

## Language Choice and Code-Switching Strategies in Indonesian Tiktok Influencer Content

Juwintan Juwintan\*, Maulina Nabila

Institut Prima Bangsa, Indonesia

Email: [juwintan.stibainvada@gmail.com](mailto:juwintan.stibainvada@gmail.com)\*, [nabilamaulina01@gmail.com](mailto:nabilamaulina01@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT:

This research examines the patterns and strategies of language choice and code-switching practices employed by Indonesian TikTok influencers with the highest number of views on the platform. In this study of digital sociolinguistics, it unravels how Indonesian and English are used selectively to engage audiences in influencer-mediated digital discourse. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from TikTok videos posted by four popular Indonesian influencers using purposive sampling. A total of 49 instances of Indonesian-English utterance code-switching were identified and analyzed based on Poplack's classification framework. The results show that code-switching dominates patterns and practices of language choice, with intra-sentential code-switching more prevalent than tag-code and inter-sentential code-switching; exclusive use is absent. Further analysis reveals that functions of code-switching differ by video type: English provides educational solutions, establishes professional authority, mitigates promotion, signals objectivity in reviews, supports daily vlogging, and offers cognitive and moral reframing. Overall, this study demonstrates that code-switching is not random among Indonesian TikTok influencers and serves as a strategic resource for communication and audience engagement on social media.

**Keywords:** language choice; code-switching; TikTok influencers; digital sociolinguistics; audience engagement

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### INTRODUCTION

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TikTok is a highly popular social media platform that has gained significant traction in Indonesia, particularly among younger generations. Its short video format, which is highly interactive and creative, encourages users to create and share ideas and thoughts (Cao, 2025; Dwinanda et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2025; Rizomyliotis et al., 2024). This fosters the rapid spread of concepts not only within Indonesia but also drives consumerism and participation in shaping discourses. In this context, TikTok influencers emerge as prominent digital content creators who play key roles in constructing meaning through their linguistic practices. Thus, influencer content serves as an essential site for analyzing *language in use* in digital communication (Mussa, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024; Shoukat et al., 2023; Tartaraj et al., 2024).

Indonesia's sociolinguistic landscape is characterized by multilingualism, in which interactional varieties such as *Bahasa Indonesia* coexist with local languages like *Sunda* and global ones like English. On online platforms such as social media, this multilingualism often manifests in language choices and code-switching (Mahardika & Irlina, 2025). Code-switching between *Bahasa Indonesia* and English on TikTok influencer accounts extends beyond mere bilingual ability. English usage may construct modernity, globality, authority, or belonging to digital youth subcultures, whereas *Bahasa Indonesia* facilitates accessibility.

Code-switching in digital influencer discourse functions as a strategic communication tool rather than random linguistic behavior. Influencers code-switch to emphasize aspects, convey

promotional messages, foster familiarity, and add persuasive force (Colacel, 2025; Dr. Zahida Hussain et al., 2025; Ismail & Sani, 2025). Such practices reveal that language choices and code-switching are closely tied to audience design and engagement. To understand this, it is essential to examine code-switching structurally while exploring its deployment in digital contexts involving visibility, popularity, and audience interaction.

Existing studies have begun exploring code-switching in digital contexts, yet significant gaps remain. Dahniar and Sulistyawati (2023) analyzed code-mixing in Indonesian TikTok podcasts, focusing on its impact on millennial language use. Similarly, Ramadhan, Sobarna, and Afsari (2023) examined slang-*Sunda* mixing on TikTok, highlighting local linguistic hybridity. However, these studies often emphasize typological classification or educational contexts (Amani, Nurfitriana, & Husein, 2025) rather than language choice as a deliberate, audience-oriented strategy. Broader sociolinguistic frameworks, such as those by Appel and Muysken (2005) and Blommaert (2010), provide foundations for understanding language contact and globalization, while Poplack's (1980) seminal typology offers a crucial structural lens. Nonetheless, research integrating structural and functional perspectives to analyze strategic language practices among high-impact Indonesian TikTok influencers remains scarce.

