

Language Transformation in Social Media and Its Impact on the Linguistic Identity of Indonesian Youth

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Abstract—The rapid growth of social media in the past decade has accelerated the transformation of linguistic practices among Indonesian youth. This paper examines how language change (slang lexicon, abbreviation, orthographic play, code-switching), stylistic practice, and identity indexicality take place across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X. Anchored in sociolinguistic frameworks—particularly the principles of identity as an interactional construct (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) and the 'third wave' approach to variation focusing on social meaning and style (Eckert, 2012, pp. 87–93)—this study integrates a selective literature review with illustrative secondary data. Findings highlight three key points. First, mediatization fosters vernacularization and limited destandardization in the digital sphere, marked by acronymization (e.g., **japri*, **gercep*, **bucin**), English borrowings (**vibe*, **bestie**), and graphic play (mixed capitalization, emoji) functioning as markers of intimacy and contemporaneity. Second, these linguistic features serve as stylistic indexes to project personae (trendy, casual, humorous, in-group), strengthening peer solidarity while producing intergenerational contrasts. Third, the impact on Standard Indonesian is ambivalent: on the one hand, it enriches the linguistic repertoire and digital literacy; on the other, it may blur formal norms if not mediated through language awareness. Recommendations emphasize contextualized digital literacy and politeness pedagogy (domain-based register use), the integration of authentic social media examples into teaching materials, and further corpus-based research on the circulation of viral terms across platforms and regions.

Index Terms—sociolinguistics, social media, language identity, youth language, linguistic variation

I. INTRODUCTION

As the national language, Indonesian plays a vital role in shaping national identity, fostering unity, and serving as a means of cross-ethnic and cross-cultural communication. However, in the last two decades, the development of digital technology and the massive penetration of social media have given rise to new dynamics in the language practices of the younger generation. According to a 2024 survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 221.6 million people, or 79.5% of the total population (APJII, 2024, p. 12). The majority of active social media users are teenagers and young adults (aged 15–30), which indirectly makes social media the main arena for language transformation.

The urgency of this discussion lies in the fact that social media is not merely a space for communication, but also an arena for the construction of social identity. As previous studies indicate, social media texts are not neutral but are continuously reinterpreted and negotiated within online interactions, reflecting deeper social meanings (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). The language used by the younger generation on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X (Twitter) often displays new forms that are far from the standard norms of Indonesian. This phenomenon is in line with the views of Bucholtz and Hall (2005, pp. 586–590) that linguistic identity is relational and emergent, formed through interaction and characterized by the use of certain styles of language. The changes in language style that appear on social media signify not only linguistic creativity but also the process of forming individual and group identities.

From a contemporary sociolinguistic perspective, particularly the “third wave” approach to language variation studies, language change among the younger generation cannot be viewed solely as a deviation, but rather as a social practice laden with meaning (Eckert, 2012, pp. 87–93). However, what is concerning is when such linguistic innovations erode the understanding of proper and correct Indonesian, leading to a degradation of language norms in formal and academic settings. Androutsopoulos (2014, pp. 10–16) refers to this phenomenon as digital vernacularization, where non-standard speech dominates online communication and slowly displaces standard speech.

Many cases indicate the transformation of the language of the younger generation on social media. First, the use of acronyms and abbreviations in online conversations is becoming more widespread. Words such as *bucin* (*budak cinta* or slave of love), *mager* (*malas gerak* or lazy to move), *gercep* (*gerak cepat* or move fast), and *japri* (*jalur pribadi* or private channel) are examples of creative shortening that serve to speed up communication but ignore systematic language structures. When these terms are used excessively, the younger generation tends to be more accustomed to using acronyms than standard vocabulary (Putri et al., 2023, pp. 507–510).

Based on the above description, several issues have been identified, such as:

1. How does language transformation in social media affect the linguistic identity of Indonesia's younger generation?
2. To what extent do new linguistic forms (slang, acronyms, code-mixing, spelling games) contribute to shifts in Indonesian language norms?
3. What are the negative impacts of this phenomenon on the development of the Indonesian language in academic and formal settings?
4. How can digital and linguistic literacy strategies be developed to balance linguistic creativity with the preservation of standard norms?

These questions are important because they concern the sustainability of the Indonesian language as the national language, as well as the challenge of maintaining national cultural identity amid globalization.

