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The Use of Standard and Non-Standard Indonesian by Universitas Negeri Medan Students' in Digital Communication in the Social Media Era

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ABSTRAK

The growth of social media has significantly impacted language use among university students when communicating digitally. This study aims to (1) describe how students at Universitas Negeri Medan utilize standard and non-standard Indonesian in their daily digital interactions, (2) identify deviations from standard Indonesian language rules, and (3) explore students' perspectives regarding the impact of social media on their mastery of standard language. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed in this study. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires from five active students across various majors and analyzed thematically. The results indicate that students consciously choose standard Indonesian for formal and academic contexts (e.g., communicating with lecturers, completing assignments), whereas non-standard language or slang is more frequently used in informal interactions on WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok. Common deviations include non-standard abbreviations, slang, English code-mixing, and typographical errors, which are mostly driven by habit, social environment, and the need for rapid communication. Despite these deviations, students recognize the importance of using standard Indonesian to maintain professionalism, politeness, and national identity. They also implement strategies such as reading academic texts and practicing formal language to maintain their standard language skills. This study contributes to the sociolinguistic discussion regarding language change in the digital era.
Keywords: Standard Language, Non-Standard Language, Digital Communication, Social Media, University Student

INTRODUCTION

Humans rely on language as the primary tool for communication to convey thoughts, ideas, and emotions. In the Indonesian context, the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) plays a vital role as both the national language and the official language of the state. It is utilized in daily conversations, education, governance, and scientific advancement. Therefore, maintaining the correct and appropriate use of Indonesian is paramount to preserving its role as an integral part of the national identity.

Rapid advancements in information and communication technology have significantly transformed the ways in which people interact. The internet and social media have rendered communication faster, more practical, and highly flexible. According to the *Digital 2025: Indonesia* report by DataReportal, Indonesia recorded approximately 212

million internet users and 143 million active social media identities in early 2025. These figures demonstrate that social media has become a cornerstone of daily life, particularly for the younger generation and university students. As a tech-savvy demographic, students leverage social media for various purposes, including communication, information sharing, academic discussions, and peer support. In these digital interactions, language tends to be informal and seldom adheres to strict linguistic rules. This environment has fostered the proliferation of non-standard Indonesian, characterized by abbreviations, slang, code-mixing, and orthographic styles that deviate from linguistic norms. This phenomenon is vividly apparent in interactions across platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, and others.

While utilizing non-standard language is not inherently flawed—given its appropriateness in casual settings—concerns arise when it becomes overly dominant, potentially eroding students' proficiency in standard Indonesian, particularly within academic and official spheres. Research indicates that social media influences students' linguistic habits, leading to word shortening, the adoption of slang, and frequent errors in spelling and sentence construction. Furthermore, there is a risk that these informal digital habits might spill over into academic writing and formal communications. Conversely, standard Indonesian remains imperative as the benchmark for official and academic discourse. The General Guidelines for Indonesian Spelling (PUEBI) and the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI) serve as the primary authorities for proper and correct language usage. Accordingly, the Agency for Language Development and Cultivation consistently emphasizes the preservation of standard language to safeguard national identity amid the surge of digital communication and globalization.

The dichotomy between standard and non-standard Indonesian in digital communication warrants rigorous investigation, as it reflects broader shifts in students' linguistic behavior within the social media era. This study focuses on students at Universitas Negeri Medan (Unimed) as representatives of the digital generation, exploring how technology and social media shape their language practices. Guided by this background, the study addresses three central research questions: (1) What patterns characterize the use of standard and non-standard Indonesian by Unimed students in their daily digital communication? (2) What types of deviations from standard Indonesian grammatical and spelling rules emerge in their digital interactions? (3) How do Unimed students perceive and respond to the influence of social media on their mastery of standard Indonesian?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a descriptive qualitative design. The descriptive method aims to systematically, factually, and accurately describe linguistic phenomena among students without changing variables or providing special treatments. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research seeks to understand the meanings, patterns, and subjective experiences of respondents regarding the use of standard and non-standard Indonesian in digital communication.

1. Data and Data Sources

Data consist of qualitative information derived from respondents' written answers to an open-ended questionnaire. The data are divided into three main categories that correspond to the research questions: (1) patterns of standard and non-standard Indonesian use, (2) forms of deviation from standard Indonesian rules, and (3) students'

attitudes and perceptions about the influence of social media on their standard language ability.

The data sources consist of five active Unimed students selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (a) registered in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, (b) coming from different departments at Unimed, (c) not including the researcher themselves, and (d) willing to voluntarily fill out the questionnaire with honest and thorough answers. The selection of five respondents from various departments aims to capture diverse perspectives based on different academic backgrounds and social experiences.

2. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire distributed as an online form via WhatsApp to each respondent. The questionnaire contained nine open-ended questions divided into three sections according to the three research questions: Section A (3 questions) focused on language use patterns, Section B (3 questions) on forms of deviations, and Section C (3 questions) on attitudes and perceptions. Before distribution, an initial readability test was conducted with one student outside the sample to ensure each question was clear, unambiguous, and relevant. Respondents were given 48 hours to fill out the questionnaire.

3. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted with a descriptive qualitative approach through thematic analysis. The analysis process involved three steps: (1) data organization, all questionnaire answers were collected, read repeatedly, and coded (R1–R5) to maintain anonymity and simplify data tracking; (2) data reduction, irrelevant data were removed, focusing on answers that directly answered the three research questions; and (3) interpretation and conclusion, each respondent's answers were analyzed deeply by connecting them to the theoretical framework, and the final results were presented in the form of descriptive narratives enriched with direct quotes as empirical evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Patterns of Standard and Non-Standard Language Use

All respondents stated that WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok are the platforms they use most frequently for daily digital communication. The five respondents consistently reported using standard or formal Indonesian in academic or official contexts, such as completing assignments, giving presentations, or interacting with instructors. For example, Rini (R1) said, "I use formal Indonesian when doing assignments, presentations, or speaking with lecturers." Rointan (R2), an Indonesian Language Education student, stated, "I use formal language when writing proposals/papers or speaking with lecturers."

Conversely, when communicating with peers in casual situations or on social media, all respondents tend to use non-standard language (slang/casual language). Rini (R1) mentioned using "casual language when with parents or friends." Rointan (R2) added that she uses "slang at home, in the market, on social media." Febiyola (R5) stated using "casual language when chatting with friends." All five respondents acknowledged a clear difference in language use when chatting with close friends compared to texting lecturers or in class groups. Rini (R1) explained, "With lecturers it is formal to show politeness, with friends it is casual to be closer yet still polite and not offensive." Febiyola

(R5) provided further explanation: "When chatting with friends, I tend to use casual or non-formal language, which is different from when I am with lecturers where I tend to use standard language."

Forms of Deviation from Standard Indonesian Rules

Based on the respondents' answers, several types of deviations from standard Indonesian rules have been identified. The most dominant type of deviation is the use of non-standard abbreviations. Rini (R1) admitted to frequently writing "kayak" instead of "seperti" and "ngga" replacing "tidak." Niha (R4) mentioned shortening words, for example, "dngn" for "dengan" and "pdhl" for "padahal." Tasya (R3) provided examples such as "yg" and "gk." Febiyola (R5) admitted to using abbreviations like "btw," "wkwk," and "okey."

The use of slang also frequently occurs. Tasya (R3) mentioned "capek" (should be "lelah"), while Rointan (R2) mentioned "bayada," "knp," and "omg." Code-mixing with English is clearly visible, with Rointan (R2) and Febiyola (R5) using expressions like "omg," "btw," and "okey." All respondents agreed that habit is the main cause of these deviations. Rini (R1) stated, "Habit is the main cause, and I have been introduced to it since childhood." Febiyola (R5) added, "habit or following trends."

Students' Perceptions and Responses to the Influence of Social Media

Respondents held different views on how social media affects their standard Indonesian language ability. Rini (R1) argued that social media has an influence, but this depends on individual understanding. Rointan (R2) stated that social media has no effect, because language ability depends on each individual. Febiyola (R5) provided the most in-depth explanation: "Social media has both good and bad influences. The good side is that it makes it easier for us to express opinions and increases vocabulary. However, because I often use slang and abbreviations, sometimes it carries over when doing assignments. So, I have to be more careful in using standard language."

Regarding the difficulty of switching back to standard Indonesian after a day of using slang on social media, the respondents' opinions varied. Febiyola (R5) admitted, "Yes, sometimes I find it difficult. After using slang too often on social media or chat, unconsciously that language style carries over when doing assignments. For example, writing non-standard words like 'nggak' or 'gimana' or using abbreviations that are actually inappropriate for academic writing."

To maintain their standard language skills, respondents implement various strategies. Rini (R1) tries to "learn and correct wrong words and writing." Rointan (R2) practices by "frequently reading scientific texts and practicing using standard language." Febiyola (R5) strives to "be more careful when doing assignments" and "sometimes read articles or look at examples of correct writing to stay used to using standard language, even though daily life often uses slang." All five respondents strongly agreed that maintaining standard Indonesian remains important for students in the digital era. Rini (R1) emphasized, "Very important, because in the world of work this will definitely be needed even though technology is advancing." Febiyola (R5) explained, "In my opinion, students still need to maintain standard Indonesian, especially for assignments, presentations, or formal communication. Because standard language makes writing clearer, neater, and easier to understand. In addition, using good language also shows professionalism and respect for one's own language."

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings regarding the use of standard and non-standard Indonesian by Universitas Negeri Medan students in digital communication within the social media era, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, Unimed students tend to use standard Indonesian in formal and academic situations, such as when communicating with lecturers, completing assignments, writing scientific reports, and giving presentations. Meanwhile, in informal communication on social media and chat applications such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, students more frequently use non-standard language or slang. This pattern indicates that students are able to adjust their language variations according to the communication context and the interlocutor.

Second, the most frequently found forms of deviation from standard Indonesian rules in students' digital communication include the use of non-standard abbreviations, slang, code-mixing with English, as well as spelling and punctuation errors. These deviations generally occur due to habit factors, pressure from the social environment, the need for fast and practical communication, and the influence of language trends on social media.

Third, students are aware that the use of social media can have both positive and negative impacts on their standard Indonesian language skills. On the positive side, social media helps students communicate more easily and expands their vocabulary. On the negative side, the excessive use of slang and abbreviations can carry over into academic writing. Nonetheless, most respondents still consider standard Indonesian highly important for professionalism, politeness, and the preservation of national identity in the digital era.

Fourth, students demonstrate efforts to maintain their standard Indonesian language skills, such as reading scientific texts, practicing formal language, following PUEBI guidelines, and being more meticulous when writing academic assignments. This shows that awareness of proper and correct language use remains strong among students, even though they live in a digital communication environment dominated by non-standard language.

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