An Analysis of English Slang and Abbreviations Used by Students in WhatsApp Communication

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Abstract

In the digital era, online communication through instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp has influenced the way students use language in their daily interactions. One of the emerging phenomena is the use of English slang and abbreviations in online communication. This study aims to analyze the types, functions, and reasons behind the use of English slang and abbreviations by students in WhatsApp communication. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method using a sociolinguistic approach. The data were collected from students' conversations on WhatsApp through documentation techniques. The collected data were then analyzed based on their types, functions, and reasons for usage. The findings revealed that students used various types of slang and abbreviations, including acronyms, initialisms, shortened forms, slang expressions, and code-mixing. Some examples found in the data were "lol," "idk," "brb," and code-mixing expressions such as "Aku lagi busy lol." The use of slang and abbreviations serves several functions, including increasing communication efficiency, expressing emotions, creating informal interaction, and strengthening social identity and group solidarity. In addition, their usage is influenced by digital culture, social media trends, and the need for fast communication. This study indicates that English slang and abbreviations have become an important part of students' communication on WhatsApp and reflect language variation in digital contexts.

Keywords: abbreviations, language variation, online communication, slang, sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Language plays an important role in human communication because it is used to express ideas, emotions, and social relationships. Along with the development of technology, communication has shifted from direct face-to-face interaction to digital communication through online platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media applications. This transformation has significantly influenced the way people use language in their daily interactions. In online communication, language tends to become more informal, flexible, creative, and dynamic.

Students are among the most active users of digital communication platforms. They frequently interact through chats, comments, captions, and instant messaging applications. To communicate more efficiently and quickly, students often simplify language by using slang and abbreviations. English slang expressions such as "lol" (laugh out loud), "omg" (oh my God), and "bro" are commonly found in students' online conversations. Likewise, abbreviations such as "idk" (I don't know), "brb" (be right back), and "tbh" (to be honest) are widely used to shorten messages and save time during communication.

The use of English slang and abbreviations has become a common phenomenon among students because English dominates digital media and internet culture. Students are exposed to English through social media, movies, songs, games, and online content, which encourages them to adopt English expressions in their communication. In many cases, students combine English expressions with their native language, creating code-mixing in online interactions. Expressions such as *"Aku lagi busy lol"* or *"Nanti aku chat back"* illustrate how English slang and abbreviations are integrated into Indonesian communication styles.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of slang and abbreviations reflects language variation. According to Antohi & Ciucă, 2025 In digital communication, users tend to prioritize speed, efficiency, and expressiveness. Therefore, slang and abbreviations become practical tools that allow users to communicate quickly while expressing emotions, attitudes, and identity.

Furthermore, slang and abbreviations function as markers of social identity and group belonging. Students often use informal expressions to create closeness, solidarity, and a sense of membership within their social groups. In this sense, language is not only used to deliver information but also to construct identity and maintain social relationships.

However, despite their advantages in informal communication, the excessive use of slang and abbreviations may create challenges in formal contexts. Students who are accustomed to using informal digital language may experience difficulties distinguishing between formal and informal language styles. Consequently, informal expressions sometimes appear in academic writing, classroom communication, or other formal situations where standard language is expected. This phenomenon raises concerns regarding the impact of digital communication on students' language competence.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is grounded in sociolinguistics, which examines the relationship between language and society. According to Georgieva, 2014, sociolinguistics focuses on understanding why people use different language forms in different social situations and how language serves various social functions. Language variation emerges because speakers adjust their language according to social contexts and communicative purposes Rifka Alkhilyatul Ma'rifat, I Made Suraharta, 2024

One form of language variation found in digital communication is the use of slang and abbreviations. Slang refers to informal expressions commonly used within particular social groups and is often associated with youth identity and solidarity Bahar et al., 2025. Abbreviations, on the other hand, are shortened forms of words or phrases used to simplify communication and increase efficiency, particularly in online interactions Journal of Translation Studies, 2024.

