

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION, COGNITIVE PROCESSING, AND DIGITAL DOMINANCE: A SOCIO-PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE AMONG INDONESIAN YOUTH

Bahagia Saragih¹, Barli Kifli², Noela Ashyera Manik³, Yohana Clara Elisabeth Simbolon⁴, Revalen Andryany Br Ambarita⁵, Ririn Prinita Sihotang⁶, Trisia Inggreya Saragih⁷, Yeane Celcelia Simanjuntak⁸
^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8} Universitas Negeri Medan

goldenboy@unimed.ac.id, barlikifli@unimed.ac.id, maniknoela@gmail.com,
hanasimbolon92@gmail.com, revalenambarita@gmail.com,
ririn.2253321027@mhs.unimed.ac.id, trisiainggreyasaragih@gmail.com,
yeane141207@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of English across Indonesian digital and social land-scapes has generated complex sociolinguistic phenomena among young speakers, encompassing code-switching practices, accent ideology conflicts, and evolving cognitive patterns. This study investigates the intersections of identity negotiation, cognitive processing, and the influence of digital media on English language use among a group of Indonesian senior high school students aged 16-18 in Medan. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a five-item Likert-scale survey administered to 15 respondents with in-depth qualitative interviews and open-ended responses. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative findings were subjected to thematic coding and socio-psycholinguistic interpretation. Findings reveal that code-switching commands the highest agreement (Mean = 4.00), functioning as both a communicative tool and a vehicle for social identity construction. Confidence in formal English use stands at a moderate-high level (Mean = 3.47), while the cognitive shift toward thinking in English remains developmental (Mean = 3.20). Accent ideology produces a near-equal but emotionally charged divide: 53.33% favor native-like pronunciation while 46.67% advocate for localized accent retention. Social media emerges as the primary driver of English lexical acquisition (Mean = 3.60), embedding slang terms such as literally, cringe, and slay into everyday discourse. The findings contribute to socio-psycholinguistic scholarship by demonstrating that English use among these young learners is not merely a communicative act but a dynamic process of identity performance, cognitive becoming, and resistance to linguistic normativity in the digital era.

Keywords: code-switching, accent ideology, identity negotiation, thinking in English, digital language, sociolinguistics, Indonesian youth

A. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global linguistic order, English occupies a position of extraordinary dominance not only as an international lingua franca but as a socio-symbolic marker that mediates relationships between language users and their aspirational identities (Crystal, 2020; Canagarajah, 2022). For Indonesian senior high

school students in particular, this dominance is no longer experienced solely through formal educational channels. Rather, it permeates the digital ecosystems they inhabit daily TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter/X embedding English lexical and phonological norms into the very texture of their social lives. The outcome is a generation of language

users who are simultaneously negotiating multiple, sometimes contradictory, linguistic identities.

The intersection of English acquisition and identity formation among young speakers in postcolonial, multilingual societies has attracted sustained scholarly attention (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2021; Norton, 2020). However, the distinctive configuration of forces shaping language practice among senior high school students in Medan remains underexplored. These young speakers must navigate not only the structural demands of English as a school subject, but also the sociolinguistic pressures of code-switching, the affective weight of accent stigma, the psychological experience of thinking in a second language, and the pervasive influence of social media as an autonomous language learning environment.

The concept of code-switching, the fluid alternation between languages within a single communicative act has been theorized since the foundational work of Gumperz (1982), who distinguished between metaphorical and situational switching, and later expanded by Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, which frames code choices as rational selections governed by social norms (Myers-Scotton, 2020). Yet contemporary code-switching among Indonesian youth transcends classical motivations of clarity or audience design; it is increasingly tied to what Bucholtz and Hall (2022) term "identity as practice" an ongoing, interactional achievement through which speakers claim social positions and affiliations.

Accent, as a sociolinguistic variable, similarly carries profound ideological weight. Cook's (2020) critique of the "native speaker fallacy" and Lippi-Green's (2022) framework

of accent discrimination illuminate how accent preferences are never phonetically neutral but are always entangled with prestige hierarchies, racial coding, and power asymmetries. For these young learners navigating between local vernacular accents and aspirational native-like pronunciations, the implications are both psychological and identity-constitutive.

