

## **An Analysis Of Language Style Changing In Generation Z In Digital Communication On Whatsapp And Instagram (Case Study) At Politechnic Ganesha Medan, Campus 2 (4th Semester Students)**

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**ABSTRACT-** This study looks into how Generation Z students' language usage has changed on digital communication platforms, particularly Instagram and WhatsApp. The study, which was carried out as a case study at Polytechnic Ganesha Campus 2, Medan, focused on the 32 participants in the fourth semester of class 24M24. The goal of the study is to identify the most common linguistic traits, linguistic deviation patterns, and sociolinguistic elements that affect language style changes in digital environments. Semi-structured interviews and a structured questionnaire were used in addition to direct observation of chat conversations and Instagram captions to obtain data.

Code-switching, abbreviation, the use of slang and neologisms, phonological reduction, and the extensive use of emoji and visual symbols as linguistic tools are among the notable changes in language use that Generation Z students display, according to the research. WhatsApp serves as a semi-formal and casual communication tool, but Instagram tends to stimulate more creative and informal vocabulary. The study comes to the conclusion that Generation Z's language behavior is actively shaped and constantly changing by digital platforms, which has consequences for language instruction and academic communication standards.

***Keywords: Generation Z, language style, WhatsApp, Instagram, code-switching***

### **INTRODUCTION.**

Over the past 20 years, digital technology has advanced so quickly that it has completely changed how people communicate. Instant messaging apps and social media platforms have taken over as the main means of daily communication, especially among younger generations. Those born between 1997 and 2012 are referred to as Generation Z, and they grew up at a time when social media, smartphones, and internet access were commonplace (Twenge, 2017). This

generation stands out for being "digital natives," which means that they have never lived in a world without the internet. As a result, their communication habits are intricately linked to digital technology.

Digital communication services like Instagram and WhatsApp have become incredibly popular in Indonesia. In terms of active social media users, Indonesia is among the top five nations in the world as of 2024. Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms, and WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app (We Are Social, 2024). These platforms function as venues for the construction, negotiation, and transformation of linguistic identities in addition to being instruments for social interaction.

In the face of such technological advancements, language, as a social and dynamic phenomenon, does not remain static. Digital communication brings new registers, genres, and conventions that differ greatly from conventional written and spoken language standards, according to linguists and communication researchers (Crystal, 2011; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). Abbreviations, acronyms, neologisms, emoji use, code-switching, and phonetic aberrations are all examples of the unique digital language style that Generation Z in particular has evolved. These features represent both creative adaptability and social identity building.

Relatively few studies have looked at this phenomena in the unique context of Indonesian higher education institutions, especially vocational polytechnics, despite the rising corpus of research on digital language use worldwide. Given that its student body is primarily made up of Generation Z persons who actively use digital platforms for both academic and social goals, Polytechnic Ganesha Campus 2 in Medan, North Sumatra, offers a fertile backdrop for such an investigation.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how Generation Z students—more especially, the fourth semester students in class 24M24 (32 students)—have changed their language styles in their digital conversations on WhatsApp and Instagram. The following inquiries serve as the basis for the research:

1. What language style characteristics are most prevalent among Generation Z students in class 24M24 when they communicate on Instagram and

WhatsApp?

2. What kinds of language modifications are most commonly seen in their digital correspondence?
3. What contextual and sociolinguistic elements affect these pupils' language style preferences?

By examining these issues, the study adds to the expanding body of research on digital sociolinguistics and provides useful information for teachers who want to comprehend and adapt to changing student communication styles.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Design of Research**

The qualitative case study design used in this work is suitable for a thorough examination of a circumscribed phenomena in its actual setting (Yin, 2014). The case study method enables the researcher to capture the intricacy and subtlety of language behavior in natural digital environments and permits a rich, in-depth analysis of language use patterns within a particular group of participants.

### **Study Environment and Participants**

The research was carried out at Polytechnic Ganesha Campus 2 in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The participants were selected from class 24M24, which is the fourth semester of the Medical Records and Health Information program. There were 32 students in this class (N = 32), 21 of whom were female and 11 of whom were male. The students' ages ranged from 19 to 21. Each participant provided informed consent for their digital communications to be examined as part of this study, and they were all active users of Instagram and WhatsApp.

