

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH ENGLISH IN SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK USERS

Wirentake

Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa, Sumbawa, Indonesia

*Corresponding author e-mail: wirentake@uts.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted: 13/03/2026

Accepted: 24/03/2026

Keywords

discourse analysis, English use, identity construction, social media discourse, Facebook communication

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media has transformed the ways individuals communicate and construct their identities in digital environments. Language plays a significant role in this process because users often employ linguistic choices to express social affiliations and represent themselves in online interactions. This study investigates how English is used in Facebook discourse and how it contributes to identity construction among social media users. The study employs a qualitative research design using discourse analysis to examine Facebook posts and comments that contain English expressions. The data were collected through observation and documentation of publicly accessible Facebook interactions. The analysis focuses on three aspects, namely the forms of English use in Facebook posts and comments, the discursive strategies used to construct identity through English, and the ways English use shapes identity representation in social media discourse. The findings reveal that English appears in various forms, including full English sentences, English phrases embedded within Indonesian discourse, and code mixing between English and Indonesian. The study also finds that users employ several discursive strategies, such as expressing opinions, signaling group membership, and constructing positive self images. Furthermore, the use of English contributes to identity representation by projecting global, educational, and relational identities in online interactions. These findings suggest that English functions not only as a communication tool but also as a symbolic resource for identity construction in digital communication.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed the ways people communicate and interact in contemporary society. Social media platforms have become central spaces for exchanging information, sharing experiences, and building social relationships. In these online environments, language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a means for expressing social identity. Sociolinguistic studies emphasize that language reflects social affiliations, cultural backgrounds, and ideological positions of speakers (Zahra & Supriyanto, 2025). As communication increasingly occurs through digital platforms, the relationship between language and identity has become more dynamic and complex.

Social media enables individuals to present themselves and interact with others in ways that were not previously possible. Through posts, comments, and other forms of

interaction, users can construct and negotiate their identities in digital spaces. Identity in online communication is therefore not static but continuously shaped through discourse and interaction. According to Matrood (2024), digital identity emerges through communicative practices in online environments where individuals strategically use language to represent themselves and position their identities within particular social contexts. These practices demonstrate that identity construction is closely connected to the ways language is used in communication.

The linguistic characteristics of social media communication are often marked by creativity and flexibility. Online interactions frequently involve informal language, abbreviations, emojis, and other innovative forms of expression. These linguistic features reflect how language adapts to technological environments and social media cultures (Hartina & Rivia, 2024). In addition, communication in social media is often multilingual, especially in societies where more than one language is commonly used. Users frequently combine different languages in their posts and comments, creating hybrid forms of discourse that reflect both local and global influences.

One of the most prominent linguistic resources in social media communication is English. As a global lingua franca, English plays an important role in connecting users across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Even in contexts where English is not the primary language, social media users often incorporate English words or phrases in their online interactions. This phenomenon reflects the global influence of English in contemporary communication and its association with modernity, global connectivity, and digital culture (Wagiati, Darmayanti, & Adji, 2024). The use of English may therefore function as a symbolic resource that enables users to project particular identities in online spaces.

In multilingual contexts, English is often used alongside local languages, resulting in linguistic practices such as code mixing and code switching. These practices are not merely linguistic habits but are often influenced by social motivations and identity related purposes. Rahman et al. (2025) argue that multilingual users strategically combine languages in social media communication to express cultural affiliation, signal social status, or establish solidarity with particular audiences. Through such language choices, individuals actively negotiate their identities in digital interactions.

The study of identity construction through discourse has become an important focus in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Discourse analysis highlights that identity is constructed through language in social interaction rather than existing as a fixed personal characteristic. Language choices, communicative strategies, and interaction patterns contribute to how individuals represent themselves and how they are perceived by others. Rosalina, Suhadi, and Pratiwy (2024) emphasize that social media discourse provides rich data for analyzing identity construction because users constantly engage in communication

that reflects their social positions and personal perspectives.

Among the various social media platforms available today, Facebook remains one of the most widely used platforms for online communication. Facebook allows users to share status updates, comment on posts, and participate in discussions within social networks. These interactive features generate large amounts of everyday discourse that reflect how people communicate in digital contexts. Jakaza (2020) notes that Facebook interactions offer valuable insights into identity construction because users often express opinions, beliefs, and personal experiences through their online communication.

