An Analysis of Code-Switching by College Students in Makassar

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ABSTRACT

This study examines code-switching among college students in Makassar, Indonesia. Code-switching, defined as the practice of alternating between two or more languages in a single conversation, is a common phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual communities. With the increasing influence of English in Indonesian education, students frequently switch between Indonesian and English. This research aims to identify the types of code-switching, understand its functions, and explore the reasons behind this linguistic behavior among college students. Data were gathered through recorded conversations and semi-structured interviews with 50 participants from different universities in Makassar. The results show that intra-sentential code-switching is the most prevalent, and the practice is influenced by social context, language proficiency, and exposure to digital media. This study provides significant insights into the bilingual language practices of college students in Makassar, specifically highlighting how code-switching serves as a dynamic tool for social interaction, identity negotiation, and academic expression. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of bilingual practices in Southeast Asia and provide practical insights for educators, suggesting that embracing multilingualism in academic contexts can create more inclusive and effective learning environments.

1. Introduction

In Indonesia, particularly in urban areas like Makassar, code-switching is commonly observed among bilingual and multilingual speakers, especially college students. The phenomenon is not merely a linguistic practice but also reflects social, cultural, and cognitive dimensions. The choice to switch languages, particularly among college students, is influenced by various factors including social identity, cultural context, and language proficiency. College students in Makassar frequently use code-switching as a tool for efficient communication, social alignment, or expression of certain cultural nuances that may not be easily conveyed in a single language. For instance, using English terms or phrases in daily conversations is often seen as a marker of modernity, academic competence, or even social status (Al-Obaydi et al., 2022; Said et al., 2021; Yaumi et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the use of local languages such as Makassarese is a way to maintain cultural heritage and establish group solidarity. This multifaceted nature of code-switching makes it an intriguing area of study, especially in the context of higher education.

In sociolinguistic research, understanding the motivations behind code-switching can provide insights into the broader socio-cultural dynamics of a community. Several studies have explored the pragmatic functions of code-switching, such as marking discourse boundaries, signaling a change in topic, or managing interpersonal relationships (Myers-Scotton, 2023; Poplack, 2021; Yaumi et al., 2024). In the context of Makassar, where English is increasingly incorporated into educational curricula, students often blend English with Indonesian or Makassarese during their conversations. This phenomenon raises questions about the underlying reasons for code-switching, the patterns that emerge, and the implications for language use in academic and social settings.

The present study aims to investigate the patterns and functions of code-switching among college students in Makassar. Specifically, the research addresses three main questions: (1) What are the common patterns of code-switching among Makassar college students? (2) What are the primary reasons behind their code-switching behavior? (3) How does code-switching reflect the students' social and cultural identity? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of how multilingual college students navigate their linguistic repertoire and how this reflects broader social and cultural trends in Makassar.

Additionally, this study situates itself within the broader framework of bilingualism and language contact, acknowledging the influence of digital communication and globalization. With the increasing exposure to English through media, social networks, and academic environments, students are more inclined to integrate English into their daily conversations. This trend aligns with global patterns where English functions as a lingua franca, especially in educational settings (Kim & Hartanto, 2021; Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Youngsun et al., 2024). The use of English alongside Indonesian or local languages not only highlights the changing linguistic landscape but also points to a shift in language attitudes among the younger generation. This study, therefore, contributes to our understanding of the evolving role of code-switching by college students in Makassar.

Furthermore, the findings of this research are expected to have practical implications for educators and policymakers. As language use in educational contexts often reflects broader societal changes, analyzing code-switching can inform curriculum design and teaching strategies that embrace multilingualism rather than treating it as a problem. Understanding why and how students code-switch can help create more inclusive and effective language policies that acknowledge the realities of students' linguistic practices (Setiawan & Zhang, 2023; Weda et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where the official language policy promotes Indonesian as the national language, yet the presence of local languages and the increasing influence of English cannot be ignored.

The rapid growth of social media and exposure to global content have further accelerated this process, making English a popular choice for code-switching. College students in Makassar, who are typically bilingual or trilingual, tend to use English alongside Indonesian and their native languages, reflecting their cultural and educational influences. The theoretical framework for this study is based on Poplack's (1980) categorization of code-switching, which identifies three main types: intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching. Additionally, this study draws on Myers-Scotton's (2023), which suggests that code-switching is a communicative strategy used by speakers to convey social meanings and negotiate their identities.

