local district, which serves a majority African American population (57 percent). I knew that many African American students speak a dialect distinct from that expected in school, and so I wondered:

- Does home speech crop up in school writing?
- If so, how do teachers respond to vernacular grammar in student writing?
- Are teachers successful in fostering Standard English mastery among vernacular speakers?
- What might basic linguistics offer to support teachers as they respond to vernacular grammar in student writing?

To answer these questions, I collected sample essays from one hundred students across five third-grade classrooms.

The real work began. In analyzing those essays, I was looking strictly at grammar, not spelling or punctuation or capitalization or sentence boundary issues (comma splices, run-ons, etc.). Instead, I was looking to see whether (and to what degree) home speech vernacular grammar transferred into student writing.
My analysis revealed the following:

- Yes, community English does indeed transfer into students’ school writing—considerably.
- Teachers handled the vernacular grammar in student writing by correcting it, of course.
- Students’ mastery of Standard English patterns did not seem to be improving.

I knew from basic linguistics that in many cases the students weren’t making mistakes but were simply following the patterns of their first dialect, and I knew from the research on developmental writing (Shaunessey, 1977; Taylor, 1991) that urban students continue to write in the vernacular cadences of home grammar even up into community college—all this after teachers’ diligent and hard work correcting student grammar from the get-go, throughout elementary school, throughout middle and throughout high school. If correction didn’t work, then what would?

In the fall of 2001, I brought my elementary-school data to my teacher education classes at Christopher Newport University. My students and I began working on the writing samples from over seventy student essays, complete with the full array of vernacular patterns. We explored dozens of vernacular grammar patterns that cropped up consistently in student writing. We then built “grammar translators,” an early version of what has become our core graphic organizer, the code-switching chart. This type of chart enabled us to analyze, compare, and contrast the grammar of the home to the grammar of the school. We talked about home speech and school speech, about informal versus formal English, and about the research showing that correction does not work when teaching Standard English to vernacular-speaking students (Piestrup 1973; Taylor, 1991; Rickford, 1999).

That’s when Rachel Swords stepped in. Rachel, one of the students in my class, was an in-service third-grade teacher at a Title 1 school. She decided to test out these ideas with her students. Rachel figured that she already had one approach to grammar that failed—the one where she corrected students over and over. Students had ended up feeling dumb, embarrassed, and reluctant to talk or write anymore. She figured that the worst that could happen with the new approach—code-switching and contrastive analysis—would be that she would have two approaches that failed to reach her African American students. She started talking with her students about using formal and informal English, about choosing language to fit the setting. She began developing and teaching code-switching lessons, choosing simple patterns first (possessives, plurals, and past time) before moving on to harder ones (subject–verb agreement, was/were, am/is/are).
What Rachel found surprised her: Her kids lit up, they became verbal again, and they became engaged in writing and reached for their voice. By the end of her first year teaching code-switching, Rachel closed the achievement gap in her classroom. African American students either equaled (in math and writing) or outperformed (in science and social studies) their white peers on the year-end No Child Left Behind (NCLB) tests. These results have held constant ever since.

Thus began a collaboration that led to an article, a book, and now to these code-switching lessons. We’re here to share the teaching moves and language that showcase how this linguistically informed approach actually looks and sounds in a classroom.

Why teach code-switching?

*Code-Switching Lessons* will speak to any teacher who finds that his or her classroom is becoming increasingly diverse. While fifty or sixty years ago the students filling our classes may have been overwhelmingly white native English speakers, that’s clearly not the case now. Now multicultural, multilingual, multidialectical diversity is the norm. Our students come to us from down the block but also from Thailand and China, from South America and Latin America, and from Russia and the Ukraine. Our students are white but also Native American, African American, and Hispanic and come from the bayous of Louisiana as well as the boroughs of New York, with all the attendant differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. With diversity of homeland comes diversity of languages, with English as a second language; with diversity of ethnic and U.S. regional groups comes diversity of dialects and diversity of culture. Our classrooms have become culturally and linguistically diverse, and we need teaching strategies that celebrate and use that diversity as a springboard to wider knowledge.
Code-switching develops kids’ awareness of and attention to language differences and choices.

Building on the richness that children’s oral language brings to the classroom, code-switching uses strategies of active discovery to help students recognize alternative language styles and own their language choices. We illustrate with two stories from Rachel’s school.

**Story #1: “The book uses formal”**

Half of Rachel’s students sat in the reading circle in the classroom of another teacher, Ms. Jones, as children read aloud. It was February, and Rachel’s students had long since been familiar with the patterns of subject–verb agreement. Their whole class had worked through the code-switching lessons; they had discovered the informal patterns (*Mama walk to the store Saturdays*) and added the formal patterns (*Mama walks to the store Saturdays*) to their repertoires. The code-switching charts were up on the wall for their use during the writing process.

Ms. Jones had also been telling students about formal subject–verb agreement. She’d been marking their papers, writing in the missing -s on students’ verbs, but it didn’t seem to make much difference. And here, her students were reading out loud from a book written in Standard English, and they were leaving off the verb endings, just as they did in their writing, just as they did in their speaking.

The second-grade class was reading *The Paperboy* by Dav Pilkey. When Tarik’s turn came, he read, “The paperboy know his route by heart.”

The teacher interrupted him. “Read that again, more carefully.”

Tarik reprised: “The paperboy know his route by heart.”

“Again!” said the teacher. “Pay attention to the grammar!”

And Tarik read, “The paperboy know . . . ”

By this time, the child was embarrassed, confused, and increasingly alienated from reading. Notice, he got the meaning – he would have had to understand the sentence in order to be able to speak through the grammar of his home language.