Although previous studies have examined language use and identity in social media, many of them focus on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok. Research that specifically investigates Facebook discourse from the perspective of discourse analysis remains relatively limited. In addition, existing studies often discuss multilingual practices in general without closely examining how English is used as a discursive resource for identity construction in everyday Facebook interactions. This indicates the need for further research that explores how English contributes to identity representation in Facebook communication.

Based on the increasing role of social media in shaping digital communication and identity expression, it is important to examine how language is used in online interactions. In particular, the use of English in social media may function not only as a communication tool but also as a resource for identity construction. Therefore, this study investigates the use of English in Facebook discourse and its role in representing users' identities. To guide the investigation, the study addresses the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. How is English used by Facebook users in posts and comments?
2. What discursive strategies are employed to construct identity through English in Facebook interactions?
3. How does English use shape identity representation in social media discourse?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using discourse analysis to examine how English is used in Facebook discourse and how it contributes to identity construction. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that aim to explore meanings, interpretations, and social phenomena embedded in language use (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this context, discourse analysis allows researchers to investigate how language is used in specific social contexts and how identities are constructed through communicative practices.

Discourse analysis focuses on examining language beyond the sentence level and considers how linguistic choices relate to social meanings and identity representation (Gee, 2014). Through this approach, the present study analyzes linguistic patterns and discursive

strategies used by Facebook users in their posts and comments. Previous studies have emphasized that social media discourse provides a rich context for examining identity construction because online interactions often reveal how individuals position themselves within social and cultural environments (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015).

Data Source

The data for this study were obtained from Facebook posts and comments written by users who incorporate English in their interactions. Facebook was selected as the research site because it remains one of the most widely used social networking platforms and provides diverse forms of user interaction. According to KhosraviNik (2017), social media platforms offer valuable sources of discourse data because they contain naturally occurring communication that reflects everyday social practices.

The unit of analysis consisted of textual data in the form of Facebook posts and comments that contain English expressions. These expressions may appear as full English sentences, phrases, or single lexical items embedded within multilingual discourse. Such data provide insights into how English is used as a linguistic resource in online communication and how it contributes to identity construction.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a documentation technique by observing publicly accessible Facebook posts and comment threads. Online observation has been widely used in studies examining digital communication because it allows researchers to analyze naturally occurring interactions in social media environments (Tagg, Seargeant, & Brown, 2017). The data collection process was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher identified Facebook posts and comments that contained English expressions within user interactions. Second, posts that reflected meaningful communication and interaction among users were selected as the dataset. Third, the selected posts and comments were documented through screenshots and transcription to facilitate analysis.

To ensure the relevance of the data, purposive sampling was used in selecting posts that clearly demonstrate the use of English in social media communication. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select data that are most relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). In addition, ethical considerations were maintained by anonymizing the identities of Facebook users. All personal names were replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect user privacy.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using discourse analysis procedures in order to examine how English is used and how identity is constructed through language in Facebook

interactions. Discourse analysis enables researchers to explore the relationship between language use, social meaning, and identity representation in communication (Gee, 2014).

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher examined how English is used by Facebook users in their posts and comments. This stage involved identifying patterns of English usage, including full English sentences, code mixing with local languages, and the use of English lexical items within multilingual discourse. This stage was conducted to answer the first research question concerning how English is used in Facebook interactions.

Second, the analysis focused on identifying discursive strategies used by Facebook users when employing English in their interactions. Discursive strategies refer to the ways language is used to achieve particular communicative purposes and social positioning (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In this stage, the researcher examined how users employ language to express opinions, construct personal narratives, or signal social affiliations. This stage aimed to address the second research question concerning the strategies used in identity construction.

Third, the researcher interpreted how the use of English contributes to users' identity representation in social media discourse. At this stage, the analysis explored how English functions as a symbolic resource that allows users to project certain identities, such as being globally oriented, educated, or socially connected. Identity construction through language is often shaped by social contexts and communicative intentions, particularly in digital communication environments (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016). By combining these analytical stages, the study aims to reveal how linguistic practices in Facebook interactions contribute to the construction and representation of identity in contemporary digital communication.

