

LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND STRUCTURAL PATTERNS OF ENGLISH - VIETNAMESE CODE-MIXING IN GEN Z'S TIKTOK

ĐẶC ĐIỂM NGÔN NGỮ VÀ CẤU TRÚC CỦA HIỆN TƯỢNG TRỘN MÃ ANH - VIỆT TRÊN TIKTOK CỦA GEN Z

Nguyen Thi Thuy Chung^{1,*}, Nguyen Thi Loan²

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ABSTRACT

Under the influence of globalization and the rapid expansion of social media platforms, English is becoming increasingly popular in Vietnam. Many Vietnamese, especially young people and digital content creators, like mixing English terms in their daily communication. This language phenomenon is referred to as code-mixing, which is found to be exceptionally common in youth-oriented digital content on TikTok, a video-sharing platform that has a significant influence on Vietnamese youth. This study aims to find out the patterns and features of English terms mixed in the selected corpus. The findings indicated that there were 406 English lexical items mixed in the 50 volumes of video samples investigated, among which 64.53% are nouns, 20.20% are verbs, 8.13% are adjectives, and 7.14% belong to other word classes. Most of the mixed words are related to modern lifestyle topics.

Keywords: *Linguistic features, structural patterns, Code-mixing, TikTok content, Gen Z Bilingualism, Sociolinguistics.*

TÓM TẮT

Dưới tác động của toàn cầu hóa và sự phát triển mạnh mẽ của mạng xã hội, tiếng Anh ngày càng trở nên phổ biến tại Việt Nam. Nhiều người Việt Nam, đặc biệt là giới trẻ và các nhà sáng tạo nội dung số, thường sử dụng xen tiếng Anh trong giao tiếp hằng ngày. Hiện tượng này, được gọi là trộn mã (code-mixing), xuất hiện phổ biến trong các nội dung TikTok hướng đến giới trẻ. Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu đặc điểm và cấu trúc của các từ tiếng Anh được sử dụng theo hình thức trộn mã trong ngữ liệu được lựa chọn. Kết quả phân tích 50 video cho thấy có 406 đơn vị từ vựng tiếng Anh được sử dụng theo hình thức trộn mã, trong đó danh từ chiếm 64,53%, động từ 20,20%, tính từ 8,13% và các loại từ khác 7,14%. Phần lớn các từ được trộn liên quan đến các chủ đề về lối sống hiện đại.

Từ khóa: *Đặc điểm ngôn ngữ, đặc điểm cấu trúc, trộn mã, nội dung TikTok, Gen Z song ngữ, ngôn ngữ học xã hội.*

¹Thuongmai University, Vietnam

²Post-graduate student, School of Languages and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry, Vietnam

*Email: chung.ntt@tmu.edu.vn

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1. INTRODUCTION

The reason for choosing Vietnamese Generation Z on TikTok as the subject of study is that they are assumed to have the highest frequency of mixing languages in their daily digital environment. Obviously, as English has been taught nationwide in all Vietnamese schools and integrated into modern curricula, this generation has been exposed to English at a very early age. As a result, English has become highly familiar to them. Additionally, driven by the boom in social media, global

entertainment, and Western influence, English has become the preferred language of creative expression in digital media. Gen Z, born at the peak of the digital era, inherently relies on technology and online networks for communication [1]. Consequently, the phenomenon of language mixing (code-mixing) has objectively emerged as a natural consequence of this integration. On TikTok, a dominant platform for Gen Z [2], this practice has manifested as a unique linguistic phenomenon, blending English and Vietnamese across spoken dialogue, on-

screen captions, hashtags, and comment sections. Since the late 20th century, a substantial number of research works have been carried out on English-Vietnamese code-mixing in various contexts, ranging from daily spoken conversations to traditional media. In 2024, Vinh [3] also examined code-mixing as a socio-cultural product driven by globalization and media consumption. Though valuable results have been found, they still leave gaps in research on code-mixing in contemporary multimodal and video-centric digital platforms. Most existing literature focuses primarily on traditional print media, like magazines and newspapers, or purely spoken or written language. There remains a lack of specific empirical research in Vietnam addressing the dynamic, visual, and multi-layered code-mixing practices among Gen Z specifically on TikTok.

