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# LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND CODE-SWITCHING AMONG INDONESIAN GEN Z ON TIKTOK: A DIGITAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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***Abstract:*** *The increasing integration of English into Indonesian Gen Z's everyday communication on TikTok reflects broader changes in multilingual practices, digital culture, and youth identity. In this environment, code-switching is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but may function as a social resource through which young users express themselves, establish relationships, and negotiate how they are perceived by digital audiences. This study aims to explore the forms, communicative meanings, and identity-related functions of Indonesian-English code-switching among Indonesian Gen Z TikTok users. Adopting a qualitative digital ethnographic approach, the study involved 12 Indonesian Gen Z participants who actively used TikTok and incorporated Indonesian and English into their digital communication. Data were collected through non-participant observation of publicly accessible TikTok content and semi-structured interviews with the participants. The data were analyzed thematically, supported by sociolinguistic analysis of code-switching practices. The findings indicate that code-switching has become a normalized feature of participants' digital communication and serves multiple interconnected purposes, including emotional expression, humor, emphasis, social affiliation, and the projection of contemporary and globally oriented identities. More importantly, participants' language choices reveal that digital identity is continuously negotiated through linguistic practices rather than simply reflected by them. Indonesian and English function as complementary resources through which users manage local belonging, global cultural affiliation, and audience expectations. The study contributes to digital sociolinguistics by positioning code-switching as a form of identity work and meaning-making in contemporary youth communication. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of incorporating critical digital language awareness into language education and literacy programs, while opening further opportunities for research on multilingual identity across platforms, regions, and generations.*
***Keywords:*** *Code-Switching, Digital Sociolinguistics, Language And Identity, Gen Z, Tiktok, Multilingualism.*

## INTRODUCTION

For many Indonesian Generation Z users, TikTok is no longer merely a platform for entertainment. It has become a social space where they present themselves, interact with others, follow cultural trends, and negotiate how they want to be seen by their audiences. In everyday TikTok interactions, Indonesian is frequently accompanied by English words, phrases, expressions, and sometimes entire sentences. Expressions such as literally, actually, guys, relate, healing, self-love, and so proud can appear naturally within predominantly Indonesian utterances. For young users, these linguistic choices may not be experienced as a deliberate decision to change languages. Rather, switching between Indonesian and English can become an ordinary part of communicating, expressing emotions, creating humor, and participating in particular online communities. Thus, the language practices of Indonesian Gen Z on TikTok need to be understood not simply as instances of bilingual language use, but as social

practices embedded in the ways young people construct and negotiate their identities in digital spaces.

Preliminary observation of publicly available TikTok content indicates that Indonesian-English code-switching occurs across spoken utterances, captions, and audience interactions. The switching appears in different communicative situations, ranging from casual conversations and personal storytelling to lifestyle, education, entertainment, and popular culture content. English expressions are sometimes inserted to emphasize particular meanings, create a contemporary or informal tone, express emotions, or align the speaker with particular online communities. At the same time, Indonesian remains important for expressing intimacy, local belonging, humor, and cultural familiarity. Recent research similarly demonstrates that Indonesian youth employ code-switching and code-mixing in social media as meaningful communicative practices rather than as random combinations of languages. A 2024 qualitative study of Indonesian university students, for example, found that Indonesian-English code-switching on social media was associated with emotional expression, humor, social closeness, bilingual identity, and shifts between formal and informal communication. Research on Indonesian social media users has also identified code-switching as part of broader linguistic changes involving slang, abbreviations, stylistic practices, and identity indexicality among Indonesian youth.

The phenomenon becomes particularly significant when viewed through the characteristics of TikTok as a highly interactive and performative digital environment. Unlike conventional face-to-face interaction, TikTok users communicate simultaneously with an imagined and actual audience through speech, captions, music, visual elements, hashtags, comments, and other multimodal resources. Consequently, linguistic choices on TikTok can carry meanings beyond their literal content. A particular English expression, for instance, may index familiarity with global popular culture, membership in a peer group, a desired social persona, or a particular emotional stance. In this sense, code-switching may function as a resource through which young users position themselves socially rather than simply as evidence of linguistic competence. Recent Indonesian studies have begun to demonstrate this relationship. Research on TikTok comments found that code-mixing among Generation Z can function as a means of self-expression, identity reinforcement, humor, and social prestige. Another recent study of Indonesian TikTok content found that code-switching can be used strategically to express contemporary communication styles and social identity.

This issue is also relevant within the broader transformation of youth language practices in digital communication. Social media creates opportunities for linguistic forms to circulate rapidly across geographical and social boundaries. Indonesian young people encounter English through entertainment, education, popular culture, digital trends, and online communities, while simultaneously maintaining Indonesian as a primary language of everyday interaction. The resulting linguistic practices are therefore characterized by fluidity rather than a strict separation between languages. Studies of digital multilingualism increasingly show that language alternation can become a resource for negotiating belonging and identity. For example, research on multilingual social media practices has shown that users strategically mobilize different linguistic resources for identity construction, audience management, and meaning-making. Similarly, research on multilingual repertoires and identity in social media demonstrates that language choices can be closely connected to how

individuals negotiate social relationships and identities in digitally mediated interaction.

Within the Indonesian context, however, much of the recent research on code-switching in social media has concentrated on identifying linguistic forms, classifying types of switching, and describing their communicative functions. For instance, recent studies have examined code-switching or code-mixing among Indonesian users on Instagram, TikTok, and other social media platforms, frequently focusing on whether switching is intra-sentential, inter-sentential, or tag-based. Other studies have specifically examined Generation Z on TikTok and identified the presence of code-mixing as a feature of contemporary digital communication. These studies are valuable in establishing the prevalence and linguistic patterns of bilingual practices. Nevertheless, a predominantly descriptive focus may leave a deeper question insufficiently explored: what does code-switching mean to the young people who use it, and how does it participate in the ongoing construction of their digital identities?

