



# Switching Among Worlds: How Online Friends Encourage Code-Switching in Communication

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## Abstract

This study investigates code-switching in digital communication among bilinguals, focusing on informal conversations on WhatsApp and Discord. It aims to examine the types of Code-Switching that occur and the underlying motivations behind them. The study employs a qualitative case study approach, the research involved chat data analysis and semi-structured interviews with a 21-year-old Indonesian and an 18-year-old Malaysian, both of whom are online friends. Data were collected over a three months period (January-March 2025). Guided by Poplack's typology, the analysis identified three types of code switching: intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching with intra-sentential switching being the most frequent (76% of all instances). Participants reported that their language choices were influenced by social dynamics, emotional state and the context of the conversation. Reasons for code-switching were for expressive clarity, social connection and cultural identity reinforcement. While limited by its small sample and short timeframe, this study highlights how digital platforms facilitate linguistic flexibility and position Code-Switching as a strategic tool for interpersonal communication. The findings contribute to the fields of sociolinguistic and digital communication by providing insight into how online communication shapes multilingual practices in contemporary context.

**Keywords:** *code-switching; bilingual; digital communication; WhatsApp; Discord*

## Introduction

Code-switching defined as the alteration between two languages within a single conversation, sentence, or clause is common in multilingual countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia is known for its remarkable linguistic diversity, with 718 regional languages identified and validated through national language mapping across 2,560 observation points (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan

Bahasa, 2019). Malaysia similarly hosts speakers of Tamil, Malay, English, and Mandarin, these diverse languages are used in everyday conversation. According to Poplack (1980, as cited in Moradi & Chen, 2022), code-switching was categorized into three types of switching namely intra-sentential switching, where language switching in a sentence; inter-sentential switching, where language switching occurs between different sentences; and tag-switching, where phrases/words from one language are inserted into sentences in another language. While Poplack focuses on the structural aspect of language alternation, another researcher, Otheguy et al. (2015) approached code-switching from its sociolinguistic aspects. They argue that code-switching serves as a communicative strategy that reflects social relationship and cultural context, functioning as a means for speakers to navigate their identities and social interactions. In this sense, code-switching is not only a linguistic resource but also a social practice deeply embedded in interactional contexts.

In this digital era, communication is rapidly evolving due to advanced improvisation of technology and the widespread use of digital media. Darginavičienė and Ignotaitė (2020) highlight that in computer-mediated communication (CMC), users often mimic spoken discourse patterns despite using written language—blurring the lines between speech and text. This digital style includes the frequent use of casual expressions, emojis, slang, and notably, code-switching. With social media and other digital platforms increasing, individuals can freely express themselves or with friends online even from a distance (Ladzekpo et al., 2023). These digital spaces allow users from various linguistic backgrounds to interact more freely and spontaneously since information sharing has become extremely fast, leading to the rapid spread of news, trends and social movements.

Previous studies have shown how code-switching is embedded in daily conversation, like the research by Goh and Wu (2024) emphasize how Gen Z often switch between languages depending on context, interlocutor, and even emotional tone when communicating online. Another study by Daulay et al. (2024) reveals frequent use of code-switching in order to emphasize a point, follow trends, or creatively engage with audiences on TikTok. In addition, Tarigan et al. (2022) studied code-switching and code-mixing practices among university students communicating in Bahasa Indonesia and Batak, both online and offline. They found that code-switching serves pragmatic purposes such as clarifying ideas, strengthening social solidarity, and expressing cultural pride. Taken together, these studies reinforce that online interaction promotes linguistic flexibility and that digital environments are essential spaces for studying how code-switching functions as a living, social practice among bilinguals today.

Despite these contributions, a specific research gap remains unexplored. Most existing studies on code-switching have been widely conducted in classroom or formal face-to-face interaction. However, the phenomenon in casual interaction like with online friends are rarely examined. Online friendship between an Indonesian and a Malaysian, for example, offering a unique environment where

individuals blend language naturally during informal conversation while still reflecting subtle cross-cultural negotiation (Jebaselvi et al., 2023). Also, unlike formal interaction, online conversations are less interconnected with institutional laws or norms that allow for a greater linguistic freedom. This setting creates a more authentic and spontaneous use of code-switching which reveals language functioning not only to convey meaning but also express identity, intimacy, and group belonging (Androutsopoulos, 2013). Moreover, existing studies mostly focus on the bilinguals' code-switching patterns based on grammatical structure analysis and few have explored the motivational aspect of the usage of code-switching especially in online interaction as a tool to maintain engagement, avoid miscommunication, or create emotional resonance.

To address this gap, the present study investigates code-switching in informal online communication between bilingual youth from Indonesia and Malaysia. This study aims to examine how online interaction encourage code-switching, focusing on the motivation driving the linguistic choices and the types of code-switching emerged in the conversation. Based on the literature, it is expected that intra-sentential switching will be the most frequent type, reflecting the creative and expressive affordances of digital communication. To find out what has been aimed for, this study conducted two research questions:

1. What types of code-switching are most commonly used when communicating with online friends?
2. What drives individuals to use code-switching in online communication?

## Method

The research design used in this research is a qualitative study with a case study approach, which was deemed appropriate for exploring the unique dynamics of informal bilingual communication between two close online friends. Case study approach allows for a deeper exploration of the context and process of forming digital friendship relationships thoroughly, so that the meanings, challenges, and strategies used by respondents in building and maintaining closeness in friendship relationships without physical interaction can be captured properly. The focus was not only on structural patterns of code-switching but also on the personal and social motivations behind these linguistic choices.

The participants in this study were two young bilingual individuals selected through purposive sampling, with the main criteria being that they had never met in person and only communicated through digital platforms. The first participant is an undergraduate student in a psychology program and the second participant just graduated high school. Participant 1 was a 21-year-old Indonesian whose mother tongue is Bahasa Indonesia, while Participant 2 was an 18-year-old Malaysian whose mother tongue is Malay.

