Language Change in the Digital Era: Social Media, Globalization, and Technological Impacts on Language Evolution

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Article Info	Abstract
	Language is a dynamic entity that continuously adapts to societal changes, especially in the 21st century with the rise of digital communication platforms like social media, instant messaging, and online communities. This digital environment, coupled with globalization and technological advancements, has fostered the evolution of new language patterns, vocabularies, and communication norms. Digital media not only alters how language is used but also redefines what constitutes language itself, contributing to the democratization of language where individuals from diverse backgrounds influence its development. This research aims to analyze the socio-cultural and linguistic impact of digital technologies and global networks on language evolution by examining real-life language use across digital platforms. Employing a qualitative approach with a library research method, data was collected through a literature review of academic sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, and publications discussing language change in the digital era. The analysis involved reviewing and comparing theories and findings from previous research to identify common patterns in language evolution. Key findings indicate five main themes: lexical innovation, code-switching, grammar simplification, the increased use of emojis and GIFs, and the emergence of globalized vernaculars. These changes align with technolinguistics, where technology actively shapes language, and Darwinian adaptation theory, where language evolves in response to social and communication demands, prioritizing efficiency and relevance.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic entity, which will continue to adapt to changes in society. In the 21st century, digital communication platforms, including social media, instant messaging, and online communities, have emerged as a major force in language change. Coupled with globalization and technological developments, this environment has led to the evolution of new language patterns, vocabularies, and communication norms. Recent research has highlighted that digital media not only changes the way we use language, but also redefines what counts as language itself.

Based on a study conducted by Salfin et al (2024), social media platforms have contributed to the democratization of language, where individuals from different backgrounds are able to influence language development. The addition of visual elements in text messages also provides depth and richness of expression in online interactions. This shows that social media is not just a means of communication, but also an important driver of language change.

Therefore, it is important to understand the role of social media in the development of modern language.

As Crystal (2011) notes, the internet has created a new linguistic ecology in which traditional grammatical rules become increasingly flexible, and multimodal elements such as emojis, hashtags and memes play a role in meaning-making. As Akodan and Anbar (2025) argue, one of the most obvious changes in digital written language is the shift from formal and structured communication formats to more flexible and context-specific language styles. Platforms like Twitter, with their strict character limits, encourage users to find efficient ways to communicate, whether by using short words, symbols, or other forms of communication such as GIFs and memes. This phenomenon also shows how technology shapes new communication patterns that differ from the traditional written language norms taught in schools.

Thus, Androutsopolulos (2014) emphasizes that the emergence of "tiered multilingualism", where speakers integrate diverse linguistic resources across multiple platforms and audiences. This phenomenon is reinforced by globalization, which supports linguistic exchange and hybridity across cultural and national boundaries (Blommaert, 2010). Furthermore, social media as a sociolinguistic laboratory has been documented in youth language innovation, where users typically manipulate language creatively to signify identity, humor, and group membership (Tagliamonte, 2016). The interaction between local languages and global English from platforms such as TikTok and Instagram proves that digital discourse is not only a replication of offline communication, but also an evolving linguistic system in its own right (Thurlow & Mrozek, 2011).

The main objective of this research is to analyze the socio-cultural and linguistic impact of digital technologies and global networks on language evolution. By examining real-life language use across digital platforms, the research highlights emerging trends in grammar, vocabulary, and cross-cultural language interaction, providing new insights into the transformation of contemporary language practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the author uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. Data were collected through literature review from various academic sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, and publications that discuss language change in the context of digital media, globalization, and technological development. The analysis was conducted by reviewing and comparing theories and findings from previous researchers to identify common patterns in language evolution in the digital era.

The literature study method is the main means of systematically collecting data from various published sources. Natsir et al. (2023) said that desk research has a strong theoretical foundation where researchers are able to compare various perspectives and produce new findings to build in-depth analysis on the topic under study. This method not only reviews relevant literature, but also critically evaluates theories related to language change, especially in the context of digitalization and globalization.

Through the literature review conducted in this research, the author can draw the conclusion that digital media, globalization, and technological developments not only have an impact on the way of communicating, but also the formation of language structures and functions in society. Thus, the use of the literature study method in this qualitative approach not only provides an opportunity for researchers to reflect more deeply on the phenomenon under study, but also becomes a link between theory and empirical reality that has been observed by many previous researchers in the fields of linguistics, communication, and digital media.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This research uses a desk study approach, where data is drawn through critical analysis of scholarly works, such as books, journals and academic publications that discuss language change in relation to digital media, globalization and technological advancement. Instead of collecting data from the field, this method allows for a thorough analysis of existing academic discourse, thus helping to identify consistent language patterns and theoretical understandings across different situations.

