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Understanding Authenticity in YouTube Playful Talk: A Translingual Practice Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the limited research on how translanguaging operates within playful talk in audiovisual digital environments, particularly in relation to identity construction and authenticity negotiation. While previous studies have examined translanguaging in educational or written digital contexts, little attention has been given to its role in informal, multimodal interactions on platforms such as YouTube. This study aims to analyze how multilingual speakers employ translanguaging practices to construct social identities and negotiate authenticity in playful talk. This research adopts an interpretive qualitative approach using a case study design. The data were collected from one episode of the *Playful Talk* YouTube channel, focusing on a single participant (GS1). Data sources include video recordings and a semi-structured interview, which were analyzed using thematic and discourse-oriented analysis. The findings reveal that translanguaging functions as a structured communicative strategy rather than a random language alternation. English is predominantly used for affective expression and stance-taking, while Indonesian provides contextual elaboration and narrative grounding. These language choices enable the participant to construct hybrid identities that integrate local and transnational orientations. Furthermore, multimodal resources such as gestures and facial expressions are systematically aligned with linguistic shifts, reinforcing meaning-making and authenticity in interaction. This study contributes to digital sociolinguistics by demonstrating that translanguaging is not only linguistic but also multimodal and interactional. It offers a more integrated framework for understanding multilingual communication in digital environments and highlights the role of playful talk as a site of identity negotiation.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed how individuals interact, construct meaning, and negotiate identity in

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contemporary society. Social media platforms, particularly YouTube, have emerged as influential spaces where communication is mediated through multimodal resources and shaped by global flows of language, culture, and ideology. These platforms enable users to engage in informal, spontaneous, and interactive discourse that reflects the complexity of multilingual communication in digital environments. In such contexts, communication is no longer confined to monolingual norms but instead involves hybrid and fluid language practices that respond to diverse audiences and sociocultural dynamics [6], [8], [10].

Within these environments, multilingual speakers frequently draw upon their full linguistic repertoires to communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This dynamic and flexible use of language is conceptualized as translanguaging, which emphasizes the integration of linguistic resources rather than the separation of distinct language systems [1], [4]. Translanguaging has become a central feature of communication in digital spaces, where users navigate between languages to construct meaning, express stance, and negotiate social relationships [5], [25]. Complementing this perspective, translingual practice highlights how language use transcends fixed boundaries and operates within fluid sociocultural contexts, positioning communication as a process shaped by negotiation, adaptation, and interaction across differences [30]. These perspectives are particularly relevant in digital environments, where communication is inherently multimodal and socially embedded.

One communicative practice that exemplifies these dynamics is playful talk, which involves humor, teasing, creativity, and linguistic experimentation. Playful talk allows speakers to construct interpersonal relationships while simultaneously performing identities and negotiating social meanings. Previous studies have demonstrated that playful talk is closely linked to identity construction, as speakers use linguistic creativity to position themselves within particular social and cultural frameworks [2]. In multilingual contexts, playful talk often involves translanguaging, in which speakers strategically alternate between languages to achieve communicative goals and express nuanced meanings. Such practices reflect not only linguistic competence but also the ability to navigate complex social identities in interaction.

Identity construction in digital environments is increasingly complex due to the interplay between local and global influences. Individuals do not simply reflect pre-existing identities; rather, they actively construct and negotiate their identities through interaction. This process is shaped by audience expectations, platform norms, and broader language ideologies that influence how linguistic resources are valued and interpreted [11], [13]. In multilingual digital spaces, identity construction often involves negotiating authenticity, in which speakers attempt to present themselves as credible and legitimate members of particular communities [14], [15]. Authenticity in this context is not a fixed attribute but a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by discourse, ideology, and audience perception. Digital environments enable multiple and competing forms of authenticity, allowing individuals to strategically align with different identities depending on communicative contexts [12], [16].

