



## Psycholinguistics In a Digital Perspective: The Influence of social media On Language Production

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### Abstract

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*The rapid advancement of digital technology has brought significant changes to the way people interact and use language, particularly through social media, which has now become a major space for self-expression and shaping linguistic habits. This study aims to analyze the influence of social media on human language production from a psycholinguistic perspective. The research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach through digital observations and semi-structured interviews with fifth-semester students of the English Education Program. The findings indicate that social media affects students' language production in several ways: sentence structures become simpler, register shifts occur, language is produced more quickly, and academic accuracy tends to decrease. Nevertheless, students are still able to adapt and return to using formal language when required by the context. These findings also open opportunities for further research on how digital habits relate to academic literacy skills*

#### **Keywords:**

*Social media, language production, digital communication, cognition*

### Introduction

Psycholinguistics is a field of study that examines the relationship between language and human mental processes, particularly how language is produced, understood, and used in various communicative situations. In today's digital era, the use of social media has become an integral part of students' daily lives. They interact through WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, and various other platforms almost every day. Communication in digital spaces shows linguistic features that differ significantly from formal language shorter, more fluid, more expressive, and often more creative. This phenomenon is noteworthy because in psycholinguistics, language production is not determined solely by linguistic competence, but is strongly influenced by social context, technological environments, and the speaker's cognitive state.

The linguistic shifts that occur on social media indicate that students adjust their word choices, sentence structures, and message delivery according to the fast-paced and practical nature of digital platforms. Crystal (2011) emphasizes that internet language represents a new linguistic variety that should not be viewed as language degradation, but rather as a natural linguistic evolution shaped by communicative needs. This aligns with Herring (2013), who

describes digital interaction as “computer-mediated discourse,” which has its own linguistic features such as abbreviations, ellipsis, emoticons, and informal conversational style.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, language production on social media can be analyzed through the classical model introduced by Levelt (1989), consisting of three major stages: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. During conceptualization, speakers construct the ideas they intend to express; during formulation, these ideas are translated into linguistic structures; and finally, articulation is the execution of these structures into speech or writing. Levelt explains that these processes occur rapidly and adaptively, meaning that changes in communicative context will directly influence the type of language produced. Field (2003) also states that speakers tend to choose the most efficient production strategies to achieve communicative goals, making digital media a natural environment for producing short, concise, and direct linguistic forms.

Social media, as an informal communicative space, gives users greater freedom to express themselves. Tagg (2015) emphasizes that language use on social media is flexible, creative, often involves code-mixing, and generally resembles casual spoken interaction. Similarly, Barton and Lee (2013) describe social media as a “linguistic playground,” where users experiment with new forms of expression, including nonstandard spelling, visual emphasis, and playful stylistic variations. This shows that social media is not only a communication tool but also a space for users to explore their linguistic creativity in everyday contexts.

From the cognitive perspective, social media influences how users process language. According to Krashen (1982), spontaneous communication often bypasses the monitoring system, the internal mechanism responsible for checking linguistic accuracy. As a result, the produced utterances tend to be fast, minimally planned, and less grammatically monitored. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) further argue that frequent rapid-response interaction fosters automaticity, a cognitive condition in which individuals produce words or sentences with reduced conscious control. This phenomenon is evident in students’ habitual use of short, elliptical sentences, abbreviations, acronyms, and incomplete structures.

Carr (2010) suggests that digital environments alter patterns of attention and affect how individuals select and process linguistic information. Sutherland (2018) adds that social media encourages “rapid-fire exchange,” which prioritizes speed over accuracy. Ling and Baron (2007) also point out that digital communication places emphasis on efficiency, which explains the widespread use of short forms such as “otw,” “idk,” “brb,” “lol,” and various emoticons as substitutes for longer, more structured utterances.

Previous research has discussed the characteristics of digital language, yet studies that explicitly connect these phenomena with classical psycholinguistic theories such as conceptualization, formulation, and articulation remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing students’ linguistic behavior on social media through digital interaction observations and semi-structured interviews. The study focuses on how linguistic shifts ranging from lexical choices to syntactic simplification and visual-symbolic expression can be explained through the mental processes involved in language production in digital contexts.

