

THE USE OF CODE-MIXING IN STUDENTS' DAILY CONVERSATIONS AT UNIVERSITY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the phenomenon of code-mixing in the daily conversations of university students within the multilingual academic environment of Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), Medan. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in sociolinguistic theoretical frameworks, this research aims to identify the specific types of code-mixing used, the contextual reasons for its occurrence, and the social perceptions of students regarding this linguistic practice. Data were gathered qualitatively through a rapid three-day fieldwork process, utilizing an open-ended survey and semi-structured interviews with 35 college peers from the English Education department. The findings reveal that students predominantly employ intra-sentential code-mixing (the insertion of English words or phrases into Indonesian syntactic structures), followed by intra-lexical code-mixing. The primary motivations driving this practice include the necessity of filling lexical gaps for academic terminology, the psychological desire to project a modern or educated identity, group solidarity, and subconscious habit. The study concludes that code-mixing functions as an active communicative strategy that enriches students' linguistic repertoires rather than a sign of language deficit.

Keywords: Code-Mixing, Sociolinguistics, University Students, Qualitative Approach, Uinsu Medan.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary university campus functions as a vibrant microcosm of linguistic diversity and language contact. In an era dominated by globalization, the English language has firmly cemented its role as the global lingua franca of higher education, science, and technology. In Indonesia, a country characterized by stable diglossia involving Bahasa Indonesia as the national language and hundreds of distinct regional languages, university students occupy a unique sociolinguistic position. As educated youth exposed to both international academic literature and local cultural expressions, they stand at the absolute forefront of intense language contact situations. One of the most ubiquitous and visible outcomes of this contact is the widespread phenomenon of code-mixing.

In sociolinguistics, code-mixing refers to the embedding of various linguistic units—such as words, morphemes, phrases, and clauses—from one language into another within a single utterance or speech event (Muysken, 2000). At Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU) in Medan, this linguistic practice has become a defining characteristic of daily student communication. Peer conversations in hallways, the campus cafeteria, and student lounges seamlessly shift between Bahasa Indonesia and English. Often, this bilingual mix is further seasoned with regional dialects prominent in North Sumatra, such as Bataknese, Malay, or Javanese features, creating a highly dynamic, fluid speech community.

Far from being a random error, an index of broken grammar, or a sign of linguistic incompetence, the use of code-mixing among university students is a complex, rule-governed, and dynamic communicative strategy. It reflects nuanced social identities, active cognitive processing, and the evolving nature of youth identity in a globalized world.

Students strategically mix languages to satisfy immediate lexical needs when direct Indonesian equivalents feel too rigid or obscure, to signal membership within an educated social tier, or to foster peer solidarity.

However, this growing phenomenon continues to spark academic debate in post-colonial societies. Is the pervasive blending of English into everyday Indonesian academia a healthy sign of linguistic enrichment, or does it slowly erode the vitality and structural purity of Bahasa Indonesia? This study moves beyond prescriptive, judgmental evaluations of language "purity" to delve qualitatively into the actual patterns, underlying socio-psychological motivations, and interpersonal perceptions that dictate code-mixing practices among college students at UINSU Medan.

METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive research design. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate because code-mixing is inherently a contextualized, socially constructed human behavior that cannot be fully captured or understood through sterile quantitative tallies alone. By adopting a qualitative framework, the researchers focused on the lived experiences, personal rationales, and natural linguistic descriptions provided directly by the participants. To capture a highly spontaneous and synchronized snapshot of this linguistic phenomenon, the entire fieldwork and data gathering process was executed within an intensive, short-term timeframe.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Structural Variations of Code-Mixing among UINSU Students

The qualitative analysis of the survey responses and interview transcripts indicated that code-mixing among English Education students at UINSU Medan is heavily dominated by structural Insertion, particularly at the intra-sentential level. Because the participants possess a high degree of bilingual familiarity, they do not randomly drop words; instead, they flawlessly implant English lexical units into standard Indonesian syntactic structures.

A. Intra-Sentential Insertion (Words and Phrases)

Students regularly insert singular English nouns, verbs, or adjectives into their daily conversations. The data showed that academic tasks and emotional expressions are the primary zones for word insertion. Consider the following direct accounts provided by students in the survey:

- "Aku harus prepare materi untuk presentation kelompok besok pagi."
- "Dosen itu kalau ngasih tugas bener-bener overwhelming sampai aku stress sendiri."
- "Jangan lupa print tugasnya di tempat biasa ya, biar langsung dikumpul."

In these instances, the grammatical framework remains entirely Indonesian, but key functional concepts are substituted with English words. Phrasal insertions are also highly prominent, where students introduce an entire English phrasal constituent to express a complete thought compactly:

- "Dia emang typical textbook student, makanya IPK-nya selalu cumlaude."
- "Kalian kalau ngerjain makalah jangan cuma copy-paste dari internet dong."

B. Intra-Lexical Insertion (Morphological Blending)

A fascinating structural finding is the high frequency of intra-lexical insertion, where English root words are forced to conform to Indonesian morphological rules by receiving local prefixes (di-, me-, ng-) or suffixes (-nya). This demonstrates a deep, subconscious grammatical synthesis of the two languages:

- "File jurnalnya udah aku di-download tapi belum sempat aku baca."
- "Tolong di-approve dulu ya request join ke Google Drive-nya."

- "Materi yang itu kayaknya belum di-update sama kating di grup."
- "Keren banget, presentasi kamu tadi bener-bener matching-nya pas sama PPT."

