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## The Ordinariness of Code-meshing in the Indonesian Linguistic Landscapes

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### Abstract

*Code-meshing as a strategic linguistic practice has been considered a rarity in a high-stake writing practice (e.g. academic writing). Studies in composition scholarship have demonstrated that such a practice needs arduous intellectual endeavors and extra rhetorical efforts to be realized. That is, code-meshing requires an exceptionally high linguistic adeptness, language awareness, and rhetorical sensitivity in order to be performed effectively. As such, the products of code-meshing in scholarly writing are often seen as a marked form of textual realization. This article shows that while strenuous struggles are needed to practice code-meshing in academic writing (i.e. high-stake translingual practice), such a practice can be performed as mundane, ordinary, unremarkable, and relaxed activities (i.e. low-stake translingual practice) in linguistic landscapes or signage displayed in public places. Illustrations of the code-meshed texts in the latter case will be provided, and then examined to account for their ordinariness. In light of the vibrant low-stake translingual practice, I shall develop an important notion of grassroots performativity to suggest the everydayness of quotidian language practices enacted by multilingual language users in their own community.*

**Keywords:** code-meshing, linguistic practice; linguistic landscape; multilingual language users; grassroots performativity

### Article information

Received:  
22 June 2022

Revised:  
24 August  
2022

Accepted:  
7 September  
2022

### Introduction

Initially developed as part of translingual practices in composition studies, code-meshing has become a widely-quoted terminology *du jour* used to describe an egalitarian linguistic practice of mingling and

blending different linguistic codes so as to create a hybrid textual realization, the eventual goal of which is to pluralize academic writing (see Canagarajah, 2013; Young 2004). In composition scholarship, scholars have used such terms as translingual writing (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011) and transcultural literacy (Lu, 2009) to refer to a

similar idea to code-meshing practice. Studies on cross-cultural compositions (albeit limited in numbers) have demonstrated that meshing different linguistic codes amid dominant and established writing conventions requires an exceptionally high linguistics adeptness. This suggests that code-meshing can only be effectively practiced and performed by experienced writers and scholars who have solid and mature metalinguistic knowledge (i.e. the ability to reflect and manipulate language structure to suit one's communicative purposes).

Without fully developed metalinguistic adroitness and rhetorical sensitivity in shuttling between languages and cultures, one cannot effectively create and display his hybrid textual realizations as the desired goal of code-meshing practice. Matsuda (2014), without belittling the value of code-meshing practices as an innovative approach to translingual writing pedagogy and research, cautions us against the haphazard application of these practices in both composition pedagogy and research. A lack of understanding of the notion of code-meshing as a realization of translingual writing in its application would lead students and scholars to valorize and celebrate it uncritically, rather than employing it “for its intellectual value” (Matsuda, 2014, p. 479).

While the pros and cons of the usefulness and value of code-meshing have their own merits, we, however, need to go beyond this robust intellectual debate by contextualizing code-meshing practices outside the confine of academic writing. In doing so, we can fully capture the diversity of linguistic practices in other life domains, as well as appreciate the performative potential of multilingual language users in their everyday linguistic practices. Engrossing ourselves exclusively in the translingual practice of the elitist genre (i.e. academic writing) could mask linguistic performativity of lay language users.

This article further takes issues on the idea of code-meshing by contextualizing its realization in the linguistic landscapes or public sites in the Indonesian context. It argues here that unlike in the scholarly writing domain, translingual practice of code-meshing

in public spaces can be seen as an ordinary, mundane, and unremarkable language practice, or what Dovchin and Lee, 2019 call “the ordinariness of translinguistics.” Thus, while in the former case, code-meshing can be viewed as a high-stake, exclusive and marked translingual practice, in the latter case, code-meshing can be seen as a low-stake, inclusive and unmarked translingual practice.

The article is structured as follows: first, it clarifies the seemingly interchangeably-used terms of code-meshing, code-switching, and code-mixing; second, it reviews and discusses evidence of high-stake code-meshing practices of multilingual writers from different ethnicities in published scholarly writings; then, instances of low-stake code-meshing practices in the linguistic landscapes will be presented and analyzed; finally, a notion of grassroots performativity will be proposed to suggest the everydayness of quotidian and relaxed language practices enacted by multilingual language users in their own community.

### ***Code-Meshing, Code-Switching and Code-Mixing: A Terminological Mismatch?***

Amongst the available neologisms in the field of applied linguistics, especially in composition and literacy studies, code-meshing (unveiled initially by Young, 2004) has sparked controversies among scholars in the field. Probably due to its relative novelty, code-meshing has not yet gained an established status like other seemingly similar notions of code-switching and code-mixing. At its best, it has been treated as synonymous with code-switching and code-mixing. At its worst, its significance and values have not been fully recognized.

