



**DIGITAL BILINGUALISM AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION ON INSTAGRAM:
A GENDER BASED DISCOURSE-ANALYTIC STUDY OF GEN Z UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS**

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Abstract

Social media has become one of the central spaces of language performance and identity formation among Generation Z university students. In the multilingual setting, Instagram is an overtly visible and public medium through which the bilingual lexical repertoires are purposefully used to build and negotiate sociocultural identities. The current paper explores digital bilingualism and identity construction in the case of students of Generation Z studying at universities through a gendered discourse analytical perspective of publicly shared Instagram posts. The analysis is based on sociocultural and discourse-oriented views of identity and analysed captions, hashtags, comments, and profile biographies that were scraped out of publicly accessible Instagram accounts. Using a qualitative discourse-analytic approach, the study investigates how female and male students mobilise the bilingual linguistic resources to do identity in digitally mediated situations. Findings suggest that despite the fact that both cohorts engage in digital bi-lingualism, gendered dynamics are presented in the discursive production of power, expression of feelings, sense of culture, and understanding of audience. This exploration contributes to the current research on the topic of language, culture and identity as it anticipates the Instagram platform as a viable site of identity performance and demonstrates the role of gender as a comparative lens in digital bilingual practises.

Keywords: digital bilingualism, identity construction, Instagram discourse, gender, Gen Z, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The evolution of social media has radically altered the communicative habits (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025) whereby it alters the use of language as well as how identities are formed (Ramzan et al., 2023, 2025, 2026). In the case of Generation Z university students, social spaces to which digital platforms are only ancillary are that which are at the core of day-to-day communication, self-presentation, and social statusing. Instagram has taken a unique place among such platforms due to focus on publicity, edited self-presentation and interaction with the audience. Therefore, the selection of language on Instagram is hardly neutral; instead, it is finely tuned to both projected and actual audiences. Instagram has supported bilingual and multilingual language practises, which are not confined to functional communication in multilingual settings. Code-switching, language mixing, and stylized linguistic forms provide users with identity as a global-oriented, localized (Abdelrady et al., 2025) and culturally hybridised identity (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024). According to recent scholarship, identity performances, but not linguistic deviations, should be considered the meaning of such practices (Androustopoulos, 2018; Zappavigna, 2022).

Despite the growing attention to the issue of digital multilingualism, scholarship is still confined in three aspects. To start with, many studies approach social media as a unitary milieu thus disregarding platform-specific affordance. Secondly, the issue of identity is mainly pursued through an interview or survey, as opposed to an enacted discourse analysis. Thirdly, studies have paid minimal focus on gendered identity practises in digital bilingual practises among Generation Z students especially in Global South realms. Responding to these gaps, the present paper makes an empirical study of the ways in which male and female Generation Z



campus students form identity by using bilingual language on Instagram.

2. Research Problem and Gap

The study of language and identity has grown to see the importance of digital space; however, there are still large gaps. A significant part of the available literature is devoted to bilingualism in institutional or classroom settings, thus discarding informal but exceptionally influential digital spaces. Furthermore, studies of digital multilingualism often are based on self-reports, and those might not be able to reflect the performance of identity in the form of actual language use. Although there are studies that consider the intersection of gender and language in the digital world, gender typically is not regarded as a category of discursively constructed identity, but as a demographic factor. As a result, the lack of discourse-based studies that compare the use of bilingual language practises to perform identity by male and female Gen Z students on Instagram is significant. To address this gap, the study undertaken is a comparative discourse analysis of the Instagram posts made by the public, which is gender based.

3. Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on sociocultural and discourse oriented theoretical perspectives which understand identity in terms of being dynamic, relational, and created through linguistic practises. The investigation is based on the theory of identity by Bonny Norton, who argues that the identity is multidimensional, dynamic, and changes due to power relations and the investments of people in social settings (Norton and Toohey, 2019). Language options in the digital space can be used as a marker of compatibility between users with specific social statuses and desired communities (Akram et al., 2021, 2022). The sociocultural linguistic paradigm of identity expressed by Bucholtz and Hall also adds more insights to the above view. In this context, identity is defined as a discourse practise, i.e. stance-taking, indexicality, and stylization, whereby people create and negotiate selfhood through discourse practises (Ahmad et al., 2022, Bucholtz and Hall, 2018). The conversational environment of Instagram, represented by a combination of its verbal brevity and increased visibility, creates a remarkably fruitful medium of empirical investigation of these processes that constitute the identity.