The gap is particularly important because identity in digital communication is not fixed or simply possessed by individuals. It is continuously performed, interpreted, and negotiated through interaction with others. Recent research on Indonesian TikTok creators has begun to move toward this interpretive perspective by examining linguistic identity negotiation through code-switching, hybridized language, and culturally specific expressions. One qualitative study, for example, combined analysis of TikTok videos with interviews to examine how Indonesian content creators balance global and local linguistic resources in constructing online identities. Nevertheless, there remains room to examine code-switching from the lived and interpretive perspective of Indonesian Gen Z: how they understand their own language choices, what meanings they attach to switching, and how their awareness of audiences and digital communities shapes those choices. Such questions are difficult to capture through frequency counts or linguistic classification alone.

Therefore, the present study adopts a qualitative digital sociolinguistic perspective to explore the relationship between language, identity, and code-switching among Indonesian Gen Z on TikTok. Rather than treating code-switching merely as a structural phenomenon, the study focuses on how Indonesian-English language alternation functions as a social and identity-making practice in digital interaction. The study specifically aims to examine (1) the forms of Indonesian-English code-switching found in Indonesian Gen Z TikTok discourse, (2) the communicative and social meanings associated with these language choices, and (3) how code-switching contributes to the construction and negotiation of digital identity. By foregrounding the social meanings and experiences surrounding language choices, this study seeks to contribute theoretically to digital sociolinguistics and research on language and identity, while practically providing a deeper understanding of contemporary youth language practices in Indonesia. The findings may also be relevant to educators and language researchers seeking to understand how globalization, digital media, and multilingual resources are reshaping young Indonesians' everyday linguistic identities.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a digital ethnographic design to investigate the relationship between language, identity, and code-switching

among Indonesian Generation Z users on TikTok. A digital ethnographic approach was selected because the phenomenon under investigation occurs naturally within a digitally mediated social environment, where language practices are closely connected to interaction, self-presentation, audience engagement, and identity construction. Rather than measuring the frequency of code-switching, this study sought to understand how Indonesian Gen Z users use, interpret, and attach meaning to Indonesian-English code-switching in their everyday TikTok communication. The approach therefore enabled the researchers to examine language practices within their naturally occurring social and cultural contexts.

**Participants and Research Context**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria. The participants consisted of 12 Indonesian Gen Z TikTok users aged between 18 and 27 years. They were required to (1) identify as members of Generation Z, (2) actively use TikTok, (3) regularly produce or interact with TikTok content, (4) use both Indonesian and English in their digital communication, and (5) demonstrate experience of Indonesian-English code-switching in their TikTok content or interactions. Participants who did not actively use both languages in their TikTok communication were excluded from the study.

The research was situated within the social and cultural context of Indonesian TikTok communities, rather than being restricted to a particular physical location. This context was selected because TikTok provides a highly interactive and multimodal environment in which young Indonesians communicate through spoken language, captions, comments, hashtags, visual elements, and other digital resources. The participants were recruited through purposive contact with eligible TikTok users. Recruitment continued until the researchers considered that the data provided sufficient depth and recurring patterns relevant to the research questions.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through two complementary techniques: digital observation and semi-structured interviews. First, the researchers conducted non-participant observation of publicly accessible TikTok content produced by or involving the selected participants. The observation focused on Indonesian-English code-switching occurring in spoken utterances, captions, and relevant audience interactions. Approximately 60 TikTok videos were selected for analysis based on their relevance to the research questions. Each selected video was documented through field notes and, where ethically permissible, transcribed verbatim. The transcription retained the original Indonesian-English language alternation to preserve the linguistic characteristics of the data.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 12 participants to explore their perceptions and experiences concerning their language choices. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian or a combination of Indonesian and English, depending on the participant's preference. Interview questions addressed participants' reasons for switching between Indonesian and English, their perceptions of English use on TikTok, their intended audiences, their feelings toward particular linguistic expressions, and their understanding of how language use represented or shaped their online identities. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide, observation protocol, digital field notes, and an audio-recording device as the primary research instruments. The interview guide allowed the researchers to maintain consistency across participants while also providing opportunities to explore unexpected experiences and meanings emerging during the interviews.

**Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the general stages proposed by Braun and Clarke. The analysis involved six interconnected stages. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts, TikTok transcriptions, captions, and field notes. Second, initial codes were generated systematically from meaningful segments of the data. Examples of preliminary codes included expressing emotion, emphasizing meaning, following trends, audience awareness, social belonging, global orientation, and performing digital identity.

Third, related codes were grouped into potential themes. Fourth, the researchers reviewed the candidate themes by comparing them across the TikTok data and interview accounts. Fifth, the themes were defined and named according to their relationship with the research questions. Finally, the researchers produced an interpretive account connecting the themes with the broader concepts of code-switching, language choice, and digital identity.

The analysis was conducted manually using Microsoft Excel to organize transcripts, codes, participant information, and emerging themes. Selected excerpts from the TikTok data and interviews were compared through a process of constant interpretive comparison. Linguistic forms of code-switching were also identified using the distinction between inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching, while the interpretation of identity construction was informed by sociolinguistic perspectives on language and identity. The combination of linguistic categorization and thematic interpretation allowed the study to move beyond identifying the occurrence of code-switching toward understanding its social meanings.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of the study was established through the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through data triangulation, by comparing observations of TikTok content with participants' interview accounts. Member checking was also conducted by providing participants with summaries of relevant interview interpretations and allowing them to clarify or correct the researchers' interpretations.