RESULTS

English Use in Facebook Posts and Comments

The analysis of Facebook posts and comments shows that English is used by users in several distinct forms. These forms include the use of full English sentences, the insertion of English lexical items within local language discourse, and the mixing of English with Indonesian expressions. Such linguistic practices reflect the flexible nature of language use in social media environments where multilingual communication is common. Social media communication often allows users to combine multiple linguistic resources in order to express ideas and identities in creative ways (Tagg, Seargeant, & Brown, 2017). One common pattern identified in the data is the use of English phrases or short expressions embedded within Indonesian sentences. For example, users often include expressions such as *happy birthday*, *good morning*, or *so proud of you* when responding to posts. These expressions are frequently used to convey emotions, appreciation, or encouragement. The use of English expressions in this context may function as a stylistic device that enhances emotional

expression and interpersonal communication in online discourse. Previous studies suggest that English expressions are often associated with modern digital culture and global communication practices (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Another pattern observed in the data is the use of full English sentences in status updates or comments. In several cases, users posted motivational statements, personal reflections, or opinions entirely in English. Such posts often appear when users intend to reach a broader audience or demonstrate their proficiency in English. According to Lee (2017), the use of English in digital communication frequently reflects users' efforts to construct identities that align with global communication practices. In addition to full English usage, the data also reveal frequent code mixing between English and Indonesian. Users often combine English vocabulary with Indonesian grammatical structures in a single sentence. This phenomenon illustrates how social media users draw on multiple linguistic resources simultaneously to communicate effectively. Code mixing in digital discourse is widely recognized as a strategy used by multilingual speakers to express identity, creativity, and social belonging (Barton & Lee, 2013).

These findings indicate that English is used in diverse and flexible ways within Facebook discourse. Rather than functioning solely as a communication tool, English appears to serve as a stylistic and symbolic resource that allows users to shape their online communication practices.

Discursive Strategies in Identity Construction

The second research question focuses on the discursive strategies employed by Facebook users to construct identity through English in their interactions. The analysis of the data reveals several strategies that users employ when integrating English into their posts and comments. One important strategy involves the use of English to express personal attitudes and opinions. Users frequently employ English expressions when sharing personal reflections, motivational messages, or social commentary. By using English in such contexts, users appear to position themselves as knowledgeable or globally oriented individuals. Language choice often reflects how individuals present themselves and negotiate identities in social interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016).

Another strategy observed in the data is the use of English to signal group membership and social alignment. In some interactions, users employ English expressions that are commonly associated with youth culture or digital communication, such as *bestie*, *support system*, or *stay strong*. These expressions help create a sense of shared identity among users who belong to similar social or cultural groups. According to Jones, Chik, and Hafner (2015), digital discourse frequently enables users to construct group identities through shared linguistic practices. A further strategy involves the use of English to construct a positive self-image. Some users employ English when describing personal

achievements, educational experiences, or professional activities. In such cases, English functions as a linguistic resource that enhances the presentation of competence, confidence, or global awareness. KhosraviNik (2017) explains that language use in social media is closely connected to identity performance, where individuals strategically select linguistic forms to shape how they are perceived by audiences.

Overall, these discursive strategies demonstrate that language choices in social media communication are closely connected to identity construction. The use of English is not simply a matter of linguistic preference but is often linked to social meanings and communicative intentions.

Identity Representation through English Use

The third research question examines how the use of English shapes identity representation in social media discourse. The findings suggest that English plays an important role in shaping how users represent themselves in digital communication environments. One prominent form of identity representation observed in the data is the projection of a global or cosmopolitan identity. Users who frequently employ English in their posts often present themselves as individuals who are connected to global culture or international communities. English therefore functions as a symbolic resource that reflects openness to global communication and cross cultural interaction. Androutsopoulos (2015) notes that English in digital discourse often serves as a marker of global identity and participation in transnational communication.

Another form of identity representation involves the expression of educational or professional identity. In some posts, users employ English when discussing academic achievements, professional activities, or intellectual topics. The use of English in such contexts appears to reinforce an image of competence or expertise. Studies on digital communication indicate that English can function as a marker of social capital and educational background in online interactions (Lee, 2017).

