

MORPHOLOGICAL VARIETIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The development of social media has introduced significant changes in language practices, including the emergence of various forms of linguistic creativity in digital communication. Language used on social media functions not only as a means of information exchange but also as a representation of identity, communication styles, and characteristics of user communities. This study aims to analyze morphological varieties in social media language by focusing on the forms, formation processes, and functions of morphological expressions in digital communication. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach from a digital sociolinguistic perspective. The data consisted of written utterances collected from TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and other digital discussion spaces during the period of January–June 2024. Data were collected through observation using non-participatory observation techniques and documentation, while data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that morphological varieties in social media language are formed through several major processes, including prefix deletion, informal affixation, word shortening and compression, particle usage, bound element addition, and reduplication. Forms such as *ngerti* from *mengerti*, *nyuci* from *mencuci*, *ngurusin* from *mengurusin*, and *yaudah* from *ya sudah* demonstrate the tendency toward linguistic simplification in digital communication. These findings indicate that morphological varieties in social media should not be regarded as language deviations but rather as linguistic innovations reflecting users' creativity in constructing effective, expressive, and identity-based communication within digital communities.

Keywords: Digital sociolinguistics; language change; linguistic creativity; morphological varieties; social media language

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed human communication practices. Social media is not only a medium for information exchange but

has also developed into a social interaction space that enables the emergence of various forms of linguistic creativity. Digital communication has different characteristics from conventional communication because it occurs rapidly, informally, interactively, and involves users from diverse social backgrounds. These conditions cause language in digital spaces to continuously undergo adaptation and innovation processes (Crystal, 2006; Baron, 2008).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is understood as a social phenomenon that constantly changes following the dynamics of its speech communities. Language variation emerges due to differences in social background, user groups, communication purposes, and language-use contexts (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Therefore, language variation is not a form of deviation, but rather a natural mechanism in language development. Each speech community may produce particular linguistic characteristics that distinguish it from other communities (Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

One form of language variation that develops within society is lectal variety. The term lect refers to language variation associated with particular user groups, whether based on geographical area, social class, age, or specific communities (Meyerhoff, 2019). In digital contexts, the formation of lectal varieties has experienced new developments because language communities are no longer restricted by geographical boundaries but are formed through virtual social networks. Androutsopoulos (2015) explains that digital communication creates new spaces for language users to construct identities and communication styles through particular linguistic choices.

Social media has become one of the primary environments where digital language varieties develop. Social media users actively modify language to fulfill communication needs that are fast, concise, expressive, and appropriate to the characteristics of online communities. According to Tagg (2015), digital communication demonstrates a combination of spoken and written language characteristics (written spoken-like language), resulting in innovative and flexible linguistic forms. This phenomenon indicates that digital media is not merely a place where language is used but also a space where new linguistic forms are produced.

One linguistic aspect that reflects this dynamic is morphology. Morphology is a branch of linguistics that studies the internal structure of words and the processes involved in word formation, including affixation, reduplication, shortening, compounding, and the creation of new words (Katamba & Stonham, 2006; Lieber, 2016). In digital communication, morphological processes have developed in interesting ways because language users frequently innovate word forms to produce expressions that are more effective, communicative, and socially meaningful.

Various forms of morphological creativity can be found in social media language, such as shortening (*mager* from *malas gerak*), acronym formation (*bucin* from *budak cinta*), the incorporation of foreign language elements (*spill*, *healing*, *bestie*), and the creation of new words that develop within particular communities. These forms demonstrate that language users do not merely adopt existing vocabulary but actively create and modify linguistic forms according to their social interaction needs. As stated by Bauer (2006), word formation is one indicator of morphological productivity, demonstrating the ability of language to adapt to social changes.

Previous studies on social media language have largely focused on code-switching, language interference, digital identity, and meaning change in online communication (Crystal, 2006; Androutsopoulos, 2015; Tagg, 2015). However, studies examining how morphological processes contribute to the formation of digital language varieties remain relatively limited.

In fact, morphological changes can provide important insights into users' linguistic creativity, patterns of language adaptation, and mechanisms of group identity construction in digital spaces.