At the psycholinguistic level, research into what Pavlenko (2020) calls "thinking in a second language" reveals the deep cognitive transformations that accompany advanced bilingualism. The question of whether these young speakers are beginning to process English not as a foreign code but as a genuine medium of inner thought represents a frontier of inquiry with significant implications for language pedagogy and cognitive science alike.

Despite these rich intersecting dimensions, the existing literature has tended to treat these phenomena in isolation. Sociolinguistic studies focus on code-switching patterns; psycholinguistic research examines cognitive processing; and digital language studies track the spread of internet slang. But few studies synthesize these into a unified sociopsycholinguistic portrait of youth language practice in Indonesia. This constitutes the research gap that the present study addresses.

B. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the degree of confidence Indonesian youth experience when using English in formal contexts and the factors that modulate this confidence.
2. To analyze the function and social meaning of code-switching practices, including the social stigma associated with them.

3. To explore the ideological dimensions of accent perception and its psychological impact on young English speakers.
4. To map the cognitive patterns of English-medium thinking among the student participants.
5. To assess the relative influence of social media versus formal classroom instruction on English language development of senior high school students, with particular attention to digital slang acquisition.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Sociolinguistic Frameworks: Identity, Code-Switching, and Language Ideology

The sociology of language has long recognized that linguistic choices are never purely informational; they are simultaneously social acts that position speakers within fields of power, solidarity, and distinction (Bourdieu, 2020; Canagarajah, 2022). For speakers in postcolonial contexts such as Indonesia, English functions not merely as a foreign language in the Kachruvian Expanding Circle sense but as a resource that mediates access to education, technology, and transnational social networks (Kachru, cited in Jenkins, 2020). The distinction between instrumental and integrative motivations for language learning, while increasingly contested, retains explanatory value for understanding why some young Indonesians pursue English acquisition with intense social investment while others resist or negotiate it on their own terms (Dornyei & Ryan, 2021).

Language ideology, as theorized by Woolard and Schieffelin (cited in Lippi-Green, 2022) and elaborated in the Indonesian context by Canagarajah (2022), refers to the shared beliefs and feelings about language and its social uses. The

ideology surrounding English in Indonesia is particularly complex: English is simultaneously valorized as the language of globalization and modernity, and viewed with suspicion as a colonial residue or a marker of class elitism. Young speakers are thus caught within competing ideological currents that shape not only their language choices but their self-perceptions as speakers.

b. Accent Ideology and the Native Speaker Myth

The ideological privileging of native-speaker norms what Phillipson (2020) identified as "linguistic imperialism" and Cook (2020) critiqued as the "native speaker fallacy" continues to shape language learners' aspirations and anxieties. Lippi-Green (2022) demonstrates that standard language ideology operates through the institutionalization of accent discrimination: speakers with "non-standard" accents are systematically evaluated as less intelligent, less authoritative, or less competent, even when their communicative effectiveness is unimpaired. In the Indonesian context, this ideology manifests in the social penalization of English spoken with a perceptible Indonesian or regional accent, encapsulated in stigmatizing labels such as *medok* (an overly local accent) or allegations of performing a fake accent when approaching native-like pronunciation (Andriani et al., 2021; Dardjowidjojo, 2020).

c. Psycholinguistics of Bilingual Cognition: Thinking in a Second Language

The question of whether bilinguals and advanced second-language speakers think in their second language as opposed to translating from their first occupies a

central place in psycholinguistic inquiry (Kroll & Bialystok, 2021). Pavlenko's (2020) influential work on the language-thought nexus demonstrates that inner speech, emotional processing, and autobiographical memory may all be linguistically mediated, and that the dominant language of inner speech can shift over time with proficiency and immersion. The mental lexicon model proposed by Kroll and Bialystok (2021) distinguishes between two stages of bilingual development: an early stage characterized by conceptual mediation through L1 (translation-based processing) and a more advanced stage where L2 lexical items connect directly to conceptual representations, bypassing L1 altogether.

