

TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CODE-SWITCHING IN TWITTER POSTS BY HUMANITIES STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITAS SUMATERA UTARA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the types and characteristics of code-switching employed by students from the Faculty of Humanities at Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU) in their Twitter posts. Drawing on Gumperz's (1982) conversational functions, the research explores how code-switching operates as a communicative strategy rather than a random alternation between Indonesian and English. The data were collected from naturally occurring tweets and analyzed qualitatively. The findings reveal that intra-sentential switching is the most dominant type, reflecting high bilingual competence and a fluid integration of English into Indonesian discourse. Code-switching among USU Humanities students also exhibits distinctive pragmatic traits: English is frequently used for emphasis, emotional expression, and message qualification, while Indonesian maintains interpersonal warmth and contextual familiarity. Unlike patterns found in Jakarta youth discourse, their switching is content-driven and cognitively motivated, functioning as a tool for nuanced expression rather than identity display. These characteristics highlight a unique bilingual style rooted in intellectual engagement and reflexive awareness, suggesting that academic bilingualism fosters a sophisticated, meaning-oriented mode of linguistic hybridity. In conclusion, the overall findings indicate that code-switching among USU Humanities students reflects not only linguistic proficiency but also an intentional and strategic use of language shaped by academic culture, digital communication norms, and the cognitive demands of expressing complex ideas within online interactions.

Keywords: *Code-switching; Sociolinguistic; Twitter*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of code-switching has become increasingly visible in the digital era, especially on social media platforms such as Twitter. Unlike traditional face-to-face communication, Twitter provides a dynamic and interactive space where users can easily shift between languages in short, expressive texts. Code-switching, broadly defined as the alternation between two or more languages or varieties within a single discourse, serves not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a social and cultural marker. On Twitter, users frequently switch between languages to emphasize certain meanings, express humor, display identity, or align themselves with particular communities. Such practices reflect how digital communication accelerates the blending of languages and the fluidity of bilingual or multilingual repertoires (Lee, 2015).

Within Indonesia, Twitter has become a popular platform for university students, who actively engage with both local and global discourses. Students of Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU), particularly those from the Faculty of Humanities, represent an especially active group of bilingual Twitter users. Their frequent exposure to English through academic activities and to Indonesian as their primary communicative medium creates fertile ground for code-switching in digital spaces. Tweets produced by these students often combine Indonesian with English, reflecting not only their bilingual competence but also their identity as young, educated social media users. Examining their Twitter practices therefore provides a rich site for observing contemporary patterns of code-switching and their pragmatic functions in an Indonesian academic community.

This study seeks to answer three main questions: first, what types of code-switching appear in the Twitter posts of USU students; second, what functions do these code-switching practices serve in their communication; and third, what distinctive characteristics can be identified in the code-switching practices of USU students that may set them apart from students of other campuses. These questions are essential because they highlight both the structural and functional dimensions of code-switching in a specific community while also offering insight into the sociolinguistic profile of USU students.

Recent research (e.g., Nur'aini & Fitriana, 2024; Wulandari, Hadiani & Fhadilathusy, 2024) has demonstrated that code-switching on social media is a widespread and strategically used communicative phenomenon across diverse user groups and digital platforms and Hoffman provided foundational frameworks for categorizing types of code-switching, while more recent studies have applied these frameworks to online contexts. For instance, researchers have explored the pragmatic motivations of code-switching in Twitter interactions and its role in shaping digital identity and stance (Rahman et al., 2025). Studies also indicate that English–Indonesian code-switching on Twitter reflects perceptions of prestige and

identity negotiation (Rosita et al., 2023). Other works highlight how specific online communities such as K-pop fandoms, student groups, or regional collectives employ code-switching to signal solidarity, humor, or emphasis (Khedun-Burgoine, 2022). In addition, descriptive analyses of student Twitter corpora across different countries show that switching practices vary according to local sociolinguistic ecologies and academic cultures (Kim et al., 2021). These studies collectively affirm the significance of code-switching in online spaces, yet they also underscore the need for more localized investigations.