The study of morphological varieties in social media language is important because digital language change should not only be understood as the emergence of new terms but also as a process of forming linguistic systems with particular patterns. Analysis of morphological forms and processes can reveal how social media users create, disseminate, and maintain linguistic innovations within virtual communities.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze morphological varieties in social media language by focusing on their forms, formation processes, and functions in digital communication. This study is expected to contribute to the development of digital sociolinguistic studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between morphological innovation, linguistic creativity, and user identity construction in virtual communication spaces.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Communication and Sociolinguistic Variation

Digital communication provides a social environment in which language practices are shaped by the speed, informality, interactivity, and networked nature of online exchange. Crystal (2006, 2011) and Baron (2008) describe how internet-based communication develops distinctive linguistic practices that cannot be understood simply as written language or as a direct copy of face-to-face speech. Tagg (2015) similarly discusses digital communication as language in action, in which users draw on flexible linguistic resources to manage interaction and communicate meaning. These perspectives provide a foundation for examining social media language as a situated practice rather than as a collection of isolated words.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, variation is related to social contexts, communities, and communicative purposes. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021), Holmes and Wilson (2022), and Meyerhoff (2019) emphasize the relationship between language use and social life. In digital spaces, the boundaries of a speech community may be formed through shared interests and recurring online interaction as well as through geographical proximity. Androutsopoulos (2015) demonstrates the relevance of networked environments to language practices and identity. This perspective is useful for the present study because morphological choices may be shaped not only by grammatical possibilities but also by the informal norms and interactional expectations of social media communities.

2.2 Morphology, Word Formation, and Morphological Productivity

Morphology concerns the internal structure of words and the processes through which words are formed or modified. Bloomfield (1933) emphasized that morphology deals with the internal structure of words and the rules governing their formation. Katamba and Stonham (2006) and Lieber (2016) provide a linguistic basis for examining processes such as affixation and reduplication, while Bauer (2006) discusses morphological productivity and the capacity of word-formation patterns to generate forms. In Indonesian, descriptions of word structure and formation by Ramlan (2009) and Kridalaksana (2008, 2010) provide relevant terminology for identifying bases, affixes, and changes in word forms.

These concepts allow informal digital expressions to be examined systematically. A form may arise through the omission or alteration of an affix, the use of colloquial affixes, the

combination of elements, the compression of a phrase, or the repetition of a word. Such forms should be analyzed according to their structure, meaning, and context of use rather than classified as nonstandard solely because they differ from formal written Indonesian. At the same time, the analysis must distinguish morphological processes from related phenomena, such as phonological reduction or orthographic compression, when the evidence does not establish a morphological change. This distinction is important for describing the forms in the data accurately.

2.3 Morphological Choices in Digital Interaction

The linguistic flexibility of social media makes morphology relevant to both communicative efficiency and social meaning. Shortened or colloquial forms can make messages more economical, while informal affixes and particles can help create a conversational tone or convey interpersonal stance. From the perspective of digital sociolinguistics, such choices can also become recognizable features of a community's communication style. Androutsopoulos (2015) and Tagg (2015) offer broader accounts of how linguistic choices operate in networked and digital interaction; combined with morphological accounts of word formation, these perspectives support an analysis that considers both linguistic structure and social function.

In this study, morphological description and sociolinguistic interpretation are treated as complementary but distinct analytical tasks. The first identifies the form and the process involved in its formation; the second considers how that form functions in its interactional context. For example, a shortened form may be described structurally in relation to a fuller form, while its communicative function should be interpreted from the utterance and context in which it occurs. This approach avoids assuming that every informal form necessarily expresses identity or solidarity, while allowing such functions to be considered when supported by the data.

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a digital sociolinguistic perspective to examine morphological varieties in social media language. The qualitative approach was selected because this study focuses on understanding linguistic phenomena that naturally emerge in digital communication, particularly those related to word forms, word formation processes, and the functions of word usage in online interactions. The digital sociolinguistic perspective was applied to examine language as a social practice that develops within virtual spaces, where language users actively construct identities and communication styles through specific linguistic choices (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Tagg, 2015). Through this approach, the study does not merely describe emerging linguistic forms but also explains how morphological innovations contribute to the formation of lectal varieties within social media user communities.

The research data consisted of written utterances collected from various social media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and other digital discussion spaces. These platforms were selected because they represent public communication environments that allow spontaneous, informal, and creative language interactions. The analyzed data included words, phrases, and linguistic forms that demonstrated word formation processes, such as shortening, acronym formation, creative affixation, reduplication, compounding, and the creation of new forms through the adaptation of other linguistic elements. Data collection

was conducted during the period of January–June 2024, considering the relevance and actuality of digital language usage related to the research phenomenon.