In sum, this study not only describes the forms of language that emerge on social media but also explains how cognitive mechanisms and psycholinguistic processes shape these variations. The findings are expected to contribute to modern psycholinguistic scholarship and provide deeper insights into the dynamics of language production among the digital generation.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to portray how students naturally produce language when communicating through social media. This type of research was chosen because it allows linguistic behaviors to emerge in their natural form without being forced into rigid analytical categories. As Sandelowski (2000) explains, qualitative descriptive research is appropriate for capturing everyday communication in a straightforward and realistic manner. The study was conducted at STAIN Mandailing Natal and focused on understanding how students construct, modify, and adapt their language in fast and informal digital interactions.

The data in this study were collected from two main sources: students' real-time digital communication activities and their explanations obtained through interviews. The types of data gathered included linguistic features found in social media interactions such as sentence structure, vocabulary choices, register, abbreviations, emotive expressions, and the speed of message production as well as students' verbal reflections about their communication practices. These two forms of data complemented each other by providing both observable linguistic patterns and deeper insights into the thought processes behind their language use.

Data were collected using two instruments: digital observation notes and semi-structured interview guidelines. Digital observation notes were used to document conversations, comments, captions, and short messages that appeared in students' daily online activities. This technique enabled the researcher to capture language production naturally and without intervention. The semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, explored students' reasons for simplifying sentences, mixing languages, using slang, or choosing informal expressions. The flexible format of the interviews allowed participants to describe their habits freely and provide concrete examples from their own communication. Before data collection began, ten fifth-semester students were selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion that they actively used social media. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave consent, particularly when private messages were involved.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, the researcher selected, organized, and condensed the information to focus only on data relevant to the research objectives. In the data display stage, the organized information was presented in a clear form that made patterns, connections, and linguistic tendencies easier to interpret. In the final stage, the researcher drew conclusions by interpreting the patterns found and ensuring that the interpretations were consistent with the evidence. Ethical considerations were also prioritized, especially when handling private chats, and the researcher always sought permission from participants before using their data. Through these systematic procedures, the study was able to produce an accurate and meaningful description of students' language production in digital communication.

## Result

This section presents the results of the study based on data collected through digital observations and interviews. The findings are organized according to the predetermined variables: sentence structure, register variation, speed of language production, and the impact of social media use on students' academic language awareness.

### Simplification of Sentence Structure

Observations from conversations on WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok show a clear pattern in students' everyday digital communication: they tend to use very short, straightforward, and highly efficient sentence forms. These messages often leave out key

grammatical elements such as explicit subjects, auxiliary verbs, or complete predicates. Examples that frequently appear include:

1. “Udah aku kirim”
2. “Fix nanti malam”
3. “Otw kelas”

These kinds of expressions indicate that students prioritize getting the meaning across rather than constructing grammatically complete sentences. Many students explained that this choice is intentional. Because digital conversations move quickly, they feel the need to respond just as quickly. In this fast-paced environment, clarity and speed matter more than perfect grammar. As long as the message is understood, they see no need to build a full sentence.

What becomes even more interesting is that students clearly understand when this style is appropriate and when it is not. During interviews, they emphasized that they would never write this way to lecturers or in academic assignments. When switching to more formal contexts such as emailing lecturers, preparing written reports, or communicating in professional situations they naturally return to complete, well-structured sentences. This shows that the simplified patterns they use online are shaped by context, not by a lack of ability to use proper grammar.

This ability to shift between informal and formal language demonstrates a strong sense of linguistic flexibility. Students adjust their language depending on who they are talking to and what the situation requires. This kind of adaptability is commonly found among bilingual or multilingual speakers who are used to navigating different linguistic settings.

These findings align with Levelt’s (1989) idea that language production always depends on the context and the speaker’s intention. Field (2003) also explains that people naturally choose the most efficient linguistic form when speed and clarity are more important than structural detail. Based on this perspective, the simplified language used by students in digital communication should be seen as a practical and context-aware choice not as a sign of weakening language skills.