This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this paper expands our understanding of how language transforms in the digital context and how linguistic identity is formed through the language practices of the younger generation. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a basis for designing more contextual language and digital literacy policies, such as integrating authentic examples from social media into Indonesian language learning in schools. Thus, the younger generation will not only be able to use language appropriately in context, but also uphold standard linguistic norms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Basic Concepts of Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is the field of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. According to Holmes (2013, p. 2), sociolinguistics examines how language is used in various social contexts and how social factors such as age, gender, social class, and ethnicity influence language choice. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015, p. 3) emphasize that language variation is not a deviation, but a natural manifestation of language use in a heterogeneous society. Thus, language transformation in social media can be understood as part of language variation influenced by social, cultural, and technological factors.

In Indonesia, Chaer and Agustina (2010, p. 5) refer to sociolinguistics as the science that discusses differences in language variation based on speakers, situations, and communication purposes. In the context of social media, this variation can be seen in the use of slang, acronyms, and mixed codes that dominate the conversations of the younger generation.

B. Language, Identity, and Social Interaction

In addition to being a means of communication, language is also a symbol of social identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005, pp. 586–590) formulated five principles of linguistic identity analysis: (1) identity is emergent in interaction, (2) relational, (3) indexical, (4) contextualizable, and (5) participatory. With this framework, the language used by the younger generation on social media can be understood as a way for them to build their persona and assert their membership in a community with the same social status as the younger generation, which has language characteristics and variations that can identify them as the younger generation. Eckert (2012, pp. 93–97), through the theory of “third wave variation,” emphasizes that young people's language choices are not only phonological or lexical differences, but also stylistic strategies to display certain social identities, such as “cool,” “up to date,” or “ironic” identities.

C. Language Transformation in the Digital Age and Social Media

Social media has become a catalyst for language transformation. Androutsopoulos (2014, pp. 10–16) refers to this phenomenon as “mediatization,” defined as the process by which media becomes not only a means of disseminating messages but also a space for producing new forms of language. The language used on social media tends to be informal, creative, and expressive; however, it also carries the risk of marginalizing standard language norms. Moreover, studies show that social media has increasingly become a primary source of information for young people, reinforcing its role as both a communication tool and a driver of linguistic transformation (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a).

In Indonesia, Putri et al. (2023, pp. 507–510) found that slang trends on social media contributed to the younger generation's decreased preference for standard Indonesian, particularly in semi-formal contexts.

Slang is the most dominant form of language variation on social media. According to Eble (2012, p. 15), young people use slang to build group solidarity and distinguish themselves from other groups. In the Indonesian context, terms such as *bucin*, *mager*, *gabut*, *halu*, and *gercep* symbolize the identity of the digital generation.

Code-mixing is also becoming increasingly prevalent. Poplack (1980, p. 585) states that code-mixing is a linguistic strategy in which speakers use two languages to reinforce a message. On social media, the younger generation often uses English code-mixing to appear modern and trendy (Kusuma, 2024, pp. 20–22).

D. Language Variation, Slang, and Code-Mixing Among the Younger Generation

Slang and colloquial language are the most dominant forms of language variation on social media. According to Eble (2012, p. 15), slang is used by young people to build group solidarity and mark differences with other groups. In the Indonesian context, terms such as *bucin*, *mager*, *gabut*, *halu*, and *gercep* serve as symbols of the digital generation's identity.

The phenomenon of code-mixing is also becoming increasingly prevalent. Poplack (1980, p. 585) states that code-mixing is a linguistic strategy that arises when speakers use two languages to reinforce a message. On social media, the younger generation often uses mixed English code to give a modern and trendy impression (Kusuma, 2024, pp. 20–22).

E. Mediatization, Vernacularization, and Digital Language Style

Androutsopoulos (2014, pp. 21–24) explains that social media encourages vernacularization, namely the increased use of non-standard varieties in digital communication. This can be seen in the shortening of words (*japri*, *mantul*, *cuzz*), orthographic variations (*gemoyyy*, *kangen bgt*), and the use of emojis as substitutes for words.

Crystal (2011, p. 152) in *Internet Linguistics* emphasizes that digital language is multimodal, combining text, images, emojis, and other symbols. This style of language forms a new “semiotics” that is unique to online communication.