Table 1. Participants' Information Table

Participant	Age	Gender	Country	Languages	Platforms
P1	21	Female	Indonesia	Indonesian -English	WhatsApp
P2	18	Female	Malaysia	Malay- English	Discord

Both participants were fluent in English and shared similar online communication habits. Their daily interactions via digital platforms and shared multilingual competencies made them particularly relevant to the objective of this research, which examined code-switching in informal online friendships. To ensure ethical research practice, informed consent was obtained from both participants. They were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to protect their identities, and all data were securely stored and exclusively used for research purposes.

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period from January to March 2025 to capture different variations of topic and switching patterns. The primary data sources included two selected chat conversations—one from WhatsApp and one from Discord—which were chosen based on the relevance and presence of code-switching behavior. In addition, semi-structured interviews were used in order to explore their experiences and views in a flexible yet focused manner on the research topic. The interviews were conducted via chat on WhatsApp and Discord and each interview lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes. As explained by Volda, et al. (2004), chat-based interviews allow participants to respond more reflectively and comfortably, and make it easier for researchers to document and analyze data. In this study, chat interviews provided a comfortable environment for participants to express themselves using the language and communication style they are used to in online interactions, thus increasing the validity and relevance of the data collected.

The data analysis technique used in this research is thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The coding was done manually to identify patterns related to both the types and motivations of code-switching. While member checking was not conducted due to informal and naturalistic nature of the online friendship context, validity was strengthened through data

triangulation by cross-analyzing interview and chat data and through peer debriefing, as pulmonary findings were discussed together with all the authors. Although the formal intercoder reliability measure was not conducted due to small scale of the dataset, validity was supported by consistency checks across sources and reflexive awareness of the researchers' linguistic background. Through this analysis, the main patterns and themes that emerged from the interviews and chat were identified, such as how to build trust, forms of emotional support, and challenges of virtual communication.

Although the case study approach offers rich contextual insight, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, reliance on text-based communication excluded non-verbal cues that may otherwise enrich understanding. Nonetheless, the study provides valuable insights into how bilingual individuals use language strategically in informal online interactions.

## Results

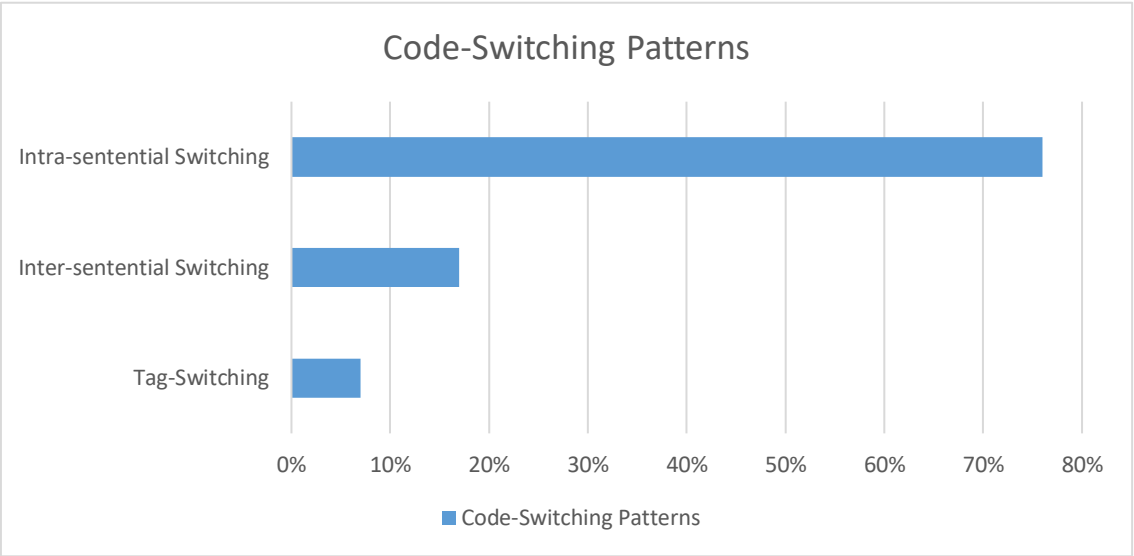
### *Patterns of Code-Switching in Digital Communication*

This research found that both participants frequently switch languages when interacting in an online environment. In examining the data, three main types of code switching, based on Poplack's typology, namely intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag switching appeared prominently. As shown in table 1 and figure 1, intra-sentential emerged as the most frequently used type (42 instances 76%) followed by inter-sentential (9 instances 17%) and tag-switching (4 instances 7%). Participant 2 demonstrated a slightly higher overall frequency than participant 1, particularly in intra-sentential instances. These findings suggest that while both participants shared similar bilingual repertoire, their switching styles diverged. Also, categories are commonly used to understand how multilingual speakers alternate between languages in digital settings (Daulay et al., 2024).

Table 2. Frequency of Code-Switching Types Identified in the Data

Types of Code-Switching	Participant 1	Participant 2	Total Instances
Intra-sentential	18	24	42
Inter-sentential	4	5	9
Tag-switching	2	2	4

Figure 1. Distribution of Code-Switching Types



***Intra-Sentential Switching***

From the results of analyzing the participants' chats, it can be seen that both participants very often change the language used when speaking on digital platforms. From the first participant, it can be seen that there's dynamic use of code-switching between Indonesian and English. Based on Poplack's classification, the most dominant type appearing is intra-sentential. This form appeared fluid and often contextualized. As for participant 1, the example in a conversation:

“Karena I can’t ngalis” (excerpt 1, chat WhatsApp 1, line 8)

Participant 1 used two languages: Indonesian and English. In the utterance “Karena I can’t ngalis”, the participant blends English and colloquial Indonesian, inserting the clause “I can’t” between the conjunction “karena” and the slang verb “ngalis”, a casual term for shaping one’s eyebrows. The use of “ngalis” reflects informal youth language, while the English phrase amplifies the dramatic effect. This intra-sentential switch is not merely structural but expressive, allowing the speaker to dramatize a relatable struggle in a humorous and performative way. As noted by Jebalsevi et al. (2023), young people on social media often develop hybrid communication styles influenced by memes, humor, and internet trends. Such code-switching enables them to express identity and connect within peer groups.