Online communication has also introduced new linguistic practices. According to Sirodom NILNARONG, 2024, internet communication has produced a distinctive style known as "Netspeak," characterized by abbreviations, slang, acronyms, and other informal linguistic features. In multilingual societies such as Indonesia, these features are often accompanied by code-mixing, which involves combining elements from different languages within the same utterance (Hussain & Zahra, 2025)

Previous Studies and Research Gap

Several studies have investigated the use of slang and abbreviations in digital communication. (Islam et al., 2025) found that text messaging language among young people reflects creativity, efficiency, and social interaction. (Stoika, 2025)explained that abbreviations and internet slang are frequently used to simplify communication and express emotions in online messaging. Similarly, (Huseynova et al., 2024) emphasized that internet communication has created new forms of language variation influenced by technology and digital culture.

Earlier studies by (Varnhagen et al., 2010) reported that internet slang and abbreviations enable users to communicate more quickly and express emotions effectively in instant messaging environments.

Although previous studies have discussed internet language, text messaging, and digital communication, limited research specifically examines the combined use of English slang and abbreviations among students in online communication contexts, particularly on WhatsApp. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by focusing on students' use of English slang and abbreviations in their online interactions.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Identify the types of English slang and abbreviations used by students in online communication.
2. Analyze the functions of English slang and abbreviations in online communication.
3. Explore the reasons behind students' use of English slang and abbreviations.

To achieve these objectives, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What types of English slang and abbreviations are used by students in online communication?
2. What are the functions and reasons behind the use of English slang and abbreviations by students in online communication?

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study contributes to sociolinguistic discussions on language variation in digital communication and enriches understanding of how globalization and technological development influence language use among students.

Practically, the findings may help students become more aware of appropriate language use in different contexts, assist educators in understanding students' language behavior in digital communication, and provide useful references for future researchers interested in sociolinguistics, digital communication, slang, abbreviations, and language variation.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative research is used to understand social phenomena and interpret meanings found in human interactions and communication. According to (Stoika, 2025), qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem.

A descriptive approach was applied because this study aimed to describe and analyze the use of English slang and abbreviations used by students in online communication without manipulating the data. The researcher focused on identifying the types, functions, and reasons behind the use of slang and abbreviations in students' digital interactions.

This design was considered appropriate because the study emphasized the interpretation and explanation of language phenomena in natural communication settings, particularly in online conversations through WhatsApp.

Participants and Data Source

The participants of this study were students who actively used online communication platforms, particularly WhatsApp. The participants were selected purposively because they were considered relevant to the objectives of the study. The criteria included: (1) students who actively used WhatsApp, (2) students who frequently used English slang and abbreviations in online communication, and (3) students who were willing to participate in the research.

The primary data consisted of chat messages, comments, and conversation screenshots containing English slang and abbreviations used by students in online communication. Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and previous studies related to sociolinguistics, language variation, slang, abbreviations, and online communication.

Data Collection

The data were collected using documentation techniques. The researcher observed students' online communication, captured screenshots of conversations containing English slang and abbreviations, recorded relevant expressions, and classified them according to their linguistic characteristics and communicative contexts.

To maintain ethical standards, all personal information, including names, profile pictures, and phone numbers, was omitted or anonymized before the data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a sociolinguistic approach. The analysis involved four stages:

1. Data Reduction

Relevant data containing English slang and abbreviations were selected from students' online communication.

2. Data Classification

The data were classified into several categories, including slang, acronyms, initialisms, shortened forms, and code-mixing expressions.

3. Data Interpretation

The researcher interpreted the functions and reasons behind the use of slang and abbreviations based on sociolinguistic theories of language variation.

4. Conclusion Drawing

The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the findings and interpretations of the data.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout the research process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of English Slang and Abbreviations Used by Students

The analysis of the WhatsApp group chat data identified 35 instances of English slang and abbreviations used by students in online communication. These expressions were classified into four major categories: Internet Slang, Acronyms, Initialisms, and Shortened Forms.

Internet Slang was the most frequently used category. Expressions such as *"wkwkwk," "YAS," "guys," "oot," "worth it," "alright," and "nice"* were commonly used to express emotions, reactions, and interpersonal relationships. These findings indicate that students prefer informal and expressive language in digital interaction.

