THE USAGE OF ENGLISH INTERNET SLANG AMONG MALAYSIANS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Nor Azida binti Sabri
Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, University of Selangor, Malaysia
norazidasabri@gmail.com

Syazzim bin Hamdan
Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, University of Selangor, Malaysia
syazzimhamdan@gmail.com

Na-Thinamalar Magiswary Nadarajan
Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, University of Selangor, Malaysia
nathina@unisel.edu.my

Soo Ruey Shing
Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, University of Selangor, Malaysia
sooruey1899@yahoo.com

Abstract

Usage of social media among Malaysian keeps on rising day by day. Almost everyone in Malaysia owns a smartphone and with those smartphones, they can access social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and et cetera anywhere and anytime they want. With the existence of social media, a new style of writing was born and it is called internet slang. The researchers conducted this study to identify how frequently Malaysian use internet slang in daily online communication. This internet slang can damage the current vocabulary and vandalize the writing skills of a person. Researchers conducted documentary research by using the qualitative method to study and gain an understanding of internet slang used among Malaysian in social media. Researchers collect all 69 findings and evidence from posts on social media made by Malaysians. This study found that there are several types of internet slang that are commonly used among Malaysians on social media. Researchers suggest that Malaysian should limit themselves in using English internet slang in daily online communication as it can damage their writing style.

Keywords: internet slang, social media, abbreviation

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Computer-mediated communication via social networking platforms has driven significant changes to people's way of interacting and the nature of written language (Zulkifli Zulfati Izazi &

Tengku Mahadi Tengku-Sepora, 2020). Ever since social media become a critical part and a common form of daily communication (Shin, 2018), social networking users have formed the largest virtual community in the world. As the number of social media users keeps growing, a new type of language - 'internet slang' has simultaneously developed to cater to the communicative needs of the community. This evolution has then gradually changed the ways language is being used in communication, especially written communication as writing is the main way to communicate in social media.

In general, slang is the use of informal words in the speaker's language which are not considered standard or formal, whereas internet slangs are words or phrases that are regularly used in online conversations (Zulkifli Zulfati Izazi & Tengku Mahadi Tengku-Sepora, 2020). The use of slang often occurs among teenagers because most adults are not into or unable to understand 'youth language' (Firooz Namvar & Noraini Ibrahim, 2014). It is a style of language use that is not widely accepted by the general population in situations outside the group. However, it is an important part of adolescent communication (Firooz Namvar, 2014) in social media such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, et cetera.

A large amount of textual or written information is posted on social media every day, and they are used for various communicative purposes (Adedamola, Modupe & Dehinbo, 2015). Though this information is constructed using a written platform, it encourages spoken-like communication which challenges what is known about spoken and written communication language features (Yeo & Ting, 2017). It is the need to use "spoken-like written language" among social media users that give rise to the use of internet slang. Additionally, social media communication is changing how language is utilized, especially in shortening conversation (Yeo & Ting, 2017). In some social media, there are limitations of character per message. So, the use of slang could help in keeping the text below the limitation of characters. Thus, the minimal length of character for such texts has led people to unconventionally interact with a mixture of formal and slang words (Adedamola, Modupe & Dehinbo, 2015).

As internet slang is frequently claimed to be a language that uniquely belong to a virtual social group, it cannot be easily perceived and understood by people who are outside the circle or

those who are not fluent in the language where slang is used (Suriyati Ujang, Norhidayah Md Yusof & Hanani Mohamed Hamdan, 2018). For instance, senior citizens might have difficulties in understanding and interpreting the internet slang used on online platforms. Sometimes, even the youth community members are also having trouble in understanding and interpreting the internet slang used by other social groups due to contextual variation in the meaning (Rezeki & Sagala, 2019). Although the use of internet slang by social media users is well documented, its use in a bilingual context remains under research. To fill this gap, this study was conducted to identify the types, meanings, and functions of the internet slang used among Malaysians in social media.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the development of technology, the way of communication among internet users has also evolved accordingly. With a greater internet-mediated communication system, combined with people's adaptation to the new demands of a more technologically sophisticated world, internet users are expected to continue to be under pressure to modify their language use to match the new communication dimensions (Barseghyan, 2013). This has resulted in the use of internet slang on various social media platforms.