One of Rachel’s students leaned over and whispered in his ear, “Look at the end of the word *know*. It’s got an ending. You need to say that ending. I know you’re using informal English, but the book uses formal and the teacher wants you to use formal. Just look at the endings on words and be sure to say them out loud” – powerful reading counsel from a second-grader.

Rachel’s student had deeply understood the difference between the patterns of vernacular and Standard English and was able to explain the issue on the spot.
Story #2: “But Spy Mouse doesn’t”

It was Rachel’s very first semester teaching code-switching, back in 2001. She was just learning. That fall, she’d taught about formal and informal places and clothing and about formal and informal language, and she’d taught students about formal and informal grammar for showing possession and plurality and so on.

Students were working in writing workshop. In particular, David was writing another story in his series on Spy Mouse, the School Detective. This one was called “Spy Mouse and the Broken Globe.” David was well into his writing when Rachel stopped by his desk.

“David,” Rachel said, “I thought we’d talked about formal and informal English.”

“Yes, Mrs. Swords,” David replied.

“But did you understand? Did you understand when we talked about formal grammar and informal grammar?” Rachel pursued.

“Yes, I did, Mrs. Swords,” David continued.

“Well, I’m disappointed. If you understood, why do you have informal English all through your writing?”

David was patient with his teacher. After all, she was venturing into new and different territory. “Mrs. Swords,” David continued patiently, “I understand the difference between formal and informal English, but Spy Mouse doesn’t.”

Indeed, David had written his author’s note entirely in Standard English, but he had used vernacular English to create character and voice for his mouse detective. Clearly, David was thinking about language and writing in writerly ways. Code-switching gave him the tools to make very savvy language choices.
**Code-switching works where correction doesn’t.**

Both experience and research tell us that correction just doesn’t work very well to teach Standard English grammar; if correction worked, then by middle or high school, students wouldn’t be making the same “errors.” At our work sessions, teachers report that this sample of teacher response is pretty familiar:

Teaching correct vernacular grammar in student writing.

This eighth-grade teacher has put lots of effort into correcting student grammar, yet there’s not a word about the student’s strengths, like those enviable similes: “The fire is warm like a mitten” or “The wood make a crackling sound like cereal.” Sure, there’s a good deal of grammar work we’d do with this student, but more fundamentally, there’s lots to celebrate in this student’s writing. Could it be that the grammar blinded the teacher to the student’s broader writing capacities?

You can bet, too, that the student who wrote this has received corrections on his or her papers all the way up through the years of elementary and secondary school, but here’s an eighth-grade essay that uses the same vernacular patterns teachers have surely been correcting for eight years. Not surprisingly, teachers of developmental writing in community college report that these same grammar patterns populate their students’ writing. The message isn’t getting through. What gives?

Research corroborates what common sense tells us: “[W]hile various strategies can be useful for learning Standard English equivalents…[o]ne that does not work is correcting vernacular features” (Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999, p. 122). Ironic, isn’t it? The very strategy that seems so intuitive, so natural, and so necessary just doesn’t work to teach Standard English. Piestrup, a language researcher over thirty-five years ago (1973) reported that with repeated correction, students “withdrew from participation in reading, speaking softly and as seldom as possible” (pp. 131–132). In other words, correction not only failed to teach Standard English but led students to opt out of the educational enterprise.
By contrast, code-switching does work in teaching Standard English grammar to vernacular-speaking students. Experience has shown the success of code-switching, and so has research. Before Rachel began implementing code-switching, her African American students performed thirty points below their white peers on year-end tests. The very year she implemented code-switching, Rachel closed the achievement gap in her classroom, a result that has held constant ever since. Indeed, in 2006, the last year Rachel was a classroom teacher, 100 percent of her African American students passed 100 percent of the year-end tests.

Research studies affirm that linguistically informed approaches to the vernacular are far more successful than traditional ones. We have results from an experimental study set in third grade (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). Students taught “proper grammar” with traditional English techniques either improved 1 percent or actually got worse in using Standard English; by contrast, students who used contrastive analysis showed a nearly 100 percent increase in Standard English mastery (Fogel & Ehri, 2000).

Not limited to elementary contexts, these results hold true all the way up into community college. Hanni Taylor demonstrated (1991) that when she corrected students’ vernacular grammar, they actually used more (not fewer) vernacular patterns but that the students who worked with contrastive analysis really improved. When Taylor taught students using the linguistically informed compare and contrast approach, students used 59 percent fewer vernacular features.

Not only in the United States (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007; Piestrup, 1973; Rickford, 1999; Rickford & Rickford, 2000) but also abroad in Norway, in Sweden, and in Canada (Rickford, 1999), scholar after scholar attest to the superiority of code-switching and contrastive analysis over the traditional methods for teaching the standard dialect to minority dialect speakers.

In summary, code-switching works, and it develops thoughtful language users. What better reasons are there to give it a try?

“Code-switching works, and it develops thoughtful language users.”
What are the essential features of a successful code-switching approach?

Refined over nearly ten years of classroom practice and grounded in research, *Code-Switching Lessons* has the following characteristics:

- It is grounded in student language, written and oral.
- It uses a graphic organizer as an analysis tool.
- It applies the scientific method to grammar discovery.
- It builds on the rules of vernacular and adds Standard English.

*Code-Switching Lessons is grounded in student language.*

Each year, we see the cadences of our kids’ home speech grammar transfer into their school writing – our students often write just as they speak – so we make note of the common and most frequent vernacular patterns that we see in student writing. These become grist for our code-switching lessons. Then after we have worked on the “big-ticket” items in the writing process, we separate issues of mechanics (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) from issues of grammar. At this point, we turn to our code-switching lessons to address Standard English usage.