Besides, this paper combines the theory of translanguaging, which challenges the rigid boundaries between the formally defined languages and prefigures the holistic linguistic repertoires that speakers use (Li, 2018; García and Otheguy, 2020). With regard to gender, the current study assumes a view of gender as a socially constructed and discursively performed identity, which comes to life through repetitive language activities rather than remaining a fixed biological category.

4. Research Objectives and Questions

1. To examine how Gen Z university students construct identity through bilingual language practices on Instagram.
2. To analyze the discursive attribute of digital bilingualism as it appears in Instagram posts made publicly.
3. To compare the differences in how male and female students express identity using bilingual language on Instagram.

Research Questions

1. How is identity constructed through bilingual language practices on Instagram among Gen Z university students?
2. What discourse features characterize digital bilingualism in Instagram posts made publicly?
3. How do male and female students differ in expressing identity using bilingual language



on Instagram?

5. Literature Review

5.1 Conceptualizing Identity in Language Studies

The concept of identity has also been significantly redefined in the context of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics over the last twenty years (Amjad et al., 2021). First, the essentialist views saw identity as a unified and fixed personal feature; secondly, the modern scholarship sees identity as a process of dynamic multiplicity of socially produced phenomena mediated by discourse. The current ideology considers identity as performance acts instead of fixed properties. In sociocultural perspective, Bonny Norton defines identity as how people understand their relationship positioning in the social world, how they organize this positioning in the temporal and spatial dimensions and imagination of what is to come (Norton & Toohey, 2019). Such definition foreshadows aspects of power, access, and investment, which makes it particularly relevant to the studies of language use in digitally mediated spaces where visibility and symbolic capital is challenged. At the same time, discourse-oriented approaches claim that identity is formed in the process of language interaction in interpersonal communication. The sociocultural linguistic model that has been developed by Bucholtz and Hall (2018) assumes that identity is created through discursive practices, such as stance-taking, indexicality, and stylistic decisions. In this paradigm, linguistic forms gain social importance through indexing a certain identity, values, and group membership, so that the framework is specifically useful to discourse analysis of social-media in which language is carefully edited to suit the consumption of masses.

5.2 Identity in Digital and Social Media Contexts

The spread of digital communication has triggered the research of scholars into the construction and negotiation of identity in virtual milieus (Ma et al., 2024, 2025). Digital spaces do not act as neutral spaces, but, through technological affordances (Jalalzai et al., 2025; Ramzan & Khan, 2019, 2024), implicit rules, and algorithmic infrastructures (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022), they actively influence linguistic practices. Androutopoulos (2018, 2020) argues that digital discourse is characterized by increased reflexivity and stylization because the users consciously create language in order to make it more visible and invite audience reactions (Ramzan & Javaid, 2025). Instagram is often defined as a place of curated identity performance, and captions, hashtags, and biographical fields are semiotic means to self-brand and affiliate. As stressed by Zappavigna (2022), the searchable talk is made possible through Instagram, and individuals can identify themselves with certain groups, ideologies, and lifestyles through the use of linguistic and multimodal options. As a result, Instagram language is inseparably connected with identity formation, especially in the context of teenagers who have to find their place in the social world and be acknowledged (Javaid & Ramzan, 2026).