Although existing studies have explored code-switching and code-mixing on social media platforms, most address education, institutional linguistic classification, or individual variation. TikTok-specific research typically focuses on language learning or typological classification of code-switching, neglecting language choice as a strategic act. Moreover, few studies integrate language choice and code-switching within a unified framework, especially for influential Indonesian TikTok users. To address these gaps, this study examines language choice patterns and strategic code-switching practices among the most-viewed Indonesian TikTok influencers. By investigating these practices, it uncovers how language serves as a tool for audience engagement and effective communication in the digital sphere. Consequently, the study is guided by two research questions: (1) What language choice patterns do the most-viewed Indonesian TikTok influencers use? and (2) In what strategic ways do these influencers employ code-switching to engage their audience? Through this inquiry, the research aims to contribute to digital sociolinguistics by elucidating how influencers leverage linguistic diversity as a deliberate online resource.

## METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of digital sociolinguistics, focusing on language choice and code-switching strategies in Indonesian TikTok influencer content. The qualitative design was appropriate because the study aimed to examine patterns and communicative functions of multilingual language use in naturally occurring digital discourse rather than test statistical hypotheses. The analysis emphasized discourse-level interpretation of language choice and code-switching as strategic practices in audience-oriented communication.

The data source consisted of TikTok videos created by four Indonesian TikTok influencers with the largest viewership at the time of data collection: Agnes Jennifer, Celine Wijaya, Maudy Ayunda, and xavieraaputri. These influencers were selected on the assumption that their extensive viewership indicated substantial influence on linguistic behavior. The videos featured speech with

alternating use of *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. The sources included TikTok video recordings from high-viewership influencers and transcripts of their utterances; only videos involving code-switching between *Bahasa Indonesia* and English were selected.

The research method used purposive sampling, in which researchers selected influencers based on the criterion of highest viewership. This sampling enabled the study to focus on influential language users who presumably shaped societal linguistic practices. Five videos were selected from each influencer.

The research procedure began with observation, which involved identifying suitable influencers via purposive sampling based on criteria such as high viewership and bilingual spoken discourse. The selected influencers—Agnes Jennifer, Celine Wijaya, Maudy Ayunda, and xavieraaputri—represented diverse profiles: lifestyle, interactive entertainment, celebrity public figures, and educational content creators. Their TikTok content frequently featured code-switching between *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. Selection criteria emphasized extensive reach and varied communicative expressions to capture a broad range of multilingual practices among Indonesian social media influencers. This approach provided a strong rationale for examining influencers' strategic multilingual practices. Data collection followed, in which selected videos were downloaded and transcribed, with all instances of *Bahasa Indonesia*, English, or mixed code noted. Data reduction then excluded utterances unrelated to spoken interaction, such as background music lyrics not produced by the influencer. Finally, data categorization coded remaining utterances for language use (*Bahasa Indonesia*, English, or mixture) and code-switching types.

The analysis employed an interactive qualitative approach, involving data categorization, display, and conclusion drawing. It focused on dominant language patterns among influencers, code-switching strategies (including reasons for using *Bahasa Indonesia* or English), frequency and distribution of language choices, code-switching types, and strategic uses for audience engagement. Results were interpreted in relation to the research questions and aligned with Poplack's (1980) theory of code-switching.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Language Choice Patterns Used by Indonesian TikTok Influencers

The analysis of 49 utterances across content produced by Indonesian influencers with the highest number of views on TikTok reveals that code-switching dominates language choice. At the same time, exclusive use of Indonesian does not occur at all.

**Table 1. Language Choice Pattern**

Language Choice Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
Indonesian only	0	0%
Indonesian + English (Lexical / Intra-sentential insertion)	20	40.8%
Intersentential switching	13	26.5%
Tag-switching	16	32.7%

Source: Research Data Analysis, 2024

As shown in Table 1, **Indonesian–English intra-sentential code mixing** is the most frequent pattern, accounting for **20 instances (40.8%)**, followed by **tag-switching** with **16 instances (32.7%)**, and **inter-sentential switching** with **13 instances (26.5%)**. The absence of Indonesian-only usage (0%) indicates that English has become an integral communicative resource rather than an optional stylistic addition in high-engagement TikTok content.

**Table 2. Types of content**

Types of content	Intra-sentential switching	Inter-sentential switching	Tag-switching
Education	4	1	3
Review	1	1	1
Endorse	6	6	4
Daily Vlog	3	3	3
Personal Mindset	6	2	5

Source: Research Data Analysis, 2024

Across various types of content, as outlined in Table 2, specific patterns of code-switching emerge. The type of content that uses code-switching to the greatest extent overall is the endorsement type of content, indicating a great need for the services of bilinguals. The educational type of content has a restricted form of code-switching, whereas the review-type content, as well as mindset-type content, switches code only within specific influencers, suggesting at specialisation rather than uniformity on the website. The daily vlog is balanced.