Matsuda (2013), for example, seems indifferent to expounding and distinguishing code-meshing with code-switching and code-mixing, and considers these terms as “a terminological mismatch” (p. 133). For him, any intellectual endeavors should not be engrossed with distinguishing the terms, as “many applied linguists use the term “code-mixing” interchangeably with code-switching,

which is more or less the same idea as code-meshing” (p. 134).

Canagarajah (2013), taking a somewhat different position, does treat code-switching as the same as code-mixing, but makes a sharp distinction of these terms with code-meshing. Problematizing the traditional differences between code-switching and code-mixing (the former requires bilingual competences, while the latter does not), he sees no need to treat the two separately, as dual language competences are not always required in switching and mixing codes. Clearly, Canagarajah’s treatment of making the terms synonymous is heavily influenced by his strenuous advocacy of translanguaging practice, in which “one can adopt language resources from different communities without “full” or “perfect” competence in them...(p. 10).

Yet, as for code-meshing, Canagarajah (2013) differentiates it from code-switching and code-mixing, in that the former “offers a possibility of bringing the different codes within the same text rather than keeping them apart” (pp. 112-113). Thus, while both code-switching and code-mixing are seen as resorting to language separation and segregation, code-meshing views different linguistic codes as integrated into one compartment (see also Canagarajah, 2006 for the distinction of code-meshing and code-mixing in a specific context of literacy theorization and pedagogy).

The distinction between language segregation and language integration in relation to the distinction of the three terms above is taken even further by Young (2009) to sharpen the distinction between code-switching (or code-mixing) and code-meshing, to which he staunchly advocates both as an ideology and as a pedagogy. For Young, code-switching subscribes to a segregation ideology, which “fortifies language barriers” (p. 67), and which serves as a basis for facilitating racism and sexism.

Furthermore, as a pedagogy, code-switching has been argued to instill into students “a segregationist logic” (p. 54), and is therefore deemed incompatible with linguistic diversities that have long characterized

language classroom. Accusing code-switching of being undergirded by “the dominant language ideology”, Young (2009) contends that this ideology has been imposed on “minoritized dialects speakers” to conform and accept the standard norm for communication.

As a corrective to this, Young (2009; see also Young, 2013) proposes a preferable notion of code-meshing. Code-meshing, as he asserts, “encourages speakers and writers to fuse *standard language* with native speech habits, to color their writing with what they bring home..., to multiply the range of available rhetorical styles, expand our ability to understand linguistic difference and make us in the end multidialectical, as opposed to monodialectical” (Young, 2009, 64-65) [italics added]. What code-meshing envisions in both oral and written communication is that language users can shuttle forth and back without necessarily conforming to the “standard principles for communication” (Young, 2009, p. 64). In addition, code-meshing used in a pedagogical context is deemed compatible with multilingual speakers and writers, as “it allows *them* to become more effective communicators by doing what we all do best, what comes naturally: blending, merging, meshing dialects” (Young, 2009, p. 72).

The above exposition provides a clear elucidation that that code-meshing is a mutually exclusive notion which radically differs from both code-switching and code-mixing, in that it heavily emphasizes language practice or performance (i.e. the actual), rather than language competence (i.e. the ideological). That is, code-meshing is concerned with “whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails” rather than with “whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*”, to borrow Hymes’ (1972, p. 281) formulation of communicative competence. [italics in original].

With its emphasis on the performativity of language in practice –an important and exclusive tenet that distinguishes it from both code-switching and code-meshing –we therefore see no reason for treating it, along

with the other two terms, as a terminological mismatch. Instead, drawing a strict boundary between these interchangeably used terms is of paramount importance for the sake of avoiding a terminological obfuscation.

### ***Code-Meshing as a High-Stake Translingual Practice***

Deemed a strategic linguistic practice in indexing and infusing one's identities and ideologies, code-meshing was initially intended to resist linguistic inequalities especially in literacy practices where the established conventions and norms of the privileged language (i.e. English) have been dominant.

In the pedagogical circle, code-meshing practices have been continuously exhorted and even encouraged in order to challenge "the dominant communicative norms through the meshing of minoritized languages and literacies for embodying alternate identities and values" (Canagarajah, 2021, p. 20). Despite the fact that the effective implementation of code-meshing in the pedagogical context has been called into question by scholars (Block, 2018; Flores, 2013, Kubota 2016), such translingual practice has long been evident in the writings of highly proficient multilingual writers.