The second category consisted of Acronyms, including *"dadikna wpp pa ya"(wallpaper), "sw" (story WhatsApp), "plss"(please), "fastres"(fast respons), "tqu"(thank you),"info"(information), "YOLO"(You Only Live Once)".* These abbreviations were frequently used because they enabled students to refer to academic concepts efficiently.

The third category was Initialisms. The expression *"wdym?", "sdm", "otw", "btw", "tbh", 'imo", 'idk", "omg", "ASAP"(As Soon As Possible)* was identified as an example of an initialism used within the communication data.

The final category was Shortened Forms, such as "*plis," "info," "chat," and "cek", "fastres", "plss", "tqu", "miskom", "wpp".* These forms demonstrate students' tendency to simplify language in order to communicate more efficiently.

Additionally, several English lexical items such as *"choose sendiri," "tolong someone,"maybe beliau masih liburan", "besok kita start jam 2an yaa", "dadekna wpp pa ya men memotivated", ra dissave", "at least untuk dikonsumsi diri sendiri", "when ya.."* appeared within Indonesian sentences. These expressions illustrate the occurrence of code-mixing, where English words are embedded into Indonesian grammatical structures.

2. Functions of English Slang and Abbreviations

The findings reveal that English slang and abbreviations perform several communicative functions in students' online interactions.

a. Phatic Function

Expressions such as "guys," "alright," and "please" were used to maintain social relationships and create a friendly atmosphere among group members. These expressions helped speakers establish closeness and solidarity within the communication group.

b. Expressive Function

Expressions such as "wkwkwk," "YAS," and "broken home" functioned as markers of emotion, humor, excitement, or personal attitude. These forms enabled students to compensate for the absence of facial expressions and vocal intonation in text-based communication.

c. Referential Function

Several expressions, including "deadline," "ELTM," "KKN," "PPL," "proceeding," and "discourse analysis," were used to convey information related to academic activities. These terms allowed students to communicate ideas efficiently and accurately.

d. Directive Function

Expressions such as "please cek edlink," "plis jawab," and "choose sendiri" were used to make requests, suggestions, or instructions. The use of English expressions often softened the tone of commands and made them appear more casual and polite.

Discussion

The findings support the sociolinguistic view that language varies according to social context and communicative purpose (Holmes, 2022). The dominance of Internet Slang demonstrates that students prioritize informality, expressiveness, and efficiency in online communication.

The results are consistent with the findings of (Islam et al., 2025), who argued that digital communication encourages linguistic creativity and efficient interaction. Likewise, the findings support (Stoika, 2025), who emphasized that internet slang and abbreviations help users communicate more quickly while expressing emotions effectively.

Furthermore, the occurrence of code-mixing reflects the influence of globalization and digital culture on students' language use. As explained by (Hussain & Zahra, 2025), bilingual and multilingual speakers frequently mix languages in communication as a result of exposure to multiple linguistic environments.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that English slang and abbreviations are not merely linguistic shortcuts but also important resources for expressing identity, building social relationships, and facilitating communication in digital contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of English slang and abbreviations among students in online communication, particularly on WhatsApp. The findings revealed four major categories of expressions used by students: Internet Slang, Acronyms, Initialisms, and Shortened Forms. Among these categories, Code-Mixing was found to be the most dominant type.

The study also found that English slang and abbreviations serve several communicative functions, including phatic, expressive, referential, and directive functions. Students use these expressions to communicate efficiently, express emotions, maintain social relationships, and facilitate interaction in digital environments.

In addition, the findings indicate that students' language use is strongly influenced by digital culture, social media exposure, and globalization. The occurrence of code-mixing further demonstrates how English has become integrated into students' everyday online communication.

These findings support sociolinguistic theories of language variation and provide evidence that digital communication continues to shape contemporary language practices among students. Future research may involve larger participant groups, different social media platforms, or investigations into the impact of digital language use on academic communication and language development.

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