### **Variation of Register and Digital Language Style**

In digital interaction, students do not only simplify sentence structures but also blend various language varieties within a single conversation. This mixture often includes Indonesian, English, and popular digital slang. Some frequently used examples are:

1. “Lagi hectic banget”
2. “Valid banget sumpah”
3. “Okay noted beb”

This kind of language mixing shows that digital communication has its own rhythm and character. Students feel free to express themselves without being bound to one specific linguistic norm. They combine English words with Indonesian intensifiers like *banget*, or add trendy expressions to make their messages sound more expressive, lively, and relatable to their peers.

In addition to code-mixing, students also rely heavily on emoticons, emojis, and stickers. These visual elements help them convey emotions, tone, or attitudes that cannot be fully expressed through text alone. For example, laughing emojis signal playfulness, sad emojis express sympathy, while animated stickers reinforce reactions in a more engaging and personal way. Students explained that these elements appear naturally and spontaneously rather than being intentionally planned as part of their everyday digital communication.

Another clear pattern is the absence of formal register in social media interactions. None of the respondents reported using formal or standardized language in their chats on WhatsApp, Instagram, or TikTok. They described formal language as “too stiff,” “too distant,” and unsuitable for the fast, casual flow of digital conversations. Using a formal register, according to them, makes the interaction feel unnatural, almost like writing an official letter rather than chatting with friends.

This phenomenon aligns with Crystal’s (2011) view that digital communication has its own flexible and expressive linguistic style, distinct from traditional forms of language use. Social media platforms provide users with space to play with language, experiment with different registers, and shape expressions that fit the moment. The findings also support Tagg’s (2015) argument that social media encourages creative and informal communication, where users freely mix words, symbols, and visuals to construct meaning in ways that feel most natural to them.

Overall, the variation of register and digital language styles observed among students should not be seen as linguistic disorder, but rather as evidence of their ability to adapt language according to context. They understand that digital spaces do not require strict adherence to formal norms. Instead, these platforms foster a more fluid, dynamic, and identity-driven style of communication that resonates with their generation.

### **Speed of Language Production and Its Consequences**

One of the most noticeable features of students’ communication on social media is the speed at which they respond to messages. In many of the conversations analyzed, replies appeared only a few seconds after the previous message. This habit reflects more than just fast typing; it shows how deeply students have adapted to the rapid tempo of digital interaction.

Because responses are sent so quickly, students have very little time to check or edit their messages. As a result, various forms of linguistic irregularities naturally appear, such as:

1. unnoticed typographical errors,
2. missing or incomplete letters,
3. sentences that end abruptly,
4. highly condensed, nonstandard abbreviations.

A clear example from the data is:

“Ok mkksdny gmna? td g kliatan vidionya”

At first glance, this message seems full of shortcuts and missing letters. However, for students, this is not a problem at all. As long as the message is understood and the conversation flows smoothly, linguistic accuracy becomes secondary. What matters most is delivering the meaning quickly.

Interviews also revealed an interesting social dimension: many students feel that replying quickly is a kind of unwritten rule in digital communication. A slow response can be interpreted as disinterest or carelessness. This social expectation pushes students to prioritize speed over well-structured sentences, reinforcing a communication style that values immediacy.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, this phenomenon is completely understandable. Krashen (1982) explains that in spontaneous communication, the monitoring system weakens because speakers simply do not have enough time to evaluate grammar or word choice. Instead, they rely on routine and intuition.

This aligns with LaBerge and Samuels' (1974) concept of automatized processing, which describes how repeated exposure to fast paced tasks like chatting online encourages the brain to use automatic responses rather than deeper, more deliberate processing. In this context, typos or unconventional abbreviations are not signs of weak linguistic competence; they are natural by products of automatic, rapid communication.

Interestingly, when students move into academic or formal settings, they can shift back to structured and accurate language. This ability shows that their linguistic competence remains intact. The informal digital style exists alongside the formal one, and students switch between them depending on the communicative situation.