Finally, English is also used to construct relational identities in interpersonal interactions. When responding to friends or acquaintances, users often employ English expressions to convey support, admiration, or affection. These expressions contribute to the maintenance of social relationships and help reinforce interpersonal connections within online communities. Social media discourse frequently reflects how language choices contribute to the construction of interpersonal identities in online networks (Tagg, Seargeant, & Brown, 2017).

Taken together, the findings indicate that English plays a significant role in shaping identity representation in Facebook discourse. Through various linguistic practices, users employ English as a symbolic resource that allows them to construct, negotiate, and express their identities in digital social environments.

DISCUSSION

English Use in Facebook Posts and Comments

The findings of this study indicate that Facebook users employ English in various forms, including full English sentences, English phrases embedded within Indonesian discourse, and code mixing between English and Indonesian. These patterns demonstrate the flexible and dynamic nature of language use in digital communication. Social media environments often encourage multilingual practices because users interact with diverse audiences and cultural contexts (Androutsopoulos, 2015). The use of English phrases within predominantly Indonesian sentences reflects a common pattern in multilingual online communication. Such linguistic practices are frequently associated with code mixing, where speakers combine elements from different languages in a single utterance. Code mixing in digital discourse allows users to express meanings that may not be easily conveyed through a single language alone (Barton & Lee, 2013). In this study, English phrases such as expressions of greetings or encouragement appear to function as stylistic resources that enhance emotional expression in Facebook interactions.

The presence of full English sentences in posts and comments also suggests that some users intentionally adopt English to reach broader audiences or to position themselves as competent English users. Previous research indicates that English often functions as a global language in online communication, enabling individuals to connect with wider communities beyond local linguistic boundaries (Lee, 2017). The use of English in Facebook discourse therefore reflects broader sociolinguistic trends in which English is associated with globalization and digital communication.

Overall, the findings support the idea that language use in social media is highly adaptive and context dependent. Users draw on multiple linguistic resources to achieve communicative goals and to navigate different social contexts within online interactions.

Discursive Strategies in Identity Construction

The findings also reveal that Facebook users employ various discursive strategies when using English in their interactions. These strategies include expressing personal opinions, signaling group membership, and constructing a positive self image. Such strategies demonstrate that language choices are closely connected to identity construction in digital communication. The use of English to express personal attitudes and opinions reflects how language can function as a resource for positioning oneself within social discourse. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2016), identity is constructed through linguistic practices that allow individuals to present particular social identities in interaction. In this study, the use of English in motivational messages or personal reflections suggests that users employ language strategically to project certain characteristics such as confidence, openness, or global awareness.

Another discursive strategy observed in the data involves the use of English expressions that signal group membership. Digital communication often involves the development of shared linguistic styles that reflect membership in particular communities or social groups. Jones, Chik, and Hafner (2015) argue that online discourse enables individuals to construct collective identities through shared communicative practices. The use of English expressions associated with youth culture or digital communication therefore functions as a marker of social alignment among Facebook users.

In addition, English is also used as a resource for constructing a positive self image. When users describe their achievements, professional experiences, or educational backgrounds using English, they appear to enhance their personal representation in the digital space. Language choices in such contexts can influence how individuals are perceived by their audiences. KhosraviNik (2017) explains that social media discourse often involves identity performance, where users carefully select linguistic resources to shape their online persona.

These findings highlight that discursive strategies in social media communication are closely linked to identity construction. The use of English is therefore not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a social practice that reflects how individuals negotiate identities in digital environments.

Identity Representation through English Use

The third research question concerns how the use of English shapes identity representation in social media discourse. The findings suggest that English plays an important role in shaping how individuals present themselves in online communication. One significant form of identity representation observed in this study is the projection of a global identity. Users who frequently employ English in their posts appear to align themselves with global communication practices and digital culture. Androutsopoulos (2015) notes that English in online environments often functions as a symbolic marker of transnational communication and cosmopolitan identity. By using English, individuals may position themselves as part of a global digital community.

Another form of identity representation involves the association between English and educational or professional identity. In several cases, users employ English when discussing academic or professional topics. This linguistic choice may reflect perceptions that English is linked to education, expertise, or intellectual authority. Previous research has shown that English often functions as a form of linguistic capital in global communication contexts (Lee, 2017).