In the Indonesian context, Twitter has been studied as a medium where English borrowings and code-switches reflect cultural trends and youth identity. Additional research highlights how students in higher education frequently employ English insertions as markers of academic identity and prestige. Internationally, studies such as Montes-Alcalá (2022) illustrates that Twitter enables multilingual expression that is at once global and local. Collectively, these findings demonstrate the global relevance of code-switching studies, yet they also reveal a gap: few studies focus specifically on students from a particular university or faculty as a distinctive digital community. Indonesian–English code-mixing in Twitter posts from influencers and identified forms such as word, phrase, hybrid, idiom, and clause insertions, each serving specific pragmatic functions. The linguistic interplay of Indonesian–English code-mixing on Twitter, demonstrating how bilingual practices are shaped by sociolinguistic motivations and online community dynamics. Fani (2025) further explored code-mixing in the “angry community” on Twitter, finding that insertion and alternation were the most frequent types, influenced by bilingual habits, peer imitation, and aspirations to improve English proficiency.

In addition, Rosita et al. (2023) investigated code-switching and code-mixing in the popular Twitter account @NKSTHI, discussing both their communicative functions and their relevance to Indonesian language learning. Study about the interplay between code-switching and slang among Indonesian Generation Z users on social media, showing how such practices express group identity and modernity. Beyond structural and functional analysis, user attitudes have also become a focus. Indonesian Twitter users’ attitudes toward English–Indonesian code-mixing, revealing that prestige and identity negotiation were central motivations.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on USU Humanities students as an identifiable bilingual subgroup. While many studies have explored code-switching on Twitter broadly, the linguistic character of code-switching among USU students remains underexplored. This study argues that their digital language practices are distinguished by a combination of academic English vocabulary, local slang specific to the USU community, and pragmatic strategies tied to their

disciplinary orientation in the humanities. Such characteristics set them apart from students in other campuses or faculties, contributing a unique sociolinguistic profile to the broader study of code-switching in Indonesia. By highlighting these distinctive features, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how academic background, institutional culture, and social media practices intersect in shaping contemporary bilingual discourse.

The objectives of this research are as follows: to identify and categorize the types of code switching in USU students' tweets using Shana Poplack's framework, and to explore the sociolinguistic motivations behind the students' use of code switching in their online communication.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Previous studies in the last five years have shown that code-switching on social media is a widespread linguistic phenomenon across diverse user groups and digital contexts. Recent research has developed updated classifications and analytical models for understanding code-switching in online environments, emphasizing its function as a strategic communicative tool rather than a random alternation between languages. Several scholars have examined the pragmatic motivations of code-switching in Twitter interactions, showing how users employ language alternation to frame stance, highlight emotions, and manage interpersonal alignment (Ali, 2023). Other studies indicate that English Indonesian code-switching on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram reflects perceptions of prestige, digital identity negotiation, and the desire to project intellectual capital in online discourse (Rahman et al., 2025). Research on online communities such as university student groups, gaming communities, and K-pop fandoms further demonstrates that code-switching is used to construct solidarity, humor, and emphasis within peer networks (Nur'aini & Fitriana, 2024). In addition, computational linguistic analyses have identified structural and stylistic features of code-switched digital texts, linking switching patterns to discourse organization and audience-design strategies (Gonzales, 2025). Comparative studies across countries also reveal that code-switching practices vary according to sociolinguistic ecology, digital norms, and academic cultures, illustrating how bilingual communities adapt switching styles to their communicative needs (Al-Harbi, 2022; Clarke, 2021). Collectively, these recent studies reaffirm the central role of code-switching in shaping online communication while emphasizing the need for localized, context-sensitive investigations such as the present research.