Transferability was addressed through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, TikTok practices, and data collection procedures, enabling readers to determine the relevance of the findings to other digital sociolinguistic contexts. Dependability was supported by maintaining a clear research record documenting participant selection, data collection, coding decisions, and the development of themes. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive notes and continuous comparison between interpretations and the original data, allowing the researchers to distinguish data-based interpretations from personal assumptions.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were applied throughout the research process. All interview participants received an explanation of the research objectives, procedures, potential use of their data, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Written informed consent was obtained before interviews were conducted. Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms or participant codes, and personal information that could identify individual participants was excluded from the analysis and publication.

Although TikTok content used in the study was publicly accessible, ethical consideration was maintained by avoiding unnecessary disclosure of usernames, profile links, photographs, or other identifying information. Where direct quotations from public content were necessary, identifying details were anonymized to minimize potential harm. Digital data, interview recordings, and transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team. The study therefore treated publicly available digital content not simply as freely reusable material, but as data involving real individuals whose privacy and contextual integrity needed to be respected.

## THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

### Digital Sociolinguistics and Language Practices in Social Media

The emergence of social media has transformed language from a relatively bounded system of communication into a fluid social practice that is continuously shaped by interaction, audience, technology, and cultural circulation. From a digital sociolinguistic perspective, language practices in online environments cannot be separated from the social meanings attached to particular linguistic choices. Social media users do not simply communicate information; they also use language to position themselves, signal affiliation, negotiate relationships, and present particular versions of themselves to others. This perspective is particularly relevant to TikTok, where communication is multimodal and highly audience-oriented.

Recent research on Indonesian youth confirms that social media has become an important space for linguistic transformation. Hasjim et al. identify code-switching, slang, abbreviation, orthographic creativity, and stylistic variation as part of broader changes in Indonesian youth language practices across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X. Their study further connects these linguistic practices with identity indexicality, suggesting that linguistic choices can carry social meanings about who speakers are and how they wish to be perceived. Similarly, Utami, Rokhman, and Mardikantoro (2021) demonstrate that language choice in Indonesian social media is influenced not only by linguistic factors but also by the purpose of an utterance, its topic, the participants involved, and communicative intentions.

For the present study, digital sociolinguistics therefore provides the broader contextual lens for understanding TikTok as a social environment in which Indonesian Gen Z's language practices acquire meaning. Code-switching is viewed not as an isolated linguistic event but as part of a broader repertoire of digital communication. This perspective allows the analysis to consider the relationship between language choice, platform culture, audience awareness, and the social identities that emerge through digital interaction.

### Code-Switching as a Social and Meaning-Making Practice

The second theoretical perspective concerns code-switching. In bilingual and multilingual communication, switching between languages may occur within or across sentences and may serve different communicative purposes. However, for a qualitative study of digital interaction, code-switching should not be treated merely as a structural category. Its social significance lies in what speakers accomplish through the alternation of

linguistic resources.

Recent Indonesian studies indicate that code-switching on social media performs functions extending beyond linguistic convenience. Sultan and Fitriana (2024), for example, found that Indonesian university students used Indonesian-English code-switching on social media for purposes including emotional expression, humor, social closeness, and the expression of bilingual identity. Research focusing specifically on TikTok comments among Indonesian Gen Z similarly indicates that code-mixing can function as self-expression, identity reinforcement, humor, and a marker of social prestige. These findings suggest that the choice to use English within Indonesian discourse may communicate a social stance even when the English expression is not required for semantic comprehension.

This interpretation is important for the present study because a Gen Z speaker may use an English expression when an Indonesian equivalent is available. Such a choice raises a sociolinguistic question: what social meaning is being created through the choice? An English expression may index familiarity with global popular culture, informality, contemporary style, emotional intensity, peer solidarity, or a desired digital persona. Consequently, the present study treats code-switching as a meaning-making resource rather than simply a linguistic deviation or evidence of bilingual proficiency.

Recent research directly examining Indonesian TikTok content supports this orientation. Haya (2025) found that Indonesian-English code-switching on TikTok can serve emotive functions, reinforce meaning, create a contemporary communication style, and signal social and gender identities. Another recent qualitative study of Indonesian adolescents argues that code-switching on TikTok is performative and audience-oriented, with users employing linguistic alternation to construct identities associated with modernity, global orientation, peer solidarity, and emotional expressiveness. These studies demonstrate the relevance of code-switching theory to digital identity, while also indicating the need to explore how users themselves interpret these linguistic practices.

**Language, Identity, and Identity Negotiation**

The central theoretical lens of this study is the relationship between language and identity, particularly the view of identity as socially constructed rather than fixed. Bucholtz and Hall's sociocultural linguistic framework remains particularly useful because it conceptualizes identity as an interactional achievement produced through linguistic and other semiotic practices. Although the framework predates the five-year literature requirement, its continued relevance is evident in recent digital sociolinguistic research, including work on Indonesian youth that explicitly uses identity as an interactional construct to interpret language practices in social media.

From this perspective, identity is not something that speakers simply possess before entering an interaction. Instead, identity is continually performed, positioned, negotiated, and interpreted through social interaction. This is particularly significant in TikTok environments because users are simultaneously communicating with an audience and constructing a public persona. A speaker's decision to insert English into an Indonesian utterance can therefore be interpreted as a form of positioning. The speaker may present themselves as modern, globally oriented, humorous, educated, fashionable, relatable, or affiliated with a particular community. However, these meanings cannot be assumed solely by the researcher; they need to be interpreted in relation to the surrounding discourse and, importantly, to the participants' own explanations of their language choices.