Data collection was conducted using the observation method through non-participatory observation and documentation techniques. The researcher observed language use on social media platforms without directly participating in the observed interactions. The identified data were subsequently documented, selected, and classified based on their relevance to the research focus. Data selection was based on several criteria: (1) the linguistic forms demonstrated specific morphological changes or word formation processes, (2) the forms were used within digital communication contexts, and (3) the forms showed tendencies of usage among social media user communities.

Data analysis employed the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data condensation stage, identified linguistic forms were selected and categorized according to their morphological processes. The data were then presented through classifications containing the linguistic form, original form, formation process, usage context, and social function within digital communication. The final stage involved interpreting the identified morphological patterns to explain the characteristics of morphological varieties in social media language.

The morphological analysis in this study was based on word formation concepts, which explain that language possesses productive capacity to create new forms according to speakers' needs (Katamba & Stonham, 2006; Lieber, 2016). Meanwhile, the interpretation of the social functions of these linguistic forms employed a sociolinguistic perspective, which views language variation as a representation of identity, group solidarity, and communication strategies within particular communities (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Meyerhoff, 2019).

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from several social media platforms to ensure that the identified morphological phenomena were not limited to a single digital environment. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by connecting research findings with concepts of morphology and digital sociolinguistics, ensuring that the interpretations were supported by strong conceptual foundations.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that morphological varieties in social media language emerge through various processes of word formation and modification. These processes include prefix deletion, affix addition, word shortening, particle usage, word compression, and reduplication. These findings indicate that social media language has more flexible characteristics compared with standard language because users tend to simplify linguistic forms to achieve effectiveness, speed, and interpersonal closeness in communication.

Morphologically, language varieties in social media do not always produce completely new forms that differ from standard forms. Instead, they frequently appear through modifications of existing linguistic forms. This phenomenon can be observed in the transformation of *mengerti* into *ngerti*, *mencuci* into *nyuci*, and *mengurusi* into *ngurusi*. These changes demonstrate a tendency toward the reduction or simplification of morphological elements in informal digital communication. According to Ramlan (2009), morphology examines the structure of word formation and changes in word forms related to

their functions and meanings. Therefore, these modifications can still be analyzed as morphological phenomena because they involve changes in word-forming elements.

In the expression *Gak ngerti lah ya kan*, the form *ngerti* demonstrates the deletion of the *meN-* prefix from the standard form *mengerti*. In standard Indonesian, *mengerti* is formed through an affixation process involving the addition of the *meN-* prefix to the base form. However, in digital informal communication, this prefix is frequently omitted, resulting in a shorter form. The deletion of affixes represents one characteristic of informal language development in social media environments. In addition to *ngerti*, the particles *lah* and *kan* also represent characteristics of digital speech. These elements do not create new lexical forms but function as grammatical markers that provide emphasis, reinforcement, and interactional meaning between speakers and interlocutors.

A similar phenomenon appears in the expression *yaudah boleh lah yang kedua*. The form *yaudah* results from the compression of the phrase *ya sudah*, which undergoes a process of fusion into a single form in informal communication practices. This compression reflects the tendency toward linguistic efficiency in social media, where users employ shorter forms without eliminating the intended meaning. Meanwhile, the form *kedua* demonstrates a more productive morphological process through affixation. It consists of the prefix *ke-* attached to the base form *dua*. The addition of the *ke-* prefix produces an ordinal meaning, making *kedua* refer to “the second one.” This finding indicates that a single digital utterance may contain both informal morphological variations and morphological forms that follow standard Indonesian patterns.

Beyond word modification, the use of bound elements also represents morphological variation in social media language. In the expression *gimana ini airnya*, the form *airnya* is derived from the base word *air* combined with the bound element *-nya*. The element *-nya* functions as a marker of possession, reference, or emphasis toward a particular referent. In this context, *-nya* connects the word with an object already understood within the communicative situation. Meanwhile, *gimana*, as a shortened form of *bagaimana*, demonstrates simplification in digital communication. Although this form is more closely related to phonological change, its presence reflects the broader tendency of social media language to prioritize practicality and speed of message delivery.