Here, words like download, approve, and update function seamlessly as Indonesian passive verbs via the di- prefix, proving that code-mixing is an integrated, systematic linguistic practice within the student community.

2. Qualitative Themes: Why Students Code-Mix

Through the open-ended survey narratives and follow-up interviews, four definitive qualitative themes emerged explaining the socio-psychological and practical drivers behind this linguistic behavior.

Theme 1: Academic Convenience and Lexical Gaps

The most prevalent theme discussed by all 35 participants was the absolute necessity of using English for specialized academic concepts. Because their primary field of study is English Education, terms related to linguistics, teaching methods, and academic administration naturally default to English. Students noted that trying to find or use the formal Indonesian translation felt awkward, forced, or failed to capture the exact contextual meaning.

One interview participant explained:

"Kalau lagi bahas kuliah, jauh lebih gampang bilang 'compile data' atau 'submit assignment' daripada 'menyusun data' atau 'mengumpulkan tugas'. Kata-kata English itu udah otomatis nempel di kepala kami sebagai mahasiswa bahasa, jadi kalau dipaksa pakai bahasa Indonesia malah kerasa kaku dan aneh."

Terms like approach, method, skripsi, drafting, syllabus, and feedback are consistently preferred in their English forms because they provide immediate, unambiguous clarity during peer discussions.

Theme 2: Socio-Prestige and Identity Projection

Another powerful theme centered on identity. Many students admitted that code-mixing functions as a symbolic tool to project an identity of being an educated, capable, and modern individual. Within the social hierarchy of a university campus, demonstrating comfortable fluency in English signals that a student is highly proactive and well-read.

A student noted in their survey response:

"Ada kebanggaan tersendiri pas kita bisa nyampur bahasa Indonesia sama Inggris dengan luwes. Secara gak langsung, itu nunjukin kalau kita ini anak kuliah yang berwawasan luas, update dengan dunia luar, dan gak ketinggalan zaman."

This aligns closely with sociolinguistic concepts of prestige; English functions as an elite linguistic currency that enhances the speaker's social standing among peers.

Theme 3: Peer Solidarity and Creating In-Group Boundaries

Code-mixing also serves a vital integrative function by fostering a sense of community and closeness among classmates. For the English Education cohort at UINSU, this mixed language style forms an "in-group" sociolect. It acts as a comfortable social bridge, making conversations feel more relaxed, casual, and intimate.

During an interview, a student remarked:

"Kalau ngomong sama sesama anak kelas pakai bahasa Indonesia yang baku banget malah rasanya berjarak dan formal kayak lagi sidang. Tapi kalau dicampur-campur pakai istilah English, suasananya langsung terasa santai, akrab, dan emang itu cara kami ngebangun chemistry sebagai teman seangkatan."

By coding their conversations this way, they implicitly signal a shared background, reinforcing peer solidarity and distinguishing their unique group identity from students of other non-language majors.

Theme 4: Subconscious Habit and Cognitive Reflex

Finally, a significant portion of the participants emphasized that code-mixing has evolved into an uncontrollable, automated habit. Due to years of reading English textbooks, watching global digital content, and practicing language skills daily, the brain automatically retrieves whichever lexical item is most cognitively accessible, regardless of language boundaries.

A participant stated:

"Seringkali itu keluar gitu aja tanpa mikir. Jadi bukan sengaja pengen gaya-gayaan, tapi emang otak udah terbiasa. Kadang pas lagi ngomong, kata English-nya yang duluan muncul di kepala daripada kata Indonesia-nya."

3. Social Perceptions: The Dual Consciousness

The qualitative analysis uncovered a compelling state of "dual consciousness" or linguistic ambivalence among UINSU students regarding their own code-mixing practices. On one side of this psychological spectrum, students view code-mixing positively as a practical reflection of their bilingual competence and communicative creativity. They see it as a natural, fluid bridge that facilitates faster, more expressive communication in a globalized academic world.

Conversely, students simultaneously harbor underlying anxieties regarding cultural preservation and language attrition. Many expressed genuine worry that the pervasive, unchecked infiltration of English into daily speech could eventually weaken the vocabulary and structural discipline of Bahasa Indonesia among the younger generation. They noted that over-reliance on English terms frequently causes them to forget proper, formal Indonesian vocabulary (*Padanan Kata*), which could be problematic in highly formal or national administrative contexts.

This striking ambivalence reflects the broader post-colonial linguistic tension found throughout modern Indonesian society: the pragmatic necessity of mastering a high-prestige global language like English versus the deep-seated nationalistic responsibility to maintain and respect the purity of the national language, Bahasa Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study demonstrates that code-mixing is an incredibly pervasive, structured, and socially meaningful linguistic phenomenon among English Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), Medan. Structurally, the practice is heavily dominated by intra-sentential and intra-lexical Insertion, wherein English words and morphologically adapted roots are embedded directly into Indonesian grammatical frames. Motivated by immediate academic lexical needs, identity and prestige projection, peer solidarity, and ingrained cognitive habits, code-mixing serves as an effective, highly expressive communicative asset rather than a sign of linguistic deficiency.

While students display a dual consciousness—balancing appreciation for its communicative efficiency against anxieties over the long-term purity of Bahasa Indonesia—it is clear that code-mixing represents a permanent evolution in youth linguistics. Future research should expand qualitatively to investigate whether similar intensive code-mixing patterns occur among students in non-language majors within Islamic higher education institutions, or explore how these bilingual students navigate the transition from informal code-mixing to strict, formal Indonesian in professional environments.

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