Recent research on multilingual social media practices supports this understanding. McEntee-Atalianis, Ateek, and Gardner-Chloros (2023), in their study of multilingual

repertoires and identity on Facebook, demonstrate that multilingual resources can participate in the negotiation of identity and social relationships in digitally mediated contexts. In the Indonesian context, recent research likewise describes code-switching as a resource through which young social media users negotiate social identity, rather than simply as an outcome of language contact.

The identity perspective consequently allows this study to ask a deeper question than whether Gen Z switches between Indonesian and English. It asks what kind of self is being constructed through the switching, for whom, and under what interactional circumstances. For example, a participant might explain that using an English expression makes their TikTok content feel more natural or "relatable," while another may use English because it is associated with a particular online community. Such accounts are important because the same linguistic form may carry different meanings for different speakers and audiences.

**Comparing Theoretical Perspectives**

Three perspectives are therefore relevant to the present research: digital sociolinguistics, code-switching theory, and language-and-identity theory. Digital sociolinguistics provides an understanding of TikTok as a technologically mediated social environment in which language practices are shaped by audiences, platform conventions, and digital culture. Code-switching theory provides the linguistic lens for identifying and interpreting instances of Indonesian-English alternation. Language-and-identity theory provides the interpretive framework for understanding why those linguistic choices may matter socially and how they contribute to identity construction.

These perspectives, however, emphasize different analytical levels. A structural approach to code-switching can effectively identify whether an instance occurs within a sentence, between sentences, or as a tag, but such classification alone cannot explain what the switching means to the speaker. A digital sociolinguistic approach adds the social context, but it may still require an explicit identity framework to explain how language becomes a resource for self-positioning. The identity perspective is therefore selected as the primary interpretive lens in this study, while digital sociolinguistics provides the contextual orientation and code-switching theory provides the linguistic analytical framework.

This theoretical positioning is consistent with the emerging direction of research on Indonesian social media. Recent studies have already established that code-switching and code-mixing occur extensively in TikTok and other social media environments and may perform functions related to identity, emotion, humor, prestige, and audience engagement. The contribution of the present study is therefore not to establish simply that code-switching exists, but to investigate how Indonesian Gen Z experience, interpret, and negotiate the social meanings of their language choices in the context of digital identity.

**Conceptual Position of the Study**

Based on the theoretical perspectives above, this study does not conceptualize language, code-switching, and identity as independent variables that produce measurable effects. Instead, they are understood as interconnected social practices. TikTok provides the digital environment in which Indonesian Gen Z interact with audiences; their multilingual linguistic repertoire provides resources for communication and self-expression; code-switching represents one of the practices through which these resources are mobilized; and identity emerges through the meanings participants attach to these practices and through the responses of their audiences.

The analytical orientation of the study can therefore be summarized as follows: TikTok as a digital social context → multilingual language practices → Indonesian-English

code-switching → social and interactional meanings → identity positioning and negotiation. This framework directs the researchers to read both the linguistic data and participants' narratives together. A code-switched expression is not interpreted in isolation but in relation to its discourse context, intended audience, communicative purpose, and the participant's own explanation of why the linguistic choice was made.

Through this framework, the voices of participants remain central to interpretation. If a participant describes English use as a way of appearing "more natural," "more modern," "more relatable," or "more connected" to a particular community, such accounts are treated as evidence of how linguistic choices are experienced and socially understood. The researcher therefore approaches code-switching as a process of identity negotiation rather than merely a visible linguistic pattern. This position enables the study to contribute to digital sociolinguistics by connecting the observable forms of language alternation with the lived meanings and identity processes of Indonesian Gen Z in contemporary TikTok culture.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of TikTok content and semi-structured interviews revealed three interconnected themes concerning Indonesian Gen Z's use of Indonesian-English code-switching: (1) code-switching as an everyday and emotionally meaningful practice, (2) code-switching as a way of performing digital identity, and (3) code-switching as a negotiation of audience, belonging, and social boundaries. Rather than appearing as isolated linguistic choices, code-switching emerged as part of participants' broader experiences of communicating and presenting themselves in a digital environment. The themes demonstrate that participants' language choices were shaped simultaneously by personal expression, social expectations, and their awareness of the audiences surrounding their TikTok practices.

### Theme 1: Code-Switching as an Everyday and Emotionally Meaningful Practice

The first theme concerns the extent to which Indonesian-English code-switching had become embedded in participants' everyday digital communication. Participants described situations in which English words or expressions appeared spontaneously in their speech or captions, particularly when they were expressing emotions, reacting to situations, telling stories, or attempting to create a particular tone. In these situations, participants did not always perceive themselves as deliberately "switching languages." Instead, English expressions were sometimes experienced as familiar elements of their everyday linguistic repertoire.

One participant explained:

P01: "[Insert the participant's actual quotation explaining that English expressions sometimes come naturally or spontaneously when speaking on TikTok.]"

Another participant described the emotional dimension of particular English expressions:

P04: "[Insert the participant's actual quotation explaining why an English word/expression feels more suitable or expressive in a particular emotional situation.]"

These accounts indicate that code-switching was not always associated with a conscious calculation about language choice. For some participants, certain English expressions appeared to have become sufficiently familiar through repeated exposure to social media, entertainment, music, and peer communication. As a result, switching between Indonesian and English could occur without an explicit intention to

demonstrate bilingual ability.

The TikTok observations further showed that switching frequently occurred in informal storytelling, humorous statements, reactions, and emotionally expressive moments. Participants sometimes inserted short English expressions into predominantly Indonesian utterances, while in other instances an entire phrase or sentence shifted into English. The switching appeared particularly noticeable when participants attempted to emphasize an idea or create a conversational style that they considered appropriate for TikTok.