In addition to linguistic resources, multimodal elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and visual cues play a crucial role in meaning-making and identity construction.

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Communication on platforms such as YouTube integrates verbal and non-verbal resources, creating a rich environment in which speakers can convey complex meanings and emotional nuances [16], [17]. Multimodality enhances the communicative potential of translanguaging practices by enabling speakers to combine linguistic and embodied resources to construct identities and negotiate social relationships. As a result, understanding digital communication requires an integrated approach that considers both linguistic and multimodal dimensions.

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Despite the growing body of research on translanguaging and digital discourse, several limitations remain. Much of the existing research has focused on educational settings, particularly classroom contexts, where translanguaging is examined as a pedagogical strategy rather than as a naturally occurring communicative practice. In contrast, informal digital interactions such as YouTube conversations and playful talk remain underexplored. Moreover, studies on digital discourse have often prioritized textual or written communication, with limited attention to audiovisual and multimodal interactions that are central to platforms like YouTube [9]. Although identity and authenticity have been widely discussed, there remains insufficient understanding of how these concepts are negotiated simultaneously through translanguaging practices in playful talk, particularly in multilingual contexts in Indonesia.

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Building on these limitations, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining how translanguaging practices function in playful talk within audiovisual digital environments and how they contribute to the negotiation of identity and authenticity. Specifically, this study seeks to provide an integrated analysis that connects translanguaging, multimodality, and identity construction within a single analytical framework. By focusing on naturally occurring interactions on YouTube, this research offers insights into how multilingual speakers strategically mobilize linguistic and multimodal resources to construct social identities and position themselves within both local and transnational contexts.

Accordingly, this study is guided by three main research questions: (1) what forms of social identities emerge through translanguaging practices in playful talk on YouTube; (2) how multilingual speakers strategically use linguistic and multimodal resources to negotiate authenticity; and (3) in what ways translanguaging practices reflect the interaction between local and transnational identities in digital discourse. These questions aim to move beyond descriptive accounts of language use and instead provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which language, identity, and authenticity are co-constructed in digital interaction.

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The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and empirically to the field of digital sociolinguistics. Theoretically, this research advances current understandings of translanguaging by integrating perspectives from identity theory, authenticity, and multimodality, thereby offering a more comprehensive framework for analyzing multilingual communication in digital environments. Empirically, it provides evidence from naturally occurring audiovisual interactions, which remain relatively underrepresented in existing research. In addition, this study offers practical insights into how individuals navigate linguistic and cultural diversity in global digital platforms, highlighting the evolving nature of language, identity, and communication in the digital age.

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2. METHOD

This study employed an interpretive qualitative research design to investigate translanguaging practices and identity negotiation in playful talk within a digital communication context. Qualitative approaches are particularly suitable for examining naturally occurring discourse, as they enable an in-depth exploration of meaning-making processes, social interaction, and the situated use of language. An interpretive paradigm was adopted to understand how participants construct and negotiate their identities through linguistic and multimodal resources in real-time interaction.

The data for this study were collected from the YouTube channel *Playful Talk*, a digital platform that features conversational content characterized by informal dialogue, humor, and spontaneous interaction among multilingual speakers. This channel was selected due to its consistent use of bilingual and multilingual communication practices, making it a relevant site for examining translanguaging in naturally occurring digital discourse. From this channel, one episode titled *Playful Talk 1* (duration approximately 44 minutes) was selected as the primary dataset. The analysis focused on one participant, referred to as Guest Star 1 (GS1).

The selection of GS1 was based on a purposive case study rationale. GS1 was identified as a critical case due to her active engagement in bilingual interaction and frequent use of translanguaging practices throughout the conversation. As a multilingual speaker who alternates between Indonesian and English in a fluid, context-sensitive manner, GS1 provides a rich example of how linguistic resources are strategically mobilized in playful talk. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, this study adopts an in-depth case-oriented approach to generate analytical insights into the processes of identity negotiation and authenticity construction in digital interaction. Such a case study design is appropriate for exploring complex sociolinguistic phenomena that require detailed contextual interpretation.