F. The Phenomenon of Dysphemism, Politeness, and Language Ethics

In addition to positive innovations, social media has also led to an increase in the use of dysphemism or harsh words. Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 32) define dysphemism as a form of expression that is deliberately used to offend, belittle, or cause negative emotional effects. In social media interactions, dysphemism is used by the younger generation as a spontaneous expression, but it has the potential to form impolite language habits.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61), through their politeness theory, emphasize the importance of maintaining the “face” of the interlocutor. When the younger generation becomes accustomed to using harsh language on social media, the norms of politeness in direct communication also have the potential to erode. Strengthening digital literacy has been identified as a crucial strategy to mitigate these problems, ensuring that online interactions remain ethical and culturally appropriate (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b).

G. Recent Research Related to Social Media Language in Indonesia

Several recent studies in Indonesia reinforce the importance of this issue. The PROTASIS team (2024, pp. 114–119) found that the use of slang on TikTok creates closeness among peers, but also widens the language gap between the younger generation and their parents. Research by Yanti et al. (2023, p. 508) confirms that the massive use of slang makes students less skilled at using standard language in academic tasks. This indicates the need to strengthen students' self-regulated strategies in language learning, which play an important role in helping them adapt informal practices to academic writing requirements (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). Kusuma (2024, pp. 18–25) states that the intensity of TikTok use correlates with changes in the speech style and social behavior of adolescents.

Thus, these studies demonstrate that language transformation on social media is not only a local phenomenon but also a national issue requiring serious attention in the context of preserving the Indonesian language.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach within a sociolinguistic framework. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 4), the qualitative approach focuses on understanding the meaning, process, and interpretation of social phenomena through data collection in a natural context. Mile et al. (2014, p. 31), on the other hand, emphasize that descriptive research aims to describe phenomena in detail to find patterns and meanings in the data.

In this study, the phenomenon is the transformation of language used by Indonesia's younger generation on social media and its impact on their linguistic identity. The research design combines the analysis of primary data obtained through direct observation and interviews with the analysis of secondary data from digital documents, previous studies, and social media archives.

B. Data Sources

Primary data was obtained through direct interaction with young people, particularly teenagers aged 13–24, in Makassar City who actively use social media, such as TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X.

The data consist of oral statements from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) and written statements from WhatsApp chats, Instagram comments, TikTok posts, and tweets on X.

Secondary data was obtained from:

- (a) Academic literature (books, reputable international journal articles, and conference proceedings).
- (b) Previous research results related to slang, digital slang, language identity, and mediatization (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Eckert, 2012; Androutsopoulos, 2014; Putri et al., 2023; Kusuma, 2024).
- (c) Social media content published openly.

C. Population and Data Sample

The research population comprises all forms of speech used by the younger generation in Indonesia on social media. Since this population is very broad, purposive sampling was used for the research. According to Palinkas et al. (2015, p. 534), purposive sampling is used when researchers select informants or data based on criteria relevant to the research objectives.

Sample selection criteria:

- Aged 13–24 years.
- Active users of at least two social media platforms.
- Use slang, colloquialisms, or mixed codes in daily communication.

Sample size:

- 50 primary data from interviews and direct observation.
- 100 secondary data from public social media posts or comments between December 2023 and June 2025.

D. Data Collection Methods

- **Participant Observation:** Conversations among adolescents in public spaces (e.g., schools, cafés, and communities) and their social media activities were observed. These observations aimed to record the natural emergence of language forms (Spradley, 2016, p. 78).
- **In-Depth Interviews:** Twenty adolescent respondents were selected purposively for in-depth interviews. Questions included reasons for using slang, perceptions of Standard Indonesian, and views on linguistic identity.
- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** Group discussions were held to explore the language attitudes of the younger generation and how they negotiate identity through language on social media.
- **Secondary Data Documentation:** The researchers collected data in the form of screenshots of public posts on TikTok, Instagram, and X. They did so with due regard for research ethics, collecting only public data and avoiding the involvement of personal identities.

E. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Mile et al. (2014, p. 33).

1. **Data reduction:** Grouping data based on categories (acronyms, mixed codes, spelling games, and dysphemisms).
2. **Data presentation:** Creating tables that show the distribution of language forms and their identity functions.
3. **Conclusions and verification:** Linking empirical findings with the theoretical frameworks of Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Eckert (2012), and Androutsopoulos (2014).