**Table 1: Demographics of Participants**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender	Female	21	65.6%
	Male	11	34.4%
Age	19 years	8	25.0%

<b>Category</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
	20 years	18	56.3%
	21 years	6	18.7%
Total	Class 24MIK2	32	100%

### **Collection Data Instrument**

Three main tools were used to get the data:

1. Instagram Content and WhatsApp Chat Logs: Over the course of 30 days, 480 chat messages from the class WhatsApp group and 96 Instagram captions and comments from participants' individual accounts were gathered and examined with their informed consent.
2. Structured Questionnaire: To collect information on the 32 participants' digital platform usage patterns, communication frequency, self-reported language practices, and views toward language change in digital contexts, a 25-item questionnaire was given to each participant.
3. Semi-structured Interviews: Eight purposefully chosen participants (four female and four male) participated in follow-up interviews to learn more about their impressions of digital language norms and the reasons behind their language choices.

### **Analysis of Data**

The framework of sociolinguistic variation (Labov, 1972) and digital discourse analysis (Herring, 2007) served as the foundation for an inductive theme approach to data analysis. The use of acronyms and abbreviations, code-switching (between Indonesian and English and Indonesian and local languages), phonological reduction, slang and neologisms, emoji and emoticon usage, punctuation variance, and capitalization patterns were among the linguistic characteristics that were coded in chat conversations and Instagram posts. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the questionnaire data, and the results of the textual analysis were combined with theme coding of the interview data.

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

### Summary of Identified Language Features

A rich inventory of linguistic traits typical of Generation Z digital communication was produced by analyzing the 576 data items (480 WhatsApp chats + 96 Instagram posts/comments). The frequency distribution of the key linguistic characteristics found on both platforms is summarized in the following table:

**Table 2: Distribution of Linguistic Features by Platform Frequency**

Linguistic Feature	WhatsApp (%)	Instagram (%)	Overall Frequency
Abbreviation/Acronym	78.3%	62.5%	Very High
Emoji/Emoticon Use	85.4%	92.7%	Very High
Code-switching (ID-EN)	64.2%	71.8%	High
Phonological Reduction	56.7%	44.8%	High
Slang / Neologism	49.2%	67.7%	High
Capitalization Deviation	41.3%	55.2%	Moderate
Punctuation Omission	73.5%	58.3%	High
Hashtag Use	5.2%	88.5%	Platform-specific

### The Use of Acronyms and Abbreviations

One of the most noticeable aspects of the participants' digital language was found to be abbreviation, especially on WhatsApp, where it was present in 78.3% of the messages that were examined. The following common acronyms were found in the data:

1. The following are Indonesian acronyms: "mf" (maaf = sorry), "mksd" (maksud = meaning), "gk" or "ga" (tidak/nggak = no/not), "blm" (belum = not yet), "udh" (sudah = already), and "yg" (yang = that/which).
2. Acronyms developed from English include "lol" (laughing out aloud), "omg" (oh my God), "btw" (by the way), "idk" (I don't know), "fyi" (for

your information), and "asap" (as soon as possible).

3. Hybrid forms: combinations like "gimana" (from "bagaimana" = how) and "gabisa" (from "gak bisa" = cannot).

These results are in line with similar findings from research on digital communication in Indonesia (Habibie, 2019; Kurniawan & Santoso, 2020) and with Crystal's (2011) description of netspeak. The main purpose of abbreviation is efficiency; in the fast-paced world of instant messaging, it enables users to communicate quickly.

### **Using Emoji and Emoticons**

Emoji usage was found in 85.4% of WhatsApp messages and 92.7% of Instagram posts and comments examined, making it the most common characteristic found in the data. This research highlights how emojis have become an essential part of Generation Z's communication toolkit, serving as real linguistic and practical tools rather than just ornamental accents.