Here’s a sample from fourth-grade writing to get us started.
Code-Switching Lessons uses a graphic organizer as an analysis tool.

We do all our work using a core graphic organizer, a T-chart; we call it a code-switching chart. After we’ve found common vernacular patterns across student papers, we construct a code-switching chart that reflects the grammar contrasts at hand. Here’s a sample code-switching chart for showing possession in vernacular (informal) and Standard (formal) English. We began with Darla’s two possessive sentences and added several from her classmates’ work.

**SHOWING POSSESSION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMAL</th>
<th>FORMAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Yes,” said Annie mom. She shouted Judy name.</td>
<td>“Yes,” said Annie’s mom. She shouted Judy’s name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My goldfish name is Scaley.</td>
<td>My goldfish’s name is Scaley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni takes Joni ex-boyfriend.</td>
<td>Toni takes Joni’s ex-boyfriend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher’s family moved to Spain.</td>
<td>Christopher’s family moved to Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to sing in the kid choir.</td>
<td>I want to sing in the kids’ choir.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE PATTERN**

owner + owned

**THE PATTERN**

owner + ’s + owned

Code-switching chart for Showing Possession

The left column contains student sentences illustrating the vernacular pattern we’re addressing, possessive patterns, and the right column contains the Standard English equivalents.
**Code-Switching Lessons** applies the scientific method to grammar discovery.

To address vernacular grammar in student writing, we draw on analysis and synthesis, critical thinking skills central to twenty-first-century literacy. Indeed, as you lead students in the discovery and learning of grammar patterns, you’ll be following the steps of the scientific method.

### SCIENTIFIC METHOD AS APPLIED TO GRAMMAR DISCOVERY

1. Collect data (student examples).
2. Examine data.
3. Seek grammar patterns.
4. Describe grammar patterns (a hypothesis).
5. Test the pattern.
6. Write the grammar pattern (the grammar rules).

Once we have built the code-switching chart, we lead students through these steps to discover the vernacular grammar pattern they’re using in their school writing. Then, we build on that existing knowledge to add new knowledge, the corresponding pattern in Standard English.

Here’s how the process goes: First, we lead students to discover the grammar pattern of informal English through the analytic and synthetic steps of the scientific method. To do so, we follow steps 2–6 once with the informal sentence in the left-hand column. Then, we apply the same process, following steps 2–6 again, for the Formal English sentences on the right. But this time we begin by exploring the formal sentences with an additional tool: comparison and contrast. We direct students’ attention to the sentences in the Formal English column and ask, “What changed? How do the Formal English sentences here differ from the Informal English we just explored?” This lets us build on students’ existing knowledge (the patterns of community English) to add new knowledge (academic English). We then lead students in analysis and synthesis, the steps of the scientific method, as they identify the grammar pattern for formal English.

Comparing and contrasting the grammar of the home to the grammar of the school is called **contrastive analysis**, a technique we’ve adapted from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and English as a Second Language (ESL). In our lessons, we use contrastive analysis in service of Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD). In this way, students develop explicit, conscious understanding of the differences between informal (vernacular) and formal (Standard) English.
**Code-Switching Lessons** builds on the rules of vernacular grammar to add the rules of Standard English.

While knowing the difference between vernacular and Standard English is a step, it’s not our end result. We want students to be able to choose the language to fit the setting. That’s code-switching – students making intentional choices in their language use! **Code-Switching Lessons** is all about empowering students to make conscious, effective choices in language and writing, to choose their language to fit the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose.

Central to **Code-Switching Lessons** is the understanding that informal or formal English is neither “right” nor “wrong” but rather appropriate or not to their situation. In our lessons, we never talk about “correcting” student grammar “errors” because, as we’ve shown, these linguistic patterns are not typically errors but are systematic vernacular rules. How, then, do we talk about grammar in a linguistically informed classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEW WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT LANGUAGE: FROM “ERROR” TO “PATTERN”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instead of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking in terms of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• proper or improper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• good or bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | |
| Talking about | Talk about |
| • right or wrong | • patterns |
| • correct or incorrect | • how language varies by setting |

| Thinking that students | See your kids as |
| • make mistakes, errors | • following the grammar patterns of |
| • have problems with plurals, possessives, tenses, etc. | their home language |
| • leave off an -s, ’s, -ed | |

| Saying to students | Invite students |
| • “should have,”“are supposed to,” “need to,”“should correct” | • to code-switch (choose the language pattern to fit the setting) |

| Red notes in the margin | Lead students to |
| • correcting students’ grammar | • compare and contrast language |
| | • build on existing knowledge to add new knowledge – Standard English |
| | • code-switch to fit the setting |
Of course, this chart is just an illustrative guide. The real point is that we are always mindful of our language about language – and we urge our colleagues to be similarly mindful. As you talk about students’ work, do you use terms that are neutral, or do you still talk in terms of error, mistake, and something missing? Can you catch yourself before you speak from a deficit perspective? It will take some time, but you’ll get there. Teachers find that truly changing their language about language is a surprisingly challenging process. We believe that it’s worth the effort – to see our kids as smart, linguistically robust, capable learners.
About Code-Switching Lessons

*Code-Switching Lessons* fits naturally into any writing block – most likely when students are revising or editing their work – when you notice the need for a grammar minilesson to highlight vernacular and standard alternatives. Rachel noticed that her students used the same home speech patterns year after year. She naturally and easily came to recognize a top-10 list of vernacular patterns common in her students’ writing. In response, Rachel developed and sequenced the model lessons in this resource to help students add Standard English to their linguistic repertoires.