For these reasons, this research was carried out to focus on illustrating the structural patterns, linguistic features, and frequency of English-Vietnamese code-mixing in short-form videos created by Vietnamese Gen Z users on TikTok, using corpus observation and descriptive qualitative analysis. To maintain a focused analysis, the scope of this study is limited to 50 publicly available TikTok videos posted between 2024 and 2026 by creators aged 18 to 30, spanning popular genres such as education, lifestyle, career advice, and humor. In order to reach the aim, the research sought to answer two questions as follows:

RQ1: What are the linguistic features that characterize English-Vietnamese code-mixing in TikTok content created by Gen Z users in Vietnam?

RQ2: What structural patterns of code-mixing are employed in Gen Z's TikTok content, and how frequently do they occur?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Code-mixing

Code-mixing refers to the deliberate or habitual integration of elements from two or more languages within a single utterance without altering the topic or overall meaning [4, 5]. Driven by media exposure, social trends, and speaker preferences, this dynamic practice enables bilingual speakers, particularly Gen Z in digital contexts like TikTok, to express identity and communicate creatively [6].

To analyze these hybrid linguistic structures, this study adopts Muysken's (2000) [7] framework, which categorizes code-mixing into three main types: Insertion

Code-mixing: The incorporation of lexical items or constituents from a guest language into the morphosyntactic frame of the base language (e.g., "*Hôm nay, tôi sẽ đi đến bakery*"); Alternation Code-mixing: A switch between distinct syntactic structures from two languages, typically at clause or discourse boundaries (e.g., "*I can't believe it - em đi đâu vậy?*"); Congruent Lexicalization: The most fluid pattern, occurring when two languages intermingle within a fully shared grammatical structure among highly proficient bilinguals (e.g., "*Mình đang planning cho trip đó mà chưa book hotel*").

2.2. Code-switching and Code-mixing

In studies of bilingualism and sociolinguistics, differentiating between code-switching and code-mixing is essential for analyzing multilingual communication. Scholars generally distinguish the two phenomena based on three primary criteria: structural boundaries, grammatical frameworks, and functional intent.

Structurally, code-mixing operates at the intra-sentential level, which involves inserting morphemes, words, or phrases from one language into another within a single sentence. In contrast, code-switching occurs at the inter-sentential level, involving language alternation across larger linguistic units such as clauses, sentences, or conversational turns [5, 8]. Code-mixing and code-switching are distinguished as follows: code-mixing represents an intimate blending of languages within a single syntactic frame, while code-switching strictly respects sentence boundaries [9]. From a grammatical perspective, Fasold [10] argues that the determining factor is the clause's syntax. If foreign words are inserted without altering the dominant language's grammatical structure, it is categorized as code-mixing. Conversely, if successive clauses follow the independent rules of their respective languages, it constitutes code-switching.

Finally, in terms of functional intent, code-switching is often a deliberate choice triggered by shifts in topic, social situation, or interlocutors. Conversely, code-mixing is generally less intentional, reflecting the habitual, natural bilingual practices of fluent speakers. Despite these distinctions, Hamers and Blanc [4] propose that they are best viewed as a linguistic continuum rather than a strict dichotomy.

2.3. Previous Studies

In their study on educational influencers, Pratiwi et al. [11] identified three types of code-mixing commonly used

by these creators on social media from a sociolinguistic and digital discourse perspective: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze ten selected utterances containing Indonesian-English code-mixing. The findings revealed that insertion was the most frequently used type of code-mixing in academic contexts, while alternation and congruent lexicalization occurred less frequently, primarily serving stylistic variation and emphasis. The researchers concluded that language mixing in digital education is not merely a communication strategy but a reflection of real-world linguistic hybridity that enhances student engagement and projects a contemporary educational identity. However, the study was constrained by its small sample size and exclusive focus on formal, educational discourse.