This reflects what Androustopoulos (2013) described as networked multilingualism, where language alternation signals alignment with globalized, digitally mediated speech norms. Also, when the participant said:

“Tapi pas suka bro lgsg nempel for as long as the world rotates” (excerpt 2, chat WhatsApp 1, line 25)

Participants creatively combine Indonesian and English to illustrate the dramatic message for delivering an emotional effect where the participant said if the person likes something, they will be glued to it forever. In this context, English is not a marker of formality but as a stylistic resource that intensifies affect and signals among online peers. As noted by Goh and Wu (2024), such lexical borrowings in digital multilingualism often signal a desire for alignment with internet peers and function as performative expressions of emotional authenticity. It allows participants to articulate thoughts that may be difficult to capture fully using only one language, and to align themselves with the linguistic norms of their peer group.

For participant 2, she shows dominant use of inter-sentential switching in her text which she used as a natural and spontaneous linguistic strategy. As she stated in the text:

“English peminatan apa nyah” (excerpt 1, chat Discord 2, line 9)

These texts show the mix of Malaysian and English lexical elements, participant 2 asking about an English subject in school, which create a distinctive fabric of meaning within a young, digitally active bilingual or multilingual community. In each case, code-switching occurs not haphazardly, but rather as a manifestation of participants’ proficiency and comfort in switching between two or more language systems smoothly.

This is consistent with the findings of Goh and Wu (2024) who explain that in the context of online communication, young adults often show a tendency to code-switch as part of their linguistic identity practices, where the use of English is used to signify global knowledge, access to popular culture, and a desire to build more fluid relationships with online communities across countries. However, this code-switch does not stop at the structural level, but also exhibits a strong expressive function. For example, the participant stated that:

“aku ga minat sains karena... actually no idea” (excerpt 2, chat Discord 2, line 7)

Participant 2 not only uses language as a means of communication, but also a mirror of their emotional state and self-reflection. She blended a Malay clause with an English that states uncertainty. This switch marks a moment of hesitation and self-reflection, with English used to soften the emotional impact of the statement. Rather than simply filling the lexical gap, the phrase “*actually no idea*” adds a casual tone that is common in online gen Z communication styles. The same thing was

stated by Daulay et al. (2024) who said that code-switching on online platforms such as chat, forums, or social media is more than just a linguistic phenomenon, it is also an integral part of how young language users express subjectivity and respond to their discursive environment. Moreover, Beatty-Martínez et al. (2020) stated that bilinguals often switch codes to use language as a flexible toolkit to navigate personal states.

### ***Inter-sentential Switching***

Inter-sentential switching is the second type that occurred frequently in the chat, which involves switching language at a sentence or clause boundary. From participant 1, the utterance that appeared is:

“PAS SD GAK PERNAH?? Are you fr” (excerpt 3, chat WhatsApp 1, line 17)?

This utterance opens with a shock question in Indonesian, then jumps to English to intensify in disbelief. This switch delivers a quick, one-two punch: the Indonesian clause and the English tag express the reaction. According to Otheguy et al. (2015), this type of code-switching exemplifies how bilingual speakers use their linguistic resource to convey nuance meanings and emotional responses. The language transition serves as contextualization cues, the code change marks a boundary between recalled fact and evaluative stance. Roslan et al. (2021) similarly note that Malaysian WhatsApp users deploy English sentences after Malay ones or highlight surprise. By switching codes at, the participant amplifies tone, creates performative contrast, and aligns herself with the conversational style valued in her peer group (Goh & Wu, 2024). Williams et al. (2020) adds that bilinguals often turn to their second language when an effective “punch line” is needed, using code choice itself as a rhetorical device. Another expression also appeared in inter-sentential style, which is:

“Her tweets sound like the flapping wings of butterflies in a stomach  
Bro tidak bisa hidup tanpa cinta” (excerpt 4, chat WhatsApp 1, line 15)

The alteration in the language usage contributes to a humorous contrast that relies on cultural tropes from both linguistic backgrounds. These instances underscore how switching language can be employed not just as a communicative strategy, but also as a narrative device to create layered meaning. This finding is in line with the study of code-switching among Malaysian youth where inter-sentential switching is often motivated by the desire to maintain social engagement and reflect dual identities (Roslan et al., 2021; Androustopoulos, 2013). In the present study, such patterns may also arise from frequent exposure to bilingual discourse among online friends, where the use of English expressions within Indonesian conversation is normalized and even expected (Daulay et al.,



2024; Goh & Wu, 2024). This normalization appears to reduce any social stigma associated with switching and instead transforms it into a sign of linguistic coordination and digital fluency.

Participant 2's inter-sentential switching also appeared as the second most used in the conversation. The language switching is used as a tool to set the rhythm and tone of the conversation. Because the 2<sup>nd</sup> participant is originally from Malaysia, in this case, English was used to deliver the main idea, while the Melayu used to insert the feeling, affection, or spontaneous response.

"biasalah hujan - at least we knowwww" (excerpt 3, chat Discord 2, line 14)

"ya kah, have you tried a curl cream brand that worked," (excerpt 4, chat Discord 2, line 24)

This indicates that in online interaction, language is just not about structure but also about intimacy, familiarity, and the ability to adjust language style to be in tune with the interlocutor. In "*biasalah hujan - at least we knowwww*", participant 2 begins with a Malay phrase to acknowledge a shared local experience, then switches to English with exaggerated tone to deliver humorous expression. Similarly, in "*ya kah, have you tried a curl cream brand that worked*," participant 2 uses Malay question marker to maintain informal rapport then followed by English to introduce product-related knowledge. These instances show how code-switching can serve as a stance-taking device (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). As stated by Goh and Wu (2024), inter-sentential switching style often functioned to mark discursive boundaries or changes in speaker demeanor, especially in informal communication in digital spaces. These examples demonstrated how inter-sentential switching serves relational alignment, echoing Goh and Wu (2024), who notes its role in stance-taking in digital spaces.

