

## EXPLORING THE USE OF ENGLISH IN *INSTAGRAM* AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE USER'S IDENTITY

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### Abstract

English has been used widely in almost all international forums. In line with the rapid use of social media, in this case *Instagram*, English is also widely used as the language of self-expression by most of its users, both native and non-native speakers. At least, this is what happened in Indonesia. Most of Indonesian *Instagram* users, especially youth, use English to write their caption. This phenomenon is important to explore since there is a belief that by actively using a foreign language, it will reduce the sense of nationality within oneself, and even it will lead to the loss of one's identity. Identity today becomes a very important issue since it shows the sense of belonging of oneself in his/her social interaction. The thing is that the social interaction model in social media is much more complex than the interaction model in the real life. In social media, most of the users do not merely want to show who they really are. They tend to have certain motive on how they can be accepted and appreciated by other users. In other words, they want to be the subject of attention instead of being themselves. Therefore, the concept of identity becomes blurred. Based on the previous description, through the direct observation method, this research aims to seek whether the use of English influences the identity of Indonesian users.

**Keywords:** use of English, *Instagram*, identity, Indonesian users

### INTRODUCTION

Being realized or not, English has become a lifestyle of most society in the world, including Indonesia. The real example of the lifestyle can be seen through the increasing use of English in various talks in social media applications, which also becomes part of modern lifestyle. Though it must be admitted that mistakes in using English is unavoidable, the users of social media keep using English as a medium to express themselves. Due to the phenomenon, English holds more important role, and certainly has effects toward other aspects of life, such as in the field of education, economy, politics, and culture, which is known as neo-colonialism power. Speaking about culture, there is an assumption that when one learns foreign

language, in this case, English, indirectly he/she also learns about the culture in which the English language is used by its native speakers. This assumption is supported by Birmer (2012) who states that culture—the traditions, lifestyle, habits, and so on that one picks up from the people he/she lives and interacts with—shapes the way he/she thinks, and also shapes the way he/she talks. Unfortunately, some people tend to have over perception toward the notion. Therefore, there is a tendency that they like foreign culture excessively that the culture seems more superior and better than their own culture. Irene (2013: 40) even describes that English dominancy leads to discriminatory prejudices against who cannot speak English considered incompetent and inferior. Certainly, the notion

may encourage people to learn and use English more than their mother tongue or national language. Even with several resistances attempted by certain group of people or government, the control of English as the dominant language in the world is undefeatable.

This phenomenon can be clearly seen in the use of English in social media, such as *Instagram*. Calkin (2015) in her article entitled *Making Pretty: Examining Contemporary Identity Construction through Instagram* raises the phenomenon of *Instagram* as the catalyst for the search and the change of identity. Based on the data provided by *Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia* (APJII) in 2016, *Instagram* is the second social media with the highest number of users, that is as many as 19,9 million users where 70% of them are dominated by 16-25 year-old group. Psychologically, the group is considered labile and easy to be influenced in terms of determining self-identity.

Erikson (1989) differentiates two kinds of identity: personal identity and ego identity. Personal identity is based on the direct experience of someone, which despite any changes happened; he/she remains the same person. Meanwhile, ego identity has something to do with existential quality as autonomous subject who is able to solve any problems within him/her self and his/her society. In other words, identity is not merely about individuality, but it is more about how individual relates to his/her environment. Therefore, individual tends to search a place or

a community in which he/she feels the same emotion and value though it is not where he/she belongs (Tajfel, 1979).

In this progressive era, identity becomes important to be investigated since the limitation of the identity itself becomes blurred. People in the whole world cannot be easily distinguished from the way they get dressed, behave, or talk. By the advancement of sophisticated technology, a person can see and imitate what is worn or done by other people. As in language, people can learn and express themselves by using certain language they want, either in their mother tongue, first language, second language, or even in foreign language. Thornborrow (in Thomas and Wareing, 2000: 121) states that language is a basic thing for someone to determine his/her identity, and to shape other people's view about who he/she is. In addition, Hassan (2010) stresses that language and identity has a tight relation socially since through the use of language, someone can construct and reconstruct his/her identity. Therefore, when someone uses various languages, identity is not something special anymore which can differentiate one person from another.

Based on the previous description, this research focuses on the forms of English used in *Instagram* and sees the influence toward its users' identity both individually and socially. This research is conducted qualitatively through direct observation and literature study methods. To support the analysis, there are 100 questionnaires distributed randomly to the *Instagram* users who use English in their

caption. The questionnaires contain fourteen main questions which lead to the final result about whether English has influence toward their identity or not. This influence can be seen from the preference, the reason, and the perspective of the users in using English instead of other languages.

