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Changes in Indonesian Students' Linguistic Identity in the Use of Code-Mixing in Instagram Captions: A Digital Sociolinguistic Study

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ABSTRACT

Instagram has emerged as a dynamic platform for self-expression among Indonesian college students, where linguistic creativity is prominently displayed through the use of code mixing in captions. This study explores the patterns and sociolinguistic functions of code mixing as part of students' linguistic identity construction in digital spaces. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research draws data from 30 public Instagram captions selected purposively based on specific criteria, including the presence of Indonesian and English code mixing, authorship by student users, recency of upload, and account accessibility. The captions were analyzed using Muysken's (2000) typology of code mixing, namely insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization while their functions were interpreted through a sociolinguistic lens focusing on identity expression, emotional resonance, aesthetics, solidarity, and communicative efficiency. Findings indicate that alternation is the most prevalent form of code mixing (50%), followed by insertion (36.7%) and congruent lexicalization (13.3%). Students employ code mixing not only to enhance communicative clarity but also as a stylistic and symbolic act of positioning themselves within both local and global cultural frames. English is often used to convey prestige, cosmopolitanism, and creative expression, while Indonesian retains its role in grounding personal authenticity and cultural belonging. These patterns suggest that social media platforms like Instagram serve not merely as communication tools but as performative arenas where young users actively construct and negotiate their linguistic identities. The study underscores the evolving role of digital media in shaping bilingual expression and highlights code mixing as a deliberate linguistic strategy in the formation of hybrid digital personas.

Keywords: Instagram, Code Mixing, Identity Linguistics, Indonesian Students, Digital Sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

The development of communication technology and social media has created a new space for Indonesia's younger generation to express their linguistic identity dynamically and creatively, particularly through the Instagram platform, which combines visual and textual elements as a medium for self-representation. The language used in Instagram captions often contains elements of *code-mixing* , *slang* , and non-standard variations that reflect social identity, group affiliation, and negotiations between local and global values (Putri et al., 2025) . These linguistic practices function not only as communication tools but also as rhetorical strategies used to construct curated digital personas within the context of the attention economy. On the other hand, although the use of non-standard and mixed language is often seen as shifting the norms of standard Indonesian, social media also provides space for linguistic innovation and more diverse cultural expressions (Husnita et al., 2025; Rohmah, 2025) .

Practically, Instagram has become a key platform for Indonesian students to curate their identities through a combination of visuals and text. Captions no longer merely serve as image explanations but also serve as expressions of personal style, markers of social affiliation, and a medium for articulating linguistic preferences. The phenomenon of *code-mixing* between Indonesian and English has become increasingly prominent and is interpreted as a performative practice of identity (Zebua et al., 2025) . Code-mixing patterns found include the insertion of words, phrases, clauses, and hybrid constructions, often used to emphasize messages, clarify communication, or attract the attention of a wider audience. Factors influencing this tendency include the level of bilingualism, social background, interaction context, and personal motivations, such as emotional needs or the desire to appear prestigious (Wibowo & Hamidah, 2023) . In addition, linguistic adaptation in the form of Indonesian affixation to English vocabulary is often used in informal contexts such as Instagram captions, demonstrating linguistic creativity that develops organically but is not always compatible with standard Indonesian language rules (Budiarti & Faris, 2023) .

In the context of digital communication, the use of *code-mixing* among students has undergone a shift in function. This practice is no longer seen simply as a solution to vocabulary limitations, but has become a symbolic representation that demonstrates the user's lifestyle, identity orientation, and social position. English is often used to construct a self-image as a modern, creative, and globally oriented individual, while Indonesian remains a medium for maintaining emotional closeness and preserving local context. The combination of the two languages produces a hybrid linguistic identity that reflects the daily lives of students in the era of globalization and digitalization. In the process, *code-mixing* also plays a role as a symbol of social status, linguistic creativity, and group solidarity, as well as a medium for negotiation between local and global values that takes place in the digital space (Husnita et al., 2025; Zebua et al., 2025) .

This phenomenon reinforces the understanding that Instagram captions have distinct linguistic and semiotic characteristics compared to other forms of digital communication. Captions constitute a curatorial space where users organize their images and reconstruct themselves in a purposeful manner, where language choice becomes part of a social calculation that takes audience perception into account (Purba et al., 2024; Zebua et al., 2025) . Previous research has shown that *code-mixing* is not only related to bilingual competence but also to symbols of social status, creativity, and group affiliation (Rahman & Muttaqin, 2024) . However, academic studies specifically highlighting the relationship between *code-mixing* and linguistic identity change in the context of Instagram captions are still limited and require further development. Several studies have suggested that the choice of language in captions is influenced by a combination of internal factors such as personal motivation and external factors such as digital culture, but have not yet examined in depth how identity dimensions are negotiated in this multimodal space (Larasati et al., 2021; Purba et al., 2024; Zebua et al., 2025) .