By providing a detailed analysis of the patterns, motivations, and implications of code-switching among college students in Makassar, this study aims to shed light on the broader sociolinguistic dynamics at play. The results are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on multilingualism and code-switching, offering insights that are applicable not only in Indonesia but also in other multilingual settings globally.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to investigate the phenomenon of code-switching among college students in Makassar. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of language use patterns and the social and cultural contexts influencing code-switching behavior. The descriptive case study design is particularly suitable as it focuses on understanding a specific group of bilingual speakers within a natural setting, providing insights into their language practices.

The research is grounded in sociolinguistic theory, particularly the frameworks of code-switching as proposed by Poplack (2021) and Myers-Scotton (2023). This theoretical basis helps in identifying and categorizing the different types of code-switching observed, including inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching. The study aims to uncover the reasons behind these switching behaviors, drawing connections between linguistic choices and social identity, as well as the pragmatic functions of switching.

2.2 Participants

The participants of this study were 50 college students from some different universities in Makassar: Universitas Hasanuddin, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, STIE Tri Dharma Nusantara Makassar, Universitas Patria Arta, Universitas Islam Makassar, Universitas Bosowa, Ciputra Busuness School Makassar, and Kalla Institute. The selection of participants was done through purposive sampling to ensure a representative sample of bilingual and multilingual speakers who frequently use English and Indonesian. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 24 years.

This demographic was chosen due to their exposure to English in academic settings and their likelihood of using multiple languages in daily conversations. Prior to data collection, the participants provided informed consent, acknowledging their voluntary participation and the anonymous nature of the study.

2.3 Data Collection

The data for this study were collected over a period of a month. A combination of methods was used to gather comprehensive and reliable data: Participant Observation: The researchers observed the participants in informal settings, such as university cafeterias, study lounges, cafes, and social gatherings. This method allowed for the natural observation of language use without the influence of a formal interview setting.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participant, focusing on their language use, preferences, and perceptions of code-switching. The interviews were conducted in a mix of Indonesian and English, allowing participants to freely express themselves in their preferred language. The interviews lasted between 15 to 20 minutes. Audio Recordings of Conversations: In addition to the interviews, participants were asked to record their casual conversations with peers in different social settings, such as during group study sessions or while socializing. These recordings provided authentic examples of code-switching in natural interactions.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns of code-switching and categorizing them according to the types outlined by Poplack (2021): inter-sentential switching (switching between sentences), intra-sentential switching (switching within a sentence), and tag-switching (insertion of a single word or phrase). The analysis involved several stages: Data Familiarization: The researchers thoroughly reviewed the transcripts and recordings to become familiar with the data, noting initial patterns and significant instances of code-switching.

Coding: The data were systematically coded, with each instance of code-switching labeled according to its type and context. Codes were developed inductively, based on the content of the conversations, and deductively, based on the theoretical framework of code-switching. Theme Development: The codes were grouped into broader themes that represented the reasons and functions of code-switching. Themes included linguistic competence, social identity, cultural expression, and pragmatic functions such as clarification, emphasis, or humor. Validation: To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, member checking was conducted. Selected participants were invited to review the preliminary analysis and provide feedback on the interpretations.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research practices, ensuring the confidentiality of the participants. Informed consent was obtained before data collection, and participants were assured that their personal information would not be disclosed. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and only accessible to the research team. Participants were also given the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any repercussions.

3. Result

3.1 Types of Code-Switching Observed

a. Intra-Sentential Code-Switching

Intra-sentential code-switching was the most frequent type observed, occurring within a single sentence. This type requires a high level of bilingual proficiency, as the speaker needs to maintain grammatical cohesion while switching languages. Intra-sentential code-switching involves the use of two languages within a single sentence, often seamlessly blended without breaking grammatical cohesion. This type was the most frequently observed, demonstrating a high level of bilingual proficiency among the participants.

Participant 1	:	"*Saya tidak bisa* **attend the meeting** *karena ada tugas.*"
Participant 2	:	"*Dia sudah* **confirm**, *tapi belum kasih tahu* **exact time**-*nya.*"
Participant 3	:	"*Besok kita mau* **hangout**, *siapa yang mau ikut?*"
Participant 4	:	"*Kemarin saya lupa* **upload assignment**-*nya* ke Google Classroom."
Participant 5	:	"*Kamu sudah* **join** Zoom **meeting**-*nya, kan?*"
Participant 6	:	"*Saya* **excited** *buat* **event** *besok karena bakal ada* **guest speaker** *dari luar negeri.*"

These samples highlight the students' tendency to insert English terms related to academic activities and digital platforms, reflecting their educational context and familiarity with English terminology.

b. Inter-Sentential Code-Switching

This type of code-switching occurs between sentences, often used when the speaker shifts topics or wants to emphasize a point.