#### ***Language Forms Used in Instagram Caption***

“Caption” is a title at the head of an article or below a picture, in a newspaper, magazine, etc. (Webster’s Dictionary). In *Instagram*, a caption means text or a piece of writing that a user adds to an image to describe, to explain, or to contextualize the photo or video being uploaded. Based on the observation and data classification, most Indonesian users write Code Switching (also called Code Mixing) and Quotes as their *Instagram* captions. However, there are also other captions that can be classified based on the grammatical category.

#### **Code Switching**

According to Wardhaugh (2010: 108), *code switching* happens when people require selecting a particular code (language) whenever they choose to speak, and they may also decide to switch from one code to another or to mix codes within utterances. It can occur within a single sentence (intra-sententially) and between sentences (inter-sententially). Wardhaugh further states that code switching arises from individual choice or be used as a major identity marker for a group of speakers who must deal with more than one language in their common pursuits.

The following are some of the data which show the intra-sententially code switching:

- a. The superb ayam bakar taliwang. Mana bisa cuman sepiring nasinya..  
(Photo caption @selytaolga on April 21, 2017)
- b. Happy Monday Indonesiaku.  
(Photo caption @onco05 on May 21 2017)
- c. Repost foto lama  
(Photo caption @cindynovithad on October 16, 2017)
- d. Backpacker itu sahabatan dg matahari, jadi gak takut hitam gak takut kliniyit  
(Photo caption @enipattinson on October 18, 2017)

Meanwhile, here are some of the data which show the inter-sententially code switching:

- e. Semangat Senin. God bless you everybody.  
(Photo caption @mirliyana.putri on May 15, 2017)
- f. Tempat yang tidak pernah sepi. Here I find unity. I understand that Islam represents similarity in diversity.  
(Photo caption @anggitdarmata on May 20, 2017)
- g. Happy birthday ce, God bless u.. Kadonya nyusul ya  
(Photo caption @kiki\_kusma on October 3, 2017)
- h. It’s okay don’t worry.. I will always love you no matter what .. termasuk 92kg mu.. hahaha  
(Photo caption @diyahayu.puspita on October 18, 2017)

### Quote

To quote means to repeat exactly the words of another person or words from a piece of writing (Webster's Student's Dictionary, 1992). Further, Bronstein (in Santoso, 2017: 18-19) states that quote is motivational words which tend to provide the chance to release the emotion and to enjoy the aesthetic. Beside code switching phenomenon, there are also many users of *Instagram* who write their *caption* in the form of quote. However, not all quotes are taken from other people's quote. Some users also show their creativity in making their own motivational words. Here are some of the data of the quotation taken from other people:

- i. A rose can never be a sunflower, and a sunflower can never be a rose. All flowers are beautiful in their own way, and that's like women too –Miranda Kerr-  
(Photo caption @dellanggraenii on March 29, 2017)
- j. Never compare yourself with others, cause no one else can do a better job of 'being you' than you do. And the only person you should try to be better than, is the person you were yesterday –NN-  
(Photo caption @retnopurwa\_rp on May 20, 2017)
- k. A book is a magical thing that lets you travel to far-away places without ever leaving your chair –Katrina Mayer-  
(Photo caption @missbiya on May 26, 2017)
- l. Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also is what it takes to sit down and listen –Winston Churchill-

(Photo caption @rahmanazila on May 28, 2017)

Meanwhile, here are some of the quotation data made by the users themselves:

- m. People go but how they left always stays.  
(Photo caption @dellanggraeni on February 22, 2017)
- n. How independent we are, we still need friend too.  
(Photo caption @desvie\_deaaa on April 7, 2017)
- o. Success is the result of perfection, hard work, learning from failure, loyalty, and persistence  
(Photo caption @rereanita on April 15, 2017)
- p. It's never too late to start over. If you weren't happy yesterday, try something different today. Don't stay stuck, do better.  
(Photo caption @wilda\_theresia01 on May 15, 2017)

### Grammatical Categories

#### 1. Caption in the Form of Parts of Speech

Part of speech is the traditional term for the major classes of words that are grammatically distinguished in a language (Shopen, 2007: 1). There are nine classes of words in English language, namely *nouns*, *verbs*, *adjectives*, *adverbs*, *verbals*, *pronouns*, *prepositions*, *conjunctions*, and *interjections*. In *Instagram*, there are some users who wrote their captions in the form of these parts of speech classes, such as:

- q. Happy  
(Photo caption @rahmanazila on April 11, 2017)

- r. Architecture  
(Photo caption @may.sr27 on May 6, 2017)
  - s. Home  
(Photo caption @wrstymadya on May 16, 2017)
  - t. Morning  
(Photo caption @enipattinson on October 16, 2017)
2. Caption in the Form of Phrase
- Phrase is generally defined as a group of words which does not contain the element of subject and verb at one time. In English, phrase is divided into three, namely: Noun Phrase, Prepositional Phrase, and Verb Phrase (Valin Jr, 2004: 5). However, most of the *Instagram* caption found is in the form of the noun phrase.
- u. A precious story  
(Photo caption @cindynovithad on September 25, 2017)
  - v. Cute bananas  
(Photo caption @elhftmha on September 26, 2017)
  - w. Dutch flag waving in wind  
(Photo caption @zharfal on October 9, 2017)
  - x. Planktons under microscope  
(Photo caption @arman\_zambava on October 11, 2017)