### ***Tag-Switching***

The third, less occurring and used switching type in both participants is tag-switching, which entails the insertion of single words or short fixed phrases from another language into another monolingual utterance. For participant 1, she does not tag-switch too much in the chat, only several sentences with tag-switching occurred in the conversation, for example:

"literally hits" (excerpt 5, chat WhatsApp 1, line 2)

"minusnya yah itu tadi" (excerpt 6, chat WhatsApp 1, line 11)

The tag switches in the phrases reveal how single lexical items drawn from different languages let speakers calibrate stance with minimal effort. English collocation "*literally hits*", a meme-born expression of emphatic approval, illustrate what Wintner et al. (2023) call "shared lexical triggers": high-frequency English

chunks that readily prompt a switch because they circulate intact across platforms. By contrast, the Indonesian discourse marker “yah” in “*minusnya yah itu tadi*” softens critique and builds rapport, in many cases, they are adopted from popular internet slang or viral content like the first phrase, suggesting that their use is closely tied to the speaker’s participation in global digital cultures. According to Daulay et al. (2024), social media users in Indonesia actively engage in tag-switching, which is often influenced by viral content and trends in digital expression. This is in line with Androutsopoulos’ (2013) view that such insertions reflect users’ active participation in global digital culture and shared online reputation.

As for participant 2, tag-switching also appears very little in the conversation. Just like participant 1, participant 2 did not use a lot of tag-switch when communicating online. Only several phrases identified in the chat, for example:

“I picked Japanese lah” (excerpt 5, chat Discord 2, line 8)

“routine untuk km lah” (excerpt 6, chat Discord 2, line 28)

These two phrases — “I picked Japanese lah” and “routine untuk km lah” — are classic examples of tag switching. Complete sentences in Malay end with the informal adverb “lah.” This adverb conveys the meaning of the statement without changing the grammatical structure of the sentence: in the first sentence, it adds a friendly emphasis (“This is my final choice”); in the second sentence, it softens the suggestion, presenting the recommendation to practice as informal help rather than a command. Because “lah” is phonetically independent and easy to insert, almost everyone who speaks both languages use this word freely and almost automatically. This pattern was first observed by Poplack and confirmed by Moradi and Chen (2022) among digital bilingual speakers of Malay and English.

On the other hand, Wei and García (2022) propose that particles like “lah” indicate that online conversation participants use unique and flexible vocabulary to adjust closeness and cohesion. These two observations suggest that participants’ linguistic flexibility is balanced by sharp awareness: in digital conversations, micro-changes signify unity, align tone, and maintain a relaxed atmosphere among friends.

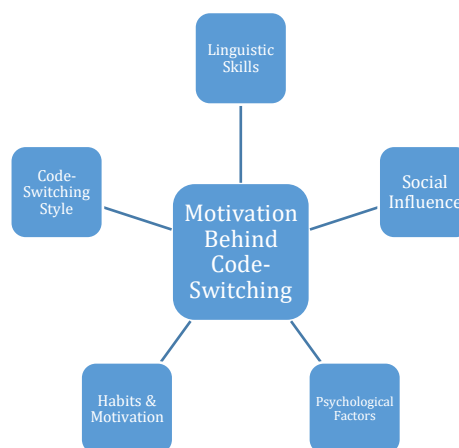
From the data, it is clear that the influence of online friends was significant, as participants appeared to adapt their language based on the norms and preferences of their peer group. The presence of English in these predominantly Indonesian/Malay utterances also demonstrates the general role of English as a lingua franca in online youth culture and also an expressive tool that enhances the performance of identity, group membership, and interpersonal dynamics. The platform differences also emerged where participant 1 who used WhatsApp were more humor-driven where Discord interaction with participant 2 leaned toward reflective self-disclosure. Over the three months period, the overall frequency

remained stable with slight shift: participant 1 gradually increased Malaysian insertion in chats, while participant 2 displayed consistent pattern in English with added Indonesian.

### ***Motivations Behind Code-Switching***

The frequent use of code-switching in communication especially in an online environment is not a random occurrence but shaped by various types of cultural and linguistic background. But this does not cover the fact that motivation also plays an important role behind frequent language switching. The following analysis synthesizes these motivations into five main themes: linguistic skills, social influence, psychological factors, habits and motivation, and code-switching style.

*Figure 2. Motivational Factors Influencing Code-Switching*



### ***Linguistic Skills***

Both participants showed that code-switching enabled them to access broader linguistic resources in conversation. Participant 1 stated that:

"I have more vocabularies in English. Do you get what I'm saying? Di bahasa Inggris tuh aku lebih tau bahasa Inggris daripada bahasa Indonesia, honestly." (excerpt 1, Interview 1, line 4)

This statement shows that participant 1 utilizes her bilingual skills to express herself more effectively, especially when the vocabulary in one language is not enough to describe what she wants to say. As explained by Beatty-Martínez et al. (2020), the use of both languages allows individuals to optimize the expressions they want to convey by choosing words or expressions that are appropriate in a

particular communication context. Furthermore, this is also aligned with De la Fuente's (2023) who highlights how bilingual speakers strategically switch languages to enhance communication and convey their thoughts more clearly in different contexts.

In addition, Participant 2 chooses to switch languages so that her interlocutors can understand the context of what is being discussed in the conversation. She stated,

"There are terms we don't understand in the other person's language so that's when we switch to a language we can understand." (excerpt 1, interview 2, line 3)

Participant 2's decision to switch language to enhance mutual understanding is encapsulated in her statement above. The statement reflects a strategic approach to communication where code-switching serves a tool for bridging linguistic gaps and ensuring clarity in conversation. Research by De la Fuente (2023) supports these findings, showing that students in Mexico use code-switching or language-switching to facilitate communication and understand context in language learning.