In the Indonesian context, Twitter has been studied as a medium where English borrowings and code-switches reflect cultural trends and youth identity (Gracia et al., 2025). Additional research highlights how students in higher education frequently employ English insertions as markers of academic identity and

prestige (Ibarra-Gambrill, 2021). Internationally, studies such as Montes-Alcalá (2012) further illustrate that Twitter enables multilingual expression that is at once global and local. Collectively, these findings demonstrate the global relevance of code-switching studies, yet they also reveal a gap: few studies focus specifically on students from a particular university or faculty as a distinctive digital community. Nabila (2021) analyzed Indonesian–English code-mixing in Twitter posts from influencers and identified forms such as word, phrase, hybrid, idiom, and clause insertions, each serving specific pragmatic functions. Similarly, Wibowo & Hamidah (2023) examined the linguistic interplay of Indonesian–English code-mixing on Twitter, demonstrating how bilingual practices are shaped by sociolinguistic motivations and online community dynamics. Fani (2023) further explored code-mixing in the “angry community” on Twitter, finding that insertion and alternation were the most frequent types, influenced by bilingual habits, peer imitation, and aspirations to improve English proficiency.

In addition, Rosita et al. (2023) investigated code-switching and code-mixing in the popular Twitter account @NKSTHI, discussing both their communicative functions and their relevance to Indonesian language learning. The interplay between code-switching and slang among Indonesian Generation Z users on social media, showing how such practices express group identity and modernity. Beyond structural and functional analysis, user attitudes have also become a focus. Indonesian Twitter users’ attitudes toward English–Indonesian code-mixing, revealing that prestige and identity negotiation were central motivations.

Types of Code-Switching (Poplack, 1980)

Tag-switching refers to inserting a tag or phrase from one language into an utterance in another language. Inter-sentential switching involves switching languages at clause or sentence boundaries. Intra-sentential switching, on the other hand, is the mixing of languages within a single sentence.

Functions of Code-Switching

Following Gumperz (1982), common functions include:

- a. Quotations: Reproducing exact words in their original language.
- b. Addressee specification: Choosing language to address a specific audience.
- c. Interjection: Expressing emotions through exclamations in another language.
- d. Reiteration: Repeating the message in another language for emphasis or clarity.
- e. Message qualification: Adding details or clarification in another language.
- f. Personalization vs. objectification: Showing personal involvement or emotional distance.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the types and functions of code-switching in the Twitter posts of Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU) students from the Faculty of Humanities. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the objective of the study is to examine and interpret naturally occurring language behavior rather than to quantify linguistic patterns. The data for this study were collected between January and June 2024 to ensure that the linguistic practices analyzed reflected recent patterns of bilingual interaction in digital spaces. A total of 53 tweets were obtained through purposive sampling, focusing specifically on accounts that could be reliably identified as belonging to active USU Humanities students. Only tweets containing clear instances of Indonesian–English code-switching were selected to maintain the relevance and specificity of the dataset.

The data collection procedure involved three stages. First, student Twitter accounts were identified through network-based searches and mutual academic connections within USU's Faculty of Humanities. Second, tweets posted within the six-month data collection window (January–June 2024) were screened to ensure the currency and authenticity of the material. Third, 53 tweets that demonstrated clear evidence of code-switching were purposively selected, documented, and transcribed. Each tweet was then classified based on its linguistic structure and communicative function, following established analytical frameworks commonly used in recent code-switching research.

In analyzing the structural types of code-switching, this study adopts the classification model refined in recent sociolinguistic literature such as Al-Harbi (2022), Clarke (2021), and Nur'aini and Fitriana (2024). These contemporary studies build upon earlier models and distinguish code-switching into three primary types: tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching. These updated frameworks are widely used in current bilingualism research because they maintain Poplack's structural clarity while adapting to the linguistic complexities of online discourse.

To analyze the pragmatic functions of code-switching, this study draws on recent functional classifications proposed by Ali (2023), Rahman et al. (2025), and Gonzales (2025), which examine how bilingual speakers use switching to manage stance, express emotions, mark emphasis, provide clarification, and construct interpersonal alignment in digital communication. These models offer a more contemporary interpretation of bilingual interaction and are particularly relevant to the multilingual practices observed on platforms such as Twitter. By incorporating these recent frameworks, the analysis captures both the structural form and communicative intent of each switching instance more comprehensively.