Additionally, the analysis employs a sociolinguistic discourse approach to examine how language choices index social identity, style, and position in interactions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Language Transformation as a Practice of Style and Identity Among the Younger Generation

Overall, the findings indicate that young people use linguistic resources—acronyms/clippings, English–Indonesian code-mixing, orthographic/graphemic play, and multimodality (emojis, GIFs, stickers)—to construct a “cool, relaxed, funny, in-group” persona that reinforces peer solidarity. Within the sociolinguistic framework of identity, these patterns function as indexical cues (identity markers) that emerge and are negotiated in interaction (principles of emergence, relationality, indexicality), rather than being inherent characteristics of the speaker (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Mary Bucholtz).

The “third wave” approach to variation asserts that these linguistic forms are stylistic practices that carry social meaning (not merely structural variation), allowing young people to position themselves in the online social landscape—for example, “trendy,” “joking/ironic,” or “bestie solidarity” (Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94, 97) (Stanford University, Annual Reviews).

The context of mediatization explains why vernacular varieties are increasingly dominant in the digital realm: the boundaries between “media language” and “community language” are blurring, media language is becoming more

colloquial/vernacular, and media fragments are being recirculated in conversation (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 3–5, 21–24, 37–38) (Jannis Androutsopoulos, De Gruyter Brill).

The implications are ambivalent: on the one hand, it enriches digital repertoire and literacy; on the other hand, it spills over into semi-formal/academic contexts, blurring norms if not balanced by register awareness. The Internet/Digital Linguistics framework helps to read multimodality (text-emoji-image) and changes in online conventions (Crystal, 2011, pp. 1–5, 148–156; Barton & Lee, 2013, pp. 1–7, 44–51) (Taylor & Francis, Internet Archive, PagePlace).

B. Categories of Linguistic Forms and Their Functions in Relation to Identity

(a). Lexical–Morphological: Acronyms, Clippings, and Innovations

Data example A (TikTok, challenge caption):

“*Fix aku bucin parah* 🧑‍🤝‍🧑, *harus gercep nonton live-nya malem ini!*”

Analysis. *Bucin* (love slave) and *gercep* (move fast) are clipping-acronym forms typical of the digital realm. The economy of form enables speed and intimacy of style, while also indexing the in-group persona that “understands the code” of the community. In the third wave framework, this variable functions as a semiotic resource to indicate closeness/membership (Eckert, 2012, pp. 90–94) (Stanford University).

Analysis. The combination of English lexical borrowings (vibes, literally) with Indonesian intensifiers (enak banget) indexes a cosmopolitan-casual persona. In terms of identity, this is in line with the principle of indexicality: lexical choices evoke an “up-to-date” persona while marking a distance from formal standard varieties (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Mary Bucholtz).

(b). Graphemic–Orthographic: Letter Aesthetics, Capitalization, Elongation, Emoji

Example of data C (Instagram, comments): “*gemoyyyy bgt pls* 😭😭”

Analysis. Letter elongation (*gemoyyyy*), aesthetically pleasing lowercase letters, and stacked crying emojis indicate intense emotion and familiarity. From a mediatization/digital discourse perspective, this visualizes the prosody of writing and multimodal stance-taking (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156; Herring, 2013, pp. 3–8) (Taylor & Francis, homes.luddy.indiana.edu).

Data example D (X/Twitter): “I DON'T WANT TO DEBATE.”

Analysis. Total capitalization increases the “volume” and assertiveness of the stance. Stylistically, this is an emphasis strategy that forms a firm/ironic persona, often combined with sarcasm. At the footing level (Goffman), there is a shift in footing from casual to authoritative (Goffman, 1981, “Footing”, pp. 124–159) (eClass UOA, sil.org).

(c). Code-Mixing: Structural Patterns and Stylistic Motivations

Data Example E (WhatsApp, peer conversation):

“*Nanti aku submit tugas dulu, abis itu healing bentar di kafe.*”

Analysis. Code-mixing occurs intra-clausally (Poplack, 1980, pp. 581–590), combining English verbs (submit, healing) within an Indonesian syntactic frame. As a form of stylistic practice, this choice produces a modern-professional effect (Eckert, 2012, pp. 93–97), while also functioning as audience-tuned speech toward peers who are equally accustomed to academic or workplace terminology (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–150) (ResearchGate, Stanford University).

Data Example F (X/Twitter):

“*Lowkey pengen resign, tapi savings belum aman* □.”

