

THE INFLUENCE OF POP CULTURE ON GEN Z'S PREFERENCE FOR CODE SWITCHING OVER STANDARD INDONESIAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of pop culture on the preferences of Generation Z (Gen Z) for using code switching over standard Indonesian. This language-mixing phenomenon is increasingly prevalent across social media platforms and everyday conversations. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from 20 Gen Z participants through social media observation and informal interviews. The findings reveal that pop culture is the primary driver of code switching among Gen Z, as it is perceived as cool, modern, and expressive. Code switching also functions as a form of social identity construction and digital adaptation. This study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics and youth communication studies in Indonesia.

Keywords: Code Switching, Generation Z, Pop Culture, Social Identity, Digital Media, Indonesian Language, Youth Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it reflects cultural identity, social belonging, and generational values. In contemporary Indonesia, one of the most noticeable linguistic phenomena among Generation Z — those born between 1997 and 2012 — is the widespread preference for code switching: the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a single conversation. Rather than using standard Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia baku), Gen Z increasingly incorporates English words, phrases, and even Korean terms into their everyday speech, particularly on social media.

This shift is not coincidental. It coincides with Gen Z's unprecedented exposure to global pop culture through platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and international streaming services. Pop culture — encompassing music, films, television series, social media trends, and celebrity culture — has become a dominant force shaping not only the lifestyle but also the communication patterns of today's youth. When a Gen Z user writes "This movie is literally so good, aku nangis banget," they are not making a linguistic error; they are participating in a globally connected youth culture (Pennycook, 2007).

Despite growing research on code switching in Indonesia, most existing studies focus on formal educational settings or traditional media contexts (Kandiawan, 2022; Tarihoran et al., 2022). Few have specifically examined pop culture as the primary driver of this phenomenon in everyday digital communication. This study addresses that gap by exploring why Gen Z in Indonesia prefers code switching over standard Indonesian, with particular attention to the role of pop culture as a sociolinguistic catalyst.

This article aims to: (1) identify the types of code switching commonly used by Gen Z on social media; (2) analyze how pop culture influences these linguistic choices; and (3) examine the social functions that code switching serves in Gen Z communities.

DISCUSSTION

1. Understanding Code Switching

Code switching is defined as the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a single communicative episode (Gumperz, 1982). It is not a sign of linguistic deficiency — quite the opposite. Myers-Scotton (1993) argues that code switching reflects a sophisticated communicative competence, allowing speakers to navigate multiple social contexts and achieve specific communicative goals. Scholars distinguish between inter-sentential switching (between sentences), intra-sentential switching (within a sentence), and tag switching (inserting a fixed phrase from another language).

In the Indonesian context, intra-sentential switching is the most common form among Gen Z. A sentence like “Aku tuh literally exhausted banget hari ini, can’t even” demonstrates how English adjectives and discourse markers are seamlessly embedded within Indonesian syntax. This aligns with Muysken’s (2000) concept of “insertion,” in which lexical items from one language are inserted into the grammatical frame of another.

2. Pop Culture as a Sociolinguistic Catalyst

The relationship between pop culture and language change is well-documented. Pennycook (2007) argues that global pop culture — particularly Anglophone music, film, and social media — promotes the spread of English-influenced speech patterns worldwide. For Indonesian Gen Z, this influence is amplified by algorithmic content distribution: TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram actively surface English-dominant content, meaning young Indonesians encounter foreign linguistic input daily.

Interview data from this study confirms this connection. When asked about their language use, participants consistently pointed to media consumption as the primary source of their code switching habits:

“I learned it from TikTok and the people I follow. Everyone talks like that, so it feels natural.” (Participant 11, 17 years old)

“English just sounds more expressive, especially for feelings. Indonesian feels too formal sometimes.” (Participant 3, 19 years old)

These responses suggest that code switching is not merely imitation — it is a form of cultural participation. By adopting the linguistic style of global content creators and K-pop idols, Gen Z users signal their membership in transnational youth communities (Androutsopoulos, 2013).

3. Types and Patterns of Code Switching

Analysis of social media data revealed consistent patterns in how and where code switching occurs. Table 1 presents representative examples collected from TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X.