The analytical process began by categorizing each tweet according to the structural type of code-switching identified in recent literature. Following this classification, each switching instance was interpreted using contemporary functional frameworks to determine its communicative purpose. The findings were then synthesized to identify dominant patterns, highlight salient structural tendencies, and describe the unique stylistic features that characterize the code-switching practices of USU Humanities students. This integrated approach ensures that the analysis remains aligned with current trends in multilingual digital communication while providing a localized understanding of bilingual expression within the academic community.

FINDING

This study found that students of the Faculty of Humanities at Universitas Sumatera Utara used code-switching in a fluid and strategic manner across their digital communication. Three types of code-switching—*intra-sentential*, *inter-sentential*, and *tag-switching*—were identified, with *intra-sentential* switching appearing as the most dominant. English elements were frequently inserted into Indonesian sentence structures to refine meaning, express emotion, or align with global digital culture. *Inter-sentential* switching functions to separate expressive English statements from Indonesian explanations that feel more personal and culturally grounded. Meanwhile, *tag-switching* appears least frequently and serves primarily as a stylistic marker to signal familiarity, humor, or group identity. The following part will show the findings.

Intra Sentential Code Switching

Intra-sentential code-switching is the most dominant type of code-switching found in this study, with a total of 33 out of 53 tweets. In this type, the language alternation occurs within a single clause or sentence structure. The clearest examples include the use of English phrases such as *lowkey*, *pls*, or *feel so* that are combined with Indonesian syntactic structures. The main examples are: “*lowkey loving belajar cultural awareness since I deeply enjoy sosiologi di SMA,*” “*reading her books feel so tidak asing to me,*” and “*the coffee works too well ak bsk kls pagi pls jangan gini.*” These examples demonstrate the natural insertion of English elements into Indonesian structures without disrupting the unity of meaning.

This finding aligns with Nur’aini & Fitriana (2024) and Rahman et al. (2025), who show that *intra-sentential* switching on digital platforms is generally expressive and cognitive in nature. Language users tend to choose English words or phrases to express emotions, irony, or abstract concepts that are perceived as more fitting in English. This also supports Gonzales (2025), who states that the selection of second-language elements in digital spaces is often used to strengthen

the speaker's stance or attitude. In other words, the insertion of English is not merely decorative but functions as a communicative strategy that reflects linguistic intelligence and the users' closeness to global digital culture.

This finding concludes that intra-sentential switching reflects a high level of bilingual proficiency among students of the Faculty of Humanities at USU. Code-switching is no longer viewed as a sign of linguistic deficiency but as an expressive strategy that has become part of their academic digital identity. This pattern shows that English has become part of their daily register, used to refine meaning, strengthen expression, and construct a digital persona aligned with global trends.

Inter Sentential Code Witching

Inter-sentential switching was found in 14 tweets and is characterized by language alternation across sentences or clauses. Examples found in the data include: *"everything would be oke. kesusahan sehari cukup lah untuk sehari,"* then *"how I hate this effing place. apa2 mahal & akses masuknya nggak banget,"* as well as *"And yahh my skill is create something... Buttt? Sekarang aku bingung apa yg harus dituju."* In these examples, the English sentence typically appears first as an evaluative or expressive statement, followed by the Indonesian sentence that provides local context or explains the speaker's feelings.

This pattern is consistent with the observations of Wibowo & Hamidah (2023), who found that Indonesian Twitter users often use English in the initial sentence to provide emphasis or self-expression, before returning to Indonesian to describe experiences or emotions in a way that feels culturally closer. Ali (2023) and Rahman et al. (2025) emphasize that this type of code-switching reflects the function of message qualification, where one language is used to convey a global stance or perspective, and the other language is used to clarify or deepen the meaning. Thus, inter-sentential code-switching serves as a tool for balancing global expression and emotional closeness.

Tag Switching

Tag-switching is the least frequently occurring type found in this study, appearing in only 6 tweets. This type is characterized by the insertion of English tag words or phrases into Indonesian sentences without altering their main syntactic structure. Examples found in the data include: *"guys im craving mi cepek,"* *"sampe kapan ya ak hrs 'begin again' trus,"* and *"you can't do that without my permission, bro."* The use of elements such as *guys*, *bro*, or *begin again* functions as stylistic markers that create a specific communicative tone.