For Indonesian youth who are advanced learners but not truly immersed English speakers, the likely cognitive reality is a hybrid or intermediate stage, what might be described as selective or domain-specific English cognition, where thinking in English occurs in familiar or high-frequency domains (social media, entertainment, academic reading) but defaults to Indonesian in emotionally charged or cognitively demanding contexts. This dynamic is consistent with the concept of code-switching in inner speech proposed by Boutonnet et al. (cited in Kroll & Bialystok, 2021), which holds that inner speech in bilinguals is itself subject to code-switching depending on affective and contextual cues.

d. Digital Media as a Language Learning Environment

The role of social media and digital platforms in language acquisition has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing domains of applied linguistics research. Leppänen

et al. (2020) have documented the emergence of networked multilingualism a condition in which digital platforms create new multilingual contact zones that operate largely outside the purview of formal educational institutions. For Indonesian youth, platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram constitute powerful informal language learning environments that expose speakers to authentic, native-produced English at a scale and frequency that formal instruction cannot rival.

Tagliamonte (2020) has analyzed the linguistic properties of internet language, demonstrating that it constitutes a coherent register with distinct phonological, lexical, and syntactic features rather than a degraded or informal version of "real" English. The rapid adoption of terms such as literally, cringe, and slay across global youth communities exemplifies what Androutsopoulos (2020) has described as viral vernacularization the spread of informal lexical items through network effects, independent of geographic proximity or formal instruction. This process is particularly consequential for Indonesian youth because it generates a form of English competence that is simultaneously current, globally connected, and orthogonal to the norms of standard written English.

D. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

a. Research Design

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2021), in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, analyzed independently, and then integrated at the interpretation stage. This design is well-suited to the

present inquiry because it enables the quantitative measurement of attitudinal patterns to be contextualized, enriched, and sometimes complicated by participants' own words, narratives, and experiences.

b. Participants

Fifteen ($N = 15$) Indonesian senior high school students participated in the study, recruited through purposive sampling from Senior High School in Medan, during the 2024-2025 academic year. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 18 years ($M = 17.2$), with students from both science and social science streams represented in roughly equal proportion to ensure diversity of English proficiency and exposure levels. All participants reported regular social media use (minimum two hours per day) and had completed at least three semesters of formal English instruction. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from all participants. This study is exploratory in nature because it involves a small number of participants ($N = 15$). The purpose is to gain initial insights rather than to generalize the findings to a larger population.

c. Instruments

A five-point Likert scale instrument (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was designed to measure attitudinal orientations across five dimensions: formal English confidence (Q1), codeswitching utility (Q2), accent-based social perception (Q3), cognitive processing in English (Q4), and the relative influence of social media versus formal instruction (Q5). Item development was informed by existing validated scales in

language attitude research (Dornyei & Ryan, 2021) and adapted to reflect the Indonesian sociolinguistic context.

The qualitative instrument comprised a set of open-ended interview prompts and reflective questions administered immediately following the Likert survey. Questions invited participants to elaborate on their code-switching practices, recount experiences of accent-related social judgment, describe their inner speech patterns in English, and identify the specific slang terms they had acquired through digital media. Responses were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to thematic analysis.

d. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequency distributions and mean scores were computed for each Likert item. A five-point Likert scale was interpreted using the following benchmark intervals: 1.00–1.80 = Very Low/Strongly Disagree; 1.81–2.60 = Low/Disagree; 2.61–3.40 = Moderate/Neutral; 3.41–4.20 = High/Agree; 4.21–5.00 = Very High/Strongly Agree (Dornyei & Ryan, 2021). Qualitative data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase procedure: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and write-up. Integration of the two data strands was achieved through joint displays, in which quantitative patterns and qualitative themes were mapped onto one another to produce a holistic interpretation.

E. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and critically analyzes the findings of both quantitative and qualitative strands. The quantitative data are reported first

through formal distribution tables and a summary mean score table, followed by integrated discussion that weaves in qualitative evidence and theoretical interpretation.

Overview: Likert Distribution and Mean Score Summary

Table 1 presents the complete Likert-scale response distribution for all five survey items across the fifteen participants, enabling a comparative view of attitudinal patterns across dimensions (SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Likert Responses Across Five Research Items (N = 15)

Research Item	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	N	Mean
Q1 – Confidence in Formal English Use	1	2	4	5	3	15	3.47
Q2 – Code-Switching Aids Self-Expression	0	2	3	6	4	15	4.00
Q3 – Accent Influences Social Perception	2	3	4	4	2	15	3.07
Q4 – Thinking in English (Cognition)	1	3	5	4	2	15	3.20
Q5 – Social Media vs. Formal Class Influence	1	2	3	5	4	15	3.60

The mean score summary in Table 2 consolidates the distributional data into a single comparative table, providing both numerical means and categorical interpretations to facilitate cross-item analysis.

