

The Phenomenon of Code-Mixing in College Students' Instagram Captions: An Analysis of Identity and Digital Language Style

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine code-mixing in Mandailing Natal Instagram captions written by college students, with a focus on identity construction and digital language style. Thirty Instagram captions were gathered between January and March of 2025 for this study, which uses a descriptive qualitative methodology. Documentation was used to gather data, and Muysken's (2000) theory of code-mixing—which incorporates insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization—was used for analysis. The results indicate that students employ three different forms of code-mixing, with insertion being the most common. Code-mixing is used to express identity and digital language style, as well as to serve as a communication tool. It suggests that students promote themselves as contemporary, expressive, and internationally connected people by using multiple languages. According to the study's findings, code-mixing is a significant component of students' social media digital communication practices. It illustrates how a multilingual environment shapes linguistic identity in the digital age.

Keywords: code-mixing, Instagram, college students, identity, sociolinguistics

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis fenomena code-mixing dalam caption Instagram mahasiswa di Mandailing Natal, khususnya dalam kaitannya dengan identitas dan gaya bahasa digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan sumber data berupa 30 caption Instagram yang dikumpulkan pada periode Januari hingga Maret 2025. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui dokumentasi, sedangkan analisis data menggunakan teori code-mixing dari Muysken (2000) yang meliputi insertion, alternation, dan congruent lexicalization. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat tiga jenis code-mixing yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa, dengan insertion sebagai bentuk yang paling dominan. Penggunaan code-mixing tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga

sebagai sarana ekspresi identitas dan gaya bahasa digital. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menggunakan bahasa campuran untuk menampilkan diri sebagai individu yang modern, ekspresif, dan terhubung dengan budaya global. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa code-mixing merupakan bagian penting dari praktik komunikasi digital mahasiswa di media sosial serta mencerminkan pengaruh lingkungan multilingual dalam pembentukan identitas linguistik di era digital.

Kata kunci: *code-mixing, Instagram, mahasiswa, identitas, sociolinguistik*

A. Introduction

These days, communication has altered dramatically due to advances in digital technology, especially among college students. Instagram is a social media site where users can express their thoughts, emotions, and sense of self, as well as share videos and images. One of Instagram's numerous features is the caption tool, which allows users to add brief text to their images to describe or enhance them. Many users frequently combine two languages, especially English and Indonesian, while writing captions rather than sticking to just one.

The use of components from several languages in a single speech is a phenomenon known as "code-mixing" (Muysken, 2000). Code-mixing is a common practice among bilingual or multilingual speakers and is widely observed in casual communication, including digital exchanges on social media, according to sociolinguistic studies. Due to the influence of educational background, media exposure, and English's status as a global language, English features are frequently used in Indonesian sentences. According to Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015), social interaction and cultural environment have a significant impact on language use in multilingual communities. Social media platforms make this engagement more lively in digital communication.

Code-mixing serves as both a stylistic device and a means of communication on Instagram. To make their posts appear more engaging, contemporary, and expressive, many users include English terms or phrases in their captions. This illustrates the tight relationship between

identity construction and language choice on social media. Code-mixing allows users to express their social background, personality, and even educational attainment in the digital realm. Additionally, through language use and digital expression, social media sites like Instagram significantly influence young people's identities (Sari & Putri, 2021).

Code-mixing on social media has been the subject of numerous prior studies, especially regarding its types and functions. For instance, studies reveal that college students frequently use code-mixing in Instagram posts to express their identities and improve their communication styles (Prasetyo & Wulandari, 2020). Few studies have examined this phenomenon in the context of particular regions, and most still focus on generic contexts or urban areas. In actuality, local languages, cultures, and social contexts can influence sociolinguistic behaviors.

Mandailing Natal is a multilingual area of North Sumatra where English, Indonesian, and the native tongue are spoken side by side. The younger generation's everyday language use, even in the digital realm, is influenced by this circumstance. However, there remains a dearth of studies that precisely examine code-mixing in Instagram posts in the Mandailing Natal sociolinguistic environment.

In light of these conditions, the purpose of this study is to examine code-mixing in Mandailing Natal students' Instagram posts. The study focuses on identifying the many forms of code-mixing and how identity and digital language style are reflected in this language use.

Consequently, the following formulation of the research problems is used in this study:

1. What kinds of code-mixing are employed in Mandailing Natal students' Instagram captions?
2. In what ways does code-mixing represent digital language style and identity in Mandailing Natal?
3. What elements affect Instagram captions' use of code-mixing in Mandailing Natal?

B. Research Method

This study uses a descriptive design and a qualitative methodology. This strategy was used because the study's goal is to understand code-mixing in students' Instagram captions and to decipher their meanings, especially in relation to identity and digital language patterns. Instagram posts produced by Mandailing Natal students served as the study's data source. The caption text in the data includes instances of code-mixing between English and Indonesian. Purposive sampling was used to select the research subjects, who were students who often write captions for their Instagram posts.

30 Instagram captions collected between January and March of 2025 constitute the data evaluated in this study. The data were selected according to specific criteria: captions that included code-mixing and were pertinent to the study's goals. The documentation approach was used to obtain data. After examining students' Instagram accounts, the researcher extracted and recorded captions that satisfied the study's requirements. The data analysis method employed in this work is based on Muysken's (2000) theory of code-mixing, which divides it into three categories:

congruent lexicalization, alternation, and insertion. Finding instances of code-mixing in the captions and categorizing them by nature constituted the analysis. To understand the purposes of code-mixing and its relationship to students' digital identities and language styles, the data were analyzed. The analysis's findings were then displayed as data examples and descriptions.