The Code-Switching Road Map

You will find that *Code-Switching Lessons* can be used in a number of ways. Regardless of how you use the book, we recommend that you wait at least four weeks into the school year before teaching any of these lessons. This will give you time to collect data and determine to what degree your students are in need of particular lessons. You may choose the book as a course of study in grammar. Since the lessons are roughly sequenced from simplest to most complex, you would simply begin with the first lesson in the first unit and work your way through the book. The units are designed to span from one to two weeks, depending on the needs of your students and the amount of time you dedicate to writing on a daily basis. After the final lesson is completed, you might discover additional grammar patterns that you’ll want to teach using code-switching. If this occurs, you will have the foundation to create your own lessons for these additional grammar patterns. To support your work, we offer a good range of additional code-switching charts for other grammar patterns common in the writing of African American students.

Another way you can choose to use *Code-Switching Lessons* is to pick and choose the lessons that are most relevant to your students, based on your analysis of their work. In this case, we recommend teaching the first two or three units relatively early in the year to set students up for comparing and contrasting formal and informal language. Once you have introduced and explored the concept of code-switching, you can select additional lessons based on your students’ needs. From this foundation, your students will be ready to tackle high frequency but harder patterns such as subject–verb agreement.

*Code-Switching Lessons*: The components

The core of *Code-Switching Lessons* is this lesson book, which contains all the direct instruction for establishing a foundation of language flexibility. The lessons develop writers’ facility in choosing and using the language style most appropriate for a given audience and purpose. The Resources CD-ROM bound with this lesson book provides both resources to support the lessons and a variety of additional information – for example, Frequently Asked Questions and an extensive list of African American English patterns often found in school writing. In addition, check out the information in the *Code-Switching Lessons* section of www.heinemann.com.
Code-Switching Lessons: The units

This lesson book contains eleven units, each containing between two and four lessons. The units are organized into three main sections. The first section and the last section contain a single unit; they provide context for code-switching as a learning approach. Nine grammar units form the core of the program.

Unit 1: Diversity in Life and Language

We begin by anchoring in common daily experiences. We make use of students’ intuitive understanding of how we all vary our self-presentation to fit the setting. We explore the idea of variation – for example, how places and clothing can vary from formal to informal. We brainstorm a list of places that are informal (McDonald’s, picnics) and places that are formal (Olive Garden, holiday dinners). We brainstorm types of clothing that are more formal (suits, ties, dresses) or less formal (sneakers, jeans, T-shirts). Then we combine these, matching informal clothing to informal settings and so on. Finally, we extend the comparison to language, as we see formal and informal styles of greeting or vocabulary. From this point, we’re ready to explore contrasts in vernacular and Standard English grammar, or what we call informal and formal English.

Units 2 through 10: Grammar patterns

Code-Switching Lessons offers lesson units addressing the top eight patterns we find in the writing of our own vernacular-speaking students from urban Tidewater, Virginia. These are the same patterns attested by teachers from all over the country and in the research literature on AAE (Charity et al., 2004; Craig and Washington, 2006; Green, 2002; Labov, 1972; Smitherman, 2000; Wolfram, 1969). Most units focus on one grammatical contrast in Standard English and the vernacular variety of English spoken by many African American students. The first lesson in each unit leads students to discover a particular formal and informal English grammar pattern (possession, plurality, past time, and so on). Subsequent lessons in each unit develop students’ mastery in identifying, defining, classifying, and practicing target grammar patterns. Each of the grammar units culminates with students editing their own writing to transition from vernacular to Standard English. The final code-switching unit explores the importance of vernacular in creating voice in literature and students’ own narrative writing.

We organize the units by whether the grammar deals with nouns or verbs. We start with nouns, as those are the most straightforward. The last unit in the series of grammar patterns looks at how to respond when students write multiple vernacular patterns within one sentence.
NOUN PATTERNS

Unit 2: Showing Possession
I want to sing in the kid choir vs.
I want to sing in the kid's choir

Unit 3: Plural Patterns
I have two brother vs.
I have two brothers

Unit 4: Reviewing Possessive and Plural Patterns

VERB PATTERNS

Unit 5: Showing Past Time
Yesterday I turn on the TV vs.
Yesterday I turned on the TV

Unit 6: Subject–Verb Agreement
She work hard vs.
She works hard

Unit 7: Was/Were
We was working vs. We were working;
They was working vs. They were working

Unit 8: Am/Is/Are
We is working vs. We are working;
They is working vs. They are working

Unit 9: Using Be
She my best friend vs.
She's my best friend

MULTIPLE PATTERNS

Unit 10: Multiple Patterns

Why these patterns?
Simply put, these vernacular patterns

• Are the most frequently occurring ones in our African American students’ vernacular English.
• Illustrate patterns in both noun phrases and verb phrases.
• Move from simple grammar to more complex grammar when taken together as a sequence.

In this way, students learn how to do contrastive analysis on the simpler patterns (noun patterns) before moving on to doing their work with the patterns that have the highest frequency but are the most difficult (verb patterns) and then on to handling multiple patterns in one sentence.