Three main roles were identified by analyzing emoji function in the data: (1) emotional expression (e.g., expressing laughter, affection, or irritation); (2) pragmatic adjustment (e.g., softening tone, suggesting sarcasm, or signaling irony); and (3) word or phrase substitution. According to research by Dresner and Herring (2010) and Vásquez (2019), the latter function was especially noticeable on Instagram, where emoji sequences were regularly employed as independent communicative units.

### **English and Indonesian Code-Switching**

64.2% of WhatsApp chats and 71.8% of the examined Instagram posts showed code-switching between Indonesian and English. This high frequency illustrates how important English is to Generation Z Indonesians' linguistic repertoire, especially for those in higher education settings where English is used as a study subject and a global communication platform.

The results revealed three main kinds of code-switching. Switching between languages at sentence borders is known as inter-sentential switching. For example, "Aku udah ngerjain tugasnya." However, I need additional time to complete the report. Switching within a single sentence is known as intra-sentential switching. For example, "Kamu tau gak, the deadline-nya besok." Tag

switching is the practice of employing brief tags or fillers from one language while speaking another, such as "like," "literally," "actually," or "seriously" in sentences that would otherwise be Indonesian.

As participants strategically use English to indicate educational level, cosmopolitan identity, or affiliation with global youth culture, these patterns reflect both global English impact and local identity performance (Coupland, 2007; Androutsopoulos, 2011).

### **Neologisms and Slang**

The research revealed a wide range of neologisms and slang phrases, with a greater prevalence on Instagram (67.7%) than on WhatsApp (49.2%). Instagram's role as a public self-presentation venue, where users use creative language forms to indicate cultural currency and group membership, may be reflected in this platform difference.

Key neologisms and slang terms found in the data include "gaje" (gak jelas = unclear, absurd), "kepo" (curious, nosy), "baper" (bawa perasaan = overly sensitive), "gabut" (gak ada kerjaan = bored with nothing to do), and "hedon" (living extravagantly); English-influenced forms like "bestie," "lowkey," "vibe," "mood," "savage," and "slay"; and hybrid coinages like "auto" (used as a prefix: "auto kesel" = automatically annoyed) and "W rizz" (used to describe social attractiveness).

The swift generational turnover of slang, where new terms appear and old ones become outdated in a matter of months, is a reflection of the faster rate of linguistic and cultural change in digital environments (Androutsopoulos, 2011).

### **Non-Standard Spelling and Phonological Reduction**

56.7% of WhatsApp messages showed phonological reduction, which is a representation of informal spoken pronunciation in written digital text. The dissolving of the spoken-written divide that characterizes digital communication is reflected in this aspect (Baron, 2008). The data revealed the following examples: "gimana" for "bagaimana," "ngga" for "tidak/tidak," "gitu" for "begitu," "banget" written as "bnget," and "sama" written as "sm."

Additionally, non-standard capitalization patterns were often seen, such as the absence of sentence-final punctuation, random capitalization for emphasis, and

the usage of all lowercase letters (even for proper nouns and sentence beginnings). The findings in the larger body of literature on digital languages are in line with these departures from normal orthographic rules (Crystal, 2011; Herring, 2007).

### **Language Patterns Particular to a Platform**

Analysis showed that each platform has unique linguistic patterns. With its dual roles as a social and quasi-academic medium, WhatsApp exhibited a greater variety of registers, ranging from extremely informal casual discussion to more organized, task-oriented communication in academic assignment-related group chats. In contrast, slang, emoji sequences, hashtag usage, and English code-switching were all more common on Instagram, which consistently prompted more imaginative, performative, and identity-conscious language use.

These platform-specific variations support Halliday's (1978) theory of "register" variation and imply that participants have advanced metalinguistic awareness, modifying their language style to fit the affordances and social norms of each platform.