Taking a broader perspective, Cúc and Hà [9] conducted an influential study on youth print media, examining English code-mixing patterns in *Hoa Hoc Tro* magazine. Using a corpus-based quantitative approach, the authors extracted 1,379 English lexical items from six magazine volumes. Their structural analysis showed that over 90% of the mixed terms were nouns, with verbs and adjectives making up the rest. Most of these mixed elements were heavily concentrated around themes of digital technology, pop culture, and Western entertainment. Despite its empirical strengths, the study was constrained by its focus on a single print publication, which could not capture the dynamic, real-time, and multimodal language habits of today's youth on video-based networks. This study was conducted to fill the existing research gap and contribute empirical evidence on the trend of code-mixing among young people on social media platforms.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design of the Study

This study adopted an exploratory descriptive qualitative design, supplemented by basic quantitative frequency analysis, to examine English-Vietnamese code-mixing among Gen Z TikTok creators. The research framework was conducted across three main phases: Framework and Sampling Setup, Data Archiving and Extraction, and Dual-Method Analysis.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The implementation of this study proceeded through three distinct phases. In the first phase, Framework and Sampling Setup, theoretical criteria were established based on Muysken's (2000) typology

[7] and Myers-Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model [12], and 50 representative TikTok videos (users aged from 18-30) were selected using purposive sampling. In the second phase, Data Archiving and Extraction, the selected videos were downloaded using SnapTik/SSSTikTok, verbatim transcripts were generated using TurboScribe, and valid code-mixing instances were identified and filtered in Microsoft Excel after excluding proper nouns, brand names, and hashtags. In the final phase, Dual-Method Analysis, qualitative content analysis was applied to examine syntactic structures, while quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the frequency and percentage distribution of each code-mixing type.

Given the dynamic, non-experimental nature of social media data, this study did not involve a control group, focusing instead on analyzing naturally occurring linguistic behaviors within the selected corpus.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Types of Code-mixing

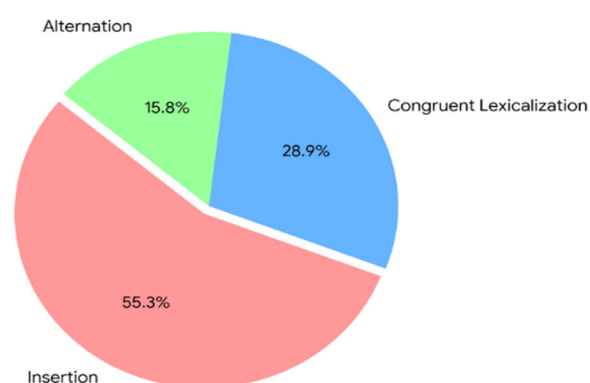


Figure 1. Distribution of code-mixing types

The findings indicated that insertion was the dominant code-mixing pattern (55.3%), primarily involving English nouns (Figure 1). This demonstrated that Gen Z utilized English as a strategic lexical resource for concise and efficient communication without altering the Vietnamese matrix grammar.

Congruent lexicalization accounted for 28.9%, reflecting a flexible structural blending driven by continuous exposure to both languages on modern social platforms. In contrast, alternation occurred least frequently because switching at the clause or sentence level required advanced bilingual competence. Consequently, Gen Z creators heavily preferred simpler structural patterns to minimize cognitive effort and maximize communicative efficiency in fast-paced digital environments.

4.2. Structural Characteristics of Mixed Codes

From Table 1, considering the structure of the mixing code in the language of digital content, we drew the following conclusions: The form of word formation accounted for the largest proportion with 333 instances (82.02%) compared to phrase units of 72 (17.73%), and the rare appearance of sentence units at one instance (0.25%).

Table 1. Classification of Mixing Codes according to Structural Characteristics

Structural units	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Words	333	82.02
Phrases	72	17.73
Sentence	1	0.25
Total	406	100

The reason for this disparity stemmed from the flexibility of the word: their short, versatile form allowed speakers to integrate English terms easily into various Vietnamese contexts. For example: “Nhớ là phải ưu tiên những web có format và giao diện như thi thật...” (VD5) (Remember to prioritize websites with a format and interface like the real exam...). The words “web” and “format” were easy to understand and remember, contributing to the conciseness and rapid information delivery required in digital environments.

Phrase-level mixing appeared less frequently (17.73%). Moreover, speakers demonstrated structural adaptation (Vietnamization) by adjusting English word order to fit Vietnamese matrix grammar. For instance: “Một trang web học writing free mà cực hay...” (VD26) (An interesting website to learn writing free...). “Writing free” was used instead of “free writing”, reflecting the Vietnamese word order in which the noun preceded the adjective. This demonstrated how mixed codes were “Vietnamized” structurally to fit the speaker's thought process.