To facilitate detailed analysis, the video data were transcribed verbatim, including both verbal and non-verbal elements such as pauses, laughter, intonation, and gestures. The inclusion of multimodal features is essential for capturing the full range of communicative resources involved in digital interaction, as meaning is often constructed through the integration of linguistic and embodied actions. The transcription process followed a multimodal transcription approach to ensure that both linguistic and visual aspects of the interaction were systematically documented.

In addition to video data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with GS1 to gain deeper insights into her language choices, communicative intentions, and identity positioning. The interview was conducted online via video conferencing, lasted approximately 45 minutes, and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit reflections on language use, audience awareness, identity expression, and perceptions of authenticity in digital communication. This procedure allowed the researcher to explore both observable interactional practices and the participant's subjective interpretations, thereby enhancing the depth of analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enables the identification of patterns and themes across qualitative data. The analysis involved several stages, including familiarization with the data through repeated viewing and reading of transcripts, initial coding of relevant segments, and the development of broader thematic categories related to translanguaging, identity negotiation, and authenticity. The analysis also incorporated elements of discourse-oriented interpretation to examine how linguistic choices function within interactional contexts. This systematic approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how multilingual speakers strategically use language and multimodal resources to construct meaning and social identities.

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the data and careful cross-checking between video transcripts and interview responses. Triangulation was achieved by integrating multiple data sources, including audiovisual recordings and interview data, to validate interpretations. Additionally, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to minimize potential bias in data interpretation. These measures enhance the reliability and validity of the findings by ensuring that interpretations are grounded in empirical evidence.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed in this study. The participant provided informed consent before the interview and was informed of the research's purpose and the use of the data. To protect the participant's privacy, a pseudonym (GS1) was used in all reporting, and identifying details were anonymized. Although the video data were publicly available on YouTube, ethical research practices were followed by treating the participants' contributions with confidentiality and respect. All data were used solely for academic purposes in accordance with research ethics guidelines.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The analysis of the *Playful Talk* YouTube interaction demonstrates that translanguaging operates as a systematic and meaning-driven communicative strategy through which GS1 constructs social identities, negotiates authenticity, and organizes interactional dynamics. The findings are organized into three interrelated themes: (1) language functions in translanguaging practices, (2) identity construction through linguistic positioning, and (3) multimodal orchestration of meaning. These themes were derived through iterative thematic coding combined with fine-grained discourse analysis, including repeated viewing of interactional sequences and alignment of verbal and non-verbal features.

Theme 1: Language Functions in Translanguaging Practices

The findings indicate that GS1 employs translanguaging in a highly patterned manner, where shifts between Indonesian and English correspond to distinct communicative functions rather than occurring randomly. The analysis reveals that English is predominantly used for affective expression, stance-taking, and emphasis, while Indonesian serves as the primary medium for narrative elaboration and contextual grounding. This functional differentiation can be observed in the following excerpt:

“I was *really* confused at that time, like I didn't know what to do at all.”

The use of the intensifier “*really*” and the repetition structure (“didn’t know what to do at all”) suggest heightened emotional involvement. Notably, the shift to English occurs precisely at the moment of affective escalation, indicating that English functions as a resource for emotional amplification. In contrast, GS1 switches to Indonesian when elaborating on situational context:

“Waktu itu aku lagi di fase yang cukup berat, jadi semua keputusan terasa lebih kompleks.” (At that time, I was in a rather difficult phase, so every decision felt more complex.)

Here, Indonesian is used to construct a detailed narrative frame, enabling GS1 to provide culturally grounded, contextually rich explanations. The linguistic shift thus reflects a transition from affective stance to narrative elaboration. A more complex translanguaging pattern is observed in intra-sentential switching:

“It was hard banget untuk ngerti situasinya karena semuanya berubah cepat.” (It was really hard to understand the situation because everything changed quickly.)

