

When Indonesian is Not Enough: English as an Emotional and Pragmatic Resource in Indonesian Digital Communication

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Abstract: English expressions have become increasingly common in Indonesian digital communication, including in contexts involving emotions, relationships, self-care, and personal experiences. This study examines why Indonesian digital users choose English expressions when Indonesian equivalents are available and investigates the pragmatic functions performed by such choices. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes publicly accessible digital communication containing English expressions related to emotional and interpersonal experiences. The data are analyzed by comparing English expressions with their Indonesian equivalents and interpreting their contextual functions through Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory. The analysis shows that expressions such as *healing*, *toxic*, *overthinking*, *burnout*, and *I need space* function beyond simple lexical substitution or code-mixing. They are used to express emotional states, evaluate interpersonal relationships, establish personal boundaries, and manage emotional distance. The findings suggest that English provides Indonesian digital users with a particular linguistic resource for framing and communicating emotionally sensitive experiences. The study therefore argues that Indonesian-English multilingual practices in digital communication should be examined not only in terms of linguistic form but also in terms of the pragmatic consequences of language choice. By shifting attention from the presence of English to the communicative work performed through English, this study contributes to the understanding of multilingualism, digital communication, and pragmatic language use in contemporary Indonesian society.

Keywords: *English Expressions; Emotional Communication; Pragmatic Acts; Language Choice; Digital Communication; Indonesian-English Multilingualism.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has created an increasingly multilingual environment in which Indonesian speakers regularly combine Indonesian and English in social media interaction. English words and phrases are particularly visible in informal digital discourse, including expressions related to emotions, relationships, self-care, and personal experiences. Studies of Indonesian social media have documented the frequent occurrence of Indonesian-English code-mixing and code-switching across platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok (Sabrina, 2021; Nabila & Idayani, 2022; Wibowo & Hamidah, 2023; Shoolihah, 2024).

The phenomenon becomes particularly interesting when English is used even though an Indonesian equivalent

is available. Expressions such as *healing*, *toxic*, *overthinking*, *struggling*, *burnout*, *space*, and *move on* have become recognizable in Indonesian digital communication. For example, a speaker may write "*Aku lagi healing dulu*" rather than "*Aku sedang memulihkan diri*," or "*I need space*" rather than "*Aku butuh jarak*." Thus, the issue cannot be reduced to the absence of an Indonesian lexical equivalent. Previous studies have identified emotional expression, communicative efficiency, identity, and stylistic purposes as motivations for Indonesian-English mixing in social media (Nabila & Idayani, 2022; Kay et al., 2022).

This phenomenon raises an important linguistic problem: why do Indonesian digital users choose English when Indonesian can express the same basic proposition? The question is particularly relevant to emotionally sensitive

expressions because lexical choices may influence how an experience is framed and understood. “*Aku sedang memulihkan diri*” and “*Aku lagi healing*” may refer to a similar state, but they do not necessarily construct the same social or emotional meaning. Likewise, “*Aku butuh jarak*” and “*I need space*” may communicate a similar interpersonal need while producing different pragmatic effects. Therefore, examining these expressions requires attention not only to what the words mean, but also to what speakers accomplish by choosing them.

Existing research on Indonesian-English language mixing has predominantly focused on the forms, types, motivations, and general functions of code-mixing and code-switching. Research on Twitter, for example, has classified Indonesian-English mixing according to linguistic forms and reported functions such as expressing emotions and making communication more informal (Nabila & Idayani, 2022). Research on Facebook has similarly examined code-switching in terms of personalization, objectivization, expression, and message qualification (Kay et al., 2022). More recent studies have extended this discussion to Twitter and Instagram, demonstrating that multilingual practices are associated with identity, bilingual competence, audience context, and communicative strategy (Wibowo & Hamidah, 2023; Shoolihah, 2024; Sultan & Fitriana, 2024).

Recent research has also begun to move toward a more pragmatic understanding of multilingual digital communication. Hasan and Benny (2024), for instance, demonstrate that code-switching in social media can perform pragmatic functions such as identity marking, solidarity, and the negotiation of interpersonal relations. More recently, research on Indonesian multilingual youth has shown that multilingual resources on social media are strategically tailored to particular pragmatic acts and communicative goals rather than being random alternations between languages. These developments indicate that digital multilingualism should increasingly be examined in relation to what users accomplish through language choice.

