

Investigating Code Mixing as a Feature of Bilingualism in Indonesian Language Education

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Abstract

In the teaching and learning process, Indonesian is formally used as the language of instruction. However, students frequently incorporate regional or foreign languages during classroom interactions, both within and beyond the classroom context, often without regard for the appropriateness of the language variety used. For students, the primary concern is that the intended message is conveyed and understood. This study aims to examine the forms of code mixing and identify the factors that influence its occurrence in Indonesian language learning among seventh-grade students at State Junior High School 2 Bangko Pusako, Rokan Hilir Regency 2 Bangko Pusako, Rokan Hilir Regency. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through non-participant observation of classroom conversations. The findings indicate the presence of code mixing during the learning process, with two types identified: inner code mixing (27 instances) and outer code mixing (7 instances). The factors contributing to code mixing include role identification (1 instance), interlocutor (1 instance), language function and purpose (9 instances), and speaker-related factors. These findings highlight the linguistic dynamics in multilingual classrooms and suggest a need for pedagogical strategies that acknowledge and manage students' bilingual or multilingual practices.

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Introduction

Language is a system of sound symbols used by humans to interact and convey thoughts, emotions, and ideas. It plays a fundamental role in facilitating communication and social interaction across diverse cultural and national boundaries. As globalization increases, so does linguistic contact, leading to widespread bilingualism and multilingualism (Garcia, 2009; Baker, 2011). In this context, code-mixing where speakers blend linguistic elements from two or more languages within a single utterance, has emerged as a common phenomenon. It differs from code-switching, which typically refers to alternating languages between clauses or sentences (Thomson, in Suandi, 2014). Code-mixing reflects not only communicative adaptation but also the identity and sociocultural background of speakers (Bullock & Toribio, 2009), and its analysis requires attention to both structural and functional dimensions in discourse.

This phenomenon is observable in both informal settings and institutional domains, including educational contexts worldwide. Indonesia, a multilingual country with over 700 regional languages (Ethnologue, 2022), provides a rich environment for examining bilingual practices. Although Bahasa Indonesia serves as the national language and official medium of instruction, many students grow up speaking local languages such as Minangkabau, Javanese, or Batak. These languages coexist in daily communication, leading to natural occurrences of code-mixing. Regional linguistic identity remains strong, and speakers often blend languages depending on context, audience, and familiarity. Despite language policies such as Permendikbud No. 23 Tahun 2016 and the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, which mandate the use of Bahasa Indonesia in schools, local languages still influence classroom communication. This interaction between national and local languages illustrates the dynamic nature of multilingual education in Indonesia.

In educational settings, especially in both urban and rural schools, code-mixing often takes place during classroom interactions. Although Indonesian is officially used as the language of instruction, students frequently shift to regional languages during learning activities, both formally and informally. At times, students use expressions in their first language unconsciously, prioritizing clarity over linguistic appropriateness. As Komba (2015) noted, the language model used by teachers significantly influences students' communication patterns. The same applies to bilingual students who navigate between their first (local) and second (national) languages during classroom conversations. However, this behavior raises questions about the acquisition of standard Indonesian and its implications for formal language development.

State Junior High School 2 Bangko Pusako, Rokan Hilir Regency exemplifies this linguistic complexity. The students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds—Malay, Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak contributing to rich bilingual interactions. In their daily

conversations, students insert regional words, phrases, or clauses into Indonesian, either during lessons or informal interactions such as breaks. Preliminary observations revealed utterances like, “Tadi kan sudah aku cakap gak ada doh,” in which “cakap” and “doh” are Malay lexical items embedded in an Indonesian sentence, an example of inner code-mixing. Such mixing arises due to sociolinguistic factors such as limited vocabulary, exposure, economic background, and lack of standard language familiarity. These real-life examples demonstrate the importance of analyzing code-mixing as a reflection of students’ linguistic environments.