Analysis. The pragmatic marker *lowkey* mitigates stance (signaling a desire not to appear excessive) and indexes a comical-honest persona typical of shitposting culture. This aligns with findings in CMC pragmatics regarding the marking of subtle stance through English particles embedded in Indonesian texts (Herring, 2013, pp. 12–18) (homes.luddy.indiana.edu).

(d). Dysphemism, Sarcasm, and the Risk of Norm Erosion

Data Example G (public TikTok comment):

“*Kontenmu toxic, mending unfollow aja ga sih?* 😏”

Analysis. The negative label (toxic) and the push toward exclusion illustrate a mild form of dysphemism as well as a call-out practice. From the perspective of politeness theory, this strategy aligns with bald-on-record acts that threaten face (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 60–68). At the level of linguistic ethos, such practices—if they spread into non-digital domains—carry the potential to blunt politeness norms and weaken academic ethos. (Note: this finding is consistent with literature highlighting the rise of face-threatening acts in CMC) (eClass UOA).

C. Interactional Dimension: Stance, Footing, and Audience Design

(a). Stance and Footing

The stylistic shifts observable in Data C – D demonstrate a change in stance (from admiration → assertiveness), which simultaneously alters the speaker’s footing or participation framework in relation to interlocutors/audiences (Goffman,

1981, Footing, pp. 124–159). Footing is indexed through the choice of graphemic resources (capitalization), intensifiers (elongation), and emojis, which collectively construct a situational persona (eClass UOA).

(b). *Audience Design and Stylistic Tuning*

The principle of audience design also applies: speakers adjust their style according to the type of audience (addressee, auditor, overhearer) and the affordances of the platform. For instance, WhatsApp (close-knit network) → intimate/familiar style (acronyms, inside jokes); Instagram (public/aesthetic display) → image-curated style (lowercase aesthetic, *bestie*); X/Twitter → concise-sharp style (light sarcasm, capitalization). Bell (1984, pp. 145–160) demonstrates that style shifts are responses to audiences rather than fixed attributes of the speaker (ResearchGate, Cambridge University Press & Assessment).

Data Example H (cross-platform comparison, same topic “tired of studying”):

WhatsApp: “*capek bgt sumpah* 😩👉”

Instagram caption: “*semester ini vibes-nya roller coaster tapi we made it* 🌟”

X/Twitter: “*MAHASISWA BUTUH TIDUR PANJANG.*”

Analysis. The three styles represent audience-tuned adjustments: (i) intimate-private → short emotive expression; (ii) semi-public aesthetic → curated vibes; (iii) public opinion → emphatic maximization. This corresponds to the framework of style as audience-responsive (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–150) and studies of meaningful variation (Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94) (ResearchGate, Stanford University).

D. *Digital Practices and Mediatization: Why is the Vernacular Strengthened?*

The stylistic transformations in §§2–3 are closely tied to the ecology of platforms: features such as hashtags, duets, and remixes (TikTok) accelerate the diffusion of forms (acronyms, catchphrases), while Stories/Reels sustain ephemeral-aesthetic styles. Theoretically, this exemplifies mediatization: media are not neutral, but design the arenas of linguistic production such that language becomes more conversational and vernacular; media fragments are then recontextualized by users (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 3–5, 21–24, 37–38) (Jannis Androutsopoulos).

The framework of Internet Linguistics highlights the importance of multimodality (text–emoji–image–sound) and online conventions that shape a kind of “written prosody” (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156). Meanwhile, Language Online (Barton & Lee, 2013) argues that online language practices require new research approaches—such as the analysis of user practices and small stories—to uncover the social meanings behind stylistic choices (Barton & Lee, 2013, pp. 1–7, 44–51) (Taylor & Francis, PagePlace).

E. *Detailed Category Analysis with Supporting Evidence*

(a). *Acronyms/Clippings and the Economy of Interaction*

Data I (TikTok comment): “*TIL dia ternyata anak rantau* 😏”

Data J (Instagram DM): “*ok OTW*”

Data K (WhatsApp): “*BT bgt kelas tambah.*”

Interpretation. Universal acronyms (*TIL*, *OTW*, *LOL*) are blended with local acronyms (*BT* = bad mood), illustrating the hybridization of global–local digital repertoires. Acronyms facilitate rapid rhythm and familiarity that index in-group solidarity (Eckert, 2012, pp. 90–94). In the long run, however, over-generalization into semi-formal contexts renders sentences less informative and less standard, creating ambiguity for out-group readers (Stanford University).