Participant 7	:	"*Saya lupa bawa buku*. **I will check it later**."
Participant 8	:	"*Minggu depan ada ujian*. **It's going to be tough**."
Participant 9	:	"*Besok ada ujian pagi-pagi*. **Don't forget to study tonight, guys.**"
Participant 10	:	"*Dia belum datang, tapi saya sudah pesan tempat*. **We should be okay**."

Inter-sentential switching was used strategically, particularly when students wanted to shift from an informal Indonesian tone to a more assertive English statement, or vice versa. It indicates a conscious choice to switch languages based on the intended emphasis.

c. Tag-Switching

Tag-switching involves inserting a tag or phrase from one language into another language structure. It is often used for emphasis or to seek agreement from the listener.

Participant 11	:	"That's your choice, *kan*?"
Participant 12	:	"You agree with me, ndak?"
Participant 13	:	"It's your decision, *ya*?"
Participant 14	:	"*Itu terlalu mahal*, you know?"

Tag-switching was commonly observed in casual conversations among peers. It serves as a tool for maintaining the listener's attention and creating a conversational bridge between languages.

3.2 Functions of Code-Switching

The analysis identified several functions of code-switching among students:

- Clarification: Students often switched to English to clarify specific academic terms or concepts. Students used English terms for clarity, especially for technical or academic vocabulary.

- Emphasis: English was used to emphasize a point or express strong emotions.

- Social Bonding and identity: Code-switching helped to establish group identity and solidarity, particularly among students who shared similar educational experiences. The use of code-switching also helped reinforce a shared identity among peers, signaling membership in a bilingual or multilingual community.

- Efficiency and Ease of Expression: English was often used for brevity and precision, particularly when Indonesian lacked an equivalent term.

4. Discussion

The findings reveal that code-switching is a common practice among college students in Makassar, driven by multiple factors:

4.1 Linguistic Proficiency and Educational Influence

The high occurrence of intra-sentential code-switching indicates a strong bilingual proficiency among the students. Their ability to switch languages smoothly suggests that English has become a natural part of their linguistic repertoire, influenced by its integration into academic contexts (Zhang & Setiawan, 2023). The prominence of intra-sentential code-switching among Makassar college students suggests a strong level of bilingual proficiency, as noted by Myers-Scotton (2023). The ability to switch languages seamlessly within a sentence reflects a high degree of fluency and familiarity with both languages. This finding aligns with Zhang and Setiawan's (2023) study on bilingual practices in Indonesian higher education, which highlighted the role of English as an integral part of students' academic and social lives.

The analysis of student conversations revealed that intra-sentential code-switching was the most common type observed. This reflects the students' bilingual proficiency, as they seamlessly integrate English terms into Indonesian sentences, often due to the influence of their educational environment.

Participant 15 : "*Saya sudah* **submit** *tugas, tapi belum ada* **feedback** *dari dosennya*."

Here, the use of submit and feedback instead of "menyerahkan" and "umpan balik" reflects the integration of English terminology common in university settings.

This pattern aligns with findings from Myers-Scotton (2023), who noted that bilingual speakers often use the language associated with specific domains (e.g., education) to convey precision and clarity.

The educational context in Makassar, where English is extensively used in coursework and digital platforms, has created an environment conducive to code-switching. Many students reported that they feel more comfortable using English for specific academic concepts that lack direct Indonesian translations, such as "assignment," "presentation," and "deadline." This echoes the findings of Kim and Hartanto (2022), who observed similar trends among university students in Southeast Asia.

4.2 Social Identity and Group Dynamics

Code-switching was frequently used as a marker of group identity. By mixing languages, students signaled their membership in a specific social group, particularly one that values bilingualism and exposure to global media (Chong & Lee, 2021). Code-switching also plays a significant role in shaping social interactions among students. Chong and Lee's (2021) analysis of youth conversations in Singapore found that code-switching serves as a tool for establishing group identity and signaling solidarity. In the current study, students frequently switched languages to connect with peers who shared similar linguistic and educational backgrounds. This practice helps reinforce a sense of belonging and in-group cohesion.