Sociolinguistics, which studies the relationship between language and society, provides the framework for understanding this phenomenon. It examines variations in speech caused by factors such as ethnicity, class, age, and setting. Suhardi (in Senjaya, Solihat & Riansi, 2018) emphasizes that sociolinguistics views language variation from a non-structural and socially driven perspective. Code-mixing is often motivated by politeness, humor, prestige, or the influence of the interlocutor (Hymes, 1974). Nababan (in Suandi, 2014), Kachru (in Marni, 2016), and Subyakto (in Rulyandi et al., 2014) define code-mixing as the use of two or more language elements in a single utterance without any situational demand. Subyakto, in particular, highlights that such use is common among familiar individuals in informal settings.

Rokhman (2013) and Gratien et al. (2023) describe code-mixing as the insertion of foreign linguistic elements such as words, phrases, idioms, and clauses. According to Indrastuti (in Fuji, 2017), code-mixing can be categorized into inner and outer types, depending on whether the languages involved are structurally or genealogically related. Suandi (2014) also introduces hybrid code-mixing. Jendra (in Suandi, 2014) classifies code-mixing by linguistic units. Thomson differentiates between code-switching and code-mixing, the former occurring between sentences and the latter within a sentence. Thelander (in Fuji, 2017) emphasizes that code-mixing involves language fragments embedded in a primary language. Masrud (2015) points out that such mixing arises in both formal and informal contexts, often due to the absence of appropriate equivalents. Kachru (in Suwito, cited by Marni, 2016) categorizes the causes into internal (linguistic competence and structural openness) and external (psychological and social factors). These align with Hymes’s (1974) Speaking model, which underlines the influence of Setting, Participants, Ends, Acts, Keys, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre.

In addition to these perspectives, this study adopts Myers-Scotton’s Markedness Model to explore how language choice in the classroom reflects social roles and norms, as well as Gumperz’s concept of contextualization cues to analyze how speakers use code-mixing to signal meaning, emphasis, or relational dynamics. These frameworks enable a deeper understanding of the pragmatic functions of code-mixing in real-time interaction. Given the complexity of students’ linguistic backgrounds and the reality of language use in the classroom, this study aims to analyze the forms and causes of code-

mixing in Bahasa Indonesia learning among seventh-grade students at State Junior High School 2 Bangko Pusako, Rokan Hilir Regency. The research focuses on identifying types of code-mixing found in classroom discourse and understanding the sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors that motivate students to mix languages during the learning process. By exploring this phenomenon in a real educational context, the study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of bilingual behavior in Indonesian classrooms and provide insights for language instruction in multilingual environments. Ultimately, the findings may inform teaching practices and curriculum design to accommodate and manage linguistic diversity more effectively.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research is a type of inquiry that explores and seeks to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Generally, qualitative research is suitable for investigating social life, history, behavior, concepts or phenomena, social problems, and various other topics. One of the main reasons the researcher adopted a qualitative approach is based on the researcher's own experience, which shows that this approach helps uncover and understand the hidden meanings behind phenomena that are often difficult to interpret. The specific type of qualitative research used in this study is a case study. A case study involves an in-depth exploration of a specific case by collecting comprehensive data through various data collection procedures over a defined period. The case may refer to an event, activity, process, or program (Creswell, 2016). This research was conducted at State Junior High School 2 Bangko Pusako, located in Balam, Jalan Pelajar Km 8, in Rokan Hilir Regency. The study was carried out from October 7, 2023, to November 9, 2023. The participants were all seventh-grade students of State Junior High School 2 Bangko Pusako, Rokan Hilir Regency, totaling 128 students, divided into four parallel classes: VII-1, VII-2, VII-3, and VII-4, with each class consisting of 32 students. The students came from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, including Minangkabau, Malay, Javanese, and Batak. The object of the study is the students' utterances involving code mixing that occurred during classroom learning activities. The data were collected using unstructured observation and note-taking, focusing on spontaneous student discourse during learning activities. All observed utterances were documented without researcher intervention. Prior to data collection, parental consent and institutional approval were obtained. All student data were anonymized to protect the identity and privacy of the participants, in accordance with ethical research standards for minors. The data were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns of code mixing. The analysis was guided by Suandi's (2014) framework, focusing on forms and causes of code mixing. The procedure followed the model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which

includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher acted as the primary instrument in coding and interpreting the data. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several validation strategies were applied, including triangulation of data sources (classroom observation, field notes, and transcriptions), peer checking, and reflective memoing throughout the research process. These strategies aimed to enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

Results and Discussion

Results

This study identified 34 instances of code mixing that occurred during Indonesian language learning activities among seventh-grade students at State Junior High School 2 Bangko Pusako, Rokan Hilir Regency. The data revealed that inner code mixing was the most frequently used, appearing in 27 utterances or 79.4%, while outer code mixing appeared in 7 utterances or 20.6%. No hybrid code mixing was found during the observation. The following table presents the distribution of code-mixing types observed throughout the study.

Table 1. The Total Number of Code-Mixing Instances Used by Students

Type of Code Mixing	Frequency	Percentage
Inner Code Mixing	27	79.4%
Outer Code Mixing	7	20.6%
Hybrid Code Mixing	0	0%

Students often embedded regional or foreign language elements into their utterances in spontaneous and context-dependent ways. One example of inner code mixing is found in the utterance “Kisanak pun ketawa pula,” which integrates a Minangkabau term within an Indonesian sentence to refer to a peer’s laughter during a casual moment in class. Another example is “Uwes buk,” where the student used the Javanese term *uwes*, meaning “already,” in response to the teacher’s inquiry about lesson comprehension. Similarly, in “Limo boleh buk,” the student inserted a Minangkabau numeral while answering a question about a test item.

Outer code mixing was also evident, predominantly through the use of English lexical items. Students often inserted English expressions such as “Yes understand buk,” “Yes present semua buk,” and “It’s oke buk aman” into their Indonesian speech. These utterances occurred in casual contexts such as confirming attendance, expressing understanding, or responding to classroom disruptions. Another example, “Em konsentrasi maybe,” reflects a mix of hesitation and uncertainty using English fillers.

A deeper analysis of the data shows that code mixing was influenced by several interrelated factors. Students sometimes shifted codes based on their communicative role in the classroom. For example, the use of local terms like *kisanak* signaled familiarity and solidarity among peers. In other cases, the background of the speech partner played a role; students who shared similar ethnic or regional identities naturally resorted to regional terms, such as *tulisannyo* or *mengapo* when speaking to classmates from the same cultural group. Functional goals also shaped language choice, particularly when students intended to inform or clarify something to the teacher. This can be seen in the use of the Malay word *tak* in “*Sih Novi yang tak hadir buk*,” instead of the more standard Indonesian *tidak*. Additionally, some expressions appeared to be habitual, influenced by students’ frequent exposure to certain language forms. For instance, the repeated use of English elements like “yes,” “present,” or “maybe” may reflect students’ routine speech patterns acquired through media, technology, or informal conversations. Overall, the findings illustrate how students actively negotiate language use in multilingual settings. Their code-mixing behavior reflects not only linguistic competence but also social awareness, adaptability, and identity expression in classroom communication.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that internal code-mixing predominates over external mixing in the observed speech acts, aligning with previous studies (Gracia-Baker, 2019; Lin, 2013). This internal mixing, often in the form of insertion and alternation of lexical items from local languages or Indonesian into English, reflects a localized bilingual repertoire that students employ for pragmatic efficiency, identity construction, and peer solidarity (García & Wei, 2014; Blommaert & Jones, 2010). From a discourse perspective, internal code-mixing functions as a strategy to manage classroom participation and mitigate power asymmetries (Hymes, 1974; Lin, 2013). For example, when students shift between languages during group discussions or in response to teacher prompts, they subtly negotiate meanings, assert agency, and navigate social hierarchies (Canagarajah, 2013; Iversen & Krulatz, 2021). These patterns are not mere linguistic accidents but socially informed communicative choices that reflect their awareness of classroom dynamics and contextual demands.