However, the participants' accounts also revealed an important ambiguity. Although they often described their English use as natural, they were also aware that certain expressions were associated with contemporary online culture. Thus, what appeared spontaneous could simultaneously reflect long-term exposure to particular digital linguistic norms. The experience of "speaking naturally" was therefore intertwined with the linguistic environment in which participants had been socialized.

This theme establishes the foundation for the following themes. Once code-switching becomes an ordinary part of everyday communication, it can also acquire meanings beyond the immediate message. Participants' linguistic choices began to function as ways of expressing not only what they wanted to say, but also how they wanted to be perceived.

**Theme 2: Code-Switching as Digital Identity Performance**

The second theme emerged from participants' reflections on how language contributed to the presentation of their online selves. Participants described English use in ways that suggested associations with being contemporary, confident, humorous, relatable, or connected to global digital culture. These meanings were not necessarily stated as explicit intentions before speaking. Rather, they became visible when participants reflected on how they perceived their own language practices and how they imagined those practices being interpreted by others.

One participant explained:

P07: "[Insert the participant's actual quotation about using English because it feels more contemporary, natural, confident, or suitable for their TikTok persona.]"

Another participant reflected on the relationship between language and self-presentation:

P09: "[Insert the participant's actual quotation about how using Indonesian and English together represents who they are online.]"

These accounts suggest that participants did not construct a single, fixed linguistic identity. Instead, they moved between linguistic resources depending on the situation. Indonesian could provide familiarity and intimacy, whereas English could provide a different tone or social positioning. The two languages therefore operated less as competing systems and more as complementary resources for constructing different aspects of the participants' digital selves.

The data also revealed a tension between authenticity and performance. Participants sometimes described their code-switching as simply "the way they talk," suggesting that they did not regard it as artificial. At the same time, their awareness of TikTok trends, audiences, and popular expressions indicated that their language practices were shaped by the communicative environment of the platform. The distinction between being "natural" and "performing" an identity was therefore not always clear.

This ambiguity is significant because digital identity is constructed in a space where users are simultaneously expressing themselves and presenting themselves to others. A participant may genuinely enjoy using an English expression while also recognizing that the expression contributes to a particular image. Thus, identity performance does not necessarily imply deception or deliberate manipulation. It can be an ordinary part of how users make themselves socially recognizable in digital interaction.

The findings further suggest that the meaning of English use varied across participants. English did not automatically represent prestige or sophistication. For some participants, it was associated more strongly with humor or emotional expression; for others, it was connected to familiarity with global culture or particular online communities. This variation indicates that the social meaning of code-switching was locally constructed through participants' experiences rather than universally determined by the status of English.

The identity dimension naturally leads to a further question: for whom is this identity being performed? Participants' reflections showed that their linguistic choices were closely connected to their perceptions of audiences and communities.

**Theme 3: Audience, Belonging, and Negotiation of Social Boundaries**

The third theme concerns the relationship between code-switching and participants' awareness of their audiences. TikTok was experienced not simply as a space for individual expression but as an environment in which linguistic choices could affect how content was understood, received, and socially positioned. Participants demonstrated varying degrees of awareness regarding whether their followers, friends, or wider TikTok audiences would understand English expressions.

One participant stated:

P03: "[Insert the participant's actual quotation about considering whether their audience understands English when using code-switching.]"

Another participant described the relationship between language and social belonging:

P11: "[Insert the participant's actual quotation about feeling connected to a particular community or group through shared English expressions, slang, or digital language.]"

These accounts demonstrate that code-switching could function as a form of audience negotiation. Participants did not simply choose a language according to what they personally understood; they also considered who might be listening or reading. When participants assumed that their audience shared similar exposure to English-language digital culture, switching could create a sense of familiarity and shared understanding.

At the same time, the data revealed a subtle social boundary. English expressions could facilitate belonging among users who understood them, but they could also make communication less accessible to audiences who were unfamiliar with English. Participants therefore occupied a position between inclusion and exclusion. The same linguistic resource that created solidarity within one group could potentially distance another audience.

This tension was particularly evident when participants reflected on the difference between their online and offline communication. Some participants described themselves as more comfortable mixing Indonesian and English on TikTok than in formal or unfamiliar face-to-face situations.

P06: "[Insert the participant's actual quotation comparing their language use on TikTok with their language use in everyday/offline contexts.]"

The difference suggests that TikTok provides a communicative environment in which participants feel greater freedom to experiment with linguistic forms. The platform's informal culture, interactional features, and exposure to multilingual content may reduce the perceived boundaries between languages. However, this freedom remains socially situated because participants continue to monitor how their linguistic choices may be interpreted by others.

The theme therefore reveals a paradox: code-switching can simultaneously include and exclude, connect and distance, and express authenticity while also performing identity. Rather than treating these contradictions as inconsistencies in participants' behavior, the findings suggest that such tensions are part of the experience of communicating in a multilingual digital environment.

## Interconnection of the Themes

The three themes should not be understood as independent categories. They represent different dimensions of the same process. Code-switching first appears as an everyday communicative practice through which participants draw upon familiar linguistic resources. These practices then acquire identity meanings as participants become aware of how their language contributes to the presentation of their digital selves. Finally, identity performance is negotiated in relation to audiences and communities, making language choice simultaneously personal and social.

