

LANGUAGE VARIATION AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION IN COLLEGE STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Ahmad Bayu Fathoni, Krisdian Aulia Putri, Nasywa Abril Maulida Zein, Nazriela Nur Syahbani, Suparwoto Sapto Wahono
State Islamic University Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember
ahmadbayufathoni123@gmail.com, krisdianauliaputri17@gmail.com,
nasywaabril@gmail.com, nazrielanursyahbani@gmail.com, wahsapto@uinkhas.ac.id

ABSTRACT: This study examines the dynamics of language use among students from a sociolinguistic perspective, particularly within campus and digital communication contexts. As a multicultural and technology-driven environment, the campus provides a space where diverse linguistic practices emerge and reflect students' social interaction and communication strategies. The objective of this study is to analyze how language variation develops and to explore its relationship with identity negotiation among students. This study employs a literature review method by analyzing 12 relevant scientific articles related to sociolinguistics, language variation, and digital communication. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns of language use and the factors influencing students' linguistic choices in both face-to-face and online interactions. The findings reveal that language variation among students emerges through continuous social interaction and exposure to digital media. Common forms include code-switching, code-mixing, dialect variation, slang, and lexical innovation, which are influenced by social relationships, cultural background, peer interaction, and technological exposure. Furthermore, language variation is closely related to identity negotiation, as students actively construct and express their social identities through context-dependent linguistic choices. Overall, this study highlights that language use among students functions not only as a means of communication but also as a dynamic social practice shaped by ongoing social and technological changes.

Keywords: *language variation, code-switching, social identity, social media, sociolinguistics*

VARIASI BAHASA DAN NEGOSIASI IDENTITAS DALAM KOMUNIKASI SOSIAL DAN DIGITAL MAHASISWA

ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika penggunaan bahasa di kalangan mahasiswa dari perspektif sosiolinguistik, khususnya dalam konteks komunikasi di lingkungan kampus dan digital. Sebagai lingkungan yang multikultural dan berbasis teknologi, kampus menjadi ruang yang memunculkan beragam praktik kebahasaan yang mencerminkan interaksi sosial dan strategi komunikasi mahasiswa. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis bagaimana variasi bahasa berkembang serta mengeksplorasi keterkaitannya dengan proses negosiasi identitas di kalangan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan menganalisis 15 artikel ilmiah yang relevan terkait sosiolinguistik, variasi bahasa, dan komunikasi digital. Analisis difokuskan pada identifikasi pola penggunaan bahasa serta faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi pilihan bahasa mahasiswa dalam interaksi langsung maupun daring. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa variasi bahasa di kalangan mahasiswa muncul melalui interaksi sosial yang berkelanjutan serta paparan terhadap media digital. Bentuk variasi yang umum meliputi alih kode, campur kode, variasi

dialek, penggunaan slang, dan inovasi leksikal, yang dipengaruhi oleh hubungan sosial, latar belakang budaya, interaksi teman sebaya, serta paparan teknologi. Selain itu, variasi bahasa berkaitan erat dengan proses negosiasi identitas, di mana mahasiswa secara aktif membangun dan mengekspresikan identitas sosial mereka melalui pilihan bahasa yang disesuaikan dengan konteks, lawan tutur, dan media komunikasi. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penggunaan bahasa di kalangan mahasiswa tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai praktik sosial yang dinamis yang dibentuk oleh perubahan sosial dan perkembangan teknologi. Media pembelajaran berbasis *web* dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris telah menjadi tren populer dan diakui secara luas oleh pendidik dan siswa dalam beberapa dekade terakhir.

Kata Kunci: *variasi bahasa, alih kode, identitas sosial, media sosial, sosiolinguistik*

INTRODUCTION

Language use is closely related to the formation of individual or group social identities. The college student environment is a pluralistic environment, so the language used is often varied and flexible. This shows that language is not only a means of exchanging information but also a medium for college students to express their identities, which are influenced by social and cultural backgrounds and technological developments. This community is often a pioneer in language change through the interactions they carry out in various spaces, both formal and informal. Therefore, this study is important in understanding language practices in the college student community through a sociolinguistic perspective. This study is relevant because language is a space for college students to express and adapt to the environment they face.

