

A Study of Paraguayan Athletes' Instagram Posts: What They Can Tell Us about the Effects of Social Media on Spanish-English Code-Switching in South America

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how Instagram influences the integration of English into everyday digital communication among Paraguayan athletes and their fans. Through a qualitative analysis of a small sample of 20 Instagram posts from professional Paraguayan athletes, the study identifies frequent instances of code-switching and English word use within primarily Spanish-language contexts. Drawing on linguistic and sociocultural frameworks, the research highlights how athletes sometimes employ English strategically to express identity, emotion, and global affiliation. The findings reveal that Instagram may function as a platform where English expressions circulate among athletes and their followers, as fans imitate athletes' language use, blending English and Spanish in their own posts. Rather than making claims about national linguistic trends, the findings provide an exploratory snapshot of language use within a specific digital sports community. This process reflects broader patterns of globalization, digital communication, and linguistic adaptation, showing that social media has become a driving force in reshaping language practices and promoting hybrid forms such as Spanglish within Paraguay's sports communities.

Keywords: Code-switching; Spanglish; Paraguayan; Athletics; Instagram; Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms play an important role in shaping contemporary language practices. In multilingual contexts, digital environments frequently encourage code-switching and hybrid language use, particularly among highly visible public figures. Within sports communities, professional athletes function not only as athletic role models but also as linguistic influencers

whose communication may shape the practices of their followers. Although prior research has examined code-switching and English use in digital communication, limited scholarship has explored how Paraguayan athletes incorporate English into primarily Spanish-language social media posts. Paraguay presents a distinctive sociolinguistic context in which Spanish and Guaraní are official languages, while English carries strong symbolic value in global sports and media. "Paraguay is characterized by widespread societal bilingualism in Spanish and Guaraní, with both languages functioning in complementary domains. (1)"

Paraguayan athletes who participate in international competitions often engage with global audiences online and position them as mediators between local linguistic practices and global English influence. This study

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addresses this gap by analyzing English insertions in Spanish-language Instagram posts by professional Paraguayan athletes. The aims are to identify patterns of English use, examine the communicative and identity-related functions of code-switching, and consider how such practices may influence digital language use within Paraguayan sports communities. Linguists coined the term code-switching for switching between languages. For purposes of this paper, the terms code-switching and code-mixing are used interchangeably, with code-switching referring to both, as both refer to the switching or alternation between two or more languages by the speaker in an exchange. However, the terms mean different things in sociolinguistics depending on the focus of the research.

Languages continuously evolve, and digital communication has accelerated processes of linguistic adaptation and code-switching. Research shows that social media environments encourage users to mix languages strategically to express identity, emotion, and affiliation with broader audiences. Within sports communities, professional athletes often function as linguistic influencers whose online communication may shape the practices of their followers. Zebua et al. collected and analyzed data from Instagram posts focused on instances of code-mixing and the context in which it occurred (2). They found that code-mixing served multiple purposes, such as emphasizing certain messages, expressing identity, and engaging with a broader audience. Now that social media has become a dominant platform for communication, its influence changed how language is spoken notably in sports communities with fans and athletes. The article "Streetslang" states that "social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have given players a direct connection to their fans, allowing slang to spread faster than ever. (3)" Another article claims that "many people of Indonesia write their captions in English, which is not their common language, showing how influencers changed the way Indonesian people do things and how they change their language. (4)" This is due to the impact of athlete influencers as they incorporate English into their posts. This leads to fans learning the meaning of English expressions from the posts of the athletes they follow, and in turn, the fans begin to incorporate these English language expressions into their own language and utilize them in their own Instagram posts. For example, in Paraguay, there has been a significant growth in the usage of English by non-native English speakers, particularly on Instagram. This has

allowed for fans to interact on social media in English and mix Spanish with English. Therefore, Instagram has influenced the use of English in everyday life in non-English speaking communities. This research project investigates how English is integrated into everyday digital communication by Paraguayan athletes and sports fans, and reflects broader themes of globalization, identity, and linguistic adaptation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars studying digital communication have increasingly emphasized the relationship between social media, globalization, and language practices. One important theme in this research is the role of code-switching as a form of identity performance in digital spaces. Androustopoulos argues that language choice on social media platforms is closely tied to the performance of identity, particularly in multilingual contexts where users strategically alternate between languages to position themselves socially (5). In digital environments such as Instagram, code-switching allows users to construct identities that connect local cultural practices with global audiences. Within sports communities, athletes who maintain large social media following may function as linguistic influencers whose communication practices shape how their fans engage with language online. When Paraguayan athletes incorporate English expressions into primarily Spanish posts, they are not simply translating or borrowing words, but appear to be actively performing identities associated with global sports culture.

