TIKTOK AS A SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON LANGUAGE CHANGE AMONG STUDENTS OF ITEBIS PGRI DEWANTARA JOMBANG

Alisa Endah Putri Wardhana[1,*], Muhammad Saibani Wiyanto[2], Suparti[3]
[1,2]PGRI Jombang University
[3]Universitas Terbuka
Email: hanaxo3234@gmail.com[1] , msaibaniw@gmail.com[2] ,
suparti@ecampus.ut.ac.id[3]

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*Corresponding author

Abstract

The way university students use language is changing rapidly due to TikTok. This study aims to address that issue by looking at how students incorporate TikTok phrases into their in-person conversations as part of a larger shift in language. The research included four female college students from ITEBIS PGRI Dewantara Jombang, selected using purposive sampling. Information was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed qualitatively. The findings indicate that students frequently and unknowingly use phrases such as damn, pick me, red flag, healing, and cringe in their everyday conversations. These expressions go beyond online platforms, serving as means to convey humor, sarcasm, emotions, and social connections. Their usage reveals an unconscious adaptation, signifying identity and belonging within a community. The results show that the way these terms are used flexibly often points to a continuous change in spoken language influenced by interactions with peers and current trends. Therefore, TikTok serves not just as a source of entertainment but also as a driving force for informal language innovation, bringing in new phrases and promoting language evolution from the ground up within student groups.

Keywords: Change from below, change in progress, language change, Sociolinguistic, TikTok

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Introduction

Language is a constantly changing system that adjusts to its social and cultural surroundings. According to Panjaitan & Patria (2024), in today's digital age, this change has sped up a lot of because of social media, which promotes quicker, simpler, and more expressive ways to communictae. The common use of slang, abbrevariations, and memes shows how digital culture is altering language standarts, both online and in everyday talks. As noted by Natsir et al (2023), the impact of these platforms often goes unnoticed, as people naturally pick up expressions in their daily interactions.

This change is particularly clear on TikTok, a platform for short video that has changed the way young people connect and communicate. According to Nashrudina et al. (2025), TikTok has significant impact, its short video sty;e promotes viral trends, causing words like "delulu", "slay", and "healing", to become common in the everyday language of Indonesian youth. Safar et al. (2025) also point out that more than just a trendy way of speaking, expressions popularized by TikTok also reflect important sociolinguistics shifts, familiar terms take on new meaning, like "gas", "insecure", and language serves as a sign of group identity and social status.

Jebaselvi et al. (2023) also mentions that in Indonesia, university students are at the forefront of adopting such linguistic innovation, often blending English with local languages in ways that reflect both globalization and local adaption. However, Wiyanto (2021) examined that existing studies largely focus on describing online slang or code-mixing in structured context. Although these studies offer important insights, they largely overlook how expressions influenced by TikTok are unconsciuously woven info face-to-face conversations, especially among students at samller university located outside of big cities. This gap emphasizes the necessity for research that look at not just the language forms but also their practical roles in student communities.

Labov (1972) ideas about change from below and change in progress give us a helpful way to understand this gap. Labov suggests that unconscious changes usually start in casual, everyday situations and slowly

spread throughout a community, showing larger changes in language norms. TikTok, with its laid-back and youth-focused vibe, is a perfect place to watch these processes happening. By looking at how Indonesian university students interact verbally, we can see that digital expressions are not just things we find online but also indicators of a continuing linguistic change within speech communities.

This research looks into how language influenced by TikTOK is used in the everyday chats of students at ITEBIS PGRI Dewantara Jombang. It aims to answer three main questions: (1) How do students unknowingly use TikTok-inspired phrases in face-to-face conversations? (2) Which types of phrases are used the most and what purposes they serve in communication? (3) How do the patterns of usage differ among various academic levels and friend groups, showing a continuous change in language? By exploring these questions, this study helps us better understand how digital platforms lead to changes in language in Indonesia, especially among students in smaller educational institutions.

Research Methods

Research Design

This research used a qualitative field study method to explore how language is changing among students at ITEBIS PGRI Dewantara Jombang due to their use of TikTok. The study was guided by Labov (1972) theory regarding change in progress and change from below, which assisted in recognizing unconscious and ongoing shifts in language during actual communication situations. This method is effective for examining how casual digital interactions influence spontaneous change in language.

Participant

This research included four female undergraduate students from same department at ITEBIS PGRI Dewantara Jombang. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling because they actively used TikTok and often used language influenced by TikTok in their daily conversations. Even though they were all in the same academic program, participants differed in their year of study and personal communication styles, which offered valuable insights into how language trends spread within a local peer group. Each participant stated that they were familiar with the latest TikTok terms and recognized that they used expressions specific to the platform in both their online and offline conversations.

Data Collection

The information was gathered through in-person semi structured interviews. Each participant answered five open-ended questions that aimed to investigate how they use expressions influenced by TikTok, the situations in which they use them, why they choose to adopt these expressions, and their views on how these expressions circulate among their friends. The interviews took about 20 minutes and were recorded with the participants' permissions. The questions were designed to reflect natural language use and the participants' opinions on language trends, enabling them to elaborate and clarify their thoughts when needed.