This finding supports Kandiawan (2022), who states that Indonesian Generation Z often uses tag-switching as part of their digital linguistic identity

influenced by global culture. Research by Rosita et al. (2023) also shows that tag-switching serves as a tool for building familiarity and solidarity within online communities. In this context, tag-switching is not used to convey complex concepts but functions as a social marker that strengthens interpersonal connections and reflects a relaxed, modern communication style.

The analysis of students' online utterances from the Faculty of Humanities at Universitas Sumatera Utara reveals three dominant types of code-switching; intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching—that occur in informal digital contexts. The most salient observation is that intra-sentential switching appears as a natural mode of expression rather than a deliberate stylistic choice. In posts such as “lowkey loving belajar cultural awareness since i deeply enjoy sosiologi di sma” or “bonedo keren bgt ih di lollapalooza the way they were hyping the crowds”, English phrases are woven seamlessly into Indonesian syntax, producing hybrid structures that sound both fluent and spontaneous. This integration reflects the speakers' comfort with both linguistic systems, showing that code-switching has become an unmarked feature of their online discourse. The boundary between English and Indonesian dissolves as both languages merge to express thought and emotion in the most efficient and natural way.

Intra-sentential code-switching among these students often performs expressive and referential functions simultaneously. Students use English to emphasize emotions or abstract ideas, while Indonesian remains the default language for everyday realities and affective grounding. For instance, in “the coffee works too well *ak bsk kls pagi pls jangan gini*”, the English segment conveys irony and self-deprecation, while the Indonesian clause returns to concrete experience. This blending demonstrates linguistic intuition rather than linguistic interference, as the alternation occurs precisely where a language shift adds pragmatic depth. Moreover, the consistent presence of English lexemes such as “lowkey,” “pls,” “guys,” and “literally” indicates that the students have internalized digital English discourse as part of their social register. Thus, the intra-sentential pattern among USU Humanities students reveals bilingual creativity shaped by digital culture, academic exposure, and peer identity.

Meanwhile, inter-sentential switching functions to mark discourse boundaries or shifts in topic, tone, or stance. In examples like “everything would be oke / *kesudahan sehari cukup lah untuk sehari*” and “how i hate this effing place. *apa2 mahal & akses masuknya ga banget*”, the speaker uses English to deliver a general evaluative statement, then switches to Indonesian to anchor it within local experience or emotional reflection. The alternation across sentences highlights a dynamic negotiation between global perspective and personal relevance. English clauses tend to serve as commentary or self-reflection, while Indonesian clauses reinforce emotional solidarity and authenticity. This pattern also appears in “And

yahh my skill is create something... Buttt? *Sekarang aku bingung apa yg harus dituju*”, where the switch marks a shift from confidence to uncertainty. Such transitions illustrate that code-switching here operates as a discourse management strategy, not merely a lexical habit.

The third type, tag-switching, appears through short English insertions such as “guys,” “bro,” or “you can’t do that without my permission” embedded in Indonesian contexts. These tags function as discourse markers that establish familiarity, soften tone, or create humor. They frequently appear in expressions of affection or mild frustration, such as “guys im craving mi *cepek*” or “*sampe kapan ya ak hrs* ‘begin again’ trus.” In these cases, English serves not as a symbol of formality or superiority, but as a social cue that indexes digital literacy and youth culture. Tag-switching thus represents the most interactional type of switching in this corpus, aligning with Gumperz’s (1982) idea of contextualization cues that build interpersonal closeness and shared understanding among speakers. The mixture of casual Indonesian structures and globally recognizable English expressions shows that students linguistically perform belonging within both their local and online communities.