Finally, the sentence unit was negligible (0.25%), with the only typical example being: “Hi, study with me. Học tiếng anh nhé!” (VD19) (“Hi, study with me. Let's study English!”). Mixing at the sentence level usually occurred when the speaker wanted to switch between two complete language systems for stylistic effect, create emphasis, express emotions, or make the message sound more engaging and natural to bilingual audiences.

4.3. Characteristics of Mixed Word Classes

Through the synthesis of 50 video data samples, a total of 406 instances of English code-mixing were identified within Vietnamese discourse. The quantitative analysis reveals a distinct hierarchy in the usage of word

classes. The Table 2 shows details of English lexical items added in the 50 videos containing code-mixing.

Table 2. Patterns of Code-mixing

Word Class	Number of codes	(%)
Noun	262	64.53
Verb	82	20.20
Adjective	33	8.13
Others	29	7.14
Total	406	100

From Table 2, it was evident that Nouns were the most frequently mixed word class, accounting for 262 instances (64.53%). These nouns functioned as essential “content words” carrying specialized technical or cultural meanings, which aligned with long-standing patterns in Vietnamese media.

Verbs formed the second largest category (20.20%), describing professional actions or platform interactions, while adjectives (8.13%) and other classes comprised minor shares.

In conclusion, content-bearing words accounted for over 92% of the dataset. Consistent with Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model, creators inserted these English content morphemes into the Vietnamese matrix framework to achieve lexical precision and brevity, thereby optimizing communicative efficiency while projecting a modern bilingual identity.

4.4. Distribution of Mixed Words in Videos

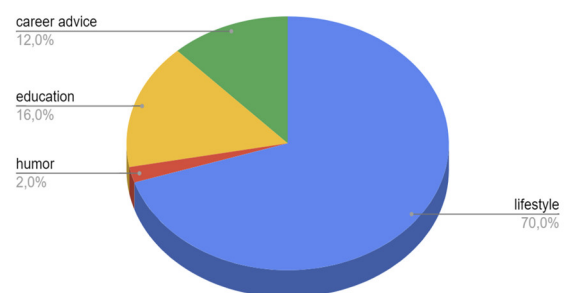


Figure 2. Distribution of code-mixing across content categories

The structural distribution of code-mixing is heavily genre-dependent, occurring predominantly in lifestyle videos (70%) compared to education (16%), career advice (12%), and humor (2%).

In lifestyle content, creators frequently utilize English terms (e.g., “routine,” “makeup,” “self-care”) to project a modern, trendy persona, enhance expressiveness, and connect with a digitally active, bilingual Gen Z audience. Conversely, in informative domains such as education and

career advice, creators prioritize Vietnamese to ensure clarity and comprehension. However, familiar, specialized academic and professional terms (e.g., “deadline,” “presentation,” “CV”) are still retained in English.

Overall, this uneven distribution demonstrates that English-Vietnamese code-mixing is not random, but is strategically guided by the specific topic, communicative purpose, and expectations of the target audience to optimize both conciseness and content appeal.

4.5. Overview Description and Discussion of Mixed Word Classes

4.5.1. Nouns

Table 3. Most Frequent Code-mixing Phenomena

No.	Code-mixing phenomena	Quantity	% (N = 262)
1	video	16	6.11
2	vlog	15	5.73
3	content	10	3.82
4	marketing	8	3.05
5	task	7	2.67
6	deadline	6	2.29
7	skincare	6	2.29
8	grammar	4	1.53

The quantitative analysis of the 50-video corpus which strictly excluded proper nouns, brand names, and program titles revealed that nouns were the most frequently code-mixed word class. As seen in Table 3, high-frequency terms such as “video” (6.11%) and “vlog” (5.73%) dominated the dataset, serving as direct, concise substitutes for lengthy Vietnamese descriptive expressions when designating media content formats (“đoạn phim ngắn” và “thước phim ngắn về cuộc sống hàng ngày”). Furthermore, vocabulary associated with contemporary workplace culture, including “content,” “marketing,” “task,” and “deadline,” appeared with notable frequency. Beyond offering brevity and communicative efficiency in short-form digital media, these lexical choices reflected the evolving professional cultural identity and routine linguistic practices of Gen Z content creators.