Morphological varieties are also evident in informal verb forms found in expressions such as *pulang mudik nyuci*, *kamu pasti bisa kok ngelewatin*, and *capek ngurusin kalian*. The form *nyuci* originates from the standard form *mencuci*, while *ngelewatin* and *ngurusin* demonstrate informal affixation patterns involving *nge-* and *-in*. In standard Indonesian, these forms correspond to *mencuci*, *melewati/melewatkan*, and *mengurus/mengurusin*. However, in social media communication, informal forms are more frequently used because they are considered closer to everyday conversational styles. Kridalaksana (2010) explains that word formation may occur through affixation processes that generate meaningful linguistic units. Therefore, the forms *nge-*, *ng-*, and *-in* can be understood as manifestations of morphological productivity in non-formal language varieties.

The use of informal affixes indicates that social media serves as a space for morphological creativity. Prefixes such as *nge-* and *ng-* do not merely function as variations of the *meN-* prefix but also represent particular linguistic styles associated with specific user groups. The use of forms such as *ngelewatin* and *ngurusin* demonstrates that social media users do not simply remove standard language elements but construct alternative linguistic patterns that are accepted within digital communities.

Another morphological variety appears in the expression *tabrakan tabrakan lagi*. The word *tabrakan* originates from the base form *tabrak*, which undergoes affixation through the addition of the suffix *-an*. The suffix produces a meaning related to an event or result of an action. Furthermore, the repetition of *tabrakan tabrakan* demonstrates a reduplication process that functions to emphasize intensity or repetition of an event. In social media communication, reduplication is often used to strengthen emotional expression, particularly when describing events considered surprising, interesting, or repetitive.

Furthermore, the forms *gunanya* in *apa gunanya Bang* and *gemboknya* in *buka Gemboknya yuk cabut* demonstrate the use of the suffix *-nya* as a morphological element. The form *gunanya* consists of the base word *guna* combined with *-nya*, while *gemboknya* is formed from *gembok* plus *-nya*. In digital communication contexts, the use of *-nya* does not merely indicate grammatical relationships but also functions as a marker showing that the discussed object is connected to the previous conversational context.

Overall, the findings indicate that morphological varieties in social media language are formed through several major patterns: (1) prefix deletion, as seen in *ngerti* from *mengerti* and *nyuci* from *mencuci*; (2) the use of informal affixes such as *nge-*, *ng-*, and *-in* in forms such as *ngelewat* and *ngurusin*; (3) word compression, such as *yaudah* from *ya sudah*; (4) the use of particles such as *lah* and *kan*; (5) the use of bound elements such as *-nya*; and (6) reduplication, such as *tabrakan tabrakan*.

These findings demonstrate that social media language maintains a morphological system that follows linguistic principles while adapting to the characteristics of digital communication. Therefore, morphological varieties in social media should not be considered irregular language forms but rather linguistic innovations that reflect users' creativity in constructing effective, expressive, and identity-based digital communication.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that social media language demonstrates morphological varieties formed through various processes of word modification and formation. These varieties do not only appear through the creation of new vocabulary but also through modifications of existing linguistic forms, including affix deletion, affix addition, word shortening, word compression, particle usage, and reduplication. These phenomena indicate that digital communication possesses flexible and adaptive linguistic characteristics according to users' communicative needs.

Forms such as *ngerti* from *mengerti*, *nyuci* from *mencuci*, *ngurusin* from *mengurus*, and *yaudah* from *ya sudah* demonstrate the tendency toward structural simplification in informal digital communication. Furthermore, the use of informal affixes such as *nge-*, *ng-*, and *-in*, as well as particles such as *lah* and *kan*, indicates that social media users construct particular linguistic patterns that differ from standard language while maintaining systematic morphological processes.

The findings demonstrate that morphological varieties in social media language represent linguistic creativity reflecting users' ability to adapt word forms to digital communication contexts. The identified morphological changes should not be viewed as language deviations but as linguistic innovations developing within virtual communities. Through these processes, social media users construct communication styles that are concise, expressive, and aligned with their social identities.

Therefore, morphological varieties in social media language demonstrate that digital spaces have become dynamic arenas for language development. This study strengthens the perspective of digital sociolinguistics by showing that language change is influenced not only by conventional geographical and social factors but also by virtual interactions, online communication cultures, and users' needs to construct identity through language.

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