Nowadays, internet slang is widely used as a medium of communication as many people interact or engage through internet platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. Therefore, the need to understand the use of internet slang among electronic society members is of utmost importance. Due to its unique features, the use of internet slang is believed to be able to maintain the solidarity of a certain group of people. Besides, many people prefer to use internet slang to make their conversation more relaxed and confident (Tri Indah Rezeki, & Rakhmat Wahyudin Sagala, 2019). In short, the use of internet slang among internet users could be associated with the factors of secrecy, time, and trend.

Internet slang is a type of electronic discourse that produces a sort of semi-discourse between speaking and writing and it contains specific characteristics and graphology (Abusa'aleek, 2015). There are a lot of internet slang styles being used all over the world. The

form of slang can be a whole sentence or a word. According to Craig (2003), there are four types of slang that are frequently found in instant messaging conversations: phonetic replacements, phrase abbreviations, word abbreviations, and inanities.

Phonetic replacement is a process of replacing characters in a word with alphabetic characters or removing some unnecessary characters to save some space. Phonetic replacement still retains the phonetic structure of the word. An example of phonetic replacement is the word "everyone" which is commonly found in social media but written as *"every1"*. The second type of internet slang, "phrase abbreviation" is similar to the use of an acronym. Phrase abbreviation is formed from the initial letter of each word in a specific phrase and pronounced as a word. It is frequently used to save spacing in messaging or posts on social media. Among the most common examples of phase abbreviation are *"omg"* and *"lol"*. *"omg"* is the short form for *"Oh My God"* and *"lol"* is the short form for *"Laugh Out Loud"*.

Word abbreviations include vowel-drop shortenings and drastic shortening. For instance, the word "people" is shortened to *"ppl"* and the word "because" is shortened to *"bc"*. Lastly, inanities refer to "neologisms, compositions of several slang categories, or simply nonsensical transmogrifications of another word" (Craig, xxx). They are frequently perceived as lacking sense and sometimes show silliness and shallowness. The most common example of inanity is the word *"lolz"*.

3.0   METHODS

3.1   Research design and context

This study employed a documentary research design that involved the qualitative analysis of documents containing information on the phenomenon being studied (Bailey, 1994). This research method is deemed equally effective in obtaining rich empirical data as compared to social surveys, in-depth interviews, or observations of participants (Ahmed, 2010). In this study, the trends and patterns in the use of Internet slang were analyzed based on the authentic data obtained from various electronic social media documents.

To be specific, the source of data was from social media websites and applications like WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and Facebook. The samples were gathered from online conversations, comments, and personal posts. The participants of this study were young adults aged between 15 and 30 years old. The generation is generally marked by increased use and familiarity with communications, media, and digital technologies (Rezeki & Sagala, 2019). A total of 69 samples were gathered from the various platforms, of which 15 were taken from WhatsApp, 24 from Twitter, 10 from Instagram, 6 from Telegram, and 14 from Facebook. These samples were posted as private and public sources such as private messages, private group chats, public posts, and public comments.

Table 1: Number of text samples by social media websites and applications

	Whatsapp	Twitter	Instagram	Telegram	Facebook
Private	0	1	4	6	0
Public	15	23	6	0	14

3.2 Data analysis

The researchers conducted a content analysis to analyze the samples collected from various social media platforms. Content analysis, which is commonly used in documentary research, was employed as it is a flexible method for analysing text data (Cavanagh, 1997). In this study, qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to analyse the text data. For the analysis procedure, the data collected were first read and re-read several times by the researchers to figure out the usage and the patterns of internet slang used by the participants. Then, a table was created to organize the data accordingly. Finally, based on its use, the data were reorganized into separate tables based on their category with the meanings of each slang.