Linguistically, the inserted English nouns underwent systematic structural adaptation to align with the grammatical rules of the Vietnamese matrix language. First, in accordance with the transnumeral nature of Vietnamese nouns, code-mixed English terms omitted plural markers (-s or -es) and retained invariant singular forms. This occurred consistently even when the nouns were preceded by explicit quantity markers or collective

quantifiers, as demonstrated in expressions like “level khác nhau từ A2 - C1” or “cả đồng task.”

Second, the inserted nouns were fully assimilated into native Vietnamese noun-phrase structures rather than adhering to English article conventions. Instead of using English articles such as a, an, or the, creators integrated these foreign words using Vietnamese classifiers and demonstratives. This grammaticalization was evident in constructions like “con baby cushion này” and “chiếc Vlog,” where classifiers (con, chiếc) and demonstratives (này) governed the English lexical items.

Ultimately, while Gen Z creators strategically utilized English nouns to enhance expressiveness, brevity, and modern appeal, these foreign elements were strictly governed by Vietnamese syntactic rules, ensuring that the underlying matrix grammar remained fundamentally Vietnamese.

4.5.2. Verbs

English verbs accounted for 82 out of 406 instances (20.20%). An examination of the morphological characteristics indicates that the majority of these inserted verbs occur in their base or bare infinitive forms (the standard root form without the particle “to”), rather than being inflected for the third-person singular, past tense, or past participle forms. Creators frequently selected these verbs to convey digital platform actions (“upload,” “edit”), workplace workflows (“confirm,” “double check”), and youth lifestyle transactions (“order,” “ship”), prioritizing them for concise, modern, and specialized expression.

Linguistically, these embedded English verbs adapted completely to the analytical, non-inflectional structure of the Vietnamese matrix language. In passive constructions, the verbs retained their bare root forms rather than adopting English past-participle inflections.

Example 1: “Sau khi mà nó được upload lên mình sẽ chọn mở bằng Google tài liệu.” (VD34)

(After it is uploaded, I will choose to open it with Google Docs.)

Example 1 employs the Vietnamese passive marker “được” to indicate a passive construction. In this sentence, the pronoun “nó” (it) functions as the entity that receives the action. According to standard English grammar, the verb “upload” in a passive context should be accompanied by the auxiliary verb “be” and appear in its past participle form, such as “is uploaded” or “has been uploaded”.

However, in this example, although the passive meaning and structure are clearly expressed through Vietnamese, the English word “upload” remains in its base form without any morphological modification. It functions like a typical Vietnamese verb, which does not require tense marking or inflection. This demonstrates that the Vietnamese syntactic framework governs the entire clause, causing the English lexical item to follow Vietnamese grammatical rules rather than the inflectional requirements of English.

Furthermore, unlike English, Vietnamese verbs do not change form to express tense or grammatical function. Instead, temporal reference and event meaning are conveyed through time adverbials, aspect markers such as “đã” (past/perfective), “đang” (progressive), “sẽ” (future), and “chưa” (not yet), or are inferred from the communicative context.

Example 2: Hôm nay mình sẽ share cho mọi người một công cụ học ngoại ngữ xịn sò cho team mê video nha. (VD7)

(Today, I am going to share a really awesome language-learning tool for those of you who love learning through videos!)

4.5.3. Adjectives

English adjectives constituted 8.13% (33 instances) of the code-mixed corpus, consisting primarily of short, one- or two-syllable tokens such as “chill,” “basic,” “free,” and “viral.” These adjectives have become widely used in contemporary digital communication because they carry a distinctive style, are easy to use in interaction, and create a sense of modernity in discourse.

Linguistically, the embedded English adjectives systematically conformed to Vietnamese matrix grammar across three key dimensions. First, rather than preceding nouns as required by English syntax, inserted adjectives consistently followed Vietnamese noun phrases to modify them, as seen in “món quà luxury” or “writing free” (violating standard English order). Second, in predicate positions, English adjectives appeared directly after subjects without copular verbs such as “to be” (e.g., “video unbox của tui flop quá”), aligning with Vietnamese stative verb properties where adjectives function as predicates without linking verbs. Third, several English nouns underwent a functional shift to act as adjectival modifiers when placed after Vietnamese nouns, exemplified by “con baby cushion” and “ngành trend.” In sum, while English adjectives enhanced stylistic expressiveness and discourse modernity, their syntactic placement and grammatical behavior were entirely governed by Vietnamese language rules.