### **Sociolinguistic Aspects Affecting Shifts in Language Style**

Several significant sociolinguistic factors impacting language style choices were identified by questionnaire and interview data:

- Peer Identity and Group Belonging: 87.5% of participants (n=28) stated that they modify their language to fit in with their peer group, demonstrating the significant influence of group identity and solidarity on the usage of digital language.
- Platform standards and Audience Awareness: 78.1% (n=25) said they were aware that WhatsApp and Instagram had different language standards, indicating the ability to create an audience (Bell, 1984).
- Efficiency and Speed: 81.3% (n=26) stated that the main reason for phonological reduction and shortening is the need to communicate rapidly.
- Aesthetic and Creative Expression: 65.6% (n=21) thought of their Instagram language as a way to express themselves creatively, especially when it came to caption writing and emoji pairings.
- English Language Exposure: The consumption of English-language digital content, such as YouTube videos, movies, and foreign social media

profiles, was cited by 71.9% (n=23) as the reason for their code-switching behavior.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study offer strong proof that Polytechnic Ganesha Campus 2, Medan's Generation Z students actively promote language change in digital environments. Language style of class 24M24 on WhatsApp and Instagram is distinguished by a sophisticated, dynamic, and imaginative fusion of elements that reflects both local Indonesian linguistic realities and worldwide trends in digital communication.

The data's prevalence of code-switching, emoji usage, and abbreviations confirms Crystal's (2011) and Baron's (2008) descriptions of digital language as a unique register that functions in accordance with its own rules, separate from conventional written or spoken language. The widespread use of emojis in particular highlights how much Generation Z has included multimodal resources into their language repertoire, employing visual symbols to carry out pragmatic tasks that words alone might not be able to effectively represent (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Vásquez, 2019).

The frequency of code-switching between Indonesian and English is indicative of both the global prestige of English and the identity-marking roles that language mixing plays in Generation Z communities, and it is consistent with broader patterns of language use among educated urban Indonesian youth (Errington, 1998; Sneddon, 2003). In line with Coupland's (2007) research on style as identity performance, interview data showed that participants are generally aware of their code-switching behavior and see it as a sign of educational attainment and cosmopolitan identity.

There are significant theoretical implications related to the platform-specific diversity in language style found in this study. It implies that speakers of Generation Z are active stylistic agents that modify their language behavior to fit the unique affordances, audiences, and social meanings connected to each platform rather than passive beneficiaries of digital language standards. Bell's (1984) audience design theory is congruent with Generation Z's ability to change

their style depending on the context, which makes it more difficult to categorize them as consistently "informal" or "ungrammatical" communicators.

From an educational standpoint, the results emphasize the necessity for language instructors at Indonesian polytechnics to have sophisticated insights into the digital language practices of their students. Teachers may benefit from seeing non-standard digital language use as a sign of sophisticated sociolinguistic competence—the capacity to negotiate various registers, audiences, and platforms—instead of seeing it as inadequate or problematic. However, given the potential for digital language habits to impact academic writing and formal communication, students need explicit training in the contexts and implications of various language choices.

## **CONCLUSSION**

This case study of language style changes among 32 Generation Z students in class 24M24 at Polytechnic Ganesha Campus 2, Medan, shows that digital communication platforms, especially Instagram and WhatsApp, are potent sites of linguistic innovation and change for this generation. The study found that the most prevalent characteristics of participants' digital language were abbreviation, emoji use, code-switching, phonological reduction, slang and neologism, and non-standard capitalization and punctuation, with different patterns linked to each platform.

The results verify that a complex interaction of sociolinguistic elements, such as peer identity, platform norms, efficiency goals, creative self-expression, and exposure to the English language, drives language development in digital contexts. These modifications show systematic, socially significant patterns of linguistic innovation and adaptation rather than being haphazard or arbitrary.

The study has a number of significant implications. The results highlight the significance of encouraging students' metalinguistic awareness and incorporating digital literacies into language courses for language teachers. The study adds to the increasing amount of evidence that digital platforms are changing language in intricate and varied ways, according to sociolinguists. The results point to the necessity of explicit communication guidelines for institutional policy-makers that recognize the variety of registers accessible to modern students

without stigmatizing their digital communicative skills.

In order to observe linguistic change over time, future research should use longitudinal designs, including cross-generational comparisons, and expand the study to additional platforms like TikTok and Twitter/X, where Generation Z is also quite active. Comparative research in various Indonesian higher education settings would shed more light on how institutional settings influence the use of digital language.

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