5.3 Digital Bilingualism and Translanguaging

The recent bilingualism research has moved beyond the concept of monolingual norms and towards more permeable ideas of language in use (Ramzan et al., 2020, 2023). Digital bilingualism refers to the intentional use of various language tools used in digital communications, and often in a post or exchange of just one post. Protagonists argue that we should study such practises using the paradigm of translanguaging that anticipates the holistic linguistic repertoires of speakers, as opposed to language systems. According to Li Wei (2018), translanguaging can be considered not only a theoretical concept but a social practise because it is important in creating identity. In the digital worlds, translanguaging allows the users to express complex hybrid identities that embrace the global mobility and local rootedness (Al-Adwan et al., 2022). Similarly, Ofelia García and Ricardo Otheguy (2020) assume that the



legitimacy of flexible bilingual practises through online spaces is achieved by undermining established language hierarchies. Empirical studies of social media discourse indicate that code-mixing is often an indication of intimacy, position, humour, and identification instead of the simple communicative necessity (Sebba, 2019). In the case of university students, digital bilingualism is one of the mechanisms of concurrent negotiating academic, social and cultural identities.

5.4 Gender, Language, and Identity as Discourse

Modern research into gender and language shifts gender as a biological category to a social identity that is created through discursive means. Gender in this framing comes out as a result of repeated language practises based on social norms and expectations. Kira Hall et al. (2016) argue that interacting gendered identities are done by taking a stance, affective positioning, and choosing style. Recent empirical research on the topic of digital discourse indicates that gendered identity performances tend to be emphasised more on social-facing platforms like Instagram, where people practise self-monitoring and audience design. The literature indicates that both male and female users might choose different linguistic strategies to accomplish such authority, emotion, humour, or authenticity not due to gender differences but because of the existing social norms (Zappavigna, 2022). However, there are still a limited number of studies that analyse the intersection of gender and social media digital bilingualism. The current literature often uses gender as a background element as opposed to using it as an analytic approach to comprehend identity performance in terms of language. This gap is especially relevant in the studies that focus on Generation Z university students in multilingual communities.

5.5 Generation Z, Higher Education, and Digital Identity

Generation Z learners are often characterised by their extreme level of digital literacy and skill in multimodal and multilingual communication. Empirical research shows that Gen Z users utilise language creatively to develop authentic online identities and at the same time to mediate between institutional and social demands (Darvin and Norton, 2018). In the context of higher education, online platforms blur the boundary between academic and personal self, thus, allowing learners to perform and experience the several identities simultaneously (Hyland and Jiang, 2021). Despite the growing academic interest in the digital behaviour of Gen Z, there is a lack of available studies that address the mechanisms by which the open social-media speech of Gen Z can be interpreted as identity negotiation due to the use of both languages, with a discourse- analytic and gender-comparative approach to the study.

5.6 Positioning the Present Study

This study addresses numerous gaps that were left by other works. To begin with, it targets Instagram as a particular location where individuals are constructing their identity instead of considering the entire social media the same. Secondly, it utilises an approach whereby the language people actually use is considered rather than asking them to report the same. Third, it examines gender to observe how Gen Z male and female students of universities display their identity in digital bilingual practises. Emphasising identity as the central theme and digital bilingualism as one of the primary resources, the given study contributes to the existing discourse regarding language, culture, and identity in online higher education.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic research design to examine digital



bilingualism as a means of identity construction on Instagram. Qualitative research would particularly be appropriate in the study that desires to understand how individuals generate meaning, how they act in interpersonal environments and how they determine their identity in the real-life contexts, as opposed to through measurement of numbers. According to John W. Creswell (2018), qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to observe how participants make sense of particular social and cultural circumstances. The reason why discourse analysis was selected as the primary approach is that it demonstrates how individuals can use language to perform an action in a social context and form their identities. Rather than viewing language as neutral, discourse analysis examines the process of selecting words depending on the situation, who was or was not in power and social conventions. It is effective on social media since it demonstrates that people are exercising their identity using language that would make them visible and engage others (Androutsopoulos, 2018). This method is suitable to the research topic of actual digital texts, which allows us to observe identity as manifested in language, not necessarily what people report in interviews or surveys.

6.2 Data Collection

The sample used in this study was restricted to publicly available Instagram accounts belonging to GenZ university students. Instagram was selected due to the popularity of the product among Generation Z and being an open platform where individuals present themselves to the world. The post on Instagram is targeted at a large audience as opposed to the private message. This causes the words that people post on this platform to be an intentional and purposeful element of their self representation.