Nevertheless, an important gap remains. Existing studies tend to treat English expressions as evidence of code-mixing or code-switching and subsequently classify their general functions. Less attention has been given to the specific choice of English over an available Indonesian equivalent, particularly when the expression concerns emotional experience and interpersonal relations. In other words, the question is not simply *whether Indonesian speakers mix English into Indonesian*, but what additional emotional or pragmatic work is performed by the English form. This distinction provides an opportunity to move beyond a descriptive analysis of code-mixing toward a more context-sensitive analysis of language choice.

This study therefore conceptualizes English as an emotional and pragmatic resource in Indonesian digital communication. Drawing on Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory, language is understood as situated action, in which the interpretation of an utterance depends on the social situation and on what speakers accomplish through their linguistic

choices (Mey, 2001). Mey's approach is particularly appropriate because pragmatic acts cannot be adequately explained through fixed linguistic categories alone; their interpretation emerges from the relationship between language, action, and context.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify English expressions used to articulate emotional and interpersonal experiences in Indonesian digital communication and examine the pragmatic functions performed by these expressions. It further investigates how choosing English rather than an available Indonesian equivalent may frame emotional experiences, evaluate relationships, establish interpersonal boundaries, and create particular forms of emotional distance. By focusing on the pragmatic consequences of language choice, rather than merely counting instances of code-mixing, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of Indonesian-English multilingual practices in contemporary digital discourse. Theoretically, the study contributes to the intersection of digital sociolinguistics and pragmatics by extending the discussion of Indonesian-English multilingualism from the description of code-mixing toward the pragmatic significance of language choice. Empirically, it provides insight into how Indonesian digital users employ English to express, frame, and manage emotional and interpersonal experiences. In this way, the study contributes to the growing literature on digital sociolinguistics, multilingualism, and pragmatics by shifting the analytical focus from the presence of English to the communicative work that English performs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *English-Indonesian Multilingualism in Digital Communication*

Digital communication has expanded opportunities for Indonesian speakers to use Indonesian and English within the same interaction. In this context, English is not only used to convey information but also to express identity, emotion, interpersonal relationships, and contemporary communication styles. Multilingual practices on social media therefore reflect the flexible use of linguistic resources according to communicative needs and social contexts (Widiana et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2026).

Indonesian-English language use is also closely related to identity and self-presentation. English expressions may help users construct a modern, global, or digitally oriented identity while simultaneously maintaining Indonesian as the dominant language of interaction. Research on Indonesian social media users demonstrates that language alternation can function as a strategy for emphasizing particular meanings and positioning the speaker socially (Manuhutu et al., 2024; Harianja et al., 2025; Aswad et al., 2019; Said et al., 2021).

The use of English in digital communication is therefore not necessarily random or caused by limited Indonesian vocabulary. Users may deliberately select English expressions because they fit the communicative context, audience, or intended style. This perspective makes language choice particularly important when examining expressions

related to emotions and interpersonal experiences (Haya, 2025; Lestari & Prakoso, 2026).

➤ *Language Choice, Emotion, and Pragmatic Meaning*

Language choice can influence how speakers express and frame emotional experiences. Multilingual speakers may associate different languages with different emotional meanings, levels of intimacy, or psychological responses. Research on multilingual communication suggests that emotional expression may vary across languages depending on context, language experience, and the social situation in which the language is used (Verkerk et al., 2023; Weda et al., 2022; Andini et al., 2025).

In digital communication, English expressions can also function as resources for expressing emotional states in concise and recognizable ways. Studies of Indonesian social media discourse indicate that switching between Indonesian and English may strengthen emotional expression, qualify a message, or create a particular interpersonal effect (Putri et al., 2025). Thus, English expressions such as *healing*, *burnout*, or *I need space* may carry pragmatic meanings beyond their basic lexical meanings.

From a pragmatic perspective, language choice can also contribute to how speakers manage relationships and present themselves to others. A particular English expression may soften an emotional statement, establish a boundary, signal solidarity, or create interpersonal distance. Accordingly, examining English in Indonesian digital communication requires attention not only to the presence of code-mixing but also to why a particular linguistic form is selected and what the speaker accomplishes through that choice.

III. METHOD

➤ *Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the use of English expressions in Indonesian digital communication. The study focused on the pragmatic functions of English expressions that appear in emotionally and interpersonally oriented communication. Rather than treating the data merely as instances of code-mixing, the

analysis examined why English was selected when an Indonesian equivalent was available and what communicative meaning the choice produced in context.