The dynamics of language in the college student environment develop through various social interactions, both direct interactions and indirect interactions through digital media. These interactions cover various contexts such as the academic world, friendships, organizational activities, and the use of social media in everyday life. In these interactions, college students often use borrowing foreign terms, mixing languages, and changing languages as a form of adjustment to the interlocutor and the situation at hand. In addition, technological developments also make the language style used by college students more flexible, efficient, and responsive. Through these interactions, language becomes an important means for college students to show their identity, strengthen social relationships, and position their status in the social environment.

Language changes in the college student environment are influenced by the communication methods used. For example, face-to-face discussions in class or organizational meetings allow college students to directly form and adjust meaning in interactions. Meanwhile, indirect communication, such as online forums or social media, gives college students more time to think before responding so that language use becomes more systematic. Both of these methods shape and influence how college students adapt and build their identities in the community.

Although various studies have discussed the dynamics of language in college student communities, most of them are still focused on the formal realm of education or language variations in learning contexts. In addition, several studies discuss the use of language in social media, but few have examined in more depth how the combination of direct and indirect interactions shapes college students' social identities and language strategies. Therefore, this study aims to examine how language practices among college students are shaped by different types of communication, particularly direct and indirect interactions, within various social contexts. It also seeks to explore how these language practices contribute to the construction of students' social identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Sociolinguistics and Language in Community

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. According to Holmes (2013), sociolinguistics focuses on how language choice is influenced by various factors such as age, gender, social status, and cultural background. Thus, language is not only a means of communication but also a tool to reflect social dynamics in a community. In the college student environment,

social influences are very visible in the way of communicating, word choice, and adaptation to community norms. This shows that language cannot be separated from social life because its existence is always tied to the social structure in which the language develops.

2. Language Variation and Identity

Language variation is closely linked to the construction and expression of social identity, particularly within dynamic communities such as college students (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). In sociolinguistic perspectives, individuals tend to adjust their language use based on social contexts, interlocutors, and communicative purposes. College students, as part of a pluralistic and socially active community, frequently employ various linguistic strategies such as code-switching, borrowing, and language mixing to reflect their identities and adapt to different interactional settings. These variations are not merely linguistic phenomena but also represent social meanings, including group affiliation, cultural background, and social positioning. Furthermore, the increasing influence of digital communication has expanded the forms of language variation, making them more flexible and responsive to situational demands. Therefore, language variation becomes a crucial medium through which college students negotiate and construct their social identities in both direct and mediated interactions.

3. Language Variation and Code Switching

Students are part of a social community that often exhibits flexible and contextual language practices. According to Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015), variations in these language practices include aspects such as dialect, speaking style, register, and the use of code mixing and code switching. This phenomenon is often influenced by the background of the interaction, the purpose of speaking, and the relationship between speakers. In a campus environment, language adjustments by students are clearly visible depending on the context and who they are interacting with.

4. Speech Communities and Language Dynamics

The speech community theory developed by Hymes (1974) states that each community has its own linguistic norms and rules. In the context of students, speech communities can be formed through academic departments, campus organizations, or informal social groups. Each of these communities develops a distinctive form of language as part of its collective identity. The uniqueness of this language emerges through repeated interactions and social values that are built and shared.

5. Community of Practice and Language Formation

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) introduced the concept of community of practice to show that language practices are formed through active participation in social activities carried out together. In the campus environment, this concept is reflected in various activities such as classroom discussions, involvement in student organizations, and interactions on social media. The language used in the community of practice not only reflects the existing social norms but also plays a role in shaping the identity of individuals as members of the community.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a literature review method with a qualitative approach to examine language dynamics in student communities from a sociolinguistic perspective. According to Ferdiansyah (2024), a literature review is a research process that involves reviewing and critically evaluating existing literature sources. The main objective is to understand and describe the current state of research in the field related to the topic being studied. In this context, 15 relevant scientific articles were selected from accredited journals and academic publications that discuss language variation, language change, and social factors influencing language use in student environments. To provide a clearer and more systematic overview, these studies are categorized based on key sociolinguistic themes, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Article Categorization List