Within this framework, this study aims to explore how Indonesian students utilize *code-mixing* in Instagram captions as part of their self-framing strategy in the digital space. By examining the tendency of code-mixing, its accompanying socio-linguistic functions, and the nuances of identity articulated through language choices, this study

aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the language practices of young people in social media environments. This approach is expected to enrich the study of digital sociolinguistics, particularly in understanding how linguistic identities are formed, maintained, and negotiated through interactions that occur on online platforms.

In this context, it is increasingly clear that Instagram is creating a new language ecology that encourages young people to use code-mixing as part of their communication and identity strategies. Code-mixing is no longer simply a deviation from standard language, but rather a linguistic choice influenced by the dynamics of digital communities, cultural trends, and users' performative needs. The interaction between visual and textual elements makes captions a flexible space for expression, where language is chosen to construct self-image, demonstrate social affiliation, and negotiate identities between local and global values. Therefore, studying code-mixing in students' Instagram captions is crucial for understanding how linguistic practices and the construction of linguistic identity evolve amidst changing patterns of digital communication today.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the form and socio-linguistic function of the mixed code in Instagram captions made by Indonesian students. The data consisted of 30 public captions that were purposively selected based on certain criteria: they came from student accounts, contained a mix of Indonesian and English codes, were publicly accessible (not locked), and were uploaded in the last six months. The identity of the account is disguised to maintain confidentiality and meet the ethical principles of the research.

Data collection is done manually through Instagram's search feature using relevant hashtags such as #kuliah, #skripsi, and #healing to capture rich linguistic expressions from student users. The collected captions are then read carefully and categorized based on the mixed typology developed by Muysken (2000) namely insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. The analysis was carried out not only on the structural aspects of the code mix, but also interpreted from a sociolinguistic point of view with a focus on five main functions: expression of identity, emotion, aesthetics of language, group solidarity, and communication efficiency. To strengthen validity, the researcher conducted repeated readings and thorough interpretation to keep the classification and analysis consistent. This study is textual and does not involve direct interaction with account owners or informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The shift in students' linguistic identities in the digital space is evident in the intentional ways they use language across social media platforms. Instagram captions, in particular, serve as compact spaces for expressing multifaceted identities through code mixing. This linguistic practice enables users to convey meaning, express emotion, and position themselves socially and culturally within a digital peer network. The following section presents an analysis of thirty Instagram captions, identifying patterns of code mixing and interpreting their associated social and linguistic functions. Through this lens, code mixing emerges not as a random occurrence but as a conscious and creative

expression of identity that aligns with the dynamic communicative norms of the digital age.

1. Code Mixing Pattern

An analysis of 30 Instagram captions written by Indonesian students indicates the dominance of two main forms of code-mixing: insertion and alternation, each of which appears in nearly half of the total data. The caption quotes and types of code-mixing are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Findings of Captions and Types of Code Mixing

No	Caption (Anonymous)	Code Mixing Types
1	Finally finished the task that made me overthink for a week	Insertion
2	Finals week is killing me. But I have to still sane .	Alternation
3	My OOTD today: comfy look for campus	Congruent Lexicalization
4	Healing thinly to stay sane	Insertion
5	Trust the process. The journey Not yet finished	Alternation
6	Self-reward first after a hectic week	Insertion
7	Deadlines everywhere, but coffee first	Alternation
8	Mood of the day this : productive but sleepy	Alternation
9	My ultimate weekend escape need	Insertion
10	Another day, another struggle. Spirit !	Alternation
11	Finally some me-time after chaos week	Alternation
12	Let it be slow origin Good luck . Just chill	Insertion
13	Let's go! But actually I'm still sleepy	Alternation
14	I miss a vacation without having to think about assignments.	Insertion
15	Keep moving forward, though slow	Insertion
16	Done pretending, now I'm just being real	Alternation
17	This semester was really chaotic , but survived	Alternation
18	New chapter. Same coffee, different mindset	Congruent Lexicalization
19	Don't overthink. Sometimes all only need time	Alternation
20	Healing is not linear, and that's okay	Insertion
21	Don't forget Rest Yes , life's tough	Alternation
22	This week's vibe: overwhelmed but hopeful	Insertion
23	Task stacked , but vibes must be guarded	Alternation
24	Mentally on vacation, physically on deadline	Alternation
25	What a week! But at least it's still sane	Alternation
26	Progress not perfection. Keep going!	Congruent Lexicalization
27	I need a long nap and ice cream	Insertion
28	After dark chill weekend is here	Insertion
29	All set for Monday… I guess	Congruent Lexicalization
30	Burnout is real. But still smiling	Alternation