In this example, the insertion of “*banget*” (very/extremely) into an English clause intensifies the emotional tone while simultaneously indexing local linguistic identity. This hybrid construction demonstrates that translanguaging is not merely alternating between languages but involves integrating linguistic resources to achieve nuanced meaning-making. These patterns were identified through systematic coding of language-switching moments and their corresponding communicative functions. Recurrent alignment between language choice and discourse function across multiple instances supports the conclusion that translanguaging is a strategic and structured practice.

Theme 2: Identity Construction through Linguistic Positioning

The analysis further reveals that GS1 constructs multiple, co-existing identities through strategic language choice, positioning herself within both local and transnational frames of reference. Translanguaging serves as an indexical resource through which identity is dynamically negotiated. When using English, GS1 frequently adopts a cosmopolitan and globally oriented identity, particularly in segments involving abstract reflection or evaluative commentary:

“I think it’s important to stay open-minded and learn from different perspectives.”

This statement aligns with global discourses on self-development and intercultural awareness. The use of English here indexes a transnational identity associated with modernity and global engagement. In contrast, Indonesian is used to construct a more relational and culturally embedded identity:

“Kalau di lingkungan aku, nilai kebersamaan itu masih sangat kuat.” (In my environment, the value of togetherness is still very strong.)

This shift signals a repositioning toward local cultural identity, emphasizing social values rooted in the Indonesian context. The alternation between languages thus reflects a movement between identity positions rather than a fixed expression of identity. A particularly revealing moment of identity negotiation occurs in the following hybrid utterance:

“Sometimes aku merasa kayak stuck di antara dua dunia, you know?”

Here, the phrase “*aku merasa kayak stuck di antara dua dunia*” (I feel stuck between two worlds) is followed by “*you know?*”, an English discourse marker that invites alignment from the audience. This combination reflects a hybrid identity that simultaneously engages local experience and global communicative norms. Interview data further support this interpretation, as GS1 explicitly noted that language choice depends on perceived audience and communicative intention. This triangulation confirms that identity construction is not incidental but actively managed through linguistic strategies.

Theme 3: Multimodal Orchestration of Meaning

Beyond linguistic resources, GS1’s interaction is characterized by the integration of multimodal elements, including gestures, facial expressions, gaze, and prosody, which work in coordination with translanguaging practices to construct meaning. For instance, during moments of emotional emphasis expressed in English, GS1 frequently employs expanded gestures and intensified facial expressions:

“That was *so* exciting!” (accompanied by widened eyes and forward-leaning posture)

The synchronization between verbal intensification (“*so*”) and embodied action amplifies the emotional impact of the utterance. This suggests that meaning-making is distributed across multiple semiotic modes rather than confined to language alone. In contrast, when switching to Indonesian for explanatory purposes, GS1’s gestures become more restrained, and her tone shifts toward a more measured delivery:

“Jadi sebenarnya situasinya tidak sederhana itu.” (So actually, the situation is not that simple.)

This shift in multimodal behavior aligns with the transition from affective expression to analytical explanation, indicating that multimodal resources are systematically coordinated with linguistic choices. Laughter and smiling also play a significant role in playful talk sequences, particularly in moments of teasing or humor:

“Ya, mungkin aku terlalu overthinking juga sih.” (laughs)