No	Author(s) & Year	Focus	Key Findings	Category
1	Aditiawarman et al. (2025)	Youth language & media	Language is influenced by digital interaction	Speech Style / Social Factors
2	Putri & Putra (2024)	Language in social media	Language mixing in an online context	Speech Style
3	Putri (2024)	Student language variation	Variation reflects context	Dialect Variation
4	Safitri & Tamrin (2025)	Identity negotiation	Language constructs identity	Social Identity
5	Septiana (2024)	Code-switching YouTube	Mixing language in interaction	Speech Style
6	Tarigan & Sihombing (2024)	Social environment	The environment affects language	Social Factors
7	Vusyk et al. (2023)	Speech practices	Language reflects community	Speech Style
8	Eckert (2000)	Variation & identity	Language tied to identity	Social Identity
9	Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015)	Sociolinguistics theory	Language variation in society	Dialect Variation
10	Holmes (2013)	Social language use	Context affects language	Social Factors
11	Hymes (1974)	Ethnography of communication	Context-based language use	Social Factors
12	Dorgham (2024)	Sociolinguistic competence in EFL	Language use is influenced by social and cultural context	Social Factors

Data were collected through a systematic search in academic databases using keywords such as "language dynamics in communities," "student sociolinguistics," and "language change among students." Data analysis was carried out descriptively and thematically by grouping the main findings of each article into categories related to dialect variation, speech style, diglossia, and the influence of social factors such as environment, language situation, and social identity. The selection prioritized studies that address language variation, language change, and social factors influencing language use, particularly in student contexts, with an emphasis on relevant research. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of language dynamics in student communities and provides a basis for further development of sociolinguistic studies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Language Variation as a Representation of Students' Identity

Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium to express the speaker's social identity. In the context of multicultural university life, students who come from diverse cultural, regional, ethnic, and social backgrounds contribute to the emergence of various language variations. These language variations are not only indicative of a person's cultural origin but also reflect their linguistic choices and group affiliations. For example, students from Medan, Jakarta, Papua, and Java often show differences in communication, such as in dialect, vocabulary, and even in their unique language structures. A study by Putri (2024) found that students often blend local dialects, slang, and code-switching in their social media interactions, which can directly reflect their social positioning and ethnic identity in digital environments.

Furthermore, these language variations also function as a strategy for identity negotiation among multilingual urban students. According to Safitri and Tamrin (2025), these students use code-switching, language hybridity, and linguistic innovation as means to adapt and assert their social positions. Language serves as a symbol of group solidarity as well as a tool to resist cultural homogenization. For example, the use of terms like “gue” and “lo” in informal interactions is not only a marker of speech style but also a bond with a relaxed and agile urban lifestyle. On the other hand, when interacting formally with lecturers or in academic forums, students use standard and formal language as a sign of respect and formal identity.

According to a study by Aditiawarman et al. (2025) analyzing the podcast *#BeritaAkhirPekan* about language phenomena used by urban teenagers, especially in South Jakarta, Aditiawarman et al. noted the occurrence of code-mixing between Indonesian and English, which is frequently used to convey an image of competence, modernity, and global awareness, as well as to signal lifestyle and social strata. Although this study does not specifically focus on university students, these usage patterns are also found among students in large urban areas who are close to popular culture and digital media. For example, a phrase like “this is so ugly, *nggak sesuai sama selera* I” shows a blend of local and global languages.

From a theoretical perspective, Eckert (2000) states that language variation not only reflects social group membership but also creates social categories of its own. The language choices made by students do not merely indicate who they are but also establish their position within the social structure of the campus. The diverse speaking styles among students can create symbolic boundaries, such as between those perceived as “intellectuals” and those associated with more casual social groups, or between “campus activists” and less academically engaged students. Thus, language variation among university students plays a crucial role in expressing and shaping their social identities. Through strategies such as code-switching and language mixing, students negotiate their social positions, group affiliations, and cultural backgrounds within diverse social contexts.