Several theme trends emerged from the literature. For example, Barton and Lee (2013) argue that digital texts operate within specific socio-technological frameworks that shape language choices and structures. Tagg (2015) emphasizes the impact of mobile technologies that promote casual and fragmented ways of communication that differ from traditional language norms. On the other hand, Deumert (2014) argues that digital spaces serve as places for language experimentation and identity expression, especially in multilingual environments. These basic insights form the basis of the following five main themes, which represent important findings on how language is changing in the digital age through a review of the literature.

1. Lexical Innovation

Digital platforms are fertile ground for the emergence of neologisms (new words) as well as new forms of unique informal language. Lexical innovation in the digital age reflects the process of borrowing, blending and compounding (Crystal, 2011). Social media users are constantly creating or adapting vocabulary from different languages and cultures, reflecting global trends. For example, terms such as "FOMO" (Fear Of Missing Out), "stan" (Superfan), or "ngabers" (a variant of "slang kid" in the context of Indonesian youth) prove how language adapts to a digital lifestyle. These words often spread through memes, short videos, or online trends and become part of the lexicon in everyday life.

Several case studies offer important insights into how digital media support lexical innovation and the formation of the English lexicon. One notable example is the term "selfie", which originated on social media platforms and has quickly become part of the language used in everyday speech. Initially popularized by users on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, "selfie" captured the essence of a new social behavior of taking photos of oneself and quickly gained general recognition through viral use and media coverage (J. House, 2018 cited in Asharaf, 2025).

Lexical innovation in this digital era not only adds to vocabulary, but also shows how online communities are able to create their own linguistic identity. According to Jebaselvi et al. (2023), social media users often create new terms to explain digital phenomena that have no equivalent in traditional languages. Another example is the word "ghosting" which describes the act of disappearing from digital communication without explanation - a concept that emerged due to the development of messaging and online dating apps. While these innovations are often global in nature, they are locally adapted to the cultural context of their users, resulting in a unique and dynamic variety of languages and terms. Thus, digital media not only acts as an intermediary, but also as an active means of new meaning formation and language evolution.

2. Code-Switching

The phenomenon of code-switching between languages in a sentence or conversation has increased dramatically in cyberspace, especially among bilinguals and multilinguals. Code-switching in digital discourse reflects translanguaging, the practice of mixing languages as a strategic communication tool (García & Wei, 2014). For example, in the sentence: "I've done the work, just upload it to the drive." This illustrates how users mix Indonesian and English for

efficiency or stylistic expression. In this context, code-switching also functions as a signal of group identity, expression of global lifestyle, and sophistication in communication.

In the context of digital communication, the use of code-switching is not just a reflection of linguistic ability, but also a strategic tool in shaping and negotiating social identity. In a study conducted by Ekoç and Etuş (2017) revealed that university students in Turkey who interact in class groups through social media use code-switching to negotiate various matters related to aspects of their identity. Based on the analysis of interactions on social media, this study states that code-switching has an important function to show their self-identity according to the context of communication.

Furthermore, Yusuf et al. (2023) in their research on university students in Makassar also found that code-switching is often used by university students as a tool used to adapt themselves to social and academic contexts. This study revealed that university students use code-switching as a tool to express their identity, strengthen social relationships, and increase communication effectiveness in a multilingual environment. This shows that code-switching plays an important role in shaping and negotiating their identity in digital communication.

3. Grammar Simplification

Often the sentence structure in digital communication tends to be short, direct, and often deviates from standard grammar rules. For example "gpp koku dh usual" or "knp km kyk so". The loss of subjects, complete presuppositions, or the use of abbreviations are forms of elliptical grammar linguistic strategies that arise from a need for speed and efficiency. Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) point out that sentences in instant messaging have grammar rules of their own, and are not arbitrary. This kind of form does not necessarily reflect a "deviation" but rather an adaptation to a faster and more interactive medium.