Data Analysis

The interviews were written out and examined using thematic analysis. Each transcript was reviewed several times to spot repeated words and speaking patterns. Codes were given to phrases that showed important language behaviours like new words for example, "slay", "gas", "redflag", practical uses like humor or making identity, and how these spread among friend groups. These themes were the looked at through the ideas of Labov (1972) about change from below and change in progress. The analysis specifically aimed to find out if TikTok language was used unconsciously (change from below) and if the differences in how students used it showed a current change in language (change in progress). The study also looked at how shared phrases across different departments and academic levels could show diffusion within the speech community. The method of recognizing themes and analyzing the interview data was done with great care to guarantee the findings are reliable. To enchance the research quality even more, extra steps were taken to uphold its trustworthiness.

Trustwothiness

To make sure this study is trustworthy, we used four main criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. We kept credibility highby spending a lot of time with the participant, carefully writing down what they said, and including direct quotes to show their real voices. For transferability, we gave detailed descriptions of the research context and the backgrounds of the participants, which helps readers see if the findings could apply to other situations. We ensured dependability by using the same methods for collecting data and analyzing themes, and we supported confirmability bu taking reflective noted and having discussions with peers to reduce any bias from the researcher.

Additionally, member checking was done to further confirm the findings. Once the transcription and initial interpretation were finished, the researcher provided summaries of the interview interpretations to the participants. They were asked to look over the findings, verify their accuracy, and propose any corrections if needed. This process helped enhance the study's credibility and made sure that the interpretations matched the participants' intended meanings.

Results and Discussion

Results

This section presents the results from interviews conducted with four female undergraduate students at ITEBIS PGRI Dewantara Jombang. The purpose was to explore the influence of social media, particularly TikTok, on their language usage, especially in offline conversations. Their responses indicated that social media has introduced a range of expression and speech patterns that the students not only comprehend but also incorporate into their daily interactions. The participants noted that they have begun to adopt specific vocabulary, phrases, and speaking styles they encountered online often without being aware of their origins or the shifts in meaning. This illustrates how language evolves organically and socially, frequently outside the influence of formal institutions. The subsequent discussion elaborates on these insights by applying Labov (1972) concepts of change from below and change in progress, alongside contemporary research on digital communication and youth language.

1. *Slang and Expression Adoption in Everyday Speech*

All four participants recognized that TikTok has had a big impact on how they communicate with their friends, especially in casual situations. They often brought up certain words or phrases that came from viral videoa and eventually became part of their everyday chats. For instance, the student 1 shared "*Sekarang tuh tiap ngobrol pasti nyelipin kata dari TikTok. Kayak ngomong 'redflag' kalo ada temen yang nyebelin, atau bilang 'cringe' kalo liat story orang yang norak*". Meanwhile, the student 2 confessed, "*Aku sih udah biasa ngomong 'damn', 'bestie', healing dulu lah' kalo lagi stress. Kadang tuh ngomong gitu bikin suasana jadi lebih santai*".

To gain a clearer picture of the types of expressions that are commonly used, the table below shows popular slang terms mentioned during the interviews, along with their meanings and how they are used.

Table 1. TikTok Slang Commonly Used by Students

Slang Word	Meaning/Interpretation
Red flag	A warning sign, especially in behaviour or character
Cringe	Something awkward, embarrassing, or annoying
Damn	Expression of shocks, amazement, annoyance, or emotional emphasize
Healing	Self-care or taking time to recover emotionally
Bestie	A close friend, used as a term of endearment
Mager	Short for "malas gerak", expressing laziness
Gas	To go for something enthusiastically
Pick me	A sarcastic label for someone who seeks attention or validation
Insecure	Feeling lack of self-confidence
Salty	Irritated, bitter, or jealous behaviour

2. Change from Below: Subconscious, Informal Language Change

Labov (1972) idea of change from below explains that language change usually starts in casual, low attention situations, often without speakers being aware of it. In this research, students often mentioned how they naturally used these phrases in conversations without any planning or consideration of whether it was 'correct'. For example, the student 3 said, "*Biasanya keluar tuh kayak 'mager banget guys', itu tuh udah jadi bahasa harian*". This indicates that TikTok phrases are not just absorbed but also take the place of local expressions because they are more convenient, funny, or emotionally clear.

3. Change in Progress: Variation and Social Spread

While some phrases were commonly used among participants, the interviews showed significant differences based on group traits like academic year and peer culture. Younger students were noted to be more adept at the latest slang, incorporating terms like "damn", "pick me girl",

and "salty" into their daily conversations, while older students seemed to use these expressions more carefully or selectively. One student remarked, "*Anak semester awal tuh biasanya lebih update. Mereka ngomong 'slay', 'pick me girl', 'salty' tuh udah kayak bahasa sehari-hari. Kakak tingkat ada juga yang pake tapi gak sebanyak itu*".

This indicates that the language influenced by TikTok is still changing, with different levels of acceptance among various student groups.