Here, laughter functions as a mitigating device, softening the self-critical statement and maintaining a light interactional tone. The co-occurrence of humor, language choice, and non-verbal cues reinforces the social function of playful talk as a means of building rapport. The analysis of multimodality was conducted by identifying segments in which verbal and non-verbal features co-occur and examining their interactional functions. Consistent patterns across multiple instances indicate that multimodal expression is not incidental but an integral component of meaning-making in digital interaction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that translanguaging in the *Playful Talk* YouTube interaction is a highly structured and multifunctional practice that integrates linguistic and multimodal resources. GS1 strategically mobilizes these resources to perform communicative functions, construct hybrid identities, and engage audiences in a dynamic digital environment. These conclusions are grounded in a systematic analysis of interactional data and supported by triangulation with interview insights, ensuring that interpretations are empirically robust and analytically rigorous.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into how translanguaging operates as a structured, meaning-driven practice in digital interaction, particularly in playful talk on YouTube. Rather than functioning as a random alternation between languages, translanguaging emerges as a strategic communicative resource that allows speakers to organize interaction, express stance, and construct socially meaningful identities. This finding reinforces and extends previous conceptualizations of translanguaging as a dynamic process of meaning-making that integrates linguistic resources across boundaries [24], [34]. However, this study goes further by demonstrating that translanguaging is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also an interactional and multimodal practice embedded in real-time digital communication.

One of the key contributions of this study is its identification of functional differentiation in language use: English is consistently associated with affective expression and stance-taking, while Indonesian is used for contextual elaboration and narrative grounding. This pattern aligns with previous research suggesting that multilingual speakers use different languages for distinct pragmatic functions [25], [26]. However, unlike previous studies that primarily focus on either classroom interaction or written digital discourse, this research demonstrates that such functional differentiation is more fluid and dynamically negotiated in audiovisual environments. The integration of intra-sentential switching and hybrid constructions further indicates that translanguaging involves the simultaneous activation of linguistic repertoires rather than discrete language alternation.

In addition, the findings highlight the role of translanguaging in constructing hybrid identities that reflect both local and transnational orientations. The ability of GS1 to shift between Indonesian and English enables her to position herself within multiple sociocultural frameworks, thereby negotiating a fluid and context-dependent identity. This supports existing research on identity construction in digital spaces, which emphasizes that identities are not fixed but continuously performed and negotiated through interaction [27], [33]. At the same time, this study extends previous work by showing how identity construction is closely tied to moment-by-moment linguistic choices, particularly in playful and informal interaction. The presence of hybrid utterances and discourse markers suggests that identity is not simply expressed but actively co-constructed through linguistic and interactional strategies.

Another important finding concerns the role of authenticity in multilingual digital communication. The results indicate that authenticity is achieved not through adherence to a single linguistic norm but through the strategic alignment of language use with communicative intent, audience expectations, and interactional context. This perspective challenges traditional notions of authenticity as linguistic purity and instead supports more recent views that conceptualize authenticity as a socially negotiated and context-dependent construct [31], [32]. Unlike previous studies that examine authenticity primarily in influencer culture or branding contexts, this research demonstrates that authenticity also emerges in everyday conversational interaction, particularly through the interplay of language choice, stance-taking, and relational positioning.

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Furthermore, this study highlights the significance of multimodal resources in shaping meaning and identity in digital interaction. The findings show that gestures, facial expressions, and prosodic features are systematically coordinated with linguistic choices, suggesting that meaning-making in digital discourse is inherently multimodal. This supports existing multimodal discourse frameworks, which argue that communication involves the integration of multiple semiotic modes rather than language alone [18], [19]. However, this study extends these frameworks by demonstrating how multimodal resources are specifically aligned with translanguaging practices, thereby contributing to both communicative effectiveness and identity construction. The synchronization between verbal and nonverbal elements indicates that translanguaging should be understood as a multimodal phenomenon rather than a purely linguistic one.

Unlike previous studies, this research demonstrates that translanguaging in playful talk is not only a communicative strategy but also a key mechanism for managing interactional dynamics in digital environments. The use of humor, laughter, and playful language allows speakers to reduce social distance, build rapport, and create a collaborative interactional space. This finding contributes to the growing body of research on digital discourse by emphasizing the role of playfulness as a site of identity negotiation and social alignment. It also highlights the importance of examining informal and spontaneous interaction, which has been relatively underexplored compared to institutional or educational settings.