Table 2. Summary of Mean Scores, Interpretive Categories, and Descriptive Labels Across Research Items

Q	Variable	Mean Score	Interpretation	Summary
Q1	Confidence in Formal English Use	3.47	Above Neutral	Moderate-High Confidence
Q2	Code-Switching Aids Expression	4.00	High	Strong Agreement – CS as Expressive Tool
Q3	Accent Influence on Social Perception	3.07	Near Neutral	Divided – Nuanced Accent Bias
Q4	Thinking in English (Cognitive Process)	3.20	Above Neutral	Partial/Developing Cognitive Shift
Q5	Social Media Influence	3.60	Above Neutral	Moderate-High Digital Media Effect

	vs. Formal Class			
--	------------------	--	--	--

The mean scores reveal a clear attitudinal gradient among the five dimensions studied. Codeswitching commands the highest endorsement (M = 4.00), followed by social media influence (M = 3.60) and formal English confidence (M = 3.47), while cognitive English processing (M = 3.20) and accent ideology (M = 3.07) occupy more moderate positions. This gradient is theoretically coherent: code-switching and digital media exposure are the most immediately accessible and socially reinforced dimensions of English use for young speakers, while cognitive transformation and accent ideology represent deeper, more contested psychological and identity-related processes that admit greater ambivalence.

Formal English Confidence and the Context-Dependence of Proficiency (Q1)

With a mean score of 3.47, formal English confidence sits comfortably within the "High/Agree" interpretive range. The distributional data, however, reveal important nuances beneath this overall figure. The modal score is 4 (Agree), selected by five respondents (33.33%), indicating that the largest group reports general confidence in formal English settings. Three respondents (20.00%) expressed strong confidence (score 5), describing formal English use as feeling natural. Four respondents (26.67%) chose the neutral midpoint (score 3), reflecting context-dependent comfort rather than consistent assurance. At the lower end, two respondents (13.33%) indicated minimal confidence (score 2) with a tendency to avoid English in formal contexts, while one respondent

(6.67%) strongly disagreed (score 1), representing a complete absence of formal-context confidence. Taken together, the three respondents scoring 1 or 2 (20.00% combined) constitute a meaningful minority experiencing genuine formal-context anxiety.

Qualitative data illuminate the mechanisms underlying this confidence variability. Several highconfidence respondents (scores 4–5) reported that formal contexts presentations, academic discussions, professional settings actually heightened their motivation to use English precisely because the formality of the setting legitimated their choice, insulating them from accusations of *sok Inggris*. As one participant observed: "When it's for a class presentation or an interview, speaking English feels okay because it's expected. No one judges you there." This observation aligns with Dornyei and Ryan's (2021) concept of the ideal L2 self the vision of oneself as a competent English speaker that motivates investment in high-stakes language performance.

Conversely, respondents reporting lower confidence (scores 1–3) described a heightened awareness of being evaluated not only on accuracy but on the appropriateness of choosing English in a given context. This suggests that confidence in formal English use is not simply a reflection of linguistic competence but is also shaped by what Goffman (cited in Bucholtz & Hall, 2022) would recognize as face concerns the management of social image in contexts where performance is publicly visible and subject to judgment. For these respondents, formal contexts amplify rather than

attenuate anxiety, because the stakes of linguistic failure or even of linguistic success perceived as pretentious are higher.

Code-Switching as Identity Work and Expressive Urgency (Q2)

The highest mean score in the dataset ($M = 4.00$) is registered for code-switching, and the distributional data reveal a markedly asymmetric pattern. No participant scored at the extreme negative end (score 1 = 0.00%), underscoring the universal acknowledgment of code-switching's expressive value. The largest group six respondents (40.00%) chose 'Agree' (score 4), and four respondents (26.67%) went further to select 'Strongly Agree' (score 5), yielding a combined agreement rate of 66.67%. Three respondents (20.00%) remained at the neutral midpoint (score 3), while only two (13.33%) expressed any level of disagreement (score 2). This distribution, with its complete absence of strong rejection and its strong positive skew, makes code-switching the most consensually endorsed dimension in the entire study.