The dataset consists of:

- Post captions
- Comment threads
- Hashtags
- Profile bio descriptions

These pieces of text were interpreted as components of conversations since they all aid in the construction of online identity. The study did not use pictures as they were unnecessary to concentrate on words and prevent difficulties with the usage of images.

6.3 Sample

The purposive sampling strategy was used to locate the Instagram posts that were relevant to the research aims. Purposive sampling that involves selection of information-rich data sources, which are directly related to the phenomenon being examined, was considered to be suitable. Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research because the aim is to obtain a comprehensive and profound insight and not a generalisation formulated statistically (Creswell, 2018).

The following criteria were used in selecting posts in this research:

- The account was publicly available.
- The account holder was a university student in the age bracket of about 18-25 years.
- The use of bilingual or multilingual language practises was used in the post.
- Gender (male or female) was a self-reported element on the account.

In order to obtain a corpus with strong and repeated bilingual patterns, a preliminary screening (the screening of about 80-100 posts) resulted in a smaller corpus. Then, the resulted dataset was stratified based on self-reported gender, which made it easier to conduct a comparative analysis of male and female identity performances in terms of discourse.

6.4 Participants and Dataset Description

The data of the current research was obtained on publicly available Instagram accounts of Generation Z university students in the age range of about 18-25 years. 20 accounts were included, ten female and ten male users, and therefore the gender was determined by self-presented information in their profile. The chosen accounts were characterised by the active posting of the material and the frequent use of the bilingual language practises in the captions, hashtags, and profiles bios. The posts produced due to a 6 months data-gathering process were analysed, and an initial corpus of about eighty to one hundred posts was produced, out of which forty-five posts with rich bilingual linguistic content were chosen to be analysed in depth. The data included captions, chosen comment threads, hashtags, and bio descriptions, but no visual images were used to keep the focus on language practises and uphold ethical integrity.

Feature	Description
Number of accounts	20 Accounts
Gender distribution	10 female, 10 male
Age range	18–25 years
Academic status	Undergraduate students
Account type	Public
Posting frequency	2–4 posts per month
Languages observed	English along with local language(s)
Data types analyzed	Captions, hashtags, comments, bios
Data collection period	no more than 6 months older posts

Table 6.4.1: Dataset overview of Instagram accounts

6.5 Ethical Considerations

Although the information considered in this study was publicly available, ethical reasoning was central in the design of the study. Modern research claims that the availability to all users does not exempt the researchers of their ethical duties to social media users (Zappavigna, 2022). Additional measures were taken to anonymize and paraphrase certain portions of the dataset, thus minimising the chances of uncovering the respondents and, in the process, adhering to the considered ethical standards in the context of digital discourse research.

In order to comply with the ethical standards:

- Usernames and other personally identifiable information were anonymized
- Textual excerpts were paraphrased instead of being provided verbatim
- No interactions or contact with account holders were made



This approach to methodology is in line with the existing ethical standards regarding digital discourse research, respecting the privacy of the users without compromising the level of analytical rigour.

6.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data has been conducted with the help of a qualitative analysis that examines the way people speak. It was informed by thematic analysis ideas and the examination of the way people utilise digital conversations. The analysis has been performed in multiple stages returning to the same point, following the usual approaches to qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Creswell, 2018) and the research that revolves around language in the social media (Androutsopoulos, 2018, 2020).

The analytical process involved five stages:

Stage 1: Familiarization

Each of the chosen posts was read more than once so that the full picture of linguistic patterns, recurrent themes, and stylistic features could be achieved.

Stage 2: Initial Coding

Posts were evaluated on the language (English, the local language or mixed), lexical preferences, style, and use of emojis, the expression of opinions and the addressee.

Stage 3: Functional Interpretation

All pieces of coded segments were analysed in terms of discursive functions, such as, but not restricted to, appeals of authority, emotion, humour, cultural identification, and scholarly identification. This stage was pre-occupied with the performative side of the language as opposed to the content of the language in terms of reference.