Furthermore, the use of English also contributes to the construction of relational identities in interpersonal interactions. Expressions of support, admiration, or encouragement in English often appear in comment sections where users respond to their

friends or acquaintances. These expressions contribute to the development of social relationships and reinforce interpersonal connections within online networks. Social media discourse frequently reflects how language practices contribute to the formation and maintenance of social relationships (Tagg, Seargeant, & Brown, 2017).

Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate that English functions as an important symbolic resource in Facebook discourse. Through various linguistic practices, users employ English to construct identities, negotiate social relationships, and position themselves within broader digital communities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how English is used in Facebook discourse and how it contributes to identity construction in social media interactions. The findings reveal that Facebook users employ English in various forms, including full English sentences, English phrases embedded within Indonesian discourse, and code mixing between English and Indonesian. These patterns demonstrate that English functions as a flexible linguistic resource in digital communication, allowing users to express ideas, emotions, and social meanings in diverse ways.

The analysis also shows that Facebook users employ several discursive strategies when using English in their interactions. These strategies include expressing personal opinions, signaling group membership, and constructing a positive self image. Through these strategies, users strategically select linguistic forms that help them position themselves within particular social contexts and communicate specific identities to their audiences.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the use of English plays an important role in shaping identity representation in social media discourse. English is often associated with global communication, educational background, and professional identity. As a result, the use of English allows Facebook users to present themselves as globally connected, knowledgeable, or socially engaged individuals. In addition, English expressions used in interpersonal interactions also contribute to maintaining social relationships within online communities.

Overall, this study highlights that language use in social media is closely linked to identity construction. English functions not only as a communication tool but also as a symbolic resource through which users construct, negotiate, and represent their identities in digital environments. Future research may further explore identity construction across different social media platforms or examine how other languages interact with English in multilingual digital communication.

REFERENCES

Barton, D., & Lee, C. (2013). *Language online: Investigating digital texts and practices*. Routledge.

- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2016). Embodied sociolinguistics. In N. Coupland (Ed.), *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical debates* (pp. 173–197). Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Hartina, S., & Rivia, D. (2024). Global perspectives on social media and language evolution. *Lingua: Journal of Linguistics and Language*, 2(4), 237–249.
- Jakaza, E. (2020). Identity construction or obfuscation on social media: A case of Facebook and WhatsApp. *African Identities*, 20(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1804829>
- Jones, R. H., Chik, A., & Hafner, C. A. (2015). *Discourse and digital practices: Doing discourse analysis in the digital age*. Routledge.
- KhosraviNik, M. (2017). Social media critical discourse studies. In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies* (pp. 582–596). Routledge.
- Lee, C. (2017). Multilingualism online. In S. Canagarajah (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of migration and language* (pp. 98–113). Routledge.
- Matrood, D. T. (2024). Language and digital identity: A sociolinguistic study of online communities. *Frontiers in Global Research*, 2(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.62051/fgr.v2i1.15>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Rahman, A., Gunawan, G., Said, D. R., & Mardi, M. (2025). Bilingual identity construction through social media: A study of English influenced code mixing. *Jurnal Studi Guru dan Pembelajaran*, 8(1), 55–67. <https://doi.org/10.30605/jsgp.8.1.2025>
- Rosalina, A., Suhadi, J., & Pratiwy, D. (2024). Discourse criticism in social media: Youth identity representation on Instagram. *Journal of English Language and Education*, 9(2), 120–134. <https://doi.org/10.26486/jele.v9i2>
- Tagg, C., Seargeant, P., & Brown, A. (2017). Taking offence on social media: Conviviality and communication on Facebook. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 19, 36–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.04.008>
- Wagiati, W., Darmayanti, N., & Adji, M. (2024). Navigating the digital landscape: Language dynamics and digital identity among Indonesia's contemporary generation. *Jurnal Sosioteknologi*, 23(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.5614/sostek.itbj.2024.23.1.2>

- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2016). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Zahra, D. N., & Supriyanto, J. (2025). Language as social identity: A sociolinguistic analysis in a multilingual society. *Al-Ufuq: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 1–12.