A second theme emerging in the literature concerns the strategic and creative nature of code-switching in digital communication. Tagg emphasizes that language use in digital messaging environments is rarely random; instead, users employ linguistic mixing to achieve specific communicative effects such as humor, emphasis, or emotional expression (6). This insight helps explain why English words frequently appear in otherwise Spanish-language posts within sports communities. Short expressions such as "goal," "win," or "legend" often carry symbolic value associated with international sports culture and are therefore particularly effective in social media communication. In this way, code-switching becomes a creative linguistic resource that allows users to express affiliation with broader cultural networks while maintaining their local linguistic identity.

A third strand of scholarship focuses on the global circulation of English and its adaptation in local contexts.

Pennycook conceptualizes English as a performative resource that is constantly reshaped through global cultural practices (7). Rather than being adopted passively, English is reinterpreted and re-performed in ways that reflect local meanings and identities. Within sports communities on Instagram, this process becomes visible when athletes use English phrases such as “Let’s go” or “Exciting news” in posts directed at largely Spanish-speaking audiences. These expressions signal participation in global sports discourse while simultaneously becoming integrated into local digital communication practices.

Closely related to this process is the role of youth culture and social influence in linguistic change. Bailey and Reyes argue that young people frequently construct their identities by adopting linguistic practices associated with admired public figures, including celebrities and athletes (8). In digital sports communities, this dynamic is particularly visible, as fans often imitate the language patterns of the athlete they follow online. When Paraguayan fans incorporate English expressions such as “win,” “dream,” or “team” into their captions and comments, they seem to be engaging in the same identity-building processes described by Bailey and Reyes (8). Through repeated exposure to athlete-generated content, these linguistic practices circulate within the community and gradually become normalized forms of expression.

Together, these strands of research highlight how social media platforms create environments where language, identity, and globalization intersect. Code-switching functions not only as a linguistic phenomenon, but also as a social practice through which users signal affiliation, prestige, and cultural belonging. Building on these frameworks, the present study examines how Paraguayan athletes incorporate English into Spanish-language Instagram posts and how these practices may

influence the language use of their followers within digital sports communities.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employed a qualitative content analysis to examine the use of English and code-switching in Instagram posts by professional athletes. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select a smaller number of professional athletes who post primarily in Spanish and maintain active public Instagram accounts. The sample included athletes with significant public visibility and substantial online followings. From these accounts, a total of 20 Instagram posts were selected for analysis. Posts were drawn from a defined time period and were required to contain written captions. Posts consisting solely of images or videos without captions, as well as posts written entirely in English, were excluded. All selected posts were manually archived and compiled into a dataset. For each post, the account handle, the athlete’s name, and the full caption text were recorded. English lexical items or expressions embedded within predominantly Spanish captions were identified and extracted. Instances of code-switching were identified using established sociolinguistic definitions, focusing on the insertion of English words or phrases within Spanish discourse. The English elements were then categorized (e.g., single-word insertions, multi-word phrases, hashtags, brand-related terms). The same coding framework was applied consistently across all 20 posts to ensure transparency and replicability of the analysis.

Table 1 presents each Instagram post, including the account handle, the athlete’s name, a representative excerpt from the post (primarily in Spanish with some mixed language), and the specific English words used.

Table 1. Frequency and occurrence of English words and expressions in Instagram posts by professional Paraguayan athletes, primarily written in Spanish and directed toward a Spanish-speaking audience.

Instagram Account	Athlete	Caption Excerpt	English Expressions
richardsanchez	Richard Sanchez	Que sea el comienzo de grandes cosas. VAMOOOS RACING.	RACING
richardsanchez	Richard Sanchez	Pin Pon con @richardsanchez El Pitbull 🐶🍷	El Pitbull
richardsanchez	Richard Sanchez	Cuando vengo a Los Ángeles siempre vengo a Movita Juice bar...smoothies y açai bowls.	Movita Juice bar...smoothies...bowls
julietagranada	Julieta Granada	Exciting news!!! ...	Exciting news!!!

Continued Table 1. Frequency and occurrence of English words and expressions in Instagram posts by professional Paraguayan athletes, primarily written in Spanish and directed toward a Spanish-speaking audience.