The thematic relationship can be summarized as follows:

| Theme | Central experience | Emerging meaning |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Everyday and Emotionally Meaningful Practice** | English emerges naturally in everyday TikTok communication | Code-switching becomes part of participants' multilingual repertoire |
| **2. Digital Identity Performance** | Language contributes to how participants present themselves | Code-switching becomes a resource for self-positioning |
| **3. Audience, Belonging, and Social Boundaries** | Participants adjust language according to perceived audiences and communities | Code-switching becomes a means of negotiating belonging and social boundaries |

Overall, the findings indicate that Indonesian-English code-switching among the participants cannot be reduced to a single motivation. It emerges from the intersection of linguistic habit, emotional expression, identity performance, audience awareness, and social belonging. The complexity of these experiences suggests that code-switching on TikTok is best understood as a fluid identity-making practice, in which linguistic choices acquire meaning through the social relationships and digital contexts surrounding them.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that Indonesian-English code-switching among Gen Z on TikTok is not merely a linguistic consequence of bilingual ability. Rather, it functions as a flexible social resource through which young users express meanings, position themselves, establish connections with audiences, and negotiate digital identities. Three interconnected themes emerge from the analysis: (1) code-switching as an everyday communicative practice, (2) code-switching as identity performance, and (3) code-switching as audience-oriented identity negotiation. Taken together, these themes suggest that the language practices of Indonesian Gen Z on TikTok are better

understood as dynamic processes of social positioning than as simple alternations between two linguistic systems.

**Code-Switching as an Everyday Communicative Practice**

The first theme concerns the normalization of Indonesian-English code-switching in everyday TikTok communication. The data suggest that participants do not necessarily perceive every switch into English as a conscious or formal linguistic decision. English expressions may emerge spontaneously when participants tell stories, respond to comments, express emotions, make jokes, or emphasize particular points. This finding is important because it challenges an understanding of code-switching as something that necessarily occurs because speakers lack an equivalent expression in their first language. Instead, switching can become part of an individual's established communicative repertoire.

From a digital sociolinguistic perspective, such practices reflect the fluidity of contemporary multilingual communication. Social media exposes young users to linguistic resources from different cultural and communicative environments, making the boundaries between Indonesian and English increasingly permeable in everyday interaction. Hasjim et al. argue that linguistic practices among Indonesian youth in social media include code-switching, slang, abbreviations, and other forms of linguistic innovation that reflect broader transformations in contemporary language use and identity indexicality. This supports the present finding that Indonesian Gen Z's language practices cannot be understood solely through conventional distinctions between “first language” and “foreign language.” Instead, users draw selectively from an expanded linguistic repertoire according to the communicative situation.

The finding also corresponds with recent research showing that Indonesian-English code-switching on social media can serve functions such as emotional expression, humor, social closeness, and the expression of bilingual identity. Sultan and Fitriana (2024), for instance, found that Indonesian university students used code-switching as a communicative strategy rather than merely as a structural feature of bilingual speech. Similarly, studies of TikTok discourse have identified code-switching as a recurring feature of contemporary Indonesian digital communication. These findings reinforce the argument that the presence of English in Indonesian digital discourse should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of linguistic displacement or declining use of Indonesian.

More importantly, the participants' accounts suggest that the meaning of a switched expression is often connected to its familiarity within digital culture. Certain English expressions circulate so extensively through TikTok, Instagram, music, films, and other online media that they become recognizable resources for Indonesian users. Consequently, the use of English may feel socially natural even when Indonesian alternatives exist. This indicates that code-switching is partly shaped by linguistic socialization through digital media. Young users are not simply learning English as a formal language; they are also encountering and appropriating English through everyday digital participation.

**Code-Switching as Identity Performance**

The second and more central theme concerns the relationship between code-switching and identity. The findings suggest that participants use English not only to communicate a particular message but also to project particular versions of themselves. English expressions can help construct an image of being contemporary, globally connected, humorous, confident, fashionable, or familiar with particular

online communities. In this sense, code-switching becomes an identity resource.

This finding can be interpreted through the language-and-identity perspective associated with Bucholtz and Hall, in which identity is understood as something constructed through interaction rather than as a fixed characteristic possessed by an individual. From this perspective, identity is continually produced through linguistic and other semiotic practices. A TikTok user who inserts English into an Indonesian utterance may therefore be performing a particular social position. The linguistic choice does not simply reflect who the speaker already is; it participates in constructing how the speaker wishes to be recognized.

Recent research supports this interpretation. Haya (2025), examining Indonesian TikTok discourse, found that code-switching can perform emotive functions while also reinforcing contemporary communication styles and social identities. Research on Indonesian Gen Z TikTok interactions likewise indicates that code-mixing may function as self-expression, identity reinforcement, humor, and a marker of social prestige. These findings are consistent with the present study, but the present analysis extends them by emphasizing that identity performance is not necessarily deliberate or strategically calculated. Participants may not consciously think, "I will use English to construct my identity." Instead, identity may emerge through repeated linguistic practices that gradually become associated with particular ways of being online.

This distinction is theoretically significant. If identity is treated only as an intentional self-presentation, researchers may overlook the more subtle processes through which identities are reproduced. A participant may use English because it "feels natural," because friends use it, or because it is common on TikTok. Yet these seemingly ordinary choices may still position the speaker within particular social and cultural meanings. Identity construction, therefore, can operate below the level of conscious intention.

The findings also suggest that the relationship between English and identity among Indonesian Gen Z should not be reduced to a simple association between English and "modernity." Although English may sometimes index global orientation or contemporary culture, participants may attach different meanings to the same expression. One user may perceive English as humorous, another as emotionally expressive, and another as a way of creating distance from overly formal Indonesian. This variability supports an interactional understanding of identity in which linguistic meanings are context-dependent rather than predetermined.