2. Campus Social Spaces for Constructing Language Norms

The speech community in the campus environment is a social setting where linguistic norms are formed and developed through intense verbal interactions between community members, such as students, lecturers, and staff. According to research conducted at Khmelnytsky National University (2023), a speech community is not just a collection of individuals who use a shared language but a dynamic community of practice, where power, legitimacy, and social identities are negotiated through everyday language use. Various social and cultural factors influence the formation of linguistic norms within campus speech communities. Vusyk et al. (2023) stated that ethnicity plays a role in creating distinctive linguistic variations, especially when the majority language is mixed with the language of a minority group, resulting in a unique and sometimes complex language variety. In addition, gender-based differences in language use also affect communication patterns, where stereotypes and social expectations shape differences in the way men and women speak. Geographical background also determines the emergence of different dialects and accents, especially in the campus environment, which is a meeting place for students from various regions with diverse language varieties.

Social identity is an important aspect of the campus speech community. In their study, Vusyk et al. (2023) found that language is used as a tool to mark social boundaries and distinguish certain groups, for example, through jargon or special terms that are only understood by members of the community. Education and fields of study also contribute significantly to the variation in language used, as students from various disciplines develop language styles and vocabulary that are appropriate to their fields of study. Linguistic norms in the campus speech community are formed through daily interactions in various academic and social activities, such as group discussions, lectures, and research projects. Through these interactions, students continuously adapt their language use by shifting between formal and informal styles depending on the context and interlocutors. The use of foreign languages, such as English and German, often emerges in these interactions, further contributing to the development of dynamic and evolving language norms on campus.

In addition, campus speech communities are also influenced by the wider social environment, such as the development of digital technology and urbanization. A study at Dormitory Saint Anna, Tanjung Balai (2023), explains that the digital era has created an online speech community whose language and communication norms are developing very rapidly, influenced by social media and digital culture. Urbanization brings multicultural influences that enrich the language variations in campus speech communities. Migration and diaspora also play a role in maintaining linguistic traditions while introducing new elements from other cultures. In this context, campus speech communities become a place for ongoing language negotiation and innovation. Besides that, slang and linguistic innovation are also an important part of language norms in campus speech communities. Slang that develops among students is a form of creativity and group identity that continues to change and adapt to the social context. The use of slang can strengthen a sense of togetherness as well as be a tool for negotiating social identity in the community.

The concept of a community of practice emphasizes that power and legitimacy in language use are not static or simply hierarchical. Eckert (2013) explains that legitimacy is obtained through active participation in community practices and joint negotiations regarding recognized language competence. Through this process,

community members construct their social identities and develop language styles that reflect their membership and participation within the community. Overall, the campus speech community is a place where diverse, dynamic, and inclusive language norms are formed. These norms are formed through complex social interactions, where factors of ethnicity, gender, geography, education, special needs, and the influence of technology and urbanization interact with each other. Language norms in this community not only function as a means of communication, but also as a medium for forming social and cultural identities that support the success of academic and social communication in the campus environment.

3. Campus Speech Community: Language Variation, Politeness, and Diversity in Academic Contexts

According to Septiana (2024), code-switching and code-mixing are common in digital communication contexts. While the study focuses on online interactions, similar linguistic practices can also be observed in face-to-face academic settings, including campus environments. In this context, students frequently use code-switching when interacting with peers and lecturers, shifting between Indonesian, local languages, and English. This practice not only reflects linguistic diversity but also serves as a strategy to adjust levels of formality and express politeness in academic communication. The use of appropriate diction and controlled intonation is often associated with respectful interaction, particularly in formal academic situations. Therefore, code-switching can indicate students' awareness of social norms, their linguistic competence, and their efforts to maintain politeness within the campus speech community.

Furthermore, language variation among students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts is influenced by factors such as topic, social relationships, and academic environment. A study published in the *Getsempena English Education Journal* (2024) shows that students frequently combine local dialects, Bahasa Indonesia, and English in classroom interactions and academic discussions. This practice reflects the diverse linguistic backgrounds within the campus speech community and demonstrates how students adapt their language use depending on the level of formality and their interlocutors. In addition, the use of non-standard English forms may arise due to the influence of the mother tongue and habitual language use. These variations illustrate how students negotiate meaning, express identity, and maintain politeness within academic communication.