➤ *Data Source and Data Collection*

The data were collected from publicly accessible Indonesian digital communication on social media platforms. The analysis focused on posts, captions, comments, and short digital utterances containing English expressions related to emotions, relationships, self-care, and personal experiences. Data were purposively selected when an English expression could be replaced by an Indonesian expression without substantially changing its basic propositional meaning. Personal information and identifiable user details were excluded from the analysis.

➤ *Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed through three stages. First, English expressions were identified and grouped according to their emotional or interpersonal context. Second, each expression was compared with its possible Indonesian equivalent to examine the significance of the language choice. Third, the expressions were interpreted using Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory (Mey, 2001), particularly by considering the situated action performed through the expression. The analysis focused on functions such as expressing emotional states, evaluating relationships, establishing personal boundaries, managing interpersonal distance, and framing personal experiences. The interpretation also considered the surrounding linguistic and social context to determine how the English expression contributed to the intended pragmatic meaning.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

➤ *English Expressions as Emotional Resources*

English expressions frequently appear in Indonesian digital communication even when corresponding Indonesian expressions are available. Rather than functioning merely as instances of code-mixing, these expressions may serve particular emotional and interpersonal purposes. The following data illustrate the English expressions identified in the communication and their potential contextual functions.

Table 1 English Expressions and their Emotional-Pragmatic Functions in Indonesian Digital Communication

No.	English Expression	Indonesian Equivalent	Contextual Function
1	"Aku lagi healing dulu."	Aku sedang memulihkan diri.	Expressing emotional recovery
2	"Dia tuh toxic banget."	Dia sangat tidak sehat/merugikan.	Evaluating a relationship/person
3	"Aku overthinking dari tadi malam."	Aku terlalu banyak berpikir/khawatir.	Expressing emotional anxiety
4	"Aku lagi struggling sama hidup."	Aku sedang berjuang menghadapi hidup.	Expressing personal difficulty
5	"I need space dulu."	Aku butuh waktu/jarak sendiri.	Requesting emotional distance
6	"Aku belum bisa move on."	Aku belum bisa melupakan/beranjak.	Expressing emotional attachment
7	"Aku lagi burnout banget."	Aku sangat kelelahan secara mental.	Describing psychological exhaustion
8	"Aku butuh closure."	Aku butuh penyelesaian/kejelasan.	Expressing the need for emotional resolution
9	"Aku butuh me time."	Aku butuh waktu untuk diri sendiri.	Expressing self-care
10	"Aku cuma mau protect my peace."	Aku hanya ingin menjaga ketenangan diri.	Establishing an emotional boundary

- *English as a Pragmatic Resource for Emotional Expression*

The data show that English expressions are not used merely because Indonesian equivalents are unavailable. In most cases, the speakers have access to relatively understandable Indonesian alternatives. Nevertheless, expressions such as *healing*, *toxic*, *overthinking*, *struggling*, and *space* are preferred because they perform particular pragmatic functions within emotional interaction.

This pattern can be explained through Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory, which views meaning as something produced through the interaction between linguistic expressions and their contextual use. From this perspective, the important question is not simply what an English expression means lexically, but what the speaker is doing by using that expression in a particular context. The choice of *healing*, for example, does more than describe recovery. It pragmatically positions the speaker as someone who is temporarily withdrawing from a situation in order to recover emotionally.

- ✓ *Consider the Expression:*

"Aku lagi healing dulu."

The Indonesian alternative "*Aku sedang memulihkan diri*" conveys the basic propositional meaning, but it does not necessarily reproduce the same pragmatic effect. The use of *healing* frames the speaker's withdrawal as part of a broader discourse of emotional recovery and self-care. Thus, English functions as a pragmatic resource through which the speaker presents and manages an emotional state.

- ✓ *A Similar Pattern Appears in:*

"Dia tuh toxic banget."

Here, *toxic* does not simply describe something as literally "poisonous." Within Indonesian digital communication, it functions as an evaluative pragmatic act that categorizes a person or relationship as emotionally harmful. The English expression therefore provides a compact way of performing interpersonal evaluation without requiring an extended Indonesian explanation.

The expression "*Aku butuh space dulu*" provides an even clearer example of the relationship between language choice and pragmatic function. Although *space* can be replaced by *jarak* or *waktu sendiri*, the English expression can make the speaker's intention less explicitly confrontational. Rather than directly saying "*Aku ingin menjauh darimu*," the speaker frames the action as a personal need. In pragmatic terms, the expression can therefore function simultaneously as a request, boundary-setting act, and strategy of emotional distancing.