Yagodkina (2021) emphasizes that ellipsis sentence structure in internet communication not only shows linguistic efficiency, but it also makes it easier to convey information quickly and effectively. Ellipsis in this context is usually situational, where the missing element can be easily understood in the context or situation of communication, which allows efficient understanding and does not need full expression. This shows that the use of ellipsis structures is not a deviation from language norms, but a form of adaptation to communication media that demand speed and efficiency.

4. Emojis and GIFs

Visual symbols such as emojis, stickers and GIFs are increasingly replacing words in expressing emotions, intentions and nuances. For example, instead of typing "I'm sad", users can simply express □ or □. This creates a semiotic communication system that is paralinguistic, which is complementary to verbal messages. From this context, language becomes multimodal, not only limited to text, but also visuals with conventional and contextual meanings. According to Thurlow and Mrozek (2011), emojis function as "digital gestures", enriching the expression of emotions in online communication.

Based on research by Hu et al. (2017) states that using emojis can increase positive perceptions in online communication. This research shows that emojis used are not only used in expressing emotions, but can also be used to reinforce messages, show intentions, and organize the flow of conversation. In this case, the use of emoji can serve as a multifunctional communication tool, thus helping users to send their messages more effectively and efficiently. The right use of emojis can reinforce the meaning of the message and can increase understanding between the sender and receiver of the message.

However, it should be noted that the understanding of emoji can vary depending on the context and culture of the user. The study by Czestochowska et al. (2022) explains that some emojis have significant meaning ambiguity when not accompanied by text. This shows how

important it is to consider the context in which emoji are used to maintain effective communication and avoid misunderstandings.

5. Globalized Vernaculars

In online communities such as K-pop fandoms, gaming forums, or global social media, new dialects emerge that mix elements of different languages and cultures. For example: the use of terms like "bias", "comeback", or "main character energy" in non-English communities shows the adoption of a globalized vernacular that can be understood across cultures. Language is no longer local; it is a global communication tool that is flexible, adaptable, and shaped by communities transnationally. Blommaerat (2010) refers to this as superdiversity, where language practices reflect a fusion of globalization, technology, and identity mobility.

The concept of supervernacular introduced by Blommaert (2012) describes new forms of semiotic codes that emerge in the context of globalization driven by technological advances. The supervernacular is a code that is widely used in communities that are not the same as traditional sociolinguistic speech communities, but are groups that are not bound by territory and transidiomatic, even so, it seems to have created a solid and normative sociolinguistic system. This phenomenon shows that language and communication practices are evolving in a globally connected digital environment, and creating new forms of communication that demonstrate different identities and cultures. In this case, the use of terms such as "bias" or "comeback" shows how online communities construct and adapt language to create meaning and identity together. Therefore, globalization and technology play an important role in shaping a global vernacular that reflects the complexity and dynamics of communication in the digital age.

Discussion

Technolinguistics Approach: Language as a Product of Technological Interaction

The changes in language found in this study are in line with the theory of technolinguistics, which claims that technology is not simply a neutral tool, but plays an active role in shaping the way and content of language as a whole (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). In the world of social media, elements such as emojis, stickers and GIFs not only serve as additions to verbal communication, but create new multimodal formats. These formats show that digital interactions not only support communication, but also change the way individuals convey meaning.

Furthermore, the growing phenomenon of language switching and simultaneous use of multiple languages in the digital world also shows how language systems adapt to platform design and interaction algorithms. Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) suggest that technology directly affects language practices. Character restrictions, quick response features, and content distribution algorithms push speakers to create new ways of communication that are in line with the "rules" of the digital ecosystem. In this context, language form is not a naturally occurring outcome, but rather a product of technological design that facilitates social interaction.

Changes in the way people communicate to be more concise, agile, and contextual, such as the use of short sentences or the elimination of syntactic structures in short messages, are consistent with the view that digital language operates in a socio-technical ecology. The use of language on social media platforms functions as an adaptive response to technological developments, where values such as efficiency, speed, and flexibility are prioritized. This is a technolinguistic characteristic, which suggests that language systems are shaped by the constraints and opportunities inherent in digital media itself.

Not only the structure, but also the identity of the language has shifted with the development of technology. The use of locally adapted international terms such as "bias" or

"main character energy" creates a blended language identity. Digital technology serves as a platform where local and international language elements are brought together to produce new social representations. This suggests that interaction in the digital realm is not just an extension of face-to-face communication, but an independent language space with its own unique logic and identity.