### ***Social Influence***

Social dynamics strongly shaped the participants' switching practices, as participant 1 remarked:

"I switch more with certain people like with you, O sama L" (excerpt 2, interview 1, line 7)

She further admitted:

"Yeah it changed, it always changes, I'm always changing. But especially ever since I met O like the way I talk, especially the way I talk has become zestier like slay." (excerpt 3, interview 1, line 20)

This reflects how social relationships can influence language use in communication. Research by Moradi and Chen (2022) shows that language switching is strongly influenced by social dynamics and communication expectations in groups. Also, Androustopoulos (2013) discusses how multilingual practices in online environments are shaped by social networks, suggesting that the language used is often the reflection of the social context and relationship involved.

As stated by Caballero and Celaya (2022) in their research on code-switching, language switching among EFL learners is influenced by the level of language proficiency and the type of interaction, such as interaction with peers or teachers. In addition, a study by Sudarsono (2021) shows that language switching among educated bilinguals in Indonesia is influenced by social and educational factors which play an important role in the formation of linguistic identity.

In terms of language switching, participant 2 pays attention to the context with whom she is speaking, as she stated in the interview:

“In real life friends are probably just words. My online friends are mostly abroad so I'll use full English,” (excerpt 2, interview 2, line 13)

This shows the different styles used when talking to certain people. In her interactions with her friends, the participant changes words more often when switching languages. As explained by Wei and García (2022), the use of single language in specific contexts can enhance clarity and effectiveness in communication. Thus, the choice of language style used by participants is contextual where it is influenced by who the interlocutor is and the communication medium used.

### ***Psychological Factors***

Moreover, in the interview, Participant 1 stated that the language shift that occurred was also influenced by her mood:

“But most of the times it depends on my mood” (excerpt 4, interview 1, line 13)

This psychological factor plays an important role in the choice of language used by speakers. The study by Kheder and Kaan (2020) showed that bilinguals who frequently make language switches have good cognitive control which allows them to be more flexible in choosing language according to their social and emotional context. As stated by participant 1, when feeling comfortable or confident in one language, individuals will tend to choose that language to express themselves. This aligns with the findings by Williams et al. (2020), who highlight that emotional factors can significantly influence code-switching behavior, suggesting that speakers may move to a language that best captures their emotional states or capture a deeper connection with their interlocutors.

However, based on the interview transcript and chat data, there was no clear evidence indicating that Participant 2 experienced psychological factors such as anxiety, shyness, or emotional triggers that influenced her code-switching behavior. Most of her language choices appeared to be driven by practical, social, or habitual motivations rather than psychological states. The findings by Wei and García (2022) support this argument. They suggest that some bilinguals may engage in code-switching primarily for functional reasons, such as accommodating their interlocutors or fitting into social context rather than as a reflection of their emotional states. Therefore, no conclusive findings can be drawn regarding this aspect for this participant.

### ***Habits and Motivation***

In terms of the habits of language switching, participant 1 recognizes that language switching brings benefits to her especially in the aspect of increasing the vocabulary and increase in confidence in speaking English:

“I've been incorporating more Malaysian words when I talk like I use *comel*, *kut* and all that.” (excerpt 5, interview 1, line 22)

“I'm not really good at choosing my words and I have Minimal, minimum amount of Bahasa Indonesia vocabulary like, just barely there because I don't really talk a lot, I don't really talk much. So, I would prefer talking in both *tapi saya berbicara lebih banyak dalam bahasa inggris*.” (excerpt 6, interview 1, line 36)

This statement describes how participant 1 often uses Malaysian words/phrases when interacting with her friends, reflecting a dynamic approach to language use that enriches her communicative repertoire. The study by Blanco (2024) shows that language switching is used as an effective communication tool in a supportive social environment, assisting individuals in overcoming the challenges of speaking English.

Participant 1 also stated that the limitation in Indonesian vocabulary makes her prefer English to interact and speak to express herself better. This is supported by Androustopoulos (2013) that stated the importance of social context in language use, which suggest that individuals may prefer one language over another based on their comfort level and the communicative demands of the situation.

In terms of habits, participant 2 prefers to use his first language to interact both online and offline, as she said in the interview.

“Because I just think since I'm in Malaysia, it's better to speak my native language. This is only online; in real life we'd speak Bahasa of course.” (excerpt 3, interview 2, line 10)

“Code switching is fun but I'd rather not be like *kacang melupakan kulit sendiri*.” (excerpt 4, interview 2, line 19)

Participant 2's statement shows that habits as well as personal motivations can influence the choice of language used on a daily basis. The study by Razali et al. (2024) observe similar patterns among Jakarta adolescents, where code-switching reinforced cultural identity while maintaining social fit. Additionally, research by Daulay et al. (2024) indicate that social media platforms serve as a space for bilinguals to experiment with language, further reinforcing their cultural identity while adapting to their social environment. Participant 2's preference for his native language reflects a desire to maintain cultural ties and authenticity in her interactions, suggesting that language choice is deeply intertwined with individual

identity and social context.

### ***Code-Switching Style***

For code-switching style, participant 1 reports that she just uses words when chatting with Indonesian friends but uses more English with peers who are equally bilingual, as she stated in her interview:

“um i mix ya ya tergantung sih kadang kadang i just use words kayak biasanya kalau sama orang indo aku aku cuma pakai beberapa kata-kata dalam bahasa inggris” (excerpt 7, interview 1, line 11)

“tapi kalau sama sama orang yang bisa bahasa ya sama orang yang sehari-hari Aku lebih banyak pakai bahasa Inggris tuh.” (excerpt 8, interview 1, line 12)

This friendly attitude toward the public reinforces Wei and García's (2022) view of translanguaging as the flexible use of a single integrated vocabulary: the use of single words in English provides simplicity and uniqueness in communicating with local friends, while complete sentences in English demonstrate bilingual ability in a bilingual environment. In addition, participant 1's statement in the text that she uses English more often with people who have the same language skills as her shows a higher level of harmony and solidarity, in line with Caballero and Celaya's (2019) findings that learners tend to use complete sentences when their conversation partners have comparable levels of competence. This choice of language style reflects a strategic approach rather than random borrowing, indicating a preference among chat users for expressiveness.