Stage 4: Thematic Categorization

Discussions were codified under larger categories that demonstrate popular methods by which people develop their identity. These themes were enhanced through a constant comparison between them across posts.

Stage 5: Gender-Based Comparative Analysis

Lastly, the comparison of the themes between the posts of both male and female students was made to determine the convergences and differences in identity performance against the backdrop of digital bilingualism. Following modern research trends in the field of gender and language, gender became a category that is constructed discursively (Hall et al., 2016).

This methodological process led to a systematic but flexible examination of digital bilingual practises as performative identities, thus providing the coherence of the empirical results, theoretical concepts, and the judgements of the interpretation. The process of analysis offered confidence of methodological rigour, transparency, and consistency throughout the data, analysis, and the resulting interpretations.

Methodological Rigor and Trustworthiness

In order to improve the credibility of the analysis, the study used:

- Re-coding and coding of data.
- Theoretical informed reflexive interpretation.
- Descriptions of the linguistic patterns as opposed to single examples.

These approaches are consistent with qualitative criteria of reliability and critical thinking (Creswell, 2018).

7. Findings

The section outlines findings of a discourse-analytic investigation of social Instagram posts by male and female Generation Z students of a university. In the analysis, the author questions the role of bilingual linguistic practises as identity-creating resources, using gender as the analytical tool. All quotes are de-personalised and simplified to maintain the ethical integrity and do not lose the structure of the language.

7.1 Theme 1: Construction of Hybrid Identity Through Digital Bilingualism

Hybrid identities were constructed by the male and female students through a combination of English and local languages, however, the discursive orientation of hybridity differed between them.

Female Students

The use of bilingual captions, which were a mix of English and culturally and emotionally charged local-language phrases, were also often used by female students, which implied reflective, relational, and culturally based identities.

Excerpt F1 (Caption):

“Another long day chasing dreams, but grateful for every step ... Alhamdulillah!”

Discourse Analysis:

The English term, chasing dreams, indicates ambition and how young people in different parts of the world refer to it whereas the religious phrase in the native language depicts humility, gratitude, and belongingness. This blend produces a hybrid identity that is positive and cultural.

Male Students

Male students also spoke two languages, but mixing languages was normally associated with doing something, be productive or portraying themselves as goal oriented.

Excerpt M1 (Caption):

“Work mode on 🔄 grind never stops, InshAllah..”

Discourse Analysis:

English is professional and determined and the phrase in the local language is used as the cultural and religious anchor. The process of identity is formed based on perseverance and orientation on the future.

Key Finding:

Hybrid identity was observed in both men and women, yet that of women centred on the thoughts and gratitude and that of men centred on the action and having ambitions.

To social cultural perspective, these bilingual practises are identity performances, not language switching. Applying the concept of identity change and society influence used by Bonny Norton, the combination of languages used by both the male and female students in their posts demonstrates that they are devoted to different identities even competing ones. Simultaneously, the translation into the local languages combined with English is in accordance to the theory of translanguaging. According to this theory, individuals exhibit language flexibility to display complicated social identities rather than adhering to predetermined language boundaries.

7.2 Theme 2: Authority and Academic Identity Performance

There were specific gender demonstrations of how the students used language to indicate authority and seriousness of learning.

Male Students

Only English captions were more frequently utilised among male students, particularly in the posts dedicated to academic or professional issues.

Excerpt M2 (Caption):

“Conference presentation done. Progress matters.”



Discourse Analysis:

Communicating in English without use of emotional words and short sentences show that one is authoritative, competent, and fit to meet academic standards.

Female Students

Women students also expressed power through English but were able to ease it by adding emoji or using a reflective voice or framing it in a relationship.

Excerpt F2 (Caption):

“Presented my research today, feeling proud and thankful 🙌”

Discourse Analysis:

Even though the English language provides the denotatively created academic legitimacy, the emotive phrase of being proud and thankful and the surrounding use of emojis dilute the authoritative statements, aligning academic identity with the interpersonal authenticity.

Key Finding:

Both men and women constituted ideas of authority, though the authority of men appeared stronger, whereas the authority of women was negotiated by the use of relationships.

Gender influences the construction of authority in this theme, where the identity is constructed by the use of language as Bucholtz and Hall speculate. Authority is not an attribute but a gift of language such as English usage, simple talk and opinion display. The language of male and female students differs showing that academic identity is realised with the help of the language that is adequate to the notions of power and professionalism in the society.

7.3 Theme 3: Emotional Expression and Affective Identity

There was a significant difference in emotion tone between genders.

Female Students

Female students tended to use local languages to discuss their vulnerability, emotional disruptions, or reflective self.

Excerpt F3 (Caption):

“Some days feel heavier than others, but we keep going 🤔” (local language phrase included)

Discourse Analysis:

The native language assists individuals in discussing emotions in a straightforward and authentic manner. Being conscious of feelings and strong is what identity is constructed on.

Male Students

Male students were hardly expressing their emotions directly. Rather, they applied humour or style to convey emotions.

Excerpt M3 (Caption):

“Stress level: 100% exams doing their thing”

Discourse Analysis:

Joking and analogies help in uttering the affective states without having to be very vulnerable. This makes identity a constituted and regulated, resilient and conforming, to socially accepted masculine norms.

Key Finding:

Emotional identity had an explicit manifestation (it was linguistically intimate among female students), and an indirect and stylized manifestation among male students. These gendered forms of expressing emotion are still supporting the ideas of Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall who tell us that identity is a product of the position we place ourselves in, and the manner in which we express ourselves. Girls express intimacy in their language of the nearby area,



whereas guys count on humour and fashion demonstrating the identity of gender is not obtained through genes but is created through dialogue.

7.4 Theme 4: Audience Awareness and Self-Monitoring

Instagram being public by nature basically affected the manner in which language was oriented by the user to perceived audiences.

Female Students

The female students were more audience-aware, used a polite tone, often inclusive language, and a softener of emotions.

Excerpt F4 (Caption):

“Trying to balance studies and life... Any advice welcome”

Discourse Analysis:

The identity created through an open invitation is through collaboration and integration with the society which enhances our joint actions.

Male Students

Male students assumed more individual and explicit positions.

Excerpt M4 (Caption):

“Focused. No distractions.”

Discourse Analysis:

The mere appearance and powerful voice demonstrate independence and confidence, which create a self-reliant identity.

Key Finding:

Female students oriented their identity on social interaction whereas male students oriented their identity on self-sufficiency.

Different genders have dissimilar awareness of their audience, and this corresponds with the theory of identity being constructed through interaction. This is where Instagram is an environment where users construct their own audience and observe how other people will judge them, and adjust their language in line with it. This confirms the view held by Norton that identity is constructed by power relations and possession of symbolic capital in communicating in public.

7.5 Theme 5: Cultural Belonging Through Hashtags

Hashtags have been used as strong identity indicators.

Female Students The hashtags were mainly in line with personal development, interpersonal relationships and well-being and spirituality.

Excerpt F5 (Hashtags):

#SelfGrowth #GratefulHeart #StudentLife

Male Students

The hashtag used in the study relates to success, ambition or trends.

Excerpt M5 (Hashtags):

#HustleMode #Goals #NextLevel

Discourse Analysis:

he hashtags are used as indicators of ideological position and positioning according to cultures, thus, showing gender-ed orientations towards self-presentation.

Key Finding:

The hashtags were associated with a relational identity among females and achievement oriented identity among males.

The use of hashtags in this work demonstrates the identity construction based on signs, which identify the users with certain groups and concepts. According to the concepts expressed by

Bucholtz and Hall, the hashtags serve as labels, which bring cultural belonging into sight and searchability. The cultural identity is also formed not only by nature but also through discussion which may be seen in the different ways in which people select hashtags depending on their gender.

7.6 Theme 6: Playfulness, Humor, and Stylization

Playfulness came out in both genders but in different discursive ways.

Male Students

Humour was often competitive, ironic and self enhancing

Excerpt M6:

“Sleep is optional, deadlines are never 🏹”

Female Students

Humour was emotional and interpersonal.

Excerpt F6:

“Running on chai and good intentions 🍵”

Key Finding:

Stylization helped to solidify youth identity and at the same time mirror gendered standards of humour and self-expression. All genders chat and talk playfully and creatively online thus demonstrating that identity is performed. In the context of mixed language use, these creative modes of speaking are examples of how individuals employ language in ways not typically found in the rules of language to define themselves as well as attract younger audiences. This hyperbole demonstrates that identity is amorphous, incessantly shifting, and relies on the cyberspace environment.

7.7 Summary of Findings

The current research shows that digital bilingualism serves as a hub of identity acquisition in Gen Z-university students on Instagram and that gender is an important contributor to the discursive act of identity formation and not the language use itself. The male and female students strategically used the bilingual linguistic practises to build up the hybrid identities that signify the concurrent belonging to the global and local cultural narratives. However, discourse features of language choice became gendered. Female students were more likely to use bilingualism to emphasise relationality, emotionality, and cultural groundedness and to combine local languages to represent affect, gratitude, and intimacy. Contrastingly, the use of English dominant discourse to establish authority, ambition, and self-reliance was more commonly used by male students, whereas emotionality was generally facilitated by use of humour or through stylization. There was also a difference in terms of audience awareness between genders: female students were more sensitive to social interactions and positioning relationships, and male students took more aggressive and self-centred standpoints. Further on, hashtags and styles were identity tags that continued to strengthen gendered orientations to cultural belonging and self-representations. In sum, these results clearly demonstrate that Instagram identity is actively created and achieved with the help of the bilingual discourse practise which is predetermined with the social norms, platform affordances, and gender expectations thus, casting the digital bilingualism into the performance and as a socially-mediated phenomenon.

8. Discussion

The framework of the study allows us to better examine how the two-language use on the Internet allows individuals to define themselves on Instagram. According to Bonny Norton, identity consists of numerous components, it is dynamic, and power has an impact on it. The bilingual practises that we observed demonstrate that students are concentrated on particular



social positions and groups they fantasise about. The choice of language on Instagram is not only speaking, but it makes people visible, they are legitimate, and they belong to other people in the social network.

The current paper provides convincing empirical evidence to the hypothesis that digital bilingualism on Instagram is a deliberate and socially relevant identity practise among the Generation Z-university students. As per sociocultural reconceptualizations of identity, the choice of language is not chance occurrence or functional need, but instead, it is entrenched in the self-presentation, audience orientation, and social position processes. The discussion reveals that identity is actively enacted in the process of bilingual discourse, which, in turn, confirms the idea that identity is created in the process of interaction and discourse, rather than being a fixed personal property (Bucholtz and Hall, 2018; Norton and Toohey, 2019).

The prevalence of hybrid bilingual behaviour among both male and female students supports the new scholarship in translanguaging that views bilingualism as an active use of linguistic resources, as opposed to language systems that are used in turns (Li, 2018; Garccia and Otheguy, 2020). Instagram hashtags and captures analysis shows that, students use English to indicate global orientation, modernity, and academic legitimacy, and local languages are strategically used to indicate affect, cultural belonging, and authenticity. This point is consistent with the idea proposed by Androutsopoulos (2018, 2020) that the digital environment supports the increased level of reflexivity in language production, as the user is able to carefully design talk to be visible and construct meaning.

One of the main contributions, which this study made is the gender-based comparison of discourse, which shows that male and female students practised digital bilingualism, but discursive roles of the language choice varied. The female students more commonly engaged in bilingual practises to create relational, emotionally expressive and culturally based identities. This is consistent with other past studies which propose that female users tend to take discourse practises that would focus on connexion, affect, and audience involvement with online public space (Zappavigna, 2022). It is necessary to mention, though, that these trends cannot be taken as gender characteristics. Instead, they are a form of reflection of femininity-related cultural expectations and norms influencing socially situated identity performances.

Male students, however, more often used the English-dominant discourse to point at authority, ambition and seriousness in the academic sphere. Male students tended to express their emotions indirectly, through humour, stylization or minimalistic language. This observation aligns with gender studies grounded on discourse, which states that masculinity is often being created by demonstrations of power, autonomy, inexpressiveness instead of directly being vulnerable (Hall et al., 2016). Notably, these performances were not consistent but different in situations, which stresses the fluidity of the construction of gendered identity.

Looking at the intersection between culture and language, the differences between genders that we could discover can be viewed as the means of people expressing themselves through language and it does not mean that it is inbuilt. Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall affirm that identity is a result of repetition in the use of language in a manner that demonstrates stance, style and personal indications. Students in the female gender choose words that are emotional and relational whereas the male students use strong and short words. Those are social regulations of gender in which Instagram has cast its judgmental environment.

The affordances of Instagram as a platform have a significant effect on the creation of identity performances. Instagram as a visually inclined, social media platform encourages self-observation and increased audience awareness, which enhances the performative aspect of language usage. The empirical findings support the idea of searchable talk by Zappavigna



(2022), where hash tags and captions are taken to be identity markers which place the user within a certain community, system of values and ideological paradigm. The gendered tendencies that are identified in the use of hashtags also shed further light on how identity is discursively curated in relation to the perceived audiences.

These results are consistent with the theory of translanguaging, which states that it is incorrect to consider languages independently. It deals with the entire bunch of languages that an individual speaks. (Li, 2018; García & Otheguy, 2020). We observe fluid bilingualism practises among both genders of students, and it indicates that they do not perceive languages as two systems but rather as tools to be combined to construct identity. Instagram as a digital and highly visible medium is a perfect venue in which these translanguaging practises can emerge and possess social significance.

On the whole, this discussion shows that digital bilingualism is inherently associated with identity work in relation to social media. This research builds on the previous literature by demonstrating how identity is performed through language in real digital practises by foregrounding discourse instead of self-reports of these perceptions. The use of gender as a comparative analytical prism is an effective way to enhance the study, showing subtle trends in the performance of identities without essentialist interpretation.

9. Conclusion

This paper aimed at exploring to which degree digital bilingualism functions as an identity-building tool by Generation Z university students on Instagram, with a specific focus on gendered discursive patterns. Using a qualitative discourse-analytic approach to publicly accessible Instagram posts, the analysis showed that the negotiated identity of young adults in digitally mediated, publicly facing spaces is founded on bilingual language practises. This research illustrates that, in connecting how people speak to the concepts of identity and language mix, this links to how Gen Z university students apply digital bilingualism on Instagram to demonstrate and construct their identity in a manner as measurable and visible.

The results show that Instagram identity representation is not only a matter of expression but a matter of active construction due to the strategic selection of language to express it, which is characterised by global-local hybridity, cultural identity, hegemonic power, affective appeal, and awareness of the audience. Although both the male and female students practised digital bilingualism, gender influenced the forms of identity performance. The identities formulated by female students were mostly based on the foregrounding of relationality, affective expression and cultural roots, whereas male students were more inclined to construct identities that focused on authority, ambition and self-reliance. These patterns mark the existence of socially situated identity performances as opposed to the inalterable gender differences, thus promoting current discourse dependent conceptualizations of genders and identity.

This study contributes to existing research that views social media as a significant site where individuals speak and form their identity through the approach of simply analysing discussion on Instagram and employing a method that examines how people were discussing. It demonstrates that an examination of daily online discussions could assist in our understanding of how language, culture, and identity intersect among the Gen Z students. This assists in propelling forward the scholarly discourse over the application of two languages on the web and demonstrates the rationale why concepts of culture and language blending hold value in examining identity in the present day environment.

10. Implications Theoretical Implications

The analysis reveals that identity sociocultural and discourse theories are effective on Instagram. It promotes the fact that identity is shifting, performed and contextual in online



places.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers must view bilingual students on the Internet as expressing their identity in a legitimate manner rather than as a source of weakness. This recognition can be used to develop more inclusive language instruction in colleges.

Research Implications

The study could be enhanced in future by incorporating multimodal analysis, examining other types of social media websites, or comparing cultures to find out more about how the individuals construct bilingual identity via the Internet.

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