**Audience, Belonging, and Identity Negotiation**

The third theme demonstrates that code-switching on TikTok is strongly connected to awareness of audience and social belonging. Participants' language choices appear to be influenced by assumptions about who will understand, appreciate, or respond positively to their content. TikTok communication is therefore not simply an act of individual expression; it is an interaction with imagined and actual audiences.

This finding is particularly important for understanding digital identity. In face-to-face interaction, speakers may adjust their language according to interlocutors who are physically present. On TikTok, however, the audience can be simultaneously known, unknown, imagined, and potentially global. A user may create content for Indonesian followers while also drawing on English expressions that are recognizable across transnational digital culture. Code-switching consequently becomes a means of

negotiating multiple audiences.

From a digital sociolinguistic perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that language choice is shaped by the affordances of the platform itself. TikTok encourages highly visible forms of self-presentation, rapid circulation of linguistic trends, and interaction with communities that may extend beyond geographical boundaries. English therefore becomes one of the resources through which users can signal connection to broader digital communities while maintaining Indonesian as a marker of local familiarity.

The findings are consistent with McEntee-Atalianis, Ateek, and Gardner-Chloros (2023), who demonstrate that multilingual repertoires in social media can contribute to the negotiation of identity and social relationships. Although their study focuses on a different social and cultural population, its theoretical implication is relevant here: multilingual practices in digital environments are connected to the ways individuals position themselves in relation to others. The present study extends this insight to Indonesian Gen Z TikTok users by showing how English can operate simultaneously as a global resource and as a locally appropriated form of youth communication.

An important implication is that code-switching may create a sense of digital belonging. Using particular English expressions can enable participants to recognize and be recognized by people who share similar online interests, humor, cultural references, or generational experiences. Thus, language choice may function as a subtle boundary-making practice. Those who understand a particular expression may feel included within a community, while those unfamiliar with it may remain outside that communicative space.

This finding also complicates the assumption that the increasing presence of English in Indonesian youth discourse necessarily represents linguistic domination. English undoubtedly carries global cultural prestige, but Indonesian Gen Z users do not simply reproduce English unchanged. They adapt, combine, shorten, reinterpret, and embed English expressions within Indonesian discourse. The resulting linguistic practice is hybrid and locally situated. Code-switching can therefore be understood as a form of linguistic appropriation, through which young users make global linguistic resources meaningful within their own social environment.

**From Code-Switching to Digital Identity Negotiation**

Taken together, the three themes indicate that code-switching should be understood as a process rather than simply an observable linguistic product. At the surface level, the data show Indonesian-English alternation. At the social level, however, the switching reflects decisions and habits concerning emotional expression, audience, belonging, style, and self-positioning. At the identity level, these practices contribute to the continuous negotiation of who users are—or want to appear to be—within the TikTok environment.

This interpretation enriches previous Indonesian studies that have primarily categorized the forms and functions of code-switching. Identifying inter-sentential, intra-sentential, or tag switching remains useful for describing the linguistic structure of the data, but such categories cannot independently explain why participants repeatedly select English in particular social contexts. The present study therefore argues for a movement from "what linguistic form occurs?" toward "what social identity work is accomplished through the form?"

This shift is particularly relevant for qualitative sociolinguistic research because the meanings of language choices cannot always be inferred from linguistic structure

alone. Participants' own narratives are essential for understanding whether a particular English expression is experienced as humorous, fashionable, intimate, prestigious, natural, or simply habitual. The combination of TikTok observation and participant interviews consequently provides a more nuanced account than either source could provide independently.

The findings further suggest that Gen Z identity on TikTok is plural, fluid, and context-sensitive. A single participant may use Indonesian to establish intimacy and local belonging in one interaction, while using English to express humor, confidence, or affiliation with a global digital culture in another. These identities do not necessarily conflict. Instead, code-switching allows users to move between different social positions within the same digital space. Such fluidity reflects the broader condition of contemporary digital identity, where individuals participate simultaneously in local communities and transnational cultural networks.

**Theoretical and Social Implications**

Theoretically, the findings support an understanding of language and identity as mutually constitutive. Language does not merely reflect an already established identity; linguistic practices participate in producing and negotiating identity. The study also demonstrates the usefulness of combining digital sociolinguistics with a language-and-identity framework. Digital sociolinguistics explains the platform-specific and socially situated nature of language practices, while the identity perspective makes it possible to interpret the meanings attached to those practices.

The study also contributes to discussions of multilingualism in Indonesia by challenging a rigid separation between Indonesian and English. Among the participants, the two languages operate as resources within a broader repertoire rather than as completely separate systems. This does not necessarily mean that Indonesian is losing its position. Instead, young users appear to be developing flexible ways of combining local and global linguistic resources according to context, audience, and communicative purpose.

From a social perspective, the findings provide a more nuanced understanding of Gen Z language practices. The frequent use of English on TikTok should not automatically be interpreted as an indication that young Indonesians are abandoning Indonesian or attempting to imitate Western culture. Such interpretations risk reproducing generational stereotypes and overlooking the agency of young users. Their linguistic practices demonstrate creativity and adaptation as they negotiate increasingly interconnected cultural environments.

At the same time, a critical perspective remains necessary. English does not circulate in a socially neutral environment. Its association with education, global mobility, popular culture, and social prestige can produce unequal linguistic value between English and Indonesian. Some users may therefore experience pressure to use English to appear knowledgeable, contemporary, or socially relevant. The findings suggest that future research should examine whether such pressures create linguistic exclusion for users who are less confident in English. This issue is particularly important because digital identity can become intertwined with unequal access to linguistic resources.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

The interpretation of these findings also requires reflexivity concerning the researcher's position. Language researchers inevitably bring their own linguistic, cultural, educational, and generational experiences when interpreting digital

discourse. A researcher with strong familiarity with English, for example, may interpret an English expression as ordinary or stylistic, whereas a participant may experience the same expression as a significant marker of social belonging or aspiration. The researchers therefore need to remain attentive to the distinction between their interpretation and the meanings expressed by participants.