The table above shows that the insertion pattern is seen from the insertion of English words or phrases into Indonesian sentence structures, such as in the utterance "Finally finished the task that made me overthink for a week." Meanwhile, the alternation pattern is seen through the change between languages within a single utterance unit, as seen in the sentence "Finals week is killing me. But I have to stay sane." Meanwhile, the congruent lexicalization form is found less frequently, although it still appears in a number of captions, such as in the phrase "My OOTD today: comfy look for campus." Overall, this pattern shows that English functions as a stylistic element that complements the structure of Indonesian in students' digital expressions. Furthermore, the distribution of each identified code-mixing pattern is

summarized in Table 2 to provide a quantitative overview of the linguistic tendencies that appear in students' Instagram captions.

Table 2. Distribution of Code Mixing Types in Student Instagram Captions

Code Mixing Types	Amount	Percentage (%)
Alternation	15	50.0
Insertion	11	36.7
Congruent Lexicalization	4	13.3

The distribution table shows that the most dominant form of code-mixing is *alternation*, with a frequency of 15 out of 30 captions (50%). This type is characterized by switching between Indonesian and English within a single utterance or stand-alone sentence, reflecting the user's bilingual ability and pragmatic awareness in managing communication styles. Meanwhile, *insertion* appeared in 11 captions (36.7%), characterized by the insertion of English words or phrases into Indonesian sentence structures. This pattern indicates a tendency for users to enrich their expressions through foreign diction that is considered more expressive, aesthetic, or relevant to the platform context. *Congruent lexicalization* was recorded in 4 captions (13.3%). Although the lowest frequency, this form indicates more complex lexical integration and indicates a certain level of bilingual proficiency.

The dominant tendency *of alternation* and *insertion* aligns with previous studies highlighting social media users' preference for flexible forms of code-mixing that are easily adapted to informal interaction contexts (Permata & Sulatra, 2025; Sitorus, 2025) . The choice of form is also influenced by factors such as communicative goals, audience characteristics, and expectations for a language style that is considered modern and appropriate to the culture of digital platforms. This phenomenon confirms that English use is not only driven by communicative needs but also becomes a strategy for expressing social identity and a symbol of linguistic prestige (Ishak et al., 2025).

Findings Sitorus (2025) strengthening the results of this research. Bilingualism with unbalanced skills promotes the dominance *of insertion* and *alternation*, as classified by Muysken (2000). In this case, *insertion* becomes an easy-to-use form to fill vocabulary gaps or emphasize semantic intentions, while *alternation* is used rhetorically and situationally to build expressive speech styles (Permata & Sulatra, 2025). External factors such as peer influence, social expectations, and exposure to global culture contribute to this tendency, making English an expressive element in students' digital communication practices. Thus, the use of code-mixing in Instagram captions reflects creative, contextual, and dynamic linguistic adaptation within an increasingly fluid bilingual ecosystem (Rahman & Muttaqin, 2024) .

2. Socio-Linguistic Function of Code Mixing

Code-mixing in student captions serves various social functions. In the context of identity, the use of terms like "grateful," "healing," or "productive" symbolizes a modern, active, and globally minded image. English is also used to express feelings

and reinforce aesthetic impressions, as in the phrase "stay strong guys," which appears alongside the emotion of facing an assignment deadline. Popular terms like "vibes" or "OOTD" indicate an attempt to build symbolic connections with online communities that share cultural references. Meanwhile, the use of terms like "upload," "trust the process," or "escape" demonstrates efficiency and conciseness of expression, in line with the fast-paced, visual, and informal nature of social media.

Zebua et al. (2025) stated that these functions demonstrate that code-mixing is not only a communication tool but also a social strategy to assert identity, strengthen social relationships, and adapt to digital cultural norms. Furthermore, code-mixing helps social media users convey emotions, humor, and personality more expressively and attract audience attention (Nabila & Idayani, 2022) . Thus, code-mixing on social media is a dynamic phenomenon that reflects the complex interactions between language, culture, and social identity among students and other young users.

3. **Linguistic Identity in Digital Space**

Linguistic identities in digital spaces are formed through complex and dynamic language interactions. On social media, users utilize practices such as code-mixing, online slang, and register manipulation as strategies to construct digital personas. These expressions do not stand alone but are shaped by a combination of social context, platform culture, and the technical limitations of the medium itself. In a process known as digital self-fashioning, individuals actively shape and construct identities through language choices and communication styles that conform to digital community norms (Singh, 2024) .