Overall, language variation in campus speech communities reflects students' ability to adapt their linguistic choices based on academic contexts, social relationships, and levels of formality. Through practices such as code-switching and the use of diverse linguistic resources, students not only express politeness but also construct and negotiate their social identities. This demonstrates that language use in academic settings is both dynamic and socially meaningful, shaped by continuous interaction within the campus environment.

4. The Factors Influencing Students' Language Variation in the Use of Social Media

In the context of the current digital era, social media and communication technology have become integral elements in students' academic and social life. Interactions that occur through various digital platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and online learning media (e-learning), are frequently used by students for

communication and information exchange. These platforms also contribute to shaping students' language practices, as communication in digital spaces exposes them to diverse linguistic inputs and interactional styles. Thus, media and environment play an important role as factors influencing language variation in academic communities.

In their study, Aditiawarman et al. (2025) highlighted the dynamics of language among young people in South Jakarta through discourse analysis in the #BeritaAkhirPekan podcast. Using a sociolinguistic approach, this study explores patterns of language variation that reflect the influence of digital culture, urbanization, and social media exposure as key factors in shaping communication styles. The results of the study show that the practice of code-switching between Indonesian and English is a dominant feature in their interactions, both to show familiarity and to construct a modern self-image. This indicates that social media exposure and digital culture contribute significantly to the emergence of flexible and hybrid language use among young speakers.

In addition, the emergence of slang words, digital abbreviations, and expressions typical of online communities illustrates the creative process in the use of language as a tool of identity expression and a symbol of social membership. These linguistic features are influenced by peer interaction in digital environments, where students and young users continuously adapt to trending expressions and communicative practices. These findings indicate that language not only functions as a means of communication but also as a medium of social and cultural expression that continues to transform in accordance with the digital environment. This shows that social media interaction, peer influence, and exposure to online communities are important factors in shaping language variation among students and urban youth.

Dorham (2024) examined the application of sociolinguistic competence development strategies in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Although the study focuses on language learning strategies, it also highlights the importance of exposure to social and cultural contexts in developing students' ability to use language appropriately. These aspects can be understood as part of the broader factors that influence students' awareness of language variation. The results of the study showed that integrating social and cultural elements helps students understand variations in speaking styles, levels of formality, and norms of politeness. Thus, this supports the idea that exposure to diverse communicative contexts, including digital and academic environments, contributes to students' development of language variation competence.

Overall, these findings indicate that students' language variation in social media contexts is influenced by several interconnected factors, including social interaction, cultural background, and technological exposure. The use of digital media such as social media platforms and online communication spaces provides opportunities for code-switching practices, the emergence of slang, and the construction of dynamic linguistic identities among students. In addition, exposure to diverse communicative practices in both digital and academic environments contributes to students' awareness of appropriate language use in different contexts. Thus, language variation within student communities reflects not only linguistic competence but also ongoing adaptation to social and technological changes in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the dynamics of language use among students, which emerge through continuous interaction in both direct communication and digital media. Language variation develops as students engage in diverse social contexts, where exposure to different linguistic backgrounds, communication technologies, and peer interactions encourages the use of code-switching, code-mixing, dialect variation, and lexical innovation. These practices illustrate how language variation arises as a natural outcome of social interaction within multicultural campus life.

Speech communities in the campus environment create dynamic language norms that are shaped through ongoing social interactions influenced by ethnic background, gender, region of origin, and field of study, as well as technological development and urbanization. Within these communities, identity is continuously negotiated through language choices, as students adjust their linguistic behavior to express belonging, distinction, and social positioning in different contexts. The use of digital media further accelerates this process by providing spaces where new linguistic forms such as slang, internet-specific expressions, and hybrid language use emerge and circulate rapidly among students.

In addition, technology-based sociolinguistic learning approaches such as e-learning contribute to students' awareness of language variation by strengthening their understanding of how language functions in different social and cultural contexts. This suggests the importance of engaging students with diverse and authentic communicative practices, including those found in digital environments, to support the development of their pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic awareness. Overall, language variation among students emerges from the interaction between social environment, digital communication, and identity negotiation processes, where students actively construct and reconstruct their identities through language use in both academic and digital spaces.

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