4.6. Vietnamization of English Vocabulary

In TikTok videos, Gen Z content creators adapted English lexical items through phonetic naturalization, semantic hybridization, and structural truncation. First, creators altered English words phonetically and orthographically to match Vietnamese sound patterns and playful conversational styles, such as turning “TikTok” into “top top” or “vlog” into “vê lôc”. Second, they created localized compounds through semantic hybridization, combining English terms with native metaphors.

Example 3: “Nếu được trùng sinh, anh sẽ chọn làm đại gia đu bai chứ không chọn làm con trâu content lương năm triệu như này đâu.” (VD50)

(If I were reborn, I would choose to be a billionaire in Dubai instead of being a content workhorse with a 5 million salary like this.)

Example 3 showcases a more advanced level of “Vietnamization” through semantic hybridization: “con trâu content”. Here, the English abstract noun “content” is juxtaposed with the traditional Vietnamese metaphor “con trâu” (symbolizing hard, exhausting labor). Instead of using the full English term “hardworking content creator” or a pure Vietnamese equivalent like “người làm nội dung vất vả”, Gen Z creates a localized compound. These adapted forms blur the line between code-mixing and borrowing, requiring bilingual competence and digital subculture knowledge to decode.

Finally, aligning with Vietnamese monosyllabic speech preferences, creators aggressively shortened multi-syllabic phrases or job roles into single-syllable terms such as “job” and “task”. This reduction minimized cognitive load, accelerated delivery, and enhanced discourse naturalness in fast-paced video contexts.

4.7. Vocabulary Combined Between English and Vietnamese

Gen Z TikTok creators demonstrated high morphological creativity by hybridizing English affixes with Vietnamese roots, such as appending the suffix “-er” to create localized terms like “HANUer”. Overall, while English lexical items were frequently incorporated, English grammatical rules were largely discarded in favor of systematic “Vietnamization”. Specifically, nouns dropped plural inflections (s/es) and articles, verbs remained in bare root forms without tense or person conjugation, and adjectives followed Vietnamese post-nominal word order while functioning without linking verbs. Furthermore, spelling and morphological structures were playfully

adapted to align with native phonetics and monosyllabic speech preferences. Ultimately, while these foreign elements enhanced expressiveness and modern identity, all code-mixed units remained strictly governed by Vietnamese matrix grammar.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated English-Vietnamese code-mixing among Gen Z TikTok creators across 50 videos (2024 - 2026), analyzing 406 instances through Muysken's typology and Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model. Quantitatively, insertion was the dominant pattern (55.3%), followed by congruent lexicalization (28.9%) and alternation. Structurally, word level mixing heavily dominated (82.02%) over phrases (17.73%) and sentences (0.25%), optimizing communicative speed in digital environments.

Grammatically, nouns formed the primary word class (64.53%), followed by verbs (20.20%) and adjectives (8.13%), with occurrences clustering heavily in lifestyle content. Crucially, embedded English elements underwent systematic "Vietnamization" to align with matrix grammar: nouns became transnumeral and article-free, verbs remained uninflected in bare forms, and adjectives adopted post-nominal word order. Additionally, creators formed novel hybrid words and applied Vietnamese orthographic adaptations.

However, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size and dataset were relatively limited, as the study focused on a specific group of video content. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to the broader population of content creators across different digital platforms. Secondly, regarding coding reliability, the identification and classification of code-mixing instances relied mainly on the researcher's qualitative judgment. Without an independent secondary coder to calculate inter-rater reliability, some subjectivity may remain. Finally, the transcription process relied on automated speech recognition using TurboScribe. Although all transcripts were manually cross-checked, the automated speech to text tool could still misinterpret words in segments with background noise, fast speech, or unclear pronunciation, potentially causing minor errors in the initial raw data.

This paper focuses exclusively on the phenomenon of code-mixing in TikTok videos. Therefore, future research could be extended in two directions. The first direction is to investigate English code-mixing in magazines and entertainment news targeting young audiences in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of

code-mixing in the written press. The second direction is to examine this phenomenon in the spoken language of news programs or other media intended for young people, such as radio and television. The findings of these studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the use of English code-mixing across mass media in general.

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THÔNG TIN TÁC GIẢ

Nguyễn Thị Thủy Chung¹, Nguyễn Thị Loan²

¹Trường Đại học Thương mại

²Học viên cao học, Trường Ngoại ngữ - Du lịch, Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội