

TAG-SWITCHING IN AI-GENERATED PROMPTS BY ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Language constitutes a fundamental element of culture, serving not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of the speakers' ways of thinking, values, and social identity. In today's increasingly globalized society, bilingualism has become a common phenomenon, often giving rise to language alternation known as code-switching in various communicative contexts. With the rapid advancement of technology, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced new modes of interaction between humans and machines, particularly in the field of language learning. This study focuses on tag-switching, a type of code-switching that involves the insertion of a tag phrase or discourse marker from one language into an utterance in another language, as observed in AI-generated prompts produced by students of the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Dwijendra University. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and drawing upon Poplack's (1980) framework, the research analyzed 287 prompts and identified 89 instances of tag-switching. The findings reveal that students frequently insert English or Indonesian tags for functional, expressive, and pragmatic purposes. These results demonstrate that the use of AI in language learning promotes natural bilingual communication patterns while reflecting students' academic identity, linguistic creativity, and communicative competence in the digital era.

Keywords: inter-segmental code, code switching, AI-generated prompts, Bilingualism, Muysken's (2000)

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is an important part of a culture that not only functions as a means of communication, on the other hand it also reflects the way of the speaker thought, values, and social identity. In modern society, the use of two languages or bilingualism is becoming increasingly common as many individuals interact in more than one language. This condition is influenced by factors such as education, social environment, and the influence of globalization, which demands the ability to communicate across languages. In situations like this, the phenomenon of language mixing, known as code-switching, often arises, which is the alternating use of two languages in a single utterance or text. This phenomenon shows the social and cultural dynamics that exist in bilingual societies and reflects the ability of the speakers to adjust their language to the context of the communication they are faced with.

Along with technological advances, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought about a new form of linguistic interaction between humans and machines.

The use of AI in the academic setting, such as creating AI-generated prompts, such as inserting some 'code' has created a new perspective for linguistic practices. According to Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021), "code" can refer to any part of language that speakers use in communicating, it can be the smaller part of language (word, phrase or other), dialect, or specific speech style. practically, bilingual speakers some time switch from a code to another one depends on the situation, topic, or the person they are talking with. In the digital age, this phenomenon is also evident in interactions between humans and technology. Wirasa et al. (2025) showed the phenomenon of inserting a "code" were found in interactions of human using technology. Wirasa et al. (2025) found the insertion of a code in one language were also common in digital communication, such as conversations between lecturers and students via messaging applications, illustrating how part of technology has become a new medium for bilingual expression. One interesting form to study is intra-sentential code-switching, which is the switching of codes within a single sentence or clause when students use two languages simultaneously in composing prompts for AI systems.

In the case of students in the English Education Study Programme, where English is used as main academic language and since the student all from Indonesia, thus Indonesian is used in everyday conversation. In line with that, the phenomenon of tag-switching in AI prompts can reflect their language proficiency level and linguistic habits. Therefore, this study is important to explore the forms of intra-sentential code that made by the students, the factors that influence the usage of 'code'.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of describing the forms of intra-sentential code-switching in AI-generated prompts created by students of the English Education Study Programme, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Dwijendra University academic years 2025/2026. The research subjects were students from the study programme who were selected because they has bilingual competence in Indonesian and English, thus enabling code-switching practices in the utterances or texts they produced.

Data analysis was conducted using Poplack's (1980) code-switching theoretical framework, which divides code switching into three main types, namely tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching. The focus of this study is on tag-switching, which is code that can be a word or phrase that inserted within a sentence, where elements from two languages are alternately used without changing the main syntactic structure.

The Data collected from 1 to 7 October 2025. This study was done in a classroom setting, where students could use AI (in a learning context) such as ChatGPT. The main data in this study were AI prompts created by the students during learning activities. Each student was asked to generate between five and ten prompts using the AI they normally used, with topics relevant to the course they were studying. Additionally, secondary data was collected by interview or questionnaire to obtain information about the students' bilingual background and language usage habits in interactions with AI. the combination of the main and and secondary data was used as a triangulation to increase the validity of the research results.

3. RELATED RESEARCH/LITERATUR REVIEW

Language is one of main tool in social communication that allows the speakers to express their thoughts and identities. In bilingual communities, speakers would often switch from one language to another in communication setting, moreover this phenomenon known as code-switching. Based on Poplack (1980), code-switching iss a practice of shifting from a language to another in one conversation by bilingual speakers. This phenomenon not only demonstrates a person's linguistic ability of speakers in a particular communication context.

Poplack (1980) categorises code-switching into three main types, which are tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching. Firstly, tag-switching involves inserting a word or short phrase from one language into another without changing the main sentence structure. Secondly, inter-sentential switching occurs between sentences or between independent clauses. This type indicates a change of language after one sentence structure is completed. Thirdly, intra-sentential switching is a form of code-switching that occurs within the same sentence or clause. This type is the most complex because it requires high grammatical competence from the speaker to maintain the syntactic integrity of both languages used.

Intra-sentential switching describes as the ability of bilingual speakers to combine element(s) from two languages within a single grammatical structure without causing meaning or syntactic errors. This phenomenon shows a high level of proficiency, where speakers could switch codes within a sentence structure for the reasons such as; functional, expressive, or even stylistic. In the setting of English language education, bilingual students use intra-sentential switching when they write or speak to clarify the meaning or fill lexical gaps. In today's digital setting, particularly with the increasing use of AI such as chatbots and text generators, has emerged where intra-sentential switching also appears in AI-generated prompts produced by bilingual users.

Previous studies have investigated the phenomenon of tag-switching in several linguistic setting. Rachmawati (2019) showed the interactions between lecturers and students in the classroom, tag-switching is applied as a academic strategy to make complicated concepts easier to be understood. Wahyuni (2020) studied informal student conversations and discovered that intra-sentential switching is used as a tools for lexical limitations. Furthermore, Pratiwi (2021) concluded that the use of two languages in one sentence not only used as communicative function but also becomes a marker of the linguistic identity of the younger generation. Sari (2022), through research on student academic conversations, found that intra-sentential switching is often used to adapt to formal contexts and demonstrate bilingual competence in the academic sphere.

Although these four studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the form and function of intra-sentential switching, they all focus on the context of human communication, whether in classroom, social, or non-AI digital situations. To date, there has been little research examining how the phenomenon of intra-sentential switching arises in the context of AI-generated prompts, i.e. text generated by users when interacting with artificial intelligence systems. However, this context has its own linguistic characteristics, in which bilingual users adapt their language not only for human communication, but also so that it can be 'understood' by machines.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analysing the form and function of intra-sentential switching that appears in AI-generated prompts by English Education

students at Dwijendra University. The results of this study are expected to enrich the study of digital bilingualism, expand the application of Poplack's (1980) theory to the field of digital linguistics, and provide new insights into the representation of the linguistic identity of the academic generation in interactions with artificial intelligence.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows the findings of an analysis of tag-switching found in AI prompts created by students of the English Education Study Programme at Dwijendra University. There is 287 prompts collected, 89 prompts were selected as having tag-switching. These findings indicate that students often combine elements of Indonesian and English in a single sentence or clause, reflecting their bilingual competence and flexibility in language use. This phenomenon shows that the use of AI in the context of language learning allows for the emergence of spontaneous and natural bilingual expressions.

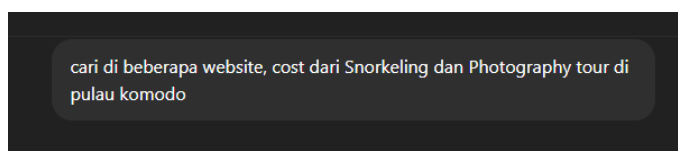


Figure 1. Intra-sentential Code-switching Segment in AI-Generated Prompt by English Education Student

In the English for Tour and Travel course, students are free to use AI as part of technology-based communication exercises. This activity aims to train students' ability to use English functionally in the field of tourism with the help of artificial intelligence (AI). One of the data collected was a prompt: '*cari di beberapa website, cost dari snorkling dan Photography tour pulau komodo*'. This data showed a combination of Indonesian and English used in one sentence structure. Based on Poplack's (1980) classification, this example falls under the category of intra-sentential code-switching, which is code switching that occurs within a single clause or sentence. In this case, the phrase '*cari di beberapa*' is written in Indonesian, while the words 'websites', 'cost,' 'snorkelling,' and 'photography tour' are from English. This code-switching reflects the simultaneous use of two language systems without changing the basic syntactic structure. This phenomenon indicates that students have linguistic awareness and bilingual abilities that enable them to choose the form of language that is considered most efficient and meaningful in the digital context.

These findings support Muysken's (2000) view that code-switching in bilingual discourse is often used as a communication strategy to achieve clarity of meaning, efficiency, and more precise expression. In this context, students seem to prefer English terms for technical terms related to tourism, as they are considered more accurate and commonly used. In addition, Halim and Maros (2014) emphasise that intra-sentential switching reflects a higher level of language proficiency because it requires simultaneous mastery of the syntactic structures of both languages. In the context of AI usage, code-switching is not only a reflection of bilingual competence but also a form of linguistic adaptation to human communication in the digital age.

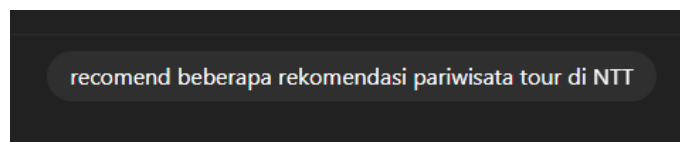


Figure 2. Intra-sentential Code-switching Segment in AI-Generated Prompt by English Education Student

In the same activity in the English for Tour and Travel course, students also produced another AI-generated prompt that read: '*recomend* beberapa rekomendasi pariwisata *tour* di NTT'. This sentence demonstrates a typical form of intra-sentential code-switching, where the word 'Recomend' (a misspelling of recommend) comes from English, while the phrase 'beberapa rekomendasi pariwisata *tour* di NTT' uses Indonesian with a one code there. Based on Shana Poplack's (1980) framework, this code-switching occurs within a single clause without a clear syntactic break, thus classified as intra-sentential switching. This shift reflects how students spontaneously use English elements in the middle of Indonesian sentences to give an academic and professional nuance in the context of tourism. In addition, the misspelling of the word 'Recomend' also indicates phonological or orthographic interference between the two languages used alternately.

These findings indicate that students use English not only to fulfil communicative functions, but also as a symbol of professional competence in the field of tourism, where international terms and terminology are preferred. This is in line with Pieter Muysken's (2000) view that code-switching in bilingual discourse often functions as a strategy of social identity and a marker of membership in a particular bilingual community. As empirical support, a study by Marwa (2014) found that bilingual students often engage in code-switching in academic contexts to fill lexical gaps and assert their social identity. Thus, the use of the word 'Recomend' in this context is not merely a linguistic choice, but also reflects students' pragmatic awareness in adapting to the professional domain they are studying. This phenomenon shows that students' interactions with AI are not only a means of language learning, but also a space for the formation of linguistic and academic identity in the digital age.

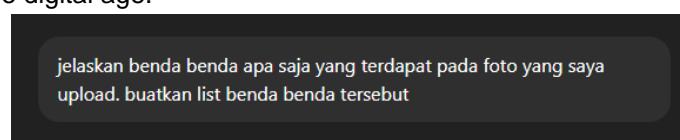


Figure 3. Intra-sentential Code-switching Segment in AI-Generated Prompt by English Education Student

In the learning activities for the Listening course, students also produced an AI-generated prompt: '*jelaskan benda benda apa saja yang terdapat pada foto yang saya upload. buat list benda benda tersebut*'. This prompt shows a form of intra-sentential code-switching, where Indonesian language elements dominate the sentence structure, but the English word 'list' is inserted into the same clause. Based on Shana Poplack's (1980) framework, this type of code-switching is classified as intra-sentential switching because it occurs within a single syntactic unit without a clear separation between the two languages. The use of the word 'list' reflects the students' linguistic awareness in choosing terms that are considered more concise, efficient, and contextual to describe the task of searching for object vocabulary from images.

This phenomenon shows that students not only use English as a communication tool, but also as a means of adapting to a technology-based academic context and foreign language learning. In line with Pieter Muysken's (2000) view, this form of code-switching can be seen as a social and professional identity strategy, whereby students attempt to demonstrate their competence as second language users. Furthermore, the findings of Halim and Maros (2014) also confirm that code-switching in learning environments is often used to overcome lexical limitations and clarify the meaning of the message being conveyed. Thus, the use of the word 'list' in this prompt is not only a form of spontaneous code-mixing, but also reflects students' ability to strategically utilise linguistic resources when interacting with AI for more meaningful learning purposes.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the phenomenon of tag-switching in AI-generated prompts created by students of the English Education Study Programme at Dwijendra University reflects bilingual ability and linguistic adaptation to the digital context. Of the 287 data analysed, there were 89 prompts containing intra-sentential switching, where Indonesian and English elements were used alternately in one sentence structure. These findings are in line with Poplack's (1980) theory, which states that code-switching within a single sentence indicates a high level of language proficiency, as well as Muysken's (2000) view that code-switching functions as a strategy for social and professional identity. In the context of AI-based learning, the simultaneous use of two languages not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a form of representation of students' academic identity and adaptive abilities in the era of artificial intelligence.

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