Thus, technolinguistic theory shows that language development is a two-way street in which it not only reflects social change, but also is a direct result of possible and impossible types of technical interactions. Language does not only adapt to media, but also radically undoes and changes its function, structure and meaning as a natural result of the characteristics of digital technology. Thus, technolinguistics is relevant for describing modern language change and revealing corpus literacy in the digital age.

Darwinian Adaptation Theory of Language: Language as an Evolutionary Mechanism

The Darwinian evolutionary theory of language assumes that changes in linguistics arise in response to changes in the social environment and ways of communicating. In the digital age, phenomena such as the emergence of new terms, the simplification of sentence structures, and the use of images in communication reflect the mechanism of natural selection in language. Only forms of language that are effective, relevant, and easy to disseminate will survive and thrive among users. For example, acronyms like "FOMO" and "LOL" continue to exist because they effectively convey complex meanings quickly.

Digital code-switching can also be interpreted as a way of adapting language to social situations that require identity fluidity. Online, people often connect with different groups from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The ability to code-switch or combine languages becomes an adaptive method of displaying social identity, expanding areas of communication, and coping with changing social norms. From a Darwinian perspective, this suggests that the means of communication that are most sensitive to the demands of the social environment tend to "survive".

The phenomenon of global vernaculars shows how social and cross-cultural adaptation occurs. Language serves as a flexible tool, helping people navigate social networks around the world. With the increasing number of cross-cultural interactions on global platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Discord, people are developing hybrid language repertoires that can adapt to different social contexts.This process confirms that language is not a uniform entity, but rather a system that is constantly changing along with existing social and cultural influences.

Furthermore, the use of visual language such as emojis and GIFs shows adaptation to the expressive limitations of digital communication. When verbal language struggles to express emotional nuances quickly, visual semiotic systems emerge as an adaptive response. This strengthens the argument that multimodal communication is not just a temporary phenomenon, but is a development of language in response to the demands of expression in the digital environment.

Finally, Darwin's doctrine emphasizes that language evolves through the selection, variation, and inheritance of efficient linguistic forms. In the digital environment, innovation in language is driven by the speed of information communication and the dynamics of social context. In other words, new forms of language structure are the result of "rapid evolution" driven by technological and social impacts. This explains why new linguistic methods can spread quickly and become commonplace in digital communities.

CONCLUSION

Digital technologies, globalization, and social media have profoundly transformed language, moving beyond mere communication tools to become active shapers of linguistic structures and functions. The research highlights five key areas of language evolution in the

digital age: lexical innovation, evidenced by terms like "FOMO" and "selfie," which demonstrate how online communities create new linguistic identities and adapt vocabulary to digital lifestyles. Code-switching has become a strategic tool for bilingual and multilingual users to achieve communication efficiency, express stylistic preferences, and negotiate social identity in cyberspace. Grammar simplification, characterized by shorter, more direct sentences and abbreviations, reflects an adaptation to the need for speed and efficiency in digital communication, demonstrating a unique grammatical system rather than mere deviation. The increasing use of emojis and GIFs has transformed language into a multimodal system, where visual symbols complement verbal messages to convey emotions and nuances effectively, although their interpretation can be context-dependent. Finally, the emergence of globalized vernaculars, like those seen in K-pop fandoms, illustrates how online communities foster new dialects that blend elements from various languages and cultures, showcasing language as a flexible, global communication tool shaped by transnational communities. These findings underscore that language in the digital era is not merely an extension of offline communication but an independent, evolving linguistic system driven by technological designs and social interactions. This evolution reflects a Darwinian adaptation where efficient, relevant, and easily disseminated linguistic forms survive and thrive in response to changing social and communication demands

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings in this study, several recommendations can be made for future developments in study and practice. First, further empirical research exploring live language use by different demographic groups on different digital platforms is needed, given the theoretical and literature-based nature of this study. Second, educators and curriculum developers are expected to integrate awareness of digital language dynamics into language education, especially regarding multimodal communication, code-switching, and lexical innovation, so that learners can understand and respond critically to language change. Third, there is a need for further research on the influence of digital language practices on academic literacy and formal writing skills, especially among the younger generation who are accustomed to online communication. Finally, an interdisciplinary approach involving technolinguistics, sociolinguistics and media studies is strongly recommended to understand the mechanisms of language change in the digital era. Challenges such as cultural differences in emoji meanings, disparities in access to technology, and linguistic inequality also need to be considered so that the development of digital communication can take place in a fair and inclusive manner.

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