This study used theoretical triangulation, comparing the analytic results with pertinent theories in sociolinguistic studies to ensure the validity of the data. To guarantee the quality and consistency of the analysis outcomes, the researcher also reexamined the classified data.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Research Findings

An examination of 30 Instagram captions written by Mandailing Natal students revealed that code-mixing is a common practice in online communication. Based on Muysken's (2000) theory, this study distinguished three categories of code mixing: congruent lexicalization, alternation, and insertion. In the examined data, these three categories showed up at different frequencies.

With 18 cases, insertion was the most common kind, according to the study's findings. In the meantime, there were four occurrences of congruent lexicalization and eight instances of alternation. This variation in frequency suggests that students incorporate English parts into Indonesian sentences more frequently than they do other forms.

An English word or phrase is inserted into an Indonesian sentence in this kind of insertion. "Hari ini lagi capek banget, but I still have to finish my assignment" is one example from the data.

This example demonstrates how the English element is added without altering the phrase's primary structure.

A change in language within a sentence or between sentences is another characteristic of alternation. "I do not know what to do" is one example. Perhaps I need to get some sleep. Congruent lexicalization, on the other hand, happens when two languages are combined inside a single structure, as in the example "Healing with my bestie at a place that's so aesthetic."

2. Discussion

The study's findings show that code-mixing in Instagram captions serves to express individuality and digital linguistic style, as well as to communicate. Students frequently utilize English to stay up to date with social media trends and to project a contemporary, informal image. This implies that language has a big impact on how people perceive themselves online.

The prevalence of insertion-type code-mixing suggests that students continue to use Indonesian as their primary language while enhancing their expression with English features. According to other studies, code-mixing on social media is frequently employed to show users' communication preferences and social identities (Prasetyo & Wulandari, 2020). Therefore, code-mixing is used in social and cultural contexts as well as linguistic ones. Additionally, through language use and digital expression, social media sites like Instagram significantly influence young people's identities (Sari & Putri, 2021).

Furthermore, the use of code-mixing reflects the students' social identity as part of a younger generation active in the digital world. By mixing Indonesian and English, they demonstrate their bilingual proficiency

and their connection to global culture. This phenomenon indicates that language on social media serves as a tool for both self-expression and social identity. In addition, social media platforms such as Instagram play an important role in shaping youth identity through language use and digital expression (Sari & Putri, 2021).

This phenomenon is especially intriguing in the Mandailing Natal context, as pupils are in a multilingual setting that includes English, Indonesian, and the local language. This suggests that English and Indonesian are more often used in digital communication on Instagram, even though the local language is not commonly used in captions.

The use of code-mixing in captions is influenced by several factors, including language habits, social media influence, and the desire to follow trends and appear more expressive. Educational variables also influence college students' increased use of English. In general, code-mixing plays a significant role in how college students use digital language to define their identities on social media. Additionally, the desire for expressive communication on online platforms and technological advancements affect the use of code mixing (Wijaya, 2020).

In general, students' digital language style plays a significant role in forming their identities on social media through code-mixing. This suggests that in the social media age, code-mixing has become an essential component of students' digital communication habits, inextricably linked to both global culture and technological progress. This is also in line with the idea that using mixed language on social media functions as a social identification strategy in the digital realm in

addition to being a communication tool (Holmes, 2013).

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

1. Conclusion

It is clear from the study's findings and analysis that code-mixing is a frequent occurrence in Mandailing Natal students' Instagram captions. According to Muysken's (2000) theory, the research reveals that the students employ three different forms of code-mixing: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. The most common of these forms in Instagram captions is insertion, which is followed by congruent lexicalization and alternation. This shows that students frequently use English words or phrases to improve expressiveness and style while keeping Indonesian as the primary language structure.

Furthermore, code-mixing in Instagram captions is used not only for communication but also to reflect students' identities and digital language styles. The use of mixed languages suggests that students seek to present themselves as modern, expressive, and globally connected individuals on social media. In addition, code-mixing in Mandailing Natal reflects the influence of multilingual environments, in which Indonesian and English are more dominant in digital communication than local languages. Overall, code-mixing plays an important role in shaping students' linguistic identity in the digital era. This finding is in line with previous research, which highlights that code-mixing is part of modern digital linguistic behavior among young speakers (Putri, 2023).

2. Suggestion

Several recommendations are made in light of the study's findings. Students should use language more judiciously on social media, striking a balance between Indonesian and English, particularly in academic settings. This is crucial to

maintaining clarity and quality of communication while permitting artistic expression on digital media.

Future researchers are advised to conduct additional research on code mixing by comparing other regions or by enlisting more individuals. To gather information that is more comprehensive and a wider range of viewpoints on the use of digital language, future studies may also examine other social media platforms such as Twitter or TikTok.

Educational institutions should teach students about language use in internet communication. This can help students understand how code mixing affects language development and identity formation in social and academic settings. To support students' linguistic competence, it is crucial to provide instruction on appropriate language use in digital media.

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