In short, the speed of language production in digital communication is not just about typing fast. It reflects the way the brain adjusts its processing strategies in environments where immediacy is expected. Accuracy decreases, not because students lack ability, but because the priorities in digital spaces are different. Fast, efficient, and spontaneous responses are valued more than grammatical perfection.

### **Impact of social media on Academic Language Awareness**

Interviews and digital observations indicate that social media significantly affects how students think about and use language in academic contexts. Several students admitted that, without realizing it, they sometimes insert informal expressions such as “banget,” “nggak,” “kayaknya,” or digital style abbreviations into their academic writing. These “accidental insertions” often occur when they are writing quickly, under time pressure, or drafting ideas in a rush. According to Biber et al. (1999), habitual exposure to informal registers can influence linguistic choices, especially when individuals frequently switch between casual and formal contexts. In this case, the constant habit of using informal language on social media seems to shape their writing rhythm, making casual expressions feel more automatic than formal ones.

Students also reported that their frequent practice of sending short, concise messages online has trained their minds to produce language rapidly and informally. Consequently, when transitioning to academic writing, they sometimes need extra effort to adjust their mindset and adopt a more formal register. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) concept of language transfer, where habits developed in one linguistic environment can influence performance in another. Importantly, this influence is not due to a lack of proficiency, but rather to deeply ingrained patterns formed through daily digital communication.

On the positive side, social media also expands students' linguistic exposure. Many students mentioned that they frequently encounter English vocabulary such as literally, vibe, hectic, and valid through memes, influencers, short videos, and online conversations. Repeated exposure allows them to acquire these words naturally in everyday interaction, even if they do not fully understand their academic usage. This process exemplifies incidental second-language acquisition (Ellis, 2008), where learners acquire vocabulary and expressions unconsciously through repeated exposure in meaningful contexts. Over time, this enhances students' familiarity with English expressions and builds confidence in engaging with English-language content.

Overall, the influence of social media on academic language awareness is twofold. Informal digital habits can unintentionally enter academic writing, affecting formal structures. At the same time, social media provides rich opportunities for vocabulary expansion and linguistic exposure. As suggested by Herring (2013), digital environments are dynamic spaces where users negotiate meaning and style, which can foster both challenges and growth in language skills. This dual impact highlights that social media does not merely weaken

academic language proficiency it shapes how students adapt their linguistic behavior across different communicative contexts.

### Overall Psycholinguistic Analysis

The findings of this study show that social media influences not only the linguistic forms students produce but also the cognitive processes behind their language production. When interacting in digital environments, students tend to produce language quickly and spontaneously. In these situations, speed and clarity of meaning become far more important than grammatical completeness or structural accuracy. This pattern reflects how their cognitive system adapts to the rhythm and demands of online communication.

The data illustrate several key psycholinguistic behaviors.

First, students frequently simplify sentence structures. They shorten phrases, omit elements they consider unnecessary, and choose only the most essential words to deliver their message. This is not a sign of reduced competence but rather a strategic adjustment to maintain conversational flow. When the main goal is to communicate efficiently, simplicity becomes a practical choice.

Second, students demonstrate flexible use of informal language. They shift between Indonesian, English, slang expressions, and digital features such as emojis depending on the person they are talking to and the nature of the conversation. Their ability to adapt their language shows that they are aware of different communicative norms and can adjust accordingly. This flexibility also highlights the social nature of digital communication, where tone, relationship, and context influence linguistic choices.

Third, the findings reveal that students reduce monitoring before sending messages. They rarely reread what they have typed, which explains the presence of typographical errors, incomplete words, and unconventional abbreviations in their chats. Psycholinguistically, this reduced monitoring occurs because immediate responses are expected in digital interactions, causing students to prioritize speed over accuracy.

Fourth, despite their informal habits, students can shift back to formal language when the context requires clarity and precision. During academic tasks or formal discussions, they demonstrate the ability to re-engage their monitoring system and produce structured, grammatical sentences. This indicates that the informal patterns used online do not replace or diminish their formal language ability. Instead, the two styles coexist and are activated depending on the communicative situation.