These findings are consistent with the translanguaging framework of García and Li Wei (2022), which holds that multilingual speakers do not simply shift between two separate, bounded language systems but draw fluidly on an integrated linguistic repertoire for expressive and communicative purposes. The qualitative data strongly corroborate this reading. Participants repeatedly described code-switching as achieving a quality of expression a feel, a register that cannot be replicated within either language alone. Representative statements include observations such

as: "Some emotions, especially from what you see online, just hit differently in English. There's no Indonesian equivalent that has the same vibe." This testimony reflects what Pavlenko (2020) identifies as the differential affective value of L1 and L2, where emotional meanings can be language-specific rather than simply translatable.

The social complexity of code-switching is, however, captured in the qualitative data's acknowledgment of its risks. Participants were acutely aware of the *sok Inggris* stigma the social charge of affectation or elitism directed at those who use English in contexts perceived as unnecessarily so. This stigma is theorized by Andriani et al. (2021) as a form of covert prestige policing: a mechanism by which peer communities enforce linguistic norms that prioritize solidarity and in-group identity over the instrumental or expressive benefits of English use. The fact that no respondent scored at the lowest level (strongly disagreeing that code-switching aids expression) while the stigma discourse nonetheless featured prominently in qualitative responses suggests that these speakers have internalized the utility of code-switching while simultaneously navigating its social costs a form of covert bilingualism (Myers-Scotton, 2020) in which the linguistic competence is acknowledged but the display is strategically modulated.

Accent Ideology and the Psychosocial Weight of Phonological Identity (Q3)

The data for Q3 ($M = 3.07$) present the most distributed and ideologically revealing pattern in the dataset. Responses were spread with relative

evenness across all five scale points, with the slight clustering in the neutral-to-agree range. Specifically, two respondents (13.33%) strongly disagreed that accent influences social perception, and three (20.00%) disagreed, together representing 33.33% who minimized or denied accent's social role. Four respondents (26.67%) selected the neutral midpoint, signaling uncertain or inconsistent views on the matter. Four respondents (26.67%) agreed, acknowledging that accent noticeably affects social perception, while two respondents (13.33%) strongly agreed, viewing accent as a powerful social and identity marker together accounting for 40.00% who recognized its social impact. The near-symmetrical distribution across the scale, with 13.33% of respondents at both extremes (scores 1 and 5), indicates that accent ideology generates the most polarized opinions of any dimension measured in this study.

This polarization is theoretically significant. Lippi-Green (2022) argues that standard language ideology is maintained partly through its invisibility the naturalization of certain accents as "neutral" or "accentless" renders accent discrimination difficult to name or contest. The approximately equal split between those who recognize accent's social impact and those who minimize or deny it may reflect this ideological invisibility: some respondents have internalized the stigma and can articulate its effects, while others have absorbed the ideology to the point where they cannot perceive accent evaluation as a social phenomenon.

Qualitative accounts reveal the emotional texture of accent

experiences in striking detail. Respondents who had been praised for their pronunciation described feelings of pride and heightened motivation, consistent with the "positive feedback loop" model of language motivation discussed by Dornyei and Ryan (2021). However, those who had faced criticism being labeled *medok* (sounding too local) or accused of performing a fake accent when striving for native-like pronunciation described experiences of shame, self-monitoring, and in some cases, inhibition of speaking altogether. One participant captured this double bind with particular clarity: "If you sound Indonesian, people mock you for being *medok*. If you try to sound American, people say you're fake. There's no winning." This testimony encapsulates what Norton (2020) calls the investment paradox: the more a learner invests in acquiring target-language norms, the more they risk being perceived as inauthentic or transgressive by their own communities.

The qualitative data also reveals an almost perfectly balanced preference for native-like versus local accents, which is discussed in the Accent Preference section below. Notably, the motivations behind each preference are not reducible to a simple prestige-solidarity opposition (Giles et al., cited in Jenkins, 2020). Those preferring native-like accents invoke professional readiness and global intelligibility, while those defending local accents frame their choice in explicitly identity-political terms as a refusal of linguistic colonialism and an assertion of cultural authenticity. These are not pre-theoretical preferences but ideologically sophisticated positions that young speakers have arrived at

through navigating real social consequences.