4. *Offline Integration: From Online Trend to Spoken Norm*

One of the key discoveries from this study is how TikTok phrases are being used in real-life, face-to-face conversations. Instead of just being limited to captions, comments, or online chats, these phrases are now commonly found in spontaneous spoken exchanges, especially in casual social situations. Participants frequently mentioned using these expressions in their daily conversations with friends, particularly during laid-back campus activities like talking in class, hanging out, or collaborating on assignments together.

Student 1 shared, "*Apalagi kalo lagi nongkrong sambil ngopi. Temen bilang 'males kuliah', aku langsung bilang 'mager parah bestie'.*" On other hand, the student 4 noted, "*Kalo ngobrol offline malah lebih lepas. Pasti ada yang nyeletuk 'cringe banget' pas bahas drama kampus*". These accounts indicate that the lines between online and offline communication are becoming increasingly indistinct.

These examples demonstrate that online slang has made its way into real-life social situations, becoming part of casual conversations in hangouts, classrooms, and group activities.

5. *Perceived Permanence and Future of TikTok Language*

Another fascinating point that came up during the interviews was how students think about the lasting power of language influenced by TikTok. When they were asked of, they thought these phrases would stick around or just fade away as fads, the answer was mixed. Some students believed that certain phrases had already become a permanent part of their everyday language and would probably stick around. As student 1 put it, "*Menurutku sebagian bakal bertahan. Kayak, 'bucin', 'mager', itu udah dari lama dan masih dipake*". This terms, which used to be considered slang, are now so widely accepted that they don't feel like trendy or borrowed phrases anymore; instead they are seen as a regular part of informal Indonesian among young people.

On the other hand, some students pointed out that even though the expressions might evolve over time, the process of borrowing, adapting, and replacing language will keep happening. Student 2 mentioned, "*Kayaknya bakal terus berkembang, tapi bakal ganti-ganti juga. Mungkin nanti kata 'damn' hilang, muncul kata baru lagi*". This shows an understanding that language is always changing and dynamic, with some words having a short life while others become more stable and part of everyday use.

These viewpoints show that students recognize how slang is always changing: some word settle in and become a part of casual Indonesian, while others just stay as fleeting trends.

Discussion

The result indicate that TikTok significantly influences language innovation amonguniversity students in Indonesia. Terms like 'red flag',

'cringe', and 'mager' exemplify Labov (1972) idea of change from below, where language evolves unconsciously during informal convesations. Students mentioned that they use these phrases naturally in their discussions, showing how interactions with peers help new expressions to spread.

Differeces among groups also match Labov's concept of change in progress. Younger students used the newest terms like 'slay', 'pick me girl', and 'salty' more often, while seniors were more selective in their usage. Al-Khasawneh (2023) support this unevenness, showing that age, exposure, and group identity play role in linguistic change.

The findings further emphasize the social roles of slang. In line with

Safar et al. (2025), terms from TikTok act not just as trends but also as means for humor, identity, and community. Notably, these phrases aren't limited to online interactions; they also find their way into face-to-face discussions Notably, these phrases aren't limited to online interactions; they also find their way into face-to-face discussions, reflecting Panjaitan & Patria (2024) idea of transmodality.

Students demonstrated an understanding of permanence: some words

'mager', 'bucin' have become stable, while others disappear quickly. This aligns with Nashrudina et al. (2025) perspective on the cyclical nature of language change, where slang words appear and vanish, but the cycle of renewal continues.

Although TikTok slang encourages creativity and self-expression, it also carries certain risks. Relying too much on casual language might blur the distinction between formal and informal styles, impact academic writing, and create gaps in communication between students and teachers. These insight highlight the importance of being linguistically flexible, allowing young speakers to switch between digital slang and formal language effectively.

Conclusion

This study indicates that TikTok significanty impacts the way university students at ITEBIS PGRI Dewantara Jombang communicate in their everyday conversations. The students mentioned that they use different expressions from TikTok, like "slay", "pick me", "red flag", and "healing", both online and in person. These terms have integrated into their everyday language, frequently coming up effortlessly in casual discussions with friends.

The language shift noted in this study points out two important sociolinguistic trend. First, it shows a clear case of change from below, where language develops naturally through casual use without being consciously acknowledged or formally instructed. Second, the various ways these expressions are utilized among different studen groups and social circles indicate that this is also a change that is still happening, an ongoing transformation within the speech community that keeps evolving and expanding.

In addition to making new words, expressions from TikTok have crucial social and emotional functions. Students use them to inject humor, exaggerate, give compliments, critique, or show frustration in ways that seem current and culturally significant. The way these expressions are woven into daily offline chats shows how much social media influences spoken language, particularly for younger people. This indicates that students aren't just passive viewers of online content: they're also proactive in creating new communication styles.

Future research should look into the wider and long-term effects of language changes driven by social media, especially in different areas, educational levels, and language backgrounds. Including male participants, various departments, or even studies across different campuses could provide more valuable comparisons. A long-term study would also help figure out if certain phrases become part of everyday language or fade away as trends change.

Moreover, teachers, linguists, and language policy makers should start to see digital language not just as slang or background noise, but as a sign of

changing social realities. Instead of pushing back against these changes, they could be welcomed as a way to connect with students better and to understand how language grows along with culture, technology, and identity..

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