Unit 11: Character and Voice in Literature

The final unit comes full circle, affirming that diversity in life and language is natural and desirable. It demonstrates that through the choice of distinct language varieties, authors (including student authors) create character and voice. Without dialect diversity, literature wouldn’t be literature.
**Code-Switching Lessons: The lessons**

As noted earlier, our code-switching instruction follows the scientific method in grammar inquiry. The direct instruction portion of every lesson, then, leads students to explore informal and formal grammar patterns in search of generalizations, comparisons, and contrasts. The broad outline of the approach you will find throughout direct instruction is represented in the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIRECT INSTRUCTION IN CODE-SWITCHING LESSONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How We Teach</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Examine data | • Unveil the code-switching chart.  
• Invite students to read sentences silently.  
• Read sentences aloud.  
• Look at sentences to spotlight a grammar pattern. |
| Seek the grammar pattern | • Ask kids to look at underlined structures.  
• Ask kids what pattern they see in these structures.  
• Talk about a common pattern they see in each sentence.  
• With your guidance revise or add to the rule if it doesn't match the data. |
| Describe the grammar pattern | • Ask students how we might state the pattern.  
• Restate the definition (grammar rule) in a simple form.  
• Describe the pattern. |
| Test the grammar pattern | • Lead students to check each sentence.  
• Read each sentence and restate the rule.  
• Determine if the rule describes all sentences.  
• Revise the rule if it does not fit all sentences. |
| Write the grammar pattern | • Write the pattern at the bottom of the list of sentences.  
• Restate the grammar pattern. |
LESSON WALKTHROUGH
Unit Introduction

Each unit is preceded by a brief introduction that does the following:

**The Pattern explains**
the grammar patterns—
informal and formal—that the unit explores

**The Code-Switching Chart**
details the process we used to create the unit’s code-switching chart

---

**Plural Patterns**

**The Pattern**
In our students’ papers, we noticed that vernacular-speaking students may show more than one by inserting a *number word* (*I have two dogs*) or another *signal word* (*I have many friends*). At other times, no signal word appears in the sentence; instead, we know the student means more than one through *common knowledge* (*I should respect adults; in fall, people turn their clocks back*). We will build on students’ existing grammar knowledge to teach the formal pattern—*I have two dogs and two cats*. Thus, vernacular and Standard English both show plurality but follow different patterns.

**Vernacular pattern:**
- number words
  - (one, two, three)
- other signal words in the sentence
  - (all, some, many, several)
- common knowledge
  - (we simply know that the sentence refers to more than one)

**Standard English pattern:**
- noun + -s

**The Code-Switching Chart**

**Identifying vernacular plural patterns in kids’ work**
Identifying vernacular instances of plurality in students’ work is fairly straightforward. We just look for regular nouns that signal more than one and that would take -s in Standard English. All of these patterns involve number words or other signal words, and common knowledge. We order the examples to facilitate students’ discovery of the vernacular patterns. Since number words are the most prototypic and straightforward, we put two examples with number words early in our list, and then we include an example or two with other signal words (like *I have a bunch of friends*). For our papers in which students follow the vernacular, or informal, pattern for plurality, we use these to pull example sentences for our chart. For our

**UNIT 3**

**Choosing the examples**
The first step in building a code-switching chart is to collect a range of student papers in which students follow the vernacular, or informal, pattern for plurality. We include an example or two with number words early in our list, and then we put two examples with other signal words (like *I have a bunch of friends*). For our papers in which students follow the vernacular, or informal, pattern for plurality, we use these to pull example sentences for our chart. For our

As with all our compare and contrast charts, we set up a T-chart. We title our chart **Plural Patterns**. As with all our compare and contrast charts, we set up a T-chart. We title our chart **Plural Patterns**.

Creating the code-switching chart

We've chosen examples that illustrate each vernacular rule: number words, other signal words, and common knowledge, we don't underline anything. The number words or other signal words. For the sentences illustrating common knowledge, we underline the plural -s, the pattern for showing plurality in Standard English.

As always, we list informal sentences from student writing on the left, shortened sentences so they fit on one line. We also remember to return any other errors of spelling or punctuation or capitalization and to write the formal translations next to them on the right. We use four to six sentences, remembering to correct any errors of spelling or punctuation or capitalization and to write the formal translations next to them on the right.

**UNIT 3**

---

**In fall, people turn their clock back**

In our students’ papers, we noticed that vernacular-speaking students may show more than one by inserting a *number word* (*I have two dogs*) or another *signal word* (*I have many friends*). At other times, no signal word appears in the sentence; instead, we know the student means more than one through *common knowledge* (*I should respect adults; in fall, people turn their clocks back*). We will build on students’ existing grammar knowledge to teach the formal pattern—*I have two dogs and two cats*. Thus, vernacular and Standard English both show plurality but follow different patterns.

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**Standard English pattern:**
- noun + -s

**Identifying vernacular plural patterns in kids’ work**
Identifying vernacular instances of plurality in students’ work is fairly straightforward. We just look for regular nouns that signal more than one and that would take -s in Standard English. These students have used the informal pattern for showing plurality:

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**Standard English pattern:**
- noun + -s

**Identifying vernacular plural patterns in kids’ work**
Identifying vernacular instances of plurality in students’ work is fairly straightforward. We just look for regular nouns that signal more than one and that would take -s to form the plural in Standard English. These students have used the informal pattern for showing plurality:

- **In my family I have two dog and two cat.**
- **Three ship sailed across the ocean when he came to Virginia.**
Choosing the examples
The first step in building a code-switching chart is to collect a range of student papers in which students follow the vernacular, or informal, pattern for plurality. We use these to pull example sentences for our chart. For our Plural Patterns chart, we're looking for examples of regular nouns. In the previous two samples, we readily find two examples — *I have two dog and two cat* and *Three ship sailed across the ocean*. In each case, the corresponding plural equivalent in Standard English would take an -s. We will not put nouns that would take an irregular plural form in Standard English on the chart (ox, deer, fish, and so on).

Creating the code-switching chart
As with all our compare and contrast charts, we set up a T-chart. We title our chart Plural Patterns. As always, we list informal sentences from student writing on the left, writing the formal translations next to them on the right. We use four to six sentences, remembering to correct any errors of spelling or punctuation or capitalization and to shorten the sentences so they fit on one line. We also remember to return any other vernacular grammar patterns to the Standard English equivalent to help students focus on the plural patterns only. Finally, we write The Pattern under each column of the chart, leaving space to write the pattern during the lesson.