Participant 2 displays a parallel but audience-reversed pattern. She “*just words*” with face-to-face Malaysian friends yet shifts to “*full English*” with international online peers:

“just words i think.” (excerpt 5, interview 2, line 13)

“Irl friends prob just words. My online friends are mostly abroad so ill use full English” (excerpt 6, interview 2, line 14)

Here, it is the context that determines the style of language use, where it allows participant 2 to maintain a Malay base while showing a certain informal familiarity, while the full use of English corresponds to the expectation of intelligibility towards speakers who do not know Malay. Beatty-Martínez et al. (2020) define this approach as a “device for planning casual speech”: the speaker chooses the structure that best suits the immediacy, precision, or formality of the task. Participant 2's change in style suggests sophisticated audience planning, in

line with Kheder and Kaan's (2021) notion who emphasize that bilinguals navigate their language use to achieve coherence and clarity in communication, particularly in digital communication.

## **Discussion**

Based on the results of interviews and evidence of conversations with participant 1 and 2, the use of code-switching in communication can be explained through various factors including linguistic skills, social influence, psychological habits, motivation, and the style of code-switching used. These findings are in line with recent studies that address the dynamics of bilingualism and language choice in social and psychological contexts.

### ***Linguistic Skills***

The findings demonstrated that both participants strategically mobilize their linguistic ability to navigate online communication, albeit in different ways. Participant 1 draws on intra-sentential switching blending, revealed that the English forms the semantic core while Indonesian provides commentary:

"Their daily vocabs tuh yg membingungkan" (excerpt 7, chat WhatsApp 1, line 22)

Beatty-Martínez et al. (2020) states that code-switching is a tool for opportunistic speech planning. Bilinguals use code-switching to utilize the strengths of each language they speak and this is also reflected in the conversation of participant 1. This aligns with her experience, as the ability to navigate between languages allows her to adapt to various social contexts and engage with peers more effectively. Unlike traditional face-to-face settings, the asynchronous and informal nature of online chats encourages more playful and expressive forms of code-switching.

In linguistic skills, participant 2 shows flexible and adaptive linguistic abilities in the use of two languages, namely Malay and English, where she often engaged in inter-sentential shift:

"honestly i wanna go back to japan this shi is too difficult, sirius la" (excerpt 7, chat Discord 2, line 5)

These statements indicate a high degree of metalinguistic awareness, which allows her to recognize the limitations of one language and strategically switch to another to ensure smooth communication. The findings of (Wei & García, 2022) who explained that bilinguals have translanguaging ability to utilize language resources effectively for smooth communication supports this argument. Participant 2's approach reflects a pragmatic understanding of her linguistic environment, where she is attuned to the needs of her interlocutors and the context



of the conversation.

These examples demonstrate how bilingual teenagers effectively use their range of languages to improve digital communication's expressiveness, clarity, and unity. While both participants leverage bilingualism for lexical gaps, their approaches differ: Participant 1 employs intra-sentential blends to enhance expressiveness, whereas participant 2 uses inter-sentential shifts for pragmatic clarity. This aligns with Wei and García's (2022) observation that translanguaging ranges from identity-driven mixing (participant 1) to utility-driven switching (participant 2). This contrast shows the diversity of code-switching strategies, even among youth with similar multilingual backgrounds.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, these findings extend Poplack's (1980) typology by illustrating how intra- and inter-sentential switches in online context are tied not only to linguistic gaps but also to identity construction and audience design. Participant 1 playful mixing reflects an identity-driven while participant 2 demonstrates accommodation and audience awareness which resonates Androustopoulos (2013) who argued that multilingual practice in digital media are shaped by both expressive and functional motivations. Moreover, globalization and the role of English as lingua franca are evident in participants' practices. English provide access to broader peer network and cultural content but its integration with local languages ensures communication remains contextual and culturally grounded.

### ***Social Influence***

Social influence also plays an important role in the decision to switch languages and accents for participant 1. She revealed that her friends have a strong influence on the way they speak:

"Oh, my accent kind of changed yeah I used to learn Australian but all the Australian accents I finally managed to learn has disappeared because of O. I sound more American mixed."  
(excerpt 9, interview 1, line 23)

This quote emphasizes how social influences especially from close friends can affect changes in accent and speaking style. Similar findings were discussed by Williams et al. (2020), who observed that bilinguals often adjust their speech patterns, including accent and code-switching behavior, in emotionally close interactions. This suggests that code-switching and accent shifts can function as adaptive strategies in response to the social environment and the nature of interpersonal relationships.

In interviews and chats, Participant 2 described the use of code-switching is often done to adjust to the interlocutor and social context. Participant 2 revealed in her interview:

"If they speak Malay with me, I will speak Malay to them until the point they don't even know I can speak English lmao." (excerpt 7, interview 2, line 7)

This finding is in line with the study of Roslan et al. (2021) which states that code switching is often used as an expression of habit and to strengthen group identity in online communication. Participant 2's willingness to switch to Malay when conversing with peers reflects her understanding of the social dynamics at play and her desire to foster a sense of belonging within her group. This can be seen in the language used by participant 2 in the conversation, she said:

"Woi dia ini reveal muka aku dulu" (excerpt 8, chat Discord 2, line 1)

"aku gigit karang kalo muka aku ga ready" (excerpt 9, chat Discord 2, line 3)

This shows how participant 2 naturally uses the language she is more familiar with where this kind of language transfer is used to strengthen expression and facilitate the conveyance of meaning more precisely. In chat conversations, language use also reflects word choice that is more easily understood by all parties involved, given the more informal and less standardized nature of the interaction, as noted by Androustopoulos (2013) that multilingual practices in online communication are deeply embedded in peer culture and serve to negotiate closeness, authenticity, and playfulness.