- *English and the Reframing of Emotional Meaning*

The findings further suggest that English expressions can reframe emotional experiences rather than simply replace Indonesian words. Expressions such as *overthinking*, *struggling*, and *burnout* provide recognizable labels for

particular psychological experiences. Their use allows speakers to package complex emotional states into concise lexical forms.

- ✓ *For Instance:*

"Aku overthinking dari tadi malam."

The expression does not merely mean that the speaker has been thinking excessively. In digital discourse, *overthinking* has become associated with anxiety, emotional uncertainty, relationship concerns, and repetitive thoughts. Consequently, the English form functions as a culturally recognizable label for a particular emotional condition.

From the perspective of Pragmatic Act Theory, this means that the meaning of the expression emerges from its use in context rather than from its dictionary definition alone. The speaker uses *overthinking* to identify, frame, and communicate an emotional experience to an audience that is expected to recognize the expression.

- *Discussion*

The findings suggest that English expressions in Indonesian digital communication function as more than simple lexical substitutions. Although Indonesian equivalents are generally available, expressions such as *healing*, *toxic*, *overthinking*, and *struggling* are selected to frame emotional experiences in ways that are recognizable within contemporary digital discourse. This interpretation is consistent with Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory, which emphasizes that meaning is shaped by the relationship between linguistic choices, speakers, and the social context in which an utterance is produced. Recent research on Indonesian digital communication similarly demonstrates that multilingual resources are used strategically to perform pragmatic acts and negotiate social meanings rather than occurring randomly (Ren & Tahir, 2026).

For example, "*Aku lagi healing dulu*" does not simply communicate the idea of recovery. The expression frames withdrawal as an intentional process of emotional recovery and self-care. Likewise, "*Dia tuh toxic banget*" functions as an evaluative act through which the speaker categorizes a person or relationship as emotionally harmful. In this sense, English provides speakers with compact resources for framing emotional states and evaluating interpersonal experiences. This finding is compatible with recent research on Indonesian Instagram communication, which identifies emotional resonance, identity expression, and stylistic positioning as important functions of Indonesian-English code-mixing (Rosmaria, 2024).

The expression "*I need space*" provides a stronger example of how language choice can shape interpersonal meaning. Rather than directly stating "*Aku ingin menjauh*," the speaker frames distance as a personal need. The expression can therefore operate simultaneously as a request, a boundary-setting act, and a means of managing interpersonal tension. Such strategic use of multilingual resources is also consistent with recent research showing that

language choice in digital interaction is related to pragmatic goals, identity positioning, and audience alignment (Ren & Tahir, 2026). Research on social-media communication further suggests that code-switching may serve interpersonal functions such as solidarity and audience engagement, indicating that language alternation cannot be understood solely as a matter of lexical necessity (Pérez-Sabater, 2021).

The use of *overthinking*, *struggling*, and *burnout* further illustrates how English can function as an emotional labeling resource. These expressions allow speakers to package complex psychological experiences into relatively concise and socially recognizable forms. Recent studies of Indonesian youth have likewise found that English in digital communication is associated with expressive, modern, and socially meaningful positioning, rather than being used only because Indonesian lacks an equivalent expression.

Taken together, the findings indicate that English in Indonesian digital communication should not be reduced to code-mixing for lexical convenience. Instead, it can function as a pragmatic and emotional resource through which speakers frame experiences, express vulnerability, evaluate relationships, establish boundaries, and position themselves socially. This perspective is particularly relevant in digital environments, where multilingual practices are increasingly shaped by platform-specific interaction, global cultural exposure, and users' attempts to construct recognizable identities (Ren & Tahir, 2026; Rosmaria, 2024).

V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the use of English in Indonesian digital communication cannot be understood solely as a form of code-mixing. English expressions such as *healing*, *toxic*, *overthinking*, *burnout*, and *I need space* are selected even when Indonesian equivalents are available because they can perform particular emotional and interpersonal functions. The findings indicate that English serves as a resource for expressing emotional experiences, evaluating relationships, establishing personal boundaries, and managing interpersonal distance.

Viewed through Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory, these expressions represent situated pragmatic choices whose meanings depend on the context in which they are used. The choice of English therefore contributes not only to what users say but also to how they frame and communicate their emotional experiences. This study consequently highlights the importance of examining language choice and its pragmatic consequences, rather than focusing only on the structural forms of Indonesian-English code-mixing. English in Indonesian digital communication can thus be understood as an emotional and pragmatic resource through which users construct and manage personal and interpersonal meanings.

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