We've chosen examples that illustrate each vernacular rule: number words, other signal words, and common knowledge. We order the examples to facilitate students' discovery of the vernacular patterns. Since number words are the most prototypic and straightforward, we put two examples with number words early in our list, and then we include an example or two with other signal words (*all, several, a bunch*, etc.), followed by one example illustrating common knowledge as the pattern for vernacular plural.

In order to direct students' attention to the vernacular pattern, we underline the number words or other signal words. For the sentences illustrating common knowledge, we don't underline anything.

Next, we translate each vernacular example into Standard English. For these, we underline the plural -s, the pattern for showing plurality in Standard English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLURAL PATTERNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFORMAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have two dog and two cat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three ship sailed across the ocean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the boy are here today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor loves cat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE PATTERN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other signal words</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>THE PATTERN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun + -s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now we're ready for the lesson!
Throughout the lesson, a transcript narrates how the teaching plays out in Rachel’s classroom. Teaching language and student responses show how to build understanding of the principles and patterns of code-switching.

### Engagement

- **Have the students gather around the Plural Patterns chart. Review the formal and informal plural patterns.**

  We have now spent several days working on plural patterns. Let’s review the formal and informal plural patterns. Who would like to tell us about the informal plural pattern?

  **TYREEK:** There is a number word and other words to say more than one. That’s right, number words, other signal words, and common knowledge tell us if something is plural. What is the formal plural pattern?

  **DAR'ASIA:** There is an -s on the end of the word that is more than one. Like I like books. Books has an -s on the end because I like more than one book.

  Exactly, the -s on the end of the noun, or naming word, shows there is more than one.

### Direct Instruction

- **Introduce the topic for today’s lesson.**

  Today you are going to be editing your own writing. You’re going to be editing the writing you’ve been working on for the past week. Remember that once you publish this piece, you will have it on display in the classroom. Which pattern do you think you should use in your writing?

  **STUDENTS:** Formal!

  **Why do we want to use the formal pattern?**

  **QUINTIN:** Because it is a formal writing that other people might see.

  Thumbs-up if you agree with Quintin; thumbs to the side if you disagree.
Model locating plural patterns in a piece of writing and editing for the formal plural pattern.

I have a paragraph written by a student a few years ago. The paragraph has both formal and informal plural patterns in it. However, since school writing usually needs to be formal, all of the plural patterns need to be formal, so I will need your help in making the entire paragraph formal by changing the informal plural patterns to formal. Let’s start by reading the paragraph together. (I run my finger under the words as we read the paragraph together.) Let’s look at each sentence, one at a time, and make sure the formal pattern was used. Every time we find a formal plural pattern, we are going to highlight it. If we find an informal plural pattern, we are going to make the pattern formal and then highlight it.

Let’s look at the first sentence. Last week all of the third-grade student took a trip to Jamestown. The student were divided into groups of two boys and two girl. All of the groups were given lists of thing to look for in Jamestown. There were twelve items on each list. My group only found some of the thing on the list. We saw two canoe and six longhouse that looked like the kind the Powhatan Indians used long ago. We were excited because both the canoes and the longhouses were on our list. However, we didn’t see all three crop that the Powhatan Indians planted. Next time when we have a task on a field trip, I hope my group is able to finish.

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note
A customizable version of the paragraph “Jamestown” is available on the CD-ROM.

note
Our sample paragraph illustrates only vernacular examples of the grammar pattern we’re exploring — here, plural patterns.

The Resources CD-ROM provides teaching tools for the lessons, including customizable versions of writing samples.

Ways of Talking suggests “language about language” that preserves a core code-switching principle: that language style is appropriate to a specific audience and setting.
Guided Practice leads students through a writing activity that applies the lesson’s patterns to appropriate situations.

Instruction is driven by the scientific method—examine data, seek the pattern, describe the pattern, test the pattern, and write the pattern.

Guided Practice

Engage the students’ help in locating and editing the remaining plural patterns.

Let’s look at the next sentence. The student were divided into groups of two boys and two girls. Are there any plural patterns in this sentence?

Jalanay: Two boys and two girl.

That is actually two patterns. Let’s look at the first one, two boys. Is that formal or informal?

Students: Formal.

Jalanay: There is an -s on the end.

Right, since boys ends with an -s, it is formal. Jalanay, would you highlight the formal pattern for us? (Jalanay highlights the word boys.)

What about two girl? Is that formal or informal?

Students: Informal.

How do you know?

Dawnella: It says two and that’s it.

The number word tells us that it is plural. What should we do to make it formal?

Students: Add an -s!

Andrew would you please put the -s on the end of girl. (Andrew adds the -s.) Now you can highlight it because we made it formal. (Andrew highlights girls.) Let’s read the sentence again and see if we found all of the patterns. The student were divided into groups of two boys and two girls. Did we find all of the patterns?

Last week all of the third-grade students took a trip to Jamestown. The student were divided into groups of two boys and two girls. All of the groups were given lists of things to look for in Jamestown. There were twelve items on each list. My
(I continue reading through the paragraph until all of the plural patterns are found. Students will highlight formal patterns and locate informal patterns, change them to formal, and then highlight them. Once students have located all of the patterns, I reread the entire paragraph.)

Good job, everyone. I’m going to hang this paragraph in the classroom as an example of editing for formal plural patterns.

Independent Practice

Have the students work independently to edit their own writing for the formal possessive pattern.