The Cognitive Architecture of Thinking in English (Q4)

With a mean of 3.20 falling within the upper bounds of the "Neutral" range Q4 results suggest that English-medium cognition is a real but partial and developmental experience for the majority of respondents. The modal response is 'Neutral' (score 3), selected by five respondents (33.33%), indicating that thinking in English is an occasional rather than habitual experience for this group. Moving toward the positive end, four respondents (26.67%) chose 'Agree' (score 4), reporting that they frequently process thoughts in English especially for familiar topics, and two respondents (13.33%) selected 'Strongly Agree' (score 5), indicating that they habitually think in English with minimal reliance on L1 as an intermediary together representing roughly 40% who report meaningful English-medium cognition. On the other side, three respondents (20.00%) chose 'Disagree' (score 2), suggesting minimal or rare English-medium cognitive processing, while one respondent (6.67%) strongly disagreed (score 1), indicating complete reliance on L1 translation.

The qualitative data allow for a richer taxonomy of cognitive processing modes, yielding three distinct patterns. The first and most prevalent L1-mediated translation involves formulating thoughts in Indonesian first before converting them to English for spoken or written output. This reflects the hierarchical lexical model for intermediate-level learners (Kroll & Bialystok, 2021), in which L2 words are accessed through L1 conceptual representations, resulting in higher

processing latency and greater cognitive effort. The second pattern mixed or hybrid processing characterizes a moderate proportion of respondents who alternate between Indonesian and English depending on topic familiarity and emotional context. Participants reporting this pattern noted thinking in English when engaging with English-encoded content (academic articles, YouTube, Twitter) but defaulting to Indonesian for emotional reasoning, personal relationships, and cognitively demanding abstract thought, consistent with Pavlenko's (2020) observation that bilinguals' affective register tends to remain anchored in the language of early socialization even when L2 proficiency is high. The third and least prevalent pattern direct English cognition was reported by a minority of participants, typically those with higher proficiency and greater media immersion, for whom English functions as a genuine medium of inner experience rather than a code into which prior thoughts are translated.

This has significant implications for pedagogy: if the shift to English-medium cognition is to be facilitated, formal instruction may need to create conditions of deep immersion sustained, meaning-focused engagement with English content that current classroom designs rarely provide (Mercer & Dornyei, 2020).

Social Media as the Primary Language Ecosystem and Digital Slang Acquisition (Q5)

Q5 yields a mean of 3.60, placing it in the "High/Agree" interpretive category and confirming social media as a more salient perceived influence on English development than formal classroom instruction. The distribution for Q5

mirrors the positive skew observed in Q2. Five respondents (33.33%) agreed (score 4) that social media exerts a stronger influence, and four (26.67%) strongly agreed (score 5), yielding a combined endorsement rate of 60.00%. Three respondents (20.00%) held a neutral position, two (13.33%) disagreed, and one (6.67%) strongly disagreed, together representing only 20.00% who continued to regard formal instruction as the more influential channel. This finding aligns with a growing body of research documenting the "informal learning turn" in second language acquisition, wherein digital environments have overtaken classrooms as primary sites of authentic English exposure for younger generations (Leppänen et al., 2020; Tagliamonte, 2020).

The qualitative data provide granular texture through the specific lexical items respondents identified as having entered their vocabularies through digital media. Six terms were identified and subjected to sociolinguistic analysis: literally, random, cringe, lowkey/highkey, slay, and bro/dude. The term literally functions as a hyperbolic intensifier magnifying emotional emphasis often divorced from its denotative meaning (e.g., "I literally cannot even") and signals authenticity and emotional relatability in digital communication. Random operates as a qualifier of unexpectedness, describing content or events perceived as abrupt or contextually incongruous, frequently deployed to express spontaneity or humor. Cringe serves as a negative affective evaluator applied to socially awkward or embarrassing situations or behaviors, now functioning as an adjective across both digital and oral registers. The paired terms lowkey

and highkey act as scalar adverbial qualifiers: lowkey implies a covert admission while highkey signals overt enthusiasm or endorsement. Slay, originating from drag culture, functions as a positive acclaim marker used to praise exceptional performance, confidence, or aesthetic excellence, and has been widely adopted across demographic groups through social media virality. Finally, bro and dude serve as gender-neutral address terms expressing camaraderie, surprise, or casual intimacy, increasingly adopted in face-to-face conversation as well as online interaction.