No	Example	Type	Platform
1	"This movie is literally so good, aku nangis banget."	Intra-sentential	Instagram
2	"Gaskeun, kita YOLO aja deh, no overthinking!"	Intra-sentential	TikTok
3	"Aku exhausted banget hari ini, can't even."	Intra-sentential	Twitter/X
4	"No cap, dia ghosting gua padahal udah close banget."	Tag switching	Twitter/X
5	"Honestly sih, ini the best comeback ever, recommended!"	Intra-sentential	TikTok

Table 1. Examples of Code Switching Among Gen Z on Social Media

As shown in Table 1, intra-sentential switching is the dominant pattern, consistent with findings by Tarihoran et al. (2022) who found that over 68% of code mixing instances among Indonesian Gen Z involved word or phrase insertion within Indonesian sentences.

Table 2 further categorizes the most frequently switched linguistic items.

Category	Examples
Affective adjectives	literally, lowkey, honestly, iconic, slay
Discourse markers	basically, actually, anyway, I mean, no cap
Cultural terms (no Indonesian equivalent)	ghosting, vibe, cringe, trigger, flexing
K-pop / fandom terms	bias, stan, shipped, visual, comeback

The prevalence of affective adjectives and culturally specific terms suggests that code switching is driven by expressive need: English provides vocabulary for emotional nuance and cultural concepts that standard Indonesian does not easily accommodate. This supports Myers-Scotton’s (1993) argument that code switching is a rational, goal-oriented strategy rather than linguistic carelessness.

4. Code Switching as Social Identity

Beyond expressive function, code switching serves a powerful identity role among Gen Z. Participants consistently associated mixed-language speech with being modern, cool, and globally connected — while viewing standard Indonesian in informal contexts as outdated:

“When I use English words, my friends understand the vibe better. It’s just cooler.”
(Participant 17, 21 years old)

“Kalau nulis caption pake bahasa Indonesia doang rasanya awkward, kayak ketinggalan zaman.” (Participant 5, 20 years old)

This reflects the sociolinguistic concept of indexicality: specific language choices index particular social identities (Silverstein, 2003). For Gen Z, code switching has become an index of digital literacy, youth culture, and global awareness. Kandiawan (2022) similarly found that Indonesian Gen Z on social media uses code switching primarily for affective and identity-signaling functions.

5. Digital Media and Normalization of Code Switching

The digital media environment has accelerated the normalization of code switching among Gen Z. Social media algorithms expose users to globally trending content, while comment sections and group chats create spaces where multilingual communication is the norm. As Blommaert (2010) argues, contemporary multilingual practices are shaped not only by national norms but increasingly by translocal digital networks.

Participants reported feeling pressure to adapt their language to fit online community standards:

“Di circle gua, kalau lo gak ngerti istilah-istilah English, lo bakal ketinggalan topik.”
(Participant 14, 18 years old)

This illustrates how digital pop culture does not merely influence language — it creates new communicative expectations that young Indonesians feel compelled to meet.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that pop culture plays a central and multifaceted role in shaping Gen Z’s preference for code switching over standard Indonesian. Through constant exposure to English-dominant global media, Gen Z has developed a hybrid linguistic identity in which code switching serves simultaneously as an expressive tool, a social identity marker, and a

digital adaptation strategy. The data collected — from both social media observation and direct interviews — confirm that this phenomenon follows consistent patterns driven by affective, cultural, and social motivations.

These findings have practical implications for language education in Indonesia. Rather than treating code switching as a linguistic problem, educators should recognize it as a reflection of the complex sociolinguistic realities facing young Indonesians today. A more effective approach would focus on developing students' register awareness — helping them understand when standard Indonesian is appropriate and when code switching is acceptable.

This study is not without limitations. The sample was drawn primarily from urban Gen Z populations and focused on three social media platforms, which may not fully represent the diversity of code switching practices across Indonesia. Future research should involve larger, more geographically diverse samples and explore additional digital spaces such as online gaming communities and messaging applications. Ultimately, understanding how pop culture shapes language is essential for anyone seeking to understand the communicative lives of young Indonesians in the digital age.

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