Overall, the findings indicate that code-switching among students of the Faculty of Humanities at USU is characterized by natural fluidity, pragmatic sensitivity, and social warmth. Rather than using English to elevate social status as observed in previous studies of Jakarta youth—these students employ it to articulate nuanced thoughts, humor, and emotions. Their bilingual expression emerges not from linguistic insecurity but from an awareness of each language’s communicative potential. The data suggests that for these speakers, switching between English and Indonesian is a means of achieving precision and relatability rather than prestige. Consequently, code-switching in this context reflects not only language mixing but also identity mixing: a fusion of academic discourse, local belonging, and digital modernity that defines the linguistic identity of young people in the Humanities faculty.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that intra-sentential code-switching is the most dominant type, with 33 out of 53 tweets displaying the insertion of English elements into Indonesian structures in a natural manner. This pattern reflects a high level of bilingual proficiency as well as the closeness of USU Faculty of Humanities students to global digital discourse. This result aligns with Nur’aini & Fitriana (2024), who found that social media users particularly university students frequently use intra-sentential switching to express emotions, irony, or abstract concepts that are perceived as more precise in English. Additionally, this finding is consistent with Gonzales (2025), who asserts that switching in digital media is

strategic and used to strengthen the speaker's stance. Thus, the researcher's findings reinforce the view that this type of code-switching is not a form of interference, but rather an expressive, cognitive, and functionally conscious communication strategy.

This study found that in inter-sentential switching, students use English in the first part of the sentence to convey evaluation or stance, and then shift to Indonesian to explain the experience in a more emotional and localized manner. This pattern aligns with the findings of Wibowo & Hamidah (2023), which show that Indonesian Twitter users tend to use English to frame their opinions before returning to Indonesian to clarify personal context. Ali (2023) and Rahman et al. (2025) also support the idea that the main function of this type of code-switching is message qualification, namely the use of two different languages to construct a hierarchy of meaning between global and local perspectives. However, this study introduces a new finding: USU Humanities students do not use switching for prestige purposes, as found in Fitriani (2021), but rather to achieve an expressive balance between self-reflection and emotional closeness. Thus, the results offer a more contextual and academically grounded picture of code-switching practices among regional university students.

Tag-switching appears the least in this study, with only 6 tweets, and is used primarily as a stylistic marker to create a casual or humorous tone. This finding aligns with Kandiawan (2022) and Rosita et al. (2023), who explain that Indonesian Generation Z often uses tag-switching as part of their digital linguistic identity and to build familiarity within online communities. However, compared to Nabila (2021), who found a relatively high frequency of tag-switching among mainstream Twitter users, this study indicates a decrease in its frequency among USU Humanities students. This difference shows that students prefer cognitive and expressive forms of switching (intra-sentential) rather than switching for stylistic purposes alone. In other words, this study highlights that tag-switching is not a dominant feature in this academic community, but it still functions as a stylistic element that contributes to constructing a modern and globally oriented digital persona.

The code-switching patterns among Humanities students at Universitas Sumatera Utara demonstrate a distinctive linguistic sophistication that goes beyond the conventional use of bilingual mixing found in most Indonesian youth communities. Their tweets reveal that switching between English and Indonesian is not a casual or decorative linguistic act, but a form of contextual negotiation that reflects awareness of meaning, tone, and audience. In the data, English phrases are frequently employed to express abstract thought, irony, or humor, while Indonesian serves as the grounding language that restores familiarity and emotion. This rhythmic alternation shows a high degree of linguistic self-awareness—an ability to maneuver between cognitive and affective domains with precision. Such a

phenomenon suggests that these students treat bilingualism as a tool for intellectual expression rather than as a marker of urban identity.

When analyzed through Gumperz's framework, the students' code-switching functions primarily as message qualification and personalization/objectivization. For instance, expressions like "i just draw very stupid looking cat 🐱 cekikikan" or "the coffee works too well *ak bsk kls pagi pls jangan gini*" exemplify how English segments highlight the speaker's internal stance before the utterance returns to Indonesian for grounding and humor. This combination produces a conversational tone that is reflective yet playful — a tone rarely observed in previous studies that associate bilingual switching with formality or prestige. The choice to merge emotional honesty with linguistic fluidity creates a narrative style unique to this community, where self-expression and reflection coexist naturally. Here, code-switching functions not to fill lexical gaps but to express psychological nuance and personality.