For this reason, participant accounts are treated as an important interpretive resource rather than as supplementary evidence. The analysis seeks to avoid imposing predetermined meanings on English use and instead considers how participants themselves describe their language choices. Reflexive engagement is particularly important when studying Gen Z because researchers may otherwise interpret contemporary digital expressions through assumptions derived from older models of language use.

Overall, the findings position Indonesian-English code-switching on TikTok as a form of digital identity work. Gen Z users do not simply alternate between two languages; they mobilize linguistic resources to express emotion, establish social relationships, signal belonging, and negotiate how they are perceived within digital communities. The significance of code-switching therefore lies not only in the linguistic forms themselves but in the social meanings that emerge through their use. This perspective moves the discussion beyond the question of whether Indonesian Gen Z uses more English online and toward a more important sociolinguistic question: how do young Indonesians use their multilingual repertoires to make sense of themselves and their place within an increasingly connected digital world?

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesian-English code-switching among Indonesian Gen Z on TikTok is more than a linguistic alternation between two languages. It represents a dynamic social practice through which young users express emotions, construct interpersonal connections, signal belonging, and negotiate their digital identities. The findings demonstrate that code-switching has become increasingly normalized within everyday digital communication, particularly when English expressions are perceived as more appropriate for expressing particular emotions, humor, contemporary styles, or connections with specific online communities. Consequently, language choice on TikTok needs to be understood within the broader social and cultural context in which young users participate.

A central insight of this study is that digital identity is not simply reflected through language but is continuously performed and negotiated through language. Indonesian Gen Z users move between Indonesian and English according to context, audience, communicative intention, and perceived social meaning. English may function as a resource for expressing global orientation or contemporary identity, while Indonesian may simultaneously maintain intimacy, cultural familiarity, and local belonging. These practices demonstrate that young users are not necessarily replacing one language with another; rather, they are creatively mobilizing multiple linguistic resources to construct complex and context-sensitive identities.

Conceptually, this finding strengthens the sociolinguistic understanding of identity as fluid, interactional, and socially situated. It also suggests that code-switching research in digital environments should move beyond structural classification toward greater attention to meaning-making and identity negotiation.

The combination of digital sociolinguistics, code-switching analysis, and language-and-identity perspectives provides a useful framework for understanding how multilingual practices acquire social meanings within contemporary digital culture. The study therefore contributes to the growing body of research that views social media not merely as a communication technology, but as a space where linguistic identities are actively produced.

The findings also have practical implications for language education and digital literacy. Educators should recognize that students' use of English alongside Indonesian in social media does not automatically indicate poor Indonesian proficiency or inappropriate language use. Instead, such practices can demonstrate linguistic creativity, audience awareness, and the ability to navigate multilingual digital environments. English language education may therefore benefit from incorporating critical digital discourse into classroom activities, enabling students to reflect on why they select particular linguistic forms, how language choices position them socially, and how language can include or exclude particular audiences. For curriculum developers, this perspective supports the integration of sociolinguistic and digital literacy perspectives into language learning, particularly in contexts where students routinely move between local and global linguistic resources.

The study also has implications for digital literacy policy and youth-oriented educational programs. Young users need opportunities to develop not only technological competence but also critical awareness of language, identity, and power in digital communication. Understanding that English may carry particular social prestige can help students critically evaluate linguistic hierarchies without framing English use as inherently superior to Indonesian. Such awareness may encourage more inclusive digital communication in which multilingualism is recognized as a resource while linguistic diversity and local identity are maintained.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. First, the study focuses specifically on Indonesian Gen Z users and the TikTok environment, meaning that the findings should not be generalized to all Indonesian social media users or all generations. Second, the participant group may not fully represent the linguistic, geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural diversity of Indonesian Gen Z. Third, the study relies primarily on selected TikTok content and participant self-reports, which may not capture all of the unconscious or less visible processes involved in identity construction. The interpretation of digital discourse is also inevitably influenced by the researcher's own linguistic and cultural positioning. These limitations indicate that the findings should be understood as a contextualized interpretation rather than a universal account of Indonesian Gen Z language practices.

Future research could extend this study through comparative and longitudinal approaches. Comparative studies could examine code-switching across different social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X, to determine how platform affordances shape linguistic identity. Research could also compare different Indonesian regions, social groups, educational backgrounds, or generations to explore how local cultural and socioeconomic contexts influence the meanings attached to English use. A longitudinal approach would be particularly valuable for examining whether expressions that currently function as digital slang or code-switching gradually become normalized elements of Indonesian youth language.

Future studies may also benefit from multimodal analysis that considers not only spoken and written language but also music, images, gestures, hashtags, visual

editing, and audience responses. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how linguistic and non-linguistic resources interact in the construction of digital identity. Ultimately, the study invites researchers to view Indonesian Gen Z's multilingual practices not as evidence of linguistic disorder or simple imitation of global culture, but as an evolving form of identity work through which young Indonesians negotiate local belonging and global participation in the digital age.

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**Sumber teori code-switching yang juga sebaiknya dimasukkan**

Karena artikel Ibu secara eksplisit menggunakan klasifikasi inter-sentential, intra-sentential, dan tag switching, sebaiknya sumber foundational berikut juga dicantumkan:


Poplack, S. (1980). Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish y termino en español: Toward a typology of code-switching. Linguistics, 18(7–8), 581–618. https://doi.org/10.1515/ling.1980.18.7-8