Overall, these behaviors support Levelt's (1989) model of language production, which includes conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. These core processes remain intact; what changes is the way students adjust them to fit the fast, dynamic environment of social media. In essence, digital platforms push students to rely on automatic, efficient linguistic routines. Social media does not weaken their linguistic competence. Instead, it encourages new forms of linguistic adaptation that allow students to communicate effectively in rapid, real-time digital interactions.

### Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive explanation of how students' digital communication behaviors answer the research questions and how these behaviors correspond with established theories in psycholinguistics and digital linguistics. The first major finding concerns the simplification of sentence structure in students' online communication. The tendency to use shorter and more direct sentences illustrates how students adjust their linguistic output to the rapid nature of digital interaction. This result aligns with Levelt's (1989) claim that language production is shaped by contextual demands and communicative goals, where speakers prioritize meaning over complex grammatical structuring. It also supports Field's (2004) argument that speakers naturally choose the most efficient linguistic forms when clarity

and speed are essential. Thus, the simplification identified in this study represents a strategic adaptation rather than diminished linguistic ability.

The second important result is the variation of register and the frequent use of code-mixing. Students combine Indonesian, English, slang expressions, and digital elements such as emoticons and stickers. This hybrid linguistic behavior reflects the flexible and creative communicative environment fostered by social media. The finding reinforces Crystal's (2011) assertion that digital communication encourages innovative and expressive language use. Similarly, Tagg (2015) argues that online spaces promote informal and playful linguistic practices, a phenomenon also observed in this study. These multimodal practices demonstrate that meaning in digital communication is constructed not only through text, but also through symbols that express tone, emotion, and interpersonal intention.

Another key finding concerns the speed at which students produce messages. The habit of responding quickly results in reduced self-monitoring, explaining the frequent appearance of typographical errors, omitted letters, abbreviations, and fragmented sentences. This observation supports Krashen's (1982) theory that the monitoring system weakens during spontaneous communication. It also corresponds with LaBerge and Samuels's (1974) concept of automatized processing, in which repeated rapid responses shape linguistic production with minimal conscious oversight. Therefore, the linguistic features found in students' digital messages are not indicators of incompetence, but natural consequences of prioritizing speed and communicative efficiency.

A further insight relates to the influence of digital communication habits on academic writing. Some students unconsciously transfer informal expressions or abbreviations into academic contexts, reflecting processes of language transfer shaped by repeated exposure. This supports general theories of cross-context linguistic influence, where frequent patterns in one domain affect performance in another. Nonetheless, the findings also show that students are capable of switching back to appropriate academic registers when required, indicating that digital language use does not erase their knowledge of formal structures but coexists with it as part of their broader linguistic repertoire.

The discussion demonstrates that students possess strong psycholinguistic adaptability. They adjust their language efficiently to meet the demands of digital communication while still maintaining the ability to use formal language in academic contexts. These results illustrate that digital language habits shape, but do not diminish, students' overall linguistic competence.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that social media use has a significant influence on the way students produce language. The findings show four major changes shaped by digital communication practices: the simplification of sentence structure, the shift in language register, the acceleration of language production, and a reduced attention to academic accuracy. Students tend to prioritize brief and direct expressions to meet the fast pace of online interaction, and they naturally employ code-mixing, abbreviations, emoticons, and informal styles as part of their digital identity.

The speed at which messages are exchanged encourages more automatic language production, resulting in frequent typographical errors, incomplete sentences, and reduced grammatical monitoring. Despite these tendencies, students are still able to shift back to formal and structured language when required in academic contexts or in situations demanding clarity and politeness. This indicates that the influence of social media is contextual rather than detrimental.

Overall, the study highlights that social media plays an important role in shaping students' psycholinguistic processes, influencing both how they process language and how they

apply it in daily communication. The findings also open opportunities for further studies exploring the relationship between social media use and academic literacy, as well as long-term cognitive effects of digital language patterns.

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