The sociolinguistic significance of these terms extends beyond mere vocabulary acquisition. As Androutsopoulos (2020) argues, internet slang operates as a form of stance-taking: a way of positioning oneself as culturally current, digitally literate, and affiliated with global youth culture. For Indonesian youth, adopting these terms is therefore not an act of linguistic passivity but an active participation in a global semiotic economy. However, this participation is not costless: the same terms that signal cosmopolitan affiliation in digital spaces may appear jarring, affected, or contextually inappropriate in formal or local community settings, creating a register divide that speakers must navigate with sociolinguistic sophistication.

The differential influence of social media versus formal instruction also has implications for pedagogical design. As Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) argue, motivated engagement with English is most likely when instruction capitalizes on learners' existing digital language practices rather than positioning them as deficient or

informal relative to academic standards. The present findings suggest that curricula which incorporate digital genres YouTube commentary, TikTok narration, Twitter/X discourse as objects of genuine linguistic analysis rather than as exemplars to be corrected may more effectively bridge the gap between informal digital competence and formal academic literacy.

Accent Preference: Prestige, Identity, and the Native Speaker Dilemma

The qualitative data revealed a strikingly balanced accent preference among respondents. Eight participants (53.33%) expressed a preference for pursuing a native-like accent modeled on Standard American or British English, citing professional prestige, global mobility, and international intelligibility as their primary motivations career readiness and cultural alignment with the global professional community serving as the dominant rationale. Seven respondents (46.67%), representing a near-equal proportion, chose instead to maintain a local Indonesian-accented English, framing this preference explicitly in terms of ethnic and cultural identity, psychological comfort, and an act of resistance to what some described as linguistic colonialism. While the native-like preference holds a slight numerical majority, the near-equality of the two camps itself constitutes a theoretically significant finding, revealing that accent ideology among Indonesian youth is genuinely contested rather than settled in favor of native norms.

Those favoring native-like accents articulated their preference in terms of professional capital and global

communicative readiness a rationale consistent with Bourdieu's (2020) concept of linguistic capital, wherein the value of a linguistic variety is determined by its exchangeability within institutional fields of power such as employment and academic scholarship. The underlying assumption is that native-like English pronunciation signals competence, credibility, and cultural alignment with the global professional community a perception that, while ideologically loaded, has real material consequences in contexts where accent-based hiring discrimination operates (Lippi-Green, 2022).

Those preferring to retain their local accent drew on a different but equally sophisticated discourse one of cultural authenticity, psychological comfort, and explicit resistance to what some framed as a form of linguistic self-erasure. This position resonates with Canagarajah's (2022) concept of code meshing: the practice of blending local and international linguistic norms in ways that assert rather than suppress cultural identity. For these respondents, a local accent in English is not an index of deficiency but a marker of identity a form of accent as identity that asserts the legitimacy of non-native norms within the global English-speaking community.

What is perhaps most revealing about the accent preference data is the emotional charge that accompanied respondents' accounts on both sides of the divide. Whether aspiring to native-like pronunciation or committed to local accent retention, participants described their accent choices as deeply felt and personally significant not as neutral technical decisions about phonological production. This emotional investment confirms

Jenkins's (2020) observation that in the current global English moment, accent has become one of the most affectively charged dimensions of language identity, a site where questions of belonging, aspiration, and authenticity are negotiated with genuine psychological stakes.

F. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the multidimensional socio-psycholinguistic landscape of English use among a group of Indonesian senior high school students in Medan through a mixed-methods lens, generating findings that are simultaneously quantitatively grounded and qualitatively rich. Collectively, the data paint a portrait of a generation of language users who are neither passive recipients of English nor simple emulators of native speaker norms, but active negotiators of linguistic identity in a digitally mediated, globally connected, yet locally embedded context.

Five principal conclusions emerge from the analysis. First, formal English confidence, while moderate-to-high ($M = 3.47$), is deeply context-sensitive and regulated by social norms that determine when English use is sanctioned versus stigmatized. Second, code-switching commands the strongest and most consensual endorsement ($M = 4.00$) and functions not merely as a communicative bridge but as an expressive and identity-constructive practice a finding that challenges pedagogical frameworks that treat code-switching as a deficiency to be corrected. Third, accent ideology produces the most affectively intense and polarized responses in the dataset, revealing that phonological choice is a site of genuine identity politics among these young speakers, where the conflict

between linguistic prestige and cultural authenticity remains unresolved and potentially irresolvable at the level of individual speakers.