Classic examples of code-meshed writings can be found in Canagarajah's (2006, 2013) astute analysis of the writing of an African-American scholar, Geneva Smitherman, who attempted to gain voice in writing by meshing her home language, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) with Standard English. Despite the dominance of the established norms and conventions Smitherman had to comply for her writings to pass muster in the review process, Canagarajah demonstrated that Smitherman managed to strategically appropriate these norms and conventions and to get her writings published in the journals.

Another study of code-meshed texts by multilingual scholars have recently been carried out by Sugiharto (2015). Scrutinizing

the writings of two renowned Indonesian scholars from two different ethnicities (Javanese and Sundanese), Sugiharto has provided further evidence of code-meshing practice as a strategic way of indexing multilingual writers' identities in gaining voice in academic writing. Both Canagarajah's (2006, 2013) and Sugiharto's (2015) studies have revealed that code-meshing occurred at both lexical and morpho-syntactical levels. This will be discussed further below.

### ***Code-Meshing at Lexical Level***

Drawing upon the studies from Canagarajah (2006, 2013) and Sugiharto (2015), this sub-section shows and discusses how multilinguals writers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds successfully managed to appropriate the established academic conventions and to construct their alternate discourses. The code-meshing instances shown here occur at the lexical level.

The classic study of code-meshing at the lexical level has thrown important light into how a multilingual writer styles him/herself to gain voice amidst the dominance of the established writing conventions (Canagarajah, 2006, 2013). Consider the following code-meshed text:

*As an organizational position, the "Students' Right" resolution represented a critical mechanism for CCCC to address its own internal contradictions at the same time as marching, fist-raising, loud-talking protesters, spearheaded by the Black Liberation Movement, marred the social landscape of "America the beautiful" (Smitherman, 1999, pp. 357-358).*

From Canagarajah's (2013) analyses, the text has rhythmic voice indicated by the lexemes *marching, fist-raising, loud-talking*, which "evoke a register that is more oral and non-academic" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 118). While the inclusion of such lexical items (influenced by the AAVE oral culture) can render the text non-standard, the emotive and repetitive expressions are considered rhetorically enriching, as they have indexical values.

Consider again the following translanguaged text from another multilingual writer:

*Both Sundanese and Javanese for example share the values of silih asah (mutual learning), silih asuh (mutual caring), and silih asih (mutual loving) (Alwasilah, 2014, p. 24)*

The meshing of Sundanese phrases *silih asah*, *silih asuh*, *silih asih* with English was done deliberately, yet strategically. It is interesting to observe here that for the sake of the reader's understanding of the meanings of these phrases, Alwasilah felt obliged to provide their English equivalents for each of the phrase. However, as Alwasilah might have believed that the original Sundanese phrases could capture the specific nuances of the context of his writing, he insisted on using the phrases, for which their English counterparts might not be able to convey the original meanings. Given Alwasilah's cultural background as a Sundanese, the employment of these phrases helped index his ethnic identity. As Ivanic (1998) has pointed out, the lexical aspect of writing can construct a writer's identity. Thus, it is through the use of his native language that Alwasilah was able to self-represent himself as a multilingual scholar who was adroit in crossing different languages in order to exercise his agency.

Similar to Alwasilah's code-meshed practice, Dardjowidjojo's writing evokes a sense of deliberate deviation of the standard norm for the sake of achieving a certain stylistic and rhetorical purpose.

*The ewuh pekewuh outlook would also bar students...* (Dardjowidjojo, 2001, p. 319)

The meshing of the Javanese and English in the example above showcases not only Dardjowidjojo's linguistic dexterity in shuttling languages, but also his consciousness of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors in which the texts are constructed. As can be seen from the example, the Javanese phrase *ewuh pekewuh* 'feeling uncomfortable and uneasy' are deliberately meshed with the English codes to locate the temporality of the text and to bring the author's agency as an

Indonesian nationality with a Javanese ethnicity.

In doing the meshing, Dardjowidjojo grounded his agency "in the mutually constitutive relation of the individual and the social, the official and the lived or practical" (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 592). With a strong cultural root as a Javanese, he could freely select and choose culturally available voices and easily play out with meshing codes with the purpose of attaining a rhetorical effectiveness of his writing. Dardjowidjojo's insertion of the indigenous words instead of finding their English equivalents reflects what Wertsch (1991) calls "patterns of privileging", where the individual writer "can exercise the power to conform to or resist the social forces that are privileging one voice type over another" (Ivanic & Camps, 2001, p. 7). It should be clear here that Dardjowidjojo, while aware of the governing academic norms or standard written language he ought to conform, chose to resist the social forces that could privilege the dominant language (i.e., English), and opted instead for using codes of his home language(s).