Identity relevance. The choice of particular acronyms signals community affiliations (e.g., fandom, gaming, studygram). This resonates with the principle of relationality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590): identity is constructed through processes of similarity and differentiation (Mary Bucholtz).

(b). *Code-Mixing and Structural Types*

Referring to Poplack (1980), code-mixing can be classified into intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching (Poplack, 1980, pp. 581–618) (ResearchGate).

Intersentential

Data L (Instagram caption): “*Akhirnya skripsi selesai. I did it!*”

Function. Marks a peak of affect and cosmopolitan self-branding.

Intrasentential

Data M (X/Twitter): “*Besok mau submit paper; mohon feedback ya.*”

Function. Facilitates terminological efficiency in academia and indexes a competent/professional persona.

Tag switching

Data N (WhatsApp): “*Kamu jadi datang, right?*”

Function. Softens invitations and mitigates modality.

From the perspective of stylistic practice, these patterns convey interactional intentions (requesting help, strengthening self-image, maintaining familiarity) in concise form. Audience design explains who is imagined as the audience and why the particular code choice is made (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–160) (ResearchGate).

(c). *Orthographic/Graphemic Play and Affect*

Data O (Instagram Story): “capek banget tapi happy 🍀”

Data P (X/Twitter): “BESOK SIDANG. DOAKAN.”

Analysis. Elongation marks affective intensity, while capitalization signals urgency or exhortation. In CMC pragmatics, such markings function as substitutes for offline intonation and gestures (Herring, 2013, pp. 6–12). From an identity perspective, these practices construct an expressive persona (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156) (homes.luddy.indiana.edu; Taylor & Francis).

(d). *Multimodality (Emoji, GIFs, Stickers)*

Data Q (WhatsApp): “Mantap!” + 👍🔥

Data R (Instagram comment): “Aduh lucu 😂😂😂”

Analysis. Emojis function as affect intensifiers and stance markers. The repetition of the 😂 emoji reinforces expressions of being moved or entertained. From a digital-linguistic perspective, emojis are part of a new semiotic repertoire in communication that enriches pragmatic nuance (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156) (Taylor & Francis).

(e). *Dysphemism and Politeness Norms*

Data S (X/Twitter): “Argumenmu lugu banget, baca dulu dong.”

Analysis. The use of a derogatory label constitutes a mild dysphemism that threatens the positive face. According to Politeness Theory, this escalates the risk of conflict and spirals of aggression (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 60–68). Within mediatization, platform logics (engagement-driven algorithms) often “reward” highly emotional content, thereby amplifying sharp expressions (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 21–24) (Jannis Androutsopoulos).

F. *Impact on Language Identity and Standard Norms*

(a). *Positive Contributions*

Expanded repertoires. Young people acquire digital registers relevant to the creator economy (e.g., captioning, community talk).

Multimodal literacy. The ability to orchestrate text–emoji–visuals (semiotic assemblages) is crucial for contemporary communication (Barton & Lee, 2013, pp. 44–51) (PagePlace).

Identity discourses. Youths manage personae through stylistic and stance-taking strategies (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590; Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94) (Mary Bucholtz; Stanford University).

(b). *Challenges*

Spillover of vernacular styles into formal/semi-formal contexts, reducing adherence to norms (orthography, diction) and lowering information density (due to excessive acronymization).

Intergenerational divides. In-group codes (slang, inside jokes) may alienate out-group readers.

Reinforcement of face-threatening practices through dysphemism and sarcasm, with the potential to shape offline communication patterns (Herring, 2013, pp. 12–18; Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 60–68) (homes.luddy.indiana.edu).

From a global sociolinguistic perspective, these challenges arise under conditions of mobility and scalar shifts (local–global). Thus, the competence required is not merely “standard vs. non-standard,” but rather the management of repertoires across scales (Blommaert, 2010, pp. 1–5) (Cambridge University Press & Assessment; Cambridge Assets).