For instance, when discussing casual topics, students tended to mix English phrases with Indonesian to reflect their bilingual environment and shared cultural influences from global media. The insertion of English tags like "you know?" and "right?" mirrors the findings of Hartono (2023), who noted the impact of digital culture on language practices among Indonesian millennials.

By incorporating English phrases, students demonstrated their shared bilingual abilities and aligned themselves with a global, modern identity.

Participant 16 : "*Kamu lagi sibuk ya*? *Kalau mau, nanti kita bisa* **hang out** *setelah kelas*."

The use of hang out instead of the Indonesian equivalent "*nongkrong*" signals a casual, youthful vibe that resonates with peers familiar with English slang.

Participant 17 : "*Ini tugas grup, jadi kita harus* **discuss** *sama-sama*."

The switch to discuss instead of "membahas" indicates an attempt to use formal or academic language within the peer group, creating a sense of professionalism. This behavior supports the findings of Chong and Lee (2021), who observed similar patterns in youth conversations in multilingual urban environments, where code-switching helps establish a shared linguistic culture.

4.3 Digital Media Influence

The widespread use of social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has also contributed to the increasing prevalence of code-switching. Students reported that they often use English phrases popularized by influencers or online trends, reflecting the impact of digital culture on language practices (Hartono, 2023). The influence of social media and digital communication platforms on code-switching cannot be overlooked. With increased exposure to English content on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, students are more likely to incorporate English expressions into their everyday speech. This phenomenon aligns with Alim's (2022) research, which highlighted the role of new media in shaping modern communication patterns.

Participants in this study frequently used English terms popularized by social media influencers, such as "content creator," "trending," and "viral." The influence of social media and digital communication platforms was evident in the

students' choice of words, particularly in casual conversations. Many students adopted English terms popularized by online trends, suggesting a significant impact of digital exposure on their language practices.

Participant 18 : "*Konten dia kemarin* **viral** *sekali* di Instagram."

The use of viral instead of "*tersebar luas*" shows the influence of social media terminology that has become common in everyday speech.

Participant 19 : "saya baru tahu kalau dia itu *content creator*, makanya sering bikin video."

The term content creator is directly borrowed from English and widely used in Indonesian, reflecting the digital culture's impact on language choice. This trend aligns with Alim's (2022) research on the influence of new media, where code-switching often reflects the language used in online platforms and digital content. This suggests that the digital environment has normalized the use of English as part of students' linguistic repertoire, even in predominantly Indonesian-speaking contexts.

4.4 Communicative Strategies and Pragmatic Use

The findings also suggest that students use code-switching as a pragmatic tool for effective communication. According to the Markedness Model proposed by Myers-Scotton (2023), speakers use code-switching to mark their intentions and adapt to the social context. For example, when discussing academic topics, students were more likely to use English, as it conveyed a sense of formality and professionalism.

In contrast, when expressing emotions or making casual remarks, they tended to switch back to Indonesian or use a blend of both languages, creating a relaxed and intimate tone. This dual use of language reflects the students' ability to navigate different social settings and adjust their language choices accordingly.

Students often employed code-switching as a communicative strategy to manage conversation flow, clarify meaning, or emphasize a point. The choice to switch languages was not random but rather a deliberate decision influenced by the context and the speaker's intentions.

Participant 20 : "*Kamu mau pesan apa*? *Kalau saya*, **I'll go with the latte**."

The switch to English for ordering a drink suggests familiarity with the cafe setting, where English menu items are standard.

Participant 21 : "Ini penting sekali, **please** jangan lupa **submit form**-nya sebelum **deadline**."

The use of English phrases like please, submit and deadline adds a sense of urgency and politeness, indicating a strategic choice to convey the importance of the request.

According to the Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton, 2023), speakers use code-switching as a way to signal their intentions and adapt their language based on the communicative context. The examples above demonstrate how students leverage code-switching to enhance their messages and achieve effective communication.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that code-switching is a prevalent and strategic linguistic practice among college students in Makassar. It serves multiple functions, including clarification, emphasis, and social bonding, and is influenced by factors such as bilingual proficiency, social identity, and digital media exposure. The findings suggest that code-switching is an adaptive language strategy rather than a sign of linguistic deficiency. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of bilingual language practices among college students in Makassar, offering a comprehensive look at the motivations and implications of code-switching in a multilingual context. This research highlights the importance of recognizing bilingual language practices in educational settings and suggests further studies on the impact of digital media on language use among youth.

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