### **Code-Meshing at Morpho-Syntactical Level**

Code-meshing also occurs at the morpho-syntactical level, as illustrated in the instances of a multilingual writer below.

At the morpho-syntactical level, Dardjowidjojo meshes Javanese terms (*gugu* and *tiru*) with the Indonesian prefix *di*, ensuing a passive construction. Morpho-syntactical wise, the meshing of the codes from the three languages creates a double passive construction. As for the Standard Written English norms, the following meshed construction is rather eccentric, and may be deemed undesirable and deviant from the established norm.

*A guru to us is a school-time parent. (S)he must, therefore, be digugu (trusted that what (s)he says is right) and ditiru (imitated)...* (Dardjowidjojo, 2001, p. 315)

The construction of *be digugu* and *ditiru* demonstrates linguistic creativity, rather than deficit. To borrow Milu's term, such a creativity is called "linguistic inventiveness." (Milu, 2013). The double translanguaging (from Javanese to Indonesian to English) here may seem to flout the Standard Written English to which the writer must conform. While being conscious of the "ungrammaticality" of the above construction, Darjowidjojo, nevertheless, seems to adopt what Canagarajah (2011, p. 411) calls a "relaxed attitude" toward writing style and grammatical error, not because he is ignorant of the grammatical rules or shows no "care about form", but because he treats written standards "subservient to *his* rhetorical purposes".

Additionally, the linguistic inventiveness shows the author's boldness to enact his agency and index his ethnicity (as a Javanese) without necessarily complying with the standard conventions of academic discourse. Such a double passive construction provides further evidence that grammatical norms are always emergent in a specific communicative setting and ideological in nature.

### ***Code-Meshing as a Low-Stake Translingual Practice***

While code-meshing in academic writing can be considered as an elitist, exclusive linguistic practice that can only be effectively performed by skillful writers, code-meshing in linguistic landscape can be seen as a more inclusive, ordinary, quotidian, and mundane activity. The latter is a low-stake linguistic practice that can be done by ordinary language users who have no necessarily advanced language proficiency.

Unlike in the academic writing which compels the writers to devise their cognitive strategies in planning to code-mesh (when, where (in the texts) and how to code-mesh), code-meshing in the public space seems to be performed at ease without these tedious mental strategies. Consider, for example, Figures 1, 2 and 3 below. We see in these figures (signage found in the food stalls in

major cities in Indonesia) an assortment of creative meshing and blending of linguistic codes of English and Indonesian.

In Figure 1, for instance, we see a list of the menu, along with the prizes offered: 'prett ciken' (fried chicken), 'kulit ciken' (chicken skin), and 'ceker ciken' (chicken feet), all which have different prizes. The lexical meshing here takes the form of both whole borrowing, as in the case of 'prett ciken', and partial borrowing, as in the case of 'kulit ciken' and 'ceker ciken.' In the former case, the original English words are deliberately borrowed wholly by altering their spelling so as to sound Indonesian phonologically, and in the latter case, the original word has been partly borrowed and blended with the Indonesian words, creating what is called loan-blend. The creative meshing of these different linguistic codes also has a humorous dimension which can make people laugh upon reading it. Understood from the context in this specific instance of signage in the public site (the food stall) in a multilingual country like Indonesia, code-meshing of different languages becomes an ordinary practice.

**Figure 1**

(source: <https://twitter.com/kfcayamnyajago>)



Another example of quotidian code-meshed practice can be seen in Figure 2 where the street vendor offers different kinds of fresh beverages such as 'es jeruk' (orange ice), 'milksek' (milk shake), and 'es kelapa muda' (young coconut ice). The word 'sex' in 'milksex' has undergone a spelling change from the original *shake*, and as a result is pronounced differently from the latter word. The spelling alternation of the word *shake* into 'sex' may also evoke a sense of creative playfulness, and has a humorous dimension. Yet, despite this spelling alteration, the word is less likely to get



misunderstood if construed from its context (i.e. a street vendor selling any kinds of beverages) and its meshing with the Indonesian 'es jeruk' and 'es kelapa muda'.

**Figure 2**

(Source: <http://www.masplanet.com>)



Unlike such traditional beverages as orange ice and young coconut ice, milk shake is relatively popular among young people in the urban context. Also, the beverage is more common in the big restaurants than in the street food stalls. However, as milk shake is getting more popular among people from all walks of life, it has been offered in almost public sites including by street vendors. Thus, the meshing of the borrowed word *milkshake* (with its emerging local variant *milksex*) with other local Indonesian words, as depicted in Figure 2, is indicative that code-meshing has become a mundane and ordinary linguistic practice. That's to say, there is nothing exotic and remarkable about it.