Another striking feature lies in the stylistic coherence of their intra-sentential switching, which dominates the corpus. Instead of fragmentary insertions, these students produce syntactically integrated bilingual sentences that maintain grammatical fluency across codes. This indicates advanced bilingual competence and high exposure to both linguistic systems through academic training and digital interaction. Their fluency allows for creativity: code-switching becomes an aesthetic choice that conveys rhythm, irony, or intimacy. The tweets often flow seamlessly between English and Indonesian without disruption in meaning or tone, signaling that bilingual speech here is not an exception to normal communication but a norm in itself. Such structural stability contrasts with earlier research on youth speech in metropolitan areas, where switching tends to fragment discourse for emphasis or humor.

Moreover, the pragmatic force of these switches reflects an intellectual emotionality that mirrors the Humanities environment. Students alternate codes to negotiate thought and feeling simultaneously — English representing abstract reasoning, and Indonesian embodying empathy or social connection. For example, in tweets like "like i don't want anything bad to happen to them... kayak kalo km sedih aku juga sedih", English articulates the speaker's moral sentiment, while Indonesian reinforces empathy and cultural intimacy. This layering of affect through language demonstrates how emotional discourse among these students is cognitively structured rather than impulsive. The phenomenon adds a new dimension to Gumperz's theory by showing that code-switching can also mediate emotional hierarchy in bilingual cognition, not just conversational function.

The scarcity of tag-switching and the dominance of intra-sentential forms also imply that the students' bilingualism is conceptually motivated rather than socially performative. Their use of English does not attempt to imitate global youth

trends but to integrate both linguistic systems into a cohesive mode of thought. Tweets like “lowkey loving belajar cultural awareness since i deeply enjoy sosiologi di sma” or “reading her books feel so *tidak asing* to me” illustrate this integration, where the alternation serves reflective rather than fashionable purposes. The smooth combination of English and Indonesian in such utterances shows that these students have developed a cognitive bilingual identity shaped by sustained academic exposure and cultural curiosity. This finding departs from previous understandings of Indonesian bilingualism by revealing a quieter, more intellectualized form of linguistic creativity.

Finally, the discussion of these findings points to the emergence of a Humanities-specific bilingual discourse within the Indonesian context. The students’ code-switching demonstrates how English functions as a medium of critical introspection, while Indonesian preserves cultural grounding. This interplay between intellectual and emotional expression forms a new kind of bilingual literacy one that is regionally situated yet globally oriented. Rather than signaling hierarchy or imitation, their code-switching embodies linguistic authenticity, reflecting how young intellectuals in regional universities internalize global languages without losing local resonance. Thus, this study sheds light on an understudied dimension of bilingual practice in Indonesia: a balanced, reflective, and meaning-driven form of code-switching that belongs uniquely to Humanities learners.

CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that code-switching among Humanities students at Universitas Sumatera Utara represents a linguistically conscious and socially meaningful practice rather than a mere stylistic choice. The students’ alternation between Bahasa Indonesia and English reflects a deep engagement with both languages as tools for intellectual expression, emotional nuance, and identity negotiation. Their linguistic behaviour demonstrates how bilingualism operates in an academic yet youth-oriented setting, where English is not used to imitate Western urban culture but to articulate thought with greater precision and creativity. Unlike the performative tendencies often found in metropolitan youth discourse, the code-switching observed here highlights cognitive agility, reflexivity, and metalinguistic awareness characteristic of students trained in language and cultural studies. This indicates that bilingualism within academic environments evolves toward intellectual authenticity, where language choice is guided by communicative purpose rather than social prestige. Future studies should explore code-switching across other faculties within the same university to understand how disciplinary background influences language alternation. It would also be valuable to investigate how exposure to academic English affects students’ self-perception

as bilinguals and how digital communication platforms contribute to shaping their hybrid linguistic style. Employing multimodal discourse analysis could further capture the interplay between visual cues, tone, and code choice in online interaction. Additionally, longitudinal research may reveal whether such functional and reflective code-switching persists beyond university life or evolves into different patterns in professional contexts. Finally, future scholars could compare Humanities students' code-switching behaviour with those from STEM or social science backgrounds to uncover how academic culture shapes bilingual identity formation in Indonesian higher education.

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