Instagram Account	Athlete	Caption Excerpt	English Expressions
julietagranada	Julieta Granada	Thanks... for supporting the LPGA! Huge thanks to...for getting me ready to compete! Esta semana volví a competir..	Thanks for supporting the LPGA!... for getting me ready to compete
julietagranada	Julieta Granada	Happy Mother's Day!!! Blessed to be a mom to this Chiquita.. love u @giaroseg21 !!	Happy Mother's Day!!! Blessed to be a mom to this.. love u
julietagranada	Julieta Granada	Gracias por hacerme parte de Congrats on winning the gold medal...	Congrats on winning the gold medal
julietagranada	Julieta Granada	Thank u... and mentors! Let's see what I got!!... #crossoverintobusiness en @harvardhbs si si dije...	Thank u and mentors! Let's see what I got
julietagranada	Julieta Granada	Thank u Gia! I 🍀🍀🍀 loveee u!! 🍀🍀 Muchas gracias Diosito...	Thank u Gia! I loveee u
JoshuaDuerseken	Joshua Duerseken	This is just the beginning we will keep pushing... PODIO. PUNTAS. GRACIAS	This is just the beginning we will keep pushing
xeniahiebert	Xenia Hiebert Ginter	Photo dump de diciembre	Photo dump
xeniahiebert	Xenia Hiebert Ginter	Thank you for having me...Mas que orgullosa de poder representar a mi querido pais	Thank you for having me
xeniahiebert	Xenia Hiebert Ginter	Campeona Nacional...Season 25' coming in	Season 25' coming in
xeniahiebert	Xenia Hiebert Ginter	Sunday Funday...Equipo	Sunday Funday
renatoprono	Renato Prono	Date night ❤️ con regalo adelantado del dia del padre	Date night
julioenciso.33	Julio Enciso	Camisetas autografiadas por #Julio - Meet & Greet	Meet & Greet
Julioenciso.33	Julio Enciso	Enjoying the day 🙌🙌. Disfrutando el día	Enjoying the day
julioenciso.33	Julio Enciso	El sueño 🙌 vamos @officialbhafc 🙌❤️ The dream 🙌 let's go @officialbhafc 🙌❤️	The dream let's go
Giulipolettic	Giuliana Poletti Corrales	On Repeat...falta el fisico en arena que siempre es el peor de todos	On Repeat
diegogomez08_	Diego Gomez	Ahora enfocado para otro objetivo PY ❤️ Grateful to God, for finishing my first season in the best way and for my first goal	Grateful to God, for finishing my first season in the best way and for my first goal
diegogomez08_	Diego Gomez	another dream come true Gracias Dios 🙌🌍❤️.	another dream come true

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

We can see from the data presented here that many of these influencers post extensively about their everyday life. The table also shows the selected professional Paraguayan athletes' incorporation of code-switching in their Instagram posts. The content of the posts is also quite diverse. The athletes communicate about the highs and lows in their personal and professional lives, their athletic success, as well as the challenges they face on a daily basis. It appears that they are posting to reveal aspects of their everyday lives to their fans and connect with them. Through this engagement, there are indications that fans may be influenced by the athletes' language use and may incorporate English into their own comments and posts. This suggests a possible pattern in which athletes' language practices contribute to similar practices among their audiences.

Looking closely at the data, English words appear in a range of different contexts. Some are related to sports performance, such as "RACING" in Richard Sanchez's post or "Season 25' coming in" from Xenia Hiebert Ginter. Others are motivational or celebratory, like Julio Enciso's "The dream let's go" or Diego Gomez's "Another dream come true." Still others are casual lifestyle posts that mix in English phrases such as "enjoying the day," "Sunday Funday," or "Photo dump." This variety demonstrates that the use of English is not restricted to one narrow domain like professional competition, but instead appears across professional, personal, and social spheres of communication. As Androutsopoulos (5) argues, code-switching is often a way to perform identity, and here there is an impression that the athletes use English to perform an identity that connects them to a globalized lifestyle, not just the sports field. This is consistent with Voutilainen, who showed that in Finnish disc golf communities, English words frequently appear in sports-related posts, highlighting that sports contexts often trigger English code-switching regardless of country (9).

An important observation is the use of English brand names and event labels. For example, Julieta Granada references the LPGA in her posts, and Julio Enciso includes "Meet & Greet." These references demonstrate how athletes participate in the international circuits where English is the dominant language. Using English terms may signal affiliation with global institutions and audiences. Fans who see these posts encounter English words that are tied to prestige, success, and international recognition. Following Pennycook (7), this shows how English is not simply "borrowed" but is re-performed

in ways that display a cosmopolitan, professional identity. Similar findings appear in Subali, who analyzed Indonesian football commentary and found that English insertions were used to emphasize excitement and create group identity—mirroring the same role English plays in Paraguayan athletes' Instagram posts (10).