This phenomenon is increasingly evident in small-scale digital communities, also known as micro-tribes. Within these groups, certain linguistic styles, including emojis, informal phrases, and symbolic codes, serve as markers of internal identity and tools of exclusion from outsiders. This communication style not only strengthens group cohesion but also creates clear social boundaries through exclusionary linguistic cues (Khan, 2025) . Furthermore, digital platforms also facilitate cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interactions, allowing users to maintain, modify, or even reshape their linguistic identities in everyday communication (Saraeva et al., 2024) .

In the context of Indonesian students, the language choices in Instagram captions demonstrate a hybrid linguistic identity, a blend of local and global values. Indonesian is used as a means of expressing emotional closeness, everyday life, and cultural affiliation, while English serves as a symbol of social mobility, modern lifestyle, and global aspirations. Sentences such as "Now? I enjoy the stage," which emerge after reflection in Indonesian, demonstrate how language not only conveys meaning but also articulates attitudes and social positions. Language use in social media, as explained by Liebig et al., (2022) , is part of performative identity curation, where individuals consciously shape digital personas that align with the expectations of online audiences.

Furthermore, code-mixing practices and bilingual creativity are used as linguistic strategies to construct self-differentiation in information-dense social spaces. English is often associated with status, professionalism, and globality, while local languages

signal community closeness, cultural ties, and authentic identity (Tanaka, 2023) . Linguistic identities displayed on social media are flexible and layered, managed through word choice, narrative style, and multimodal elements such as emojis or GIFs (O'Neill, 2025) . These practices reflect the transformation of digital space as an increasingly fluid and inclusive field of identity expression, but also as an arena where language ideologies and social power structures are actively negotiated by its users (Puterbaugh, 2025) .

4. **The Role of Instagram as a Medium of Linguistic Expression**

Instagram serves as a dynamic and multifunctional medium for linguistic expression, particularly within the digital communication ecosystem, which simultaneously combines visual and verbal elements. This platform provides a space for users, including Indonesian students, to construct their identities through captions that not only describe images but also serve as a platform for emotional expression, personal statements, and social affiliations. In practice, captions often incorporate code-mixing between Indonesian and English, strategically chosen to mark achievements, strengthen audience engagement, and create a concise and aesthetic communication style (Rahman & Muttaqin, 2024; Zebua et al., 2025) .

Various studies have shown that the use of English in captions, particularly in memes, short videos, or semi-professional posts, serves as a symbol of modernity and social status. Word choices such as "but I survived" or "trust the process" that appear after reflective statements in Indonesian reflect how users use language as a means to intensify emotions, frame identities, and maintain the consistency of their digital narratives (Schaefer, 2025) . Beyond personal expression, code-mixing is also used to create broader social connections through humor, linguistic creativity, and culturally resonant language play (Fatima et al., 2025) . In this sense, Instagram is not only a sharing platform, but also a discursive space where linguistic norms are formed and negotiated.

The use of code-mixing combined with visual preferences reflects an adaptation to the platform's communication norms, where brevity, aesthetics, and communicativeness are key criteria for message success. Furthermore, this practice also reflects users' rhetorical awareness of the demands of digital audience engagement, which expects a relevant and recognizable language style (Husnita et al., 2025; Zebua et al., 2025) . More broadly, variations in register and lexical choice in captions are also used in promotional or commercial communications, demonstrating how language shapes a persuasive tone that remains fluid and contextual (Riadil, 2025) . However, the complexity of these language choices does not escape accessibility and readability challenges for some audiences, particularly when the combination of languages creates ambiguity or gaps in understanding. This situation makes Instagram not only a space for visual expression, but also an active arena for evolving social and linguistic negotiations (Zebua et al., 2025) .

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the use of code-mixing in Indonesian students' Instagram captions reflects a dynamic, flexible, and curated shift in linguistic identity. Alternation is the most dominant form as it enables fluid transitions between languages to create rhetorical and expressive effects. Insertion is frequently used to enhance meaning within a single sentence structure, while congruent lexicalization, though less common, demonstrates more advanced bilingual proficiency through syntactic integration.

Beyond its communicative function, code-mixing serves as a performative tool in shaping digital personas that merge local cultural values with global aspirations. English functions as a marker of modernity, aspiration, and symbolic capital, while Indonesian maintains cultural proximity and contextual relevance. These linguistic choices are influenced by platform norms, peer expectations, and the aesthetics of digital expression.

Overall, this practice underscores the role of social media as a strategic space for linguistic innovation and identity construction. Students utilize the affordances of digital media to negotiate their social and cultural positioning through context-sensitive and creative language use. These findings suggest the need for further research into how digital communication mediates linguistic practices and redefines identity within increasingly globalized and multilingual environments.

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