3. Caption in the Form of Sentences

Sentence can be simply defined as a group of words which consist of at least one subject and one verb. It can be in the form of simple, compound, and complex; and declarative (a statement of fact or possibility), interrogative (a question), imperative (a request or a command), and exclamatory (a

thought with a strong emotion) sentences in which the main purpose is to give information. In *Instagram*, most users wrote sentences to give explanation of the picture being uploaded or simply to describe what is on their mind (it has no correlation with the picture).

- y. I know you are never far away.  
(Photo caption @lina\_diharjo on July 26, 2017)
- z. You can't be mine forever.  
(Photo caption @diyahayu.puspita on October 4 2017)
- aa. I love people who make me forget that I have a phone.  
(Photo caption @hrlnindra on October 8, 2017)
- bb. Inside the park, Gaudi designed this route which passes through a pine grove with the portico backing onto a retaining wall made from unworked stone.  
(Photo caption @zharfal on October 12, 2017)

## RESULTS

### *The Use of English in Instagram and Its Influence toward The Users*

To find out about the influence of English toward the *Instagram* users, 100 questionnaires containing 18 questions has been distributed to 100 respondents who use *Instagram* actively in their daily life. From the 18 questions, there are 4 main questions related to the language they use when writing the caption, how they feel when they use English to write the caption, their view on whether the use of English in *Instagram* caption has positive or negative influences,

and whether or not it will influence their identity—in terms of the way of thinking and behaving.

Related to the language used to write the *Instagram* caption, 81% of the respondents often use English to write their caption, while the other 19% rarely or almost never use English to write their caption due to lack of ability in English and lack of confidence in using English. 46% of the respondents feel happy, cool, and proud when they use English to write their caption, 39% feel unconfident and afraid of being wrong, while the other 15% feel normal since they are accustomed to use English in their everyday life.

Table 1. The result of the data analysis

The Use of English	Substances	Percentage
Language Preference	English	81
	Non-English	19
Expression	Positive Feeling (Happy, Proud, Confident)	46
	Negative Feeling (Unconfident, Fear of being wrong)	39
	Ordinary Feeling	15
Attitude	Positive	95
	Negative	5
Influence on Identity	There is influence	76
	No influence	24

Related to the use of English in *Instagram*, 95% of the respondents have positive view since they realize that once they use English, they can communicate what is on their mind to all *Instagram* users all around the world. They also feel that *Instagram* is the best place to learn and to practice their ability in using English. Besides, by using English means that they broaden their relation network to international scale. There is no more

limitation to make friend with people from different country with different language and different culture. However, the other 5% think that the use of English may reduce their sense of nationality and make their original culture looks inferior.

Whether or not the use of English influencing identity, 76% of the respondents do not feel worry about their identity as long as people know the limitation—mastering English is somehow compulsory for people to live in this globalization era, however, if they still live, think, and speak according to the culture of Indonesian people, there is nothing to be worried. Meanwhile, the other 24% of the respondents think that by actively using English and interacting with the native speakers through *Instagram* will influence the users' ego, in terms of the increase of level of pride, and it will lead them to see other's culture as superior. Therefore, there is possibility that they prefer and even feel proud to live, think, and speak as English native speakers do.

## CONCLUSION

*Instagram* is one of the newest lifestyle used by people around the world, including in Indonesia. Furnished by interesting features makes the users cannot stay from it. The users can share their picture and express what is on their mind—it may or may not be related to the picture—in the caption. This caption then becomes an interesting object of language to be investigated since it reflects the users' way of thinking and way of life. Since it is a media

used by and connecting people globally, people cannot ignore the important role of English in which it is the main international language spoken by more than 1.5 billion people in the world. Therefore, it is reasonable to be apprehensive that the English dominance may influence people, especially the non-native speakers, at least in terms of language preference.

People should aware that language can be the first identity they have since they think, speak, and communicate through it. English has proven itself to be the language preference used by *Instagram* users. Undoubtedly, from this language preference, it may influence other aspects of life which become parts of a person's identity. From this research, it can be seen that English has both positive and negative impacts toward the non-native speakers, in this case Indonesian. English is seen as both compulsion and threat. In one hand, people are forced to learn and to use English to be part of globalization; while on the other hand, their nationality and culture are left behind. Therefore, it is better to be wise in facing this phenomenon. English is important, but the existence of Indonesian and other local languages is also important. Instead of using English to impress people, it is better to use English for important or necessary purposes.

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