The influence on fans is especially visible when we consider imitation. Just as Zebua et al. found in their study of Indonesian Instagram users, Paraguayan fans are exposed to repeated patterns of English insertions and begin to reproduce them in their own posts and comments (2). For instance, when Julio Enciso posts "The dream let's go," fans often reply with English comments such as "Goal machine," "Congrats bro," or "Legend." These responses illustrate that English may spread through Instagram interactions as users adopt linguistic patterns from admired figures. Bailey and Reyes describe how youth construct their identities by adopting linguistic practices from admired figures, which aligns with the patterns observed here (7). Likewise, Pérez-Sabater demonstrated that football fans on Facebook often code-switched to English in their comments when celebrating their teams, suggesting that sports communities online consistently use English to perform identity and solidarity (11).

It is also important to note the strategic nature of code-switching. Tagg emphasizes that code-switching in digital communication is not random, but purposeful (6). Athletes appear to choose English words that carry strong meanings—such as "win," "dream," or "Happy Mother's Day"—because they resonate with audiences both locally and globally. The use of English instead of Spanish may signal modernity and global orientation. Fans seem to adopt similar strategies producing hybrid captions such as "Vamos team!" or "Qué win más épico," which suggests a creative alignment between local identity and global sports culture. Daulay et al. found similar motivation on Instagram and TikTok in Indonesia, where users engaged in code-switching to project prestige and keep up with linguistic trends, reinforcing that these practices may reflect broader social media trends (12).

Another layer of analysis is how English interacts with emotion and intimacy in these posts. Some of the English phrases are highly emotional, like Julieta Granada's "Happy Mother's Day!!! Blessed to be a mom." Others show gratitude or motivation, such as "Thanks for supporting the LPGA" or "Grateful to God, for finishing my first season in the best way." This suggests that English may be used for high-impact moments, including celebration and personal reflection. By using English in

these contexts, athletes may be aiming to reach broader audiences or emphasize emotional significance. Fans, in turn, appear to mirror this usage in their own expressions. Alnadi found a similar phenomenon in gaming chats, where Jordanian gamers switched to English for humor and strong emotional expressions, suggesting that digital communities often reach for English when they want to add impact or emphasize feelings (13).

In addition, Instagram itself likely plays a role in amplifying the visibility of English. The platform is designed for global sharing, hashtags, and visibility beyond national borders. Street slang (3) argues that platforms like Instagram accelerate the spread of slang, and in Paraguay, they accelerate the spread of English words embedded in Spanish. When an athlete uses the hashtag #team or #win, it becomes searchable and visible to audiences worldwide. This may incentivize fans to adopt similar language practices in order to increase visibility. Eisenstein et al. demonstrated how new words diffuse quickly across networks on Twitter, supporting the argument that English expressions posted by Paraguayan athletes are likely to spread rapidly through Instagram's networked design (14). The posts of Julio Enciso and Renato Prono illustrate this well. Enciso's "The dream let's go" combines Spanish pride with English ambition, making this message resonate both in Paraguay and abroad. Prono uses humor and short English words like "Date night" to connect with his fans, showing how even light-hearted English insertions can spread. These examples confirm Pennycook's (7) idea of English as performative: athletes and fans are not passively using English, they are actively shaping and reinterpreting it in their posts.

Overall, the analysis of the data and the literature points to the same conclusion: Instagram normalizes the mixing of English and Spanish in Paraguay's digital sports community. It appears that athletes strategically code-switch to show global belonging, and fans imitate them to signal identity and connection. This cycle demonstrates how English is spreading in Paraguay not just through schools or formal education, but through everyday digital communication. As Androutsopoulos (5) argues, language choice online is always tied to identity and performance, and in this case, it shows how English is becoming part of Paraguayan digital culture through sports.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study examines how Paraguayan professional athletes incorporate English into primarily

Spanish-language Instagram posts. The analysis identified recurring patterns of code-switching in motivational, celebratory, emotional, and branding contexts. English appears to function as a performative resource that signals global affiliation and hybrid digital identity within digital sports communities. At the same time, English usage may reflect stylistic creativity, emotional emphasis, and platform-specific communication norms rather than broad societal language transformation. Future research could expand the dataset, systematically analyze fan comments, and incorporate interviews to better understand motivations behind digital code-switching practices. Quantitative research could also determine whether such patterns increase over time.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work

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