Finally, in Figure 3 we see how a rather odd-looking word 'tek ewei' (derived originally from the English word *take away*) is meshed with the Indonesian words. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the English *take away* has been a common sight especially in big restaurants and food stalls in the malls where customers are not allowed to dine in on site. So common and popular is the word in the ears of the Indonesian people that even street stall owners use it to inform their customers that they only provide a take-away service. As we can see in Figure 3, the banner says "Sorry, for the time being we only provide a take away service." With the spelling modification –and consequently phonological alteration –the English *take away* has not only been borrowed, but has also been meshed with the Indonesian words.

**Figure 3**

(Source Twitter/lucunation)



### **On Grassroots Performativity**

What, in fact, accounts for the occurrence of the relaxed, ordinary, and mundane meshing of the different linguistic codes in the local linguistic landscape shown above? It is important to note here that translanguaging practice is not restricted to scholarly writing only, but has expanded its scope to include the consideration of space. As such, it also involves "diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances" (Canagarajah, 2013, p.6). This expansion in scope of translanguaging practice has been triggered mainly by the notion of "the mobility of linguistic and other semiotic resources in time and space" (Blackledge & Creese, 2017), typified by migration of people, diasporic community and advanced technologies, amongst other. Mobility, in essence, has made linguistic borders become unstable, porous and unbounded. As for the global spread of Englishes worldwide, English has permeated into other localities resulting in what Pennycook (2007, p. 6) calls "transcultural flow of Englishes". Thus, when English enters and moves to a new territory beyond its place of origin, there is the possibility that it not only is borrowed, but is also remade, repurposed and even localized by the inhabitants of the new territory. This flow, as Pennycook (2007) succinctly describes it, refers "not merely to the spread of particular forms of culture across boundaries, or the existence of supercultural commonalities (cultural forms that transcend locality), but rather to the process of borrowing, blending,

remaking, returning, to the processes of alternative cultural reproduction” (p.6).

As a result of the transcultural flow of Englishes in the everydayness of communicative events, language incessantly moves and travels. In this sense, language becomes “mobile resources”, and is no longer treated as “immobile language” (Bloomaert, 2010). It is the fluidity and mutability of the mobile resources that make translingual practice such as code-meshing now ubiquitous in city’s linguistic landscape, and has become an urban phenomenon. Scholars have termed this phenomenon as “translanguaging space” (Li, 2011), or “spatial repertoires” (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, “which links the repertoires formed through individual life trajectories to the particular places in which these linguistic resources are deployed” (p. 83). The ubiquity of language resources in the public places shown in the examples previously reflects language speakers’ adroitness and resourcefulness in linking their linguistic repertoires to spaces around them.

This vibrant linguistic practice in a low stake level – everyday productive linguistic practices involving highly complex semiotic resources and culture – can be seen as “grassroots performativity” (Sugiharto, 2014). Low-stake linguistic practices such as those shown in the examples does not require advanced linguistic proficiency to be performed effectively. The convivial, playful, and quotidian code-meshed texts in the public signage above provide evidence of vibrant “multilingualism from below” (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p. 49). Despite its playfulness and seemingly lacking of seriousness, the value and significance of the conviviality in such a low-stake code-meshing practice should not be overlooked. As Blommaert (2013) has convincingly argued, the everyday linguistic practices or what he prefers to call ‘relaxed identity work’ like mundane badinage have their own linguistic significance, because this work constitutes ‘identity rehearsal,’ which eventually becomes activated in ‘specific configurations when identities become chips in a high stakes game’ (p. 620). Furthermore, the playfulness and the humorous, convivial side of the creative meshing in the examples above have an important bearing on linguistic

practice in a multilingual world, as they can “challenge the power relations and hierarchical order in the process of knowledge construction” (Tai & Li, 2020, p. 608).

## Conclusion

The banal presence of code-meshing in the public sites shown previously provides “a picture of the very ordinariness of mixed language use and also a source of pride” (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p. 5). Despite the fact that the code-meshed texts above sound parodic, humorous and playful in nature, they still exhibit significance as a linguistic practice critically and creatively performed ground-up. This stands in a stark contrast to code-meshing as a high stake linguistic practice in academic writing where linguistic dexterity and metalinguistic awareness are called for.

As an instance of grassroots performativity, convivial code-meshing practices demonstrate the resourcefulness of language users in not only borrowing and mixing different linguistic codes, but also in remaking and repurposing them by virtue of the communicative needs of the local community.

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