When comparing the two participants, it is evident that both leverage social influence but they do so in different ways. Participant 1's code-switching is influenced by her exposure to different accents and her social interactions, leading to a more fluid blending of languages. In contrast, Participant 2's code-switching is more strategic, aimed at fostering group identity and belonging within her group. Culturally, the proximity between Indonesia and Malaysia significantly influences these social interactions, which facilitate code-switching practices among speakers (Roslan et al., 2021). These findings contribute to understanding identity construction in digital spaces. The use of code-switching is not random but reflects a balance act. This dual orientation has implication for language maintenance as constant switching may risk diminishing minority language domains but it also sustains cultural ties.

### ***Psychological Factors***

In addition, psychological factors also influence the use of code-switching for participant 1. She explained that her language change depends on her mood and who she is talking to:

"kalau sama orang indo aku cuma pakai beberapa kata-kata dalam bahasa inggris tapi kalau sama sama orang yang bisa bahasa ya sama orang yang sehari-hari Aku lebih banyak pakai bahasa Inggris tuh. But most of the times it depends on my mood" (excerpt 10,

interview 1, line 11-13)

This statement demonstrates that mood and social context act as important triggers in code-switching decisions. This finding aligns with Williams et al. (2020), who argue that bilingual speakers often switch languages as a way to express emotions and internal feelings that may not be easily conveyed in just one language. This finding is reinforced by data from informal conversations between the researcher and Participant 1, where the use of Indonesian dominates with limited English inserts, for example:

“Alisku dah tebal bgt – Klw ngalis I’d look like orangutan” (excerpt 8, chat WhatsApp 1, line 9)

“Dia tuh kecoa yg baru belajar terbang untungnya – Jd pas kujatuhin dia struggle.” (excerpt 9, chat WhatsApp 1, line 10)

In these examples, Indonesian serves as the base language for narrative structure, while English inserts “*I’d look like orangutan*” intensify humor and dramatization. This demonstrates how participant 1’s psychological orientation toward expressivity leads her to alternate codes for rhetorical impact. Which in line with García and Wei (2022), where they argued that emotional resonance guides the mobilization of multilingual resources.

In contrast with participant 1, participant 2 did not show any sign of psychological factors when she code-switches. Her language choice tends to be more habitual and socially driven within digital interactions as shown in her interview:

“I don’t mix languages when I speak usually but if I forget the word in Bahasa I will.” (Excerpt 8, Interview 2, line 9)

This aligns with Beatty-Martínez et al. (2020), who argues that some bilinguals use code-switching as a strategic communicative tool independent of emotional states. The digital nature of participant 2’s communication may also play a role, as Darginavičienė and Ignaitė (2020) found that emotional factors are less dominant in computer-mediated communication, where language use tends to follow efficiency and contextual fit. Thus, the absence of psychological motivation in participant 2 illustrates the diversity in bilingual language use, showing that code-switching can be more functional than affective, especially in habitual digital communication context.

These different outcomes illustrate the range of psychological involvement in code-switching: participant 2’s lack of emotional triggers is consistent with more habitual and goal-oriented usage, whereas participant 1’s mood-based switching

is an example of an affective, expressive style. The idea that translanguaging is both identity-driven and function-driven, as proposed by Wei & García, (2022), is reflected in this contrast.

### ***Habits and Motivation***

For the habit and motivation aspect, (Wei & García, 2022) argue that bilinguals often use both languages interchangeably in daily life as part of language habits. Participant 1 who has a habit of speaking in 2 languages revealed that she feels more comfortable using English in informal communication:

“I’m better with english i think, but like daily i use more bahasa indonesia but online um my english is better than my bahasa indonesia i don’t really i’m not really good at talking in Bahasa.” (excerpt 11, interview 1, line 34)

This statement highlights her linguistic preferences and the habitual nature of her language use. It suggests that while she engages with Bahasa Indonesia daily, her comfort and proficiency in English shape her communication style. This is further reflected in Participant 1’s conversation which is dominated by English rather than Indonesian, one of which is:

“If there was adult money even if my mom disowns me I could still get by” (excerpt 10, chat WhatsApp 1, line 3)

“Then you’ll have another thing to bahas” (excerpt 11, chat WhatsApp 1, line 18)

The chat excerpt indicates that the habit of using English in certain contexts has become very automatic for her. Wintner et al. (2020) suggests that the use of a more dominant language in everyday situations is the result of communication habits formed over time. Participant 1 showed motivation to use English because she felt freer to express herself, especially in more informal online communication. Moreover, she articulates a sense of comfort and ease when communicating in English, particularly in informal settings. This motivation is crucial in understanding her language choices, as it underscores the interplay between language habits and personal preferences.

In contrast, Participant 2 also revealed that her habits and motivations in choosing language are strongly influenced by the social environment around her. She said that she switched from Bahasa Malaysia to Bahasa Rojak or mixed language because this had become a habit among Participant 2’s friends, especially in daily conversations:

“Because I just think since I’m in Malaysia, it’s better to speak my native language. This is only online irl we’d speak bahasa ofc.” (excerpt 9, interview 2, line 10)

And further explained:

“sebab orang dekat sini dia kebanyakan guna bahasa rojak yang campur campur tapi saya cuba guna bahasa melayu.” (excerpt 10, interview 2, line 17)

This is supported by Razali et al. (2024), who argue that bilingual adolescents often use code-switching not only for linguistic efficiency but also as a marker of self and group identity. The use of mixed language reflects the dynamic nature of communication among Malaysian youth, where blending languages serves as a means of expressing identity and belonging. In digital communication contexts, such as chatting, the habitual mixing of languages and colloquial expressions reflects a relaxed and familiar style of interaction, reinforcing social bonds and group membership. For example:

“no la last time i didnt finish hw bc i didnt know kena diri sampai habis rehat, under kerusi ke atas kerusi. i dont remember” (excerpt 10, chat Discord 2, line 10)

In chat, the habit of using colloquialisms indicates a more relaxed and familiar use of language, which reinforces the idea that code-switching also serves to maintain social relationships and demonstrate group identity. Furthermore, the use of Bahasa Rojak can be seen as a reflection of the multicultural landscape of Malaysia, where linguistic diversity is celebrated and embraced. This aligns with the observation of Daulay et al. (2024), who note that the mixing of languages among Malaysian youth is a natural outcome of their sociolinguistic environment, where multiple languages coexist and influence one another.