G. *Integration of Findings: The “Register-Switch Pedagogy” Model*

Based on the analysis, we propose a two-track pedagogical model:

(a) Path of Digital Creativity Appreciation. Examine students’ digital practices descriptively (rather than pathologically): identify categories of forms (acronyms, code-mixing, graphemic play, emojis) and their identity functions (solidarity, humor, stance). Ground this in the theory of stylistic practice (Eckert, 2012, pp. 90–97) and indexicality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Stanford University; Mary Bucholtz).

(b) Path of Register Discipline. Train register-shifting (register-switching) between digital vernacular ↔ formal standard through:

- Contrastive rewriting (transforming colloquial captions into standard paragraphs).
- Audience re-design (rewriting messages for different audiences) based on audience design (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–160) (ResearchGate).
- This model is not an attempt to restrict creativity, but rather to sharpen contextual awareness so that expressive digital identities can coexist with competence in standard language.

H. *Theoretical Implications*

The findings reinforce three theses:

- Identity as emergent and relational—as shown in how the same form (e.g., lowkey) indexes different personae depending on context/audience (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Mary Bucholtz).

- Variation as social semiotics—acronyms/code-mixing/graphemic practices are not deviations, but meaningful resources for stance-taking and positioning (Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94) (Stanford University).
- Mediatization—platform ecologies facilitate vernacularization and the recontextualization of media fragments in interaction (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 3–5, 21–24, 37–38) (Jannis Androutsopoulos).

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ongoing linguistic transformation on social media demonstrates that Indonesian youth use language not merely as a tool of communication, but also as a medium for identity construction and stylistic practice. Linguistic innovations such as acronyms (*bucin, mager, japri*), code-mixing with English (vibes, literally, healing), orthographic play (*gemoyyy*, capitalization, and letter elongation), as well as multimodality (emojis, GIFs, stickers), indicate that social media has become a dynamic space of linguistic creativity. This is consistent with findings on Generation Z's digital culture literacy, which show that young netizens actively engage as readers, producers, and publishers of digital texts. This aligns with evidence that interactive and collaborative practices play a key role in fostering linguistic competence (Kaharuddin et al., 2025).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, these findings align with the concept of identity as an interactional construct (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590), the third wave of variation theory emphasizing the social meaning of language (Eckert, 2012, pp. 93–97), and the framework of mediatization, which posits that media act as agents of linguistic change (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 21–24). Digital language enriches the linguistic repertoires of young people, sharpens multimodal literacy, and creates opportunities for creative expression.

However, another impact that cannot be ignored is the potential degradation of standard norms and the shift in linguistic ethics, particularly when digital vernacular styles spill over into formal domains such as academia, education, and official communication. The frequent presence of dysphemism and sarcasm in online spaces also risks eroding the cultural value of politeness in language. Thus, linguistic transformation on social media is ambivalent: it presents both opportunities and challenges for maintaining Indonesian as a national identity. Similar to how cultural stereotypes are reproduced in foreign language textbooks (Taqdir, 2025), the linguistic practices of Indonesian youth on digital platforms also reflect broader cultural ideologies that shape identity and social values.

To address these dynamics, several recommendations can be proposed:

1. **Strengthening Language and Digital Literacy.** Programs are needed that emphasize register awareness, i.e., the ability to distinguish and adjust language varieties according to communicative contexts. Youth should be trained to switch between digital colloquial styles and standard Indonesian in academic and formal settings.
2. **Integrating Digital Language into Education.** Teachers and lecturers can use authentic examples from social media as language-learning materials. For instance, exercises can involve rewriting colloquial captions into standard paragraphs or analyzing stylistic differences across platforms. This approach aligns with research highlighting the value of combining explicit and implicit methods in grammar learning, which shows that students benefit from both rule-based and contextualized instruction (Kuswanty et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies on the integration of artificial intelligence in language education indicate that digital tools can provide effective feedback and enhance students' literacy (Kaharuddin et al., 2024).
3. **Further Research.** It is essential to build cross-platform corpora that monitor the development of viral expressions and youth linguistic styles over a longer time span. Such research is crucial for identifying digital linguistic trends that influence the evolution of Indonesian.
4. **Public Policy.** The government, language institutions, and academic communities can collaborate to formulate digital politeness guidelines that emphasize communicative ethics, appropriate language variety selection, and the preservation of Indonesian identity in online spaces.

Through these strategies, the linguistic transformation of social media can be directed toward a positive force: fostering youth creativity while simultaneously safeguarding the continuity of Indonesian as the language of unity and national identity.

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