The preference for internal mixing also correlates with students’ familiarity and affective attachment to certain expressions in the local or national language, especially when discussing culturally embedded topics (Sari & Suandi, 2019; Wardani, 2020). These tendencies are also supported by recent studies indicating that learners often revert to their dominant language(s) in emotionally charged or high-stakes contexts to maintain fluency and interpersonal rapport (Trisanto et al., 2021; Apriani et al., 2023). However, the dominance of internal over external code-mixing should not be interpreted as a

rejection of global linguistic resources. Rather, it illustrates a situated and strategic linguistic negotiation that reflects students' hybrid identities and adaptive multilingual competence (Gracia-Baker, 2019; García & Wei, 2014). Recent work by Mulyani and Setiawan (2022) and Gultom, (2024). reinforces this view, nothing that students in Indonesian urban schools actively shuttle between language systems to construct modern, cosmopolitan personas while remaining anchored in local values.

Methodologically, the limitation of relying on data from a single school poses challenges for generalizability. While this micro-ethnographic approach affords contextual depth (Hymes, 1974), future research could benefit from multi-site comparative studies or the inclusion of teacher interviews and curriculum documents to triangulate findings and explore how institutional policies shape students' linguistic behavior (Mambu, 2017; Putri et al., 2022). Furthermore, recent scholarship recommends incorporating discourse analysis tools to examine turn-taking, repair sequences, and power relations in code-mixed interactions (Nurhadi & Zahro, 2024; Susanto & Rahman, 2023).

Overall, the results affirm the sociolinguistic richness of classroom code-mixing, not merely as a communicative phenomenon but as an index of broader cultural, ideological, and educational practices (Blommaert & Jones, 2010; Canagarajah, 2013). As such, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship advocating for more inclusive and context-sensitive language pedagogies that legitimize translanguaging and hybrid speech practices in the classroom (García & Wei, 2014; Apriani et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study reveals that seventh-grade students at State Junior High School 2 Bangko Pusako, Rokan Hilir Regency exhibit a consistent pattern of both internal and external code-mixing in classroom discourse. Internal code-mixing most notably influenced by regional languages such as Minangkabau and Javanese occurs more frequently than external code-mixing influenced by English. This pattern reflects a strong influence of local linguistic ecology shaped by daily interactions and cultural contact, underscoring the vitality of regional languages in students' communicative practices. Four main factors were identified as contributors to code-mixing: role identification, the presence of specific speech partners, communicative function and purpose, and speaker-related factors such as linguistic repertoire and social identity. These factors illustrate how students actively negotiate language choices in response to both interpersonal and institutional contexts. The findings support the interpretation of code-mixing not as linguistic interference but as a strategic, meaningful, and natural part of multilingual communication and identity expression in educational settings. Code-mixing serves pragmatic and sociocultural functions that align with students' lived experiences in a linguistically diverse society. Pedagogically, this study highlights

the importance of recognizing students' actual language use in shaping inclusive and effective language instruction. Language educators and curriculum designers are encouraged to accommodate regional linguistic variation and promote students' metalinguistic awareness. Instructional strategies that legitimize code-mixing as a resource can help enhance students' communicative competence and linguistic confidence. By offering empirical insight into spontaneous code-mixing among junior high school students, this study contributes to the relatively underexplored area of classroom-based sociolinguistic research in Indonesia. Future studies are recommended to broaden the scope across multiple school settings, integrate teacher perspectives, and investigate the implications of code-mixing for language learning outcomes and classroom practices in other multilingual regions.

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Authors' Note

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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