In a broader perspective, the role of globalization and English as lingua franca in shaping digital habits reflects these findings. Participant 1's preference for English echoes Dewey (2007) who argue that English becomes the default in online multilingual practice. Conversely, participant 2 demonstrates that local linguistic hybridity (bahasa rojak) persists even within globalized platforms.

### ***Code-Switching Style***

Finally, in terms of the code-switching style used by Participant 1, it can be seen that there is a variation between intra-sentential switching and inter-sentential switching. As she stated in the interview:

“um i mix ya ya tergantung sih kadang kadang i just use words kayak biasanya kalau sama orang indo aku cuma pakai beberapa kata-kata dalam bahasa inggris” (excerpt 12, interview 1, line 11)

This statement illustrates her flexible approach to language use, where she adapts her speech based on the context and her interlocutor. The blending of English and Indonesian within the same sentence exemplifies intra-sentential switching, where both languages are utilized to convey a more expressive meaning in a single communication unit. This aligns with the findings of Beatty-Martinez et al. (2020), who discuss how bilingual speakers often engage in opportunistic speech planning allowing them to mix languages fluidly to enhance expression. For instance, in the way she speaks to her friend in the chat, she mixed the two languages (English and Indonesian) in one sentence:

"Dia sempat kek semingguan nonton horror tiap malam tuh most of them horror indo"  
(excerpt 12, chat WhatsApp 1, line 13)

The use of two languages in one sentence (intra-sentential) reflects how Participant 1 utilizes both languages to convey a more expressive meaning in one communication unit, enabling her to draw on the strengths of each language to enhance her communication. Research by Darginavičienė and Ignotaitė (2020) supports this notion, indicating that code-switching can serve as a resource for bilinguals to convey nuanced meanings in digital communication. The use of inter-sentential switching is evident in the sentence:

"PAS SD GAKNAH??? Are you fr" (excerpt 3, chat WhatsApp 1, line 17)

The language change between the two sentences shows inter-sentential switching, which emphasizes switching between full sentence structures. Research by Poplack (1980, as cited in Moradi & Chen, 2022) suggests that this inter-sentence switching can occur as a way to maintain the flow of the conversation and clarify meaning, depending on the context of the conversation taking place.

In the realm of code-switching styles used by participant 2, he stated that he was more likely to use mixed language with local friends and full English with friends who came from abroad. This reflects the diversity of styles in language use depending on the social context and who is involved in the conversation, as said by participant 2:

"Irl friends prob just words. My online friends are mostly abroad so ill use full English"  
(excerpt 2, interview 2, line 13)

Research by Moradi and Chen (2022) shows that individuals are more likely to switch between full and mixed language depending on the situation and their relationship with the person they are talking to. Their findings highlight that social closeness and language attitude significantly shape bilingual speakers' choices in code-switching styles during interaction. In chat conversations, it can be seen that

they use more mixed sentences between Malay and English which shows flexibility in language style selection, depending on who is involved in the conversation, for example:

“don't americans learn spanishn for this reason karena diorang punya bible ada latino kah apa” (excerpt 10, chat Discord 2, line 11)

“I don't like kimia too”. (excerpt 11, chat Discord 2, line 6)

This statement also shows how participant 2 consciously adjusts the language used to the identity and language preferences of the interlocutor, an insight argued by Razali et al. (2024), which suggest that code-switching serves as means to expressing group identity and enhancing social relationships among bilingual individuals. By employing this strategy, Participant 2 not only facilitates smoother communication but also fosters a sense of belonging and connection with his peers. In addition, participant 2 also mentioned that code-switching can deepen understanding because *“you can understand the person better.”* This indicates that code-switching is seen as a tool to foster emotional closeness and mutual understanding between speakers. This aligns with the findings of Razali et al. (2024), who argue that code-switching serves as a means of expressing group identity and enhancing interpersonal relationships among bilingual individuals.

From a theoretical perspective, Herring (2018) further highlights in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), users engage in “stylistic hybridity” that is not only linguistic but also identity driven. Thus, the contrast between participant 1 and 2 illustrates how digital environments enable diverse switching strategies.

This study extends existing theory of code-switching by showing how digital environments create hybrid motivations that combine identity-driven and utility-driven language use. Our findings suggest that online platforms encourage more fluid, playful, and adaptive switching. This also enriches translanguaging theory (Wei & García, 2022), as bilingual youth not only mobilize their repertoires for meaning-making but also adapt these practices to the affordances of digital communication. Teachers and curriculum developers can use students' natural code-switching as a resource in translanguaging pedagogy. Future research should explore these patterns with larger and more diverse samples, including generational differences that may influence digital code-switching practices. Comparative studies across different language pairs and platforms would allow cross-cultural validation and reveal how technological affordances shape language choice. Longitudinal approaches are also needed to trace whether digital code-switching contributes to long-term process of language maintenance or shift.

## **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of code-switching in digital communication among bilinguals, particularly in informal online interactions, reveals significant insights into linguistic behavior and social dynamics. This study highlights how code-switching serves as an important tool for expressing identity, building relationships and navigating cultural context. The findings suggest that individuals often switch between languages not only for pragmatic reasons but also as a reflection of their emotional state, social relationships, and cultural identity.

Moreover, the motivations behind code-switching are multifaceted, including linguistic proficiency, social influence, psychological factors and habit. Participants revealed a strong tendency to adapt their language use based on the interlocutor and the context, demonstrating the fluidity and flexibility that characterizes modern communication.

However, this research faced a limitation due to its small sample size, the participants in this study only involved 2 online friends which may not fully capture the code-switching practices across different regions.

Future research should further explore these dynamics, especially in various cultural settings, to deepen our understanding of multilingual communication in the digital age and how sociocultural factors shape code-switching behaviors. In addition, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how code-switching patterns evolve over time, especially in relation to technological developments and changing digital communication practices.

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