Now that we have edited a paragraph together, you are going to edit some of your own writing. You are going to read through your writing and do exactly what we just did with the Jamestown paragraph. Take your time. As you read through your work, look for examples of the plural pattern. If you find a formal plural pattern, highlight it. If you find an informal pattern, change it to formal and then highlight it. (I give students five to ten minutes to edit their own writing. I walk around the room as they complete the assignment and assist students who are having trouble with the assignment.)

Sharing for Understanding

Have the students gather in a circle to share examples of plural patterns they found in their own work. Make sure they bring their writing with them.

Now it’s your turn to share some examples of the plural patterns that you found in your own writing. We’re going to go around the circle, and each of you will share one sentence that contains a plural pattern. You’ll need to pick one of your highlighted patterns. That means that all of the examples we share in the circle will be...

STUDENTS: Formal.

QUATASIA: That’s just like when we did possessives!

It’s exactly the same. Let’s get started. If you would rather not share, just say “Pass,” and we’ll go on to the next person. Nije, would you like to get us started?

Nije: On Saturday my cousins spent the night at my house.

Which word is plural?

Nije: Cousins. I put an -s on the end.

Nice job, Quintin! (I continue around the circle in this fashion until everyone has a turn or until we run out of time.)

what if...

It is taking too much time to complete the Guided Practice portion of the lesson? Due to the length of the Jamestown paragraph, it may be necessary to complete only part of the paragraph during this lesson. You can then finish the paragraph during a subsequent lesson.

Independent Practice frees students up to work with the pattern with their own writing.

Sharing for Understanding lets students show off their own writing, synthesize their learning, and respond to the lesson.

note

As the students share their sentences, periodically ask students how their sentence fits the plural pattern.

Assessment (on the following page, not shown here) provides guidance for monitoring your students’ comprehension at the end of each lesson.
Customizing Code-Switching Lessons to Your Own Classroom

*Code-Switching Lessons* demonstrates core principles and strategies that can extend far beyond the dialect we address in our lessons. The code-switching approach reaches concentrically out – to students who speak other U.S. dialects, to those who speak an international English (East Asian English, Caribbean English, British English, Australian English, etc.), and to students whose English is influenced by the grammar patterns of an entirely different native language (Thai, Russian, Greek, etc.). Code-switching can even help in your work with students who write in the casual cadences of spoken Standard English or text-messaging abbreviations!

Just as we have done while creating these lessons, you too can directly address the patterns your students need to expand their linguistic style repertoires:

- Attune your ear and eye to your students’ spoken language patterns.
- Collect examples of the patterns from your students’ written work.
- Build your own code-switching charts.
- Follow the Code-Switching Lessons model to teach your patterns.
Attuning your ear and eye to your students’ spoken language patterns

Consider the following scenario. Let’s say you’re a first-year teacher in southwestern Virginia. As a teacher in Appalachia (the “territory encompass[ing] seven states . . . from West Virginia and Ohio to Georgia” (Montgomery, p. 244), you would surely find that students’ home dialect transferred into school writing.

You have assigned your first essay in class and have received your students’ first drafts. Of course, you will begin by focusing on the “big picture” items in the writing process – the students’ focus, elaboration, concrete details, organization, sentence variety, and so on. After working on these macro issues, you’ll turn to usage and mechanics. You come across examples like these: There wasn’t a church within twenty mile of us, The bear weighed four hundred pound, He cut it into four quarter, A few year after I moved here. You immediately notice that students seem to be leaving off the plural -s right and left.

Now’s the moment for a leap of faith. You know that languages are patterned and languages are made of dialects, which themselves are patterned. You know there could be a distinctive local language variety in your part of the country – indeed, you hear it! Further, it seems that many, many of your local students seem to leave off the -s while children who have moved to the area do not. You see lots of children in a local peer group using the same forms of language, which is a hallmark of a distinct grammar rule. Having taken that leap of faith, you understand that your students are not forgetting the -s but are following a different grammar pattern, one from their home community. Still, you know you want to extend their knowledge to the patterns of standardized American English.

Collecting examples of the patterns from your students’ written work

Collect a range of student papers in which students follow the pattern you’ve noticed. You’ll use these student papers to pull example sentences. For noun patterns, plan on ending up with four to six sentences for your code-switching chart. Students need that number to be able to identify grammar patterns. To get that many sentences, you’ll probably collect eight to ten papers in which students used Appalachian plural patterns. Look for examples where the noun pattern happens in different parts of the sentence, maybe in subject position, in direct object position, in indirect object position, and so on. This broader range of papers will also let you filter out sentences that show the usage you’re interested in but that may have inappropriate content. Finally, be sure to include examples that will let students fully test and refine the grammar rules they discover. For example, Appalachian English (AE) has more than one rule for showing plurality – AE shows plurality by context (words specifying amounts such as twenty, four, etc.) when the noun is a measure noun (mile, pound, quarter). But with non-measure nouns (cat, table, bear cub), the noun requires -s, so be sure to include an example or two of non-measure nouns so students can discover the full Appalachian English pattern for plurality. Now, with a good range of examples in hand, you’ll build your code-switching chart.
Building your own code-switching charts

Your code-switching chart serves two functions. First, it helps you figure out the grammar pattern yourself. Second, once you’ve refined your own understanding of the grammatical pattern, you’ll then use the chart to lead students to compare and contrast the grammar of the home and school in order to add academic English to their linguistic repertoire.

Here are the steps for building a code-switching chart:

1. Create the code-switching chart structure.
   a. Label the grammar pattern at the top of the page.
      You know that the pattern has something to do with different ways to express plurality, so we label the chart “Plurality.” For more complex, difficult, or arcane grammar points, where a name is not so obvious, you can title the chart by just using examples (e.g., Two Mile vs. Two Miles), and that’ll capture what the chart’s about.
      In our lessons we use the terms informal and formal. However, how you title the two columns will reflect the subject matter you are exploring. Here, we could call the left-hand column “Appalachian English” and the right-hand column “Academic English,” and that would be perfectly fine and correct.