The results demonstrate that language choice patterns are not randomly distributed but are **content-sensitive**, with different forms of code-switching preferred depending on communicative goals. The data shows that Indonesian influencers use code-switching not only to indicate bilingual ability but also to achieve various pragmatic and engagement-related goals.

In educational content, all four influencers employ code mixing, with an average distribution of 75% Indonesian and 25% English. In this context, English functions as an instructional resource that signals a shift from conceptual explanation to practical action. Code-switching is used to formulate encapsulated and solution-oriented instructions, thereby reducing the didactic tone commonly associated with educational instructions conveyed purely in Indonesian. English is therefore used as a tool to improve instructiveness and equalize teaching divisions on a global productivity platform while retaining Indonesian for its ability to provide mutual closeness.

In the endorsing content, the four influencers display code-mixing, with an average of 70% Indonesian code and 30% English code. The overall English code within the endorsing contents functions as a form of code-switching that signals a move to a register, creates a code of professional identity, mitigates promotion, and also establishes an identity that is aspirational as well as world-oriented. The English code does not replace the Indonesian code; instead, the English code reinforces specific functions such as product assessment within the context of implied persuasion.

Review content appears exclusively in Maudy Ayunda's videos, with English dominating at 85% and Indonesian used only 15% of the time. In review contexts, English primarily functions as a marker of objectivity and evaluative distance rather than persuasion. It is used in instances where the speaker makes judgments, comparisons, and assessment results, both positive (evaluation) and negative (critical assessment), (e.g., "there is no difference," "5 out of 5"). Its use gives the impression that the researcher/speaker is an objective assessor speaking rationally, making the speech more credible. Furthermore, relative to the utterance of endorsement, the use of English in review videos on YouTube allows for the expression of a negative review without undermining the reviewer's credibility, who ought to appear credible to the audience. English, therefore, is a resource that helps to promote audience credulity based on a perceived objective, transparent, and professionally judgmental presentation.

Daily vlog content is produced by only three influencers, with Indonesian accounting for approximately 65% of language use and English for 35%. In daily vlogs, English functions as a narrative and evaluative marker that helps influencers manage storytelling flow, express emotional responses concisely, and construct a cosmopolitan persona in a naturalized manner. Code-switching is not employed to convey core information, but rather to add performative nuance to everyday experiences, mark boundaries between private and public spheres, and enhance narrative appeal without disrupting the sense of intimacy maintained through the use of Indonesian.

Personal mindset content appears exclusively in Maudy Ayunda's videos, with an equal distribution of Indonesian and English (50%–50%). In this dataset, English functions not merely as a medium for personal reflection, but more importantly as a cognitive and moral framing device that enables the speaker to transform subjective experiences into generalized, aphoristic, and shareable insights. Code-switching occurs consistently when the speaker summarizes, reframes experiences, or delivers implicit calls to action to the audience, while Indonesian continues to dominate the narration of processes and personal context. Thus, English operates as a symbolic resource for abstraction, reframing, and engagement management, rather than as a simple stylistic choice or self-expression.

These results show that Indonesian code-switching among Indonesian TikTok influencers is a strategic use of communication resources closely tied to the type and communication goals. Instead, English is used to supplement Indonesian, thus facilitating changes in communication register, stance, or footprint. It is these very deliberate communication choices that work to achieve balance in communication, which is very fundamental for sustaining high levels of audience engagement on TikTok.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that language choice and code-switching patterns among high-viewership Indonesian TikTok influencers are strategically deployed to achieve specific communication goals, rather than serving as random displays of bilingual skill. *Bahasa Indonesia* dominated as the foundational language for contextualization, self-narrative, and audience rapport, while English supported instructional explanations, professionalization, evaluative positioning,

narrative embedding, and cognitive repositioning. Patterns varied by content type—education, endorsements, reviews, vlogs, or mindset discussions—highlighting code-switching's role in digital sociolinguistics as a key tool for self-positioning in high-stakes social media discourse. For future research, scholars could quantitatively model code-switching frequencies across larger influencer samples using machine learning on TikTok datasets to predict engagement metrics and test generalizability beyond Indonesia.

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