Fourth, cognitive processing in English remains predominantly in a developmental, L1-mediated phase ($M = 3.20$), with a small minority having achieved direct English cognition. This finding calls for pedagogical innovation in the direction of deep immersion and meaning-focused engagement that formal instruction currently struggles to provide. Fifth, and perhaps most consequentially for educational policy, social media has surpassed formal classroom instruction as the perceived primary environment for English language development ($M = 3.60$), embedding a set of digital pragmatic competencies including sophisticated slang literacy that existing curricula have yet to meaningfully engage.

- **Implications**

For language educators, these findings recommend a pedagogical reorientation away from deficit-based approaches to code-switching and accent diversity, and toward frameworks that recognize and build upon students' digital linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging-informed pedagogy (García & Li Wei, 2022), culturally sustaining approaches to accent instruction (Jenkins, 2020), and the integration of digital discourse genres into the English curriculum all represent viable directions for practice. For sociolinguistic theory, the findings contribute evidence that identity negotiation, cognitive transformation, and digital language acquisition are not separate phenomena but deeply intertwined processes that must be

analyzed in their mutual constitution. Future research with larger and more demographically diverse samples including speakers from outside major urban centers and those with varying digital access will be essential to assess the generalizability of these findings across the Indonesian sociolinguistic landscape.

- **Limitations**

This study's primary limitation is its sample size ($N = 15$), which constrains the statistical generalizability of the quantitative findings and limits the diversity of the qualitative narratives captured. As a purposive sample drawn from a single senior high school in Medan, the participants may not be representative of Indonesian senior high school students more broadly, particularly those in rural areas or with limited digital access. Future research should expand the sample, incorporate longitudinal dimensions to track changes in language attitudes and cognitive patterns over time, and employ more sophisticated psycholinguistic instruments to measure cognitive processing.

REFERENCES

- Andriani, L., Shiobara, Y., & Efrizal, D. (2021). Language attitudes toward English among Indonesian youth: Code-switching, stigma, and identity. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 42(3), 215-229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1884340>
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2020). Networked multilingualism: Digital communication and the study of language contact. *Annual Review of Linguistics*,

- 6, 453-472.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurevlinguistics-011619-030558>
- Bourdieu, P. (2020). *Language and Symbolic Power* (Updated ed., J. B. Thompson, Ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Polity Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage Publications.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529799583>
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2022). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, 24(4), 369-407.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14614456221105012>
- Canagarajah, S. (2022). *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003138809>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2021). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Crystal, D. (2020). *English as a Global Language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108768283>
- Dardjowidjojo, S. (2020). English teaching in Indonesia. *TEFLIN Journal*, 11(1), 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v11i1/1-12>
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2021). *The Psychology of the Language Learner Revisited* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315695709>
- García, O., & Li Wei. (2022). *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765>
- Jenkins, J. (2020). *World Englishes: A Resource Book for Students* (4th ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003005063>
- Kroll, J. F., & Bialystok, E. (2021). Understanding the consequences of bilingualism for language processing and cognition. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 33(5), 477-499.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20445911.2021.1929990>
- Leppänen, S., Pitkänen-Huhta, A., Piirainen-Marsh, A., Nikula, T., & Peuronen, S. (2020). Young people's translocal new media uses: A multiperspective analysis of language choice and heteroglossia. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 25(6), 373-389.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmaa005>
- Lippi-Green, R. (2022). *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003002673>
- Mercer, S., & Dörnyei, Z. (2020). *Engaging Language Learners in Contemporary Classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108652476>
- Myers-Scotton, C. (2020). *Social Motivations for Code Switching: Evidence from Africa* (Revised ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Norton, B. (2020). *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation* (3rd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788929073>

Pavlenko, A. (2020). The affective turn in SLA: From "affect" and "emotion" to emotionality. In S. Mercer & M. Williams (Eds.), *Multiple Perspectives on the Self in SLA* (pp. 73-90). *Multilingual Matters*.

<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788929233>

Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2021). Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts: An introduction. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (2nd ed., pp. 1-33). *Multilingual Matters*.

<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788928519>

Phillipson, R. (2020). Linguistic imperialism and the English language's global role: Reflections on two decades of debate. *Language Policy*, 19(1), 131-149.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-02009536-2>

Tagliamonte, S. A. (2020). *Teen Talk: The Language of Adolescents* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108769068>