2. Adapt example sentences as necessary, and write them in the left-hand column.
   In building charts, we may need to modify student sentences slightly. In order to help your students focus on the topic of the chart, you’ll want to ensure that the only difference between your sentence and Standard English is the grammar point on which the chart focuses – here plurality patterns in Appalachian versus Standard English. That means you’ll want to correct any errors in mechanics – correct spelling, capitalization and punctuation – and return any other vernacular or regional grammar patterns to Standard English equivalents.

   Also, plan on editing student sentences to shorten them as necessary. It’s important that examples fit on one line so that we preserve a visual parallel in the chart – one line of vernacular corresponds to one line of Standard English all the way down the chart. This helps students compare and contrast the informal and formal patterns and lock the grammar contrasts explicitly in their minds.

Note:
Of course, we teach punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, and integrate these into the editing time of our writing workshop. That’s an activity distinct from our lessons on code-switching. Code-Switching Lessons focuses on grammar, the contrasts between vernacular and Standard English, or spoken and written English, so we make sure our charts focus students’ attention uniquely on the grammar issue at hand.
3. Translate each sentence in the left-hand column to Academic English.

Once you build your left-hand column containing the adapted student sentences, write each sentence's Standard English equivalent next to it in the right-hand column. Again, make sure that each example occupies one line for the sake of visual clarity. And with this column, make sure the matching sentences are side by side to facilitate comparison and contrast.

4. Underline the relevant grammar pattern.

In the beginning of your code-switching work with students, plan on underlining the part of the sentence containing the relevant grammar pattern to help support student learning. Later, as students are more familiar with the process of analyzing sentences to find grammar patterns, they will increasingly take ownership and discover the patterns with much less teacher support.

5. Write The Pattern under each column.

Finally, write The Pattern under both columns, leaving enough space to describe the grammar pattern after students' discovery work. Labeling the pattern under both vernacular and Standard English columns reinforces the core linguistic insight underlying code-switching and contrastive analysis. Speakers who say or write “The bear weighed four hundred pound” are following a grammar rule; speakers who say or write “The bear weighed four hundred pounds” are also following a grammar rule – different rules, but rules nonetheless.

**note**

When we unveil our code-switching chart, we make sure to tell students that we may have changed small parts of their sentences so that they can focus on the point we really want them to see. In this way, we can honor the students’ voices while building an effective code-switching chart.

**note**

In working with students, be sure to stick to the sentences as written on the chart. Sometimes a student will say, “I say it different than that.” Just thank the student, saying “For our work today, we are going to explore and analyze sentences from student writing. The sentences on the chart all come from students’ papers. We want to see how these student sentences compare to formal English, so let’s stick to the sentences on this chart, just exactly as they’re written!”

---

**PLURALITY**

**APPALACHIAN ENGLISH**

There wasn’t a church within twenty mile of us.
The bear weighed four hundred pound.
He cut it into four quarter.
A few year after I moved here,
The bear has two cubs.

**STANDARD ENGLISH**

There wasn’t a church within twenty miles of us.
The bear weighed four hundred pounds.
He cut it into four quarters.
A few years after I moved here,
The bear has two cubs.

**THE PATTERN**

The lesson-ready code-switching chart
In sum, here's the process you'll follow to build your code-switching chart, after you have collected examples of a pattern from your students' writing:

1. Create a chart structure, labeling the topic of the chart and creating two columns.

2. Adapt sentences as necessary, correcting spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, and shorten sentences to fit on one line. Return any other vernacular patterns to Standard English. Write four to six selected sentences under the left-hand column.

3. Translate each sentence in the left-hand column to Standard English.

4. Underline the relevant grammar pattern for both sets of sentences.

5. Write The Pattern under each column.

Following the Code-Switching Lessons model to teach your patterns

Once you have your code-switching chart, it's time to lead student discovery. The eleven code-switching units in this resource will provide ample examples and opportunity for practice. Take a look, too, at the lesson walk-through in the preceding section. Can you imagine substituting the Appalachian English code-switching chart for the one you see there? How would you describe the plural pattern you see in the Appalachian examples? How would you describe the pattern in the Standard English samples? Once you have a code-switching chart, the rest of the teaching approach falls right into place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPALACHIAN ENGLISH</td>
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<tr>
<td>A few year after I moved here,...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bear has two cub.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE PATTERN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number words + measure noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other nouns + s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Welcome to the Code-Switching Journey

Now, with a well-stocked rucksack for both you and your students, you’re ready for your code-switching journey. When our students write as they speak, they’re not making mistakes inside Standard English; instead, our kids are following the rules of a different language variety. Whether it’s the dialect of the Appalachians or of the towns of Pennsylvania, whether it’s the variety spoken in New York’s boroughs, or on the streets of DC and Detroit, whether our students speak an International English or arrive in our classes as English Language Learners, patterns from their first dialect or language may transfer into their school-time writing. On the code-switching journey, we move beyond seeing students as a glass half full or half empty. Indeed, our kids are linguistically full to overflowing.

When you move from “error” to pattern, when you move from correction to contrast, your classroom transforms. As you lay down the red pen and learn linguistic insights and strategies to build on students’ existing knowledge to add new knowledge – Standard English – your horizons will open. Students light up, returning to the educational enterprise. You join with students to choose the language to fit the setting. Through Code-Switching Lessons, you’ll feel supported and freed to engage with the whole student as a thinker and collaborator in the writerly craft.

Welcome! Enjoy the code-switching journey!