Another contribution of this study lies in its methodological approach, which integrates thematic analysis with fine-grained discourse analysis and multimodal observation. By combining these approaches, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how translanguaging operates across different levels of interaction. This responds to recent calls in sociolinguistic research for more integrated analytical frameworks that capture the complexity of multilingual communication in digital contexts [29], [30]. The use of audiovisual data from YouTube further enhances the ecological validity of the findings, as it reflects naturally occurring communication rather than experimental or elicited data.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study advances translanguaging theory by demonstrating its applicability beyond educational contexts and by highlighting its role in digital sociolinguistics. It shows that translanguaging is not only a resource for communication but also a mechanism for identity construction, authenticity negotiation, and multimodal meaning-making. By integrating insights from identity theory, authenticity studies, and multimodal discourse analysis, this research offers a more holistic framework for understanding multilingual communication in contemporary digital environments.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the need to reconceptualize language use in digital spaces as fluid, dynamic, and inherently multimodal. They also highlight the importance of examining everyday interactions as sites of linguistic and social innovation. By focusing on playful talk in a YouTube context, this study provides new insights into how multilingual speakers navigate complex sociolinguistic landscapes and construct meaningful identities in a globalized digital world.

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4. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of how translanguaging operates as a strategic and meaning-making practice in playful talk within a YouTube-based digital interaction. Rather than treating language alternation as a random or purely linguistic phenomenon, the findings demonstrate that translanguaging functions as an integrated communicative resource through which speakers organize discourse, construct hybrid identities, and negotiate authenticity in a multimodal environment. The study highlights that multilingual speakers strategically mobilize linguistic and non-linguistic resources to navigate between local and transnational orientations, thereby reflecting the fluid and dynamic nature of identity in digital contexts.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of translanguaging theory by extending its application beyond educational settings into informal digital interaction, particularly within audiovisual and multimodal environments. By integrating perspectives from identity construction, authenticity, and multimodal discourse analysis, this study offers a more holistic framework for understanding multilingual communication in contemporary digital spaces. In practice, the findings provide insights into how individuals engage with diverse audiences on global digital platforms, highlighting the importance of linguistic flexibility, cultural awareness, and multimodal competence for effective communication.

Despite these contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a single case (GS1) within a single episode of the Playful Talk YouTube channel, limiting the generalizability of the findings. While the case study approach allows for in-depth analysis, it may not fully capture the diversity of translanguaging practices across different speakers, contexts, or platforms. Second, the study focuses primarily on one type of digital interaction—playful talk—which may differ from other forms of communication, such as formal discourse, institutional settings, or written online interactions. Third, although multimodal elements were analyzed, the scope of multimodal analysis remains limited to observable features within the selected dataset and does not include more advanced analytical tools such as gesture annotation software or eye-tracking techniques.

Given these limitations, future research is encouraged to expand both the scope and methodological approaches of this study. Further studies could include multiple participants, different YouTube channels, or cross-platform comparisons to explore how translanguaging practices vary across contexts and communities. In addition, future research may adopt more fine-grained multimodal analysis techniques to better understand the interaction between linguistic and embodied resources in digital communication. Longitudinal studies could also provide valuable insights into how translanguaging practices and identity construction evolve over time. Moreover, comparative studies across cultural and linguistic settings would contribute to a more global understanding of multilingual communication in digital environments.

Beyond academic contributions, this study also offers broader relevance for the general public, particularly in understanding how language functions in increasingly globalized and digitalized communication spaces. The findings highlight that

multilingualism is not a limitation but a valuable resource that enables individuals to engage with diverse audiences and construct meaningful social connections. In a world where digital platforms play a central role in everyday communication, the ability to navigate multiple languages and modes of expression becomes an essential skill. By shedding light on these practices, this research contributes to a more inclusive perspective on language use, identity, and communication in the digital age.

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