4.0   FINDINGS

The internet slang used by the participants in various social media websites and applications can be categorised into four types: phonetic replacement, phrase abbreviations, word abbreviations, and inanity.

4.1   Phonetic Replacement

Phonetic replacement is one of the most commonly used slang categories in social media. The process of phonetic replacement involves replacing the characters with alphanumeric characters. According to Craig (2003), phonetic replacements are "words in which one or more phoneme units have been replaced by a series of letters that, phonetically, read the same way" (p. 120). Phonetic replacement requires a certain degree of creativity to understand the meaning of the slang and how the slang was produced in the first place since they combine morphemes and phonetics to produce symbols with a certain sense of an actual word or phrase (Zulkifli Zulfati Izazi & Tengku Mahadi Tengku-Sepora, 2020). An example of phonetic replacement is *"ur"*, which stands for "your" and "you are". Another example of phonetic replacement is *"every1"*.

Table 2: Phonetic replacement

No.	Phonetic replacement	Original word
1.	every1	everyone
2.	b4	before
3.	ur	your / you are
4.	m8	mate
5.	2	to
6.	u	you
7.	luv	love
8.	gr8	great

The phonetic replacements shown in Table 2 were the most common examples used by the participants in various social media websites and applications. It clearly shows that phonetic replacement helps them in saving spaces in their writing online. As online platforms are considered an informal communication platform, the use of phonetic replacement allows them to write a word without fully spelling it.

Telegram user 1
"I will love her **4eva**"

Figure 1: Example of phonetic replacement - "4eva"

The text in Figure 1 shows an example of the use of phonetic replacement. Instead of using the full spelling, the user substituted the word "for" with the alphanumeric *"4"*. The sound of the word "for" is similar to the sound of alphanumeric *"4"*. So, the user wrote *"4ever"* instead of "forever" to save space in writing online.

Twitter user 3
"evry single person came from an English speaking country I met here will ask 1 similar Q: Does **every1** from Malaysia speaks good English?

Figure 2: Example of phonetic replacement - "every1"

The figure above shows another evidence of phonetic replacement. The construction of the word *"every1"* involves the insertion of the number "1" into the word "everyone". As Twitter sets a limitation of characters used per tweet, the user applied phonetic replacement to cut down the use of the character in her tweet.

4.2   Phrase Abbreviations

With the rise of electronic communication whether by text messages or social media, abbreviations have started to appear. People use abbreviations for the reason that they do not have any words to show a concept of some words in other languages (Winarto, 2019). As more social media users switch to applications like Twitter, the use of abbreviations become popular. Twitter is also a piece of online news and social networking site where people communicate in short messages called tweets up to 280 characters (Zulkifli Zulfati Izazi & Tengku Mahadi Tengku-Sepora, 2020). When the simplification of terms becomes a necessity, the emergence of abbreviations become more common among social media users.

Table 3: Phrase abbreviations

No	Phrase abbreviation	Original words
1.	Istg	I swear to god
2.	Rofl	Rolling on the floor laughing
3.	Otw	On the way
4.	Fml	Fuck my life
5.	Omfg	Oh my fucking god
6.	Idgaf	I don't give a fuck
7.	Smh	Shake my head
8.	Btw	By the way
9.	Af	As fuck
10.	Lmao	Laughing my ass off
11.	Tbh	To be honest
12.	Lol	Laughing out loud

The examples shown in Table 3 are the most common phrase abbreviations used by Malaysians in social media. Among these, teenagers frequently use the phrases *"lol"*, *"af"*, and *"smh"* to express themselves in a certain way. These abbreviations are the most expressive phrases. For example, an individual would use the abbreviation *"af"* instead of the word "very" to emphasize an adjective when expressing his or her views. Another example showing the use of *"af"* is in the following excerpt (Figure 3). In this tweet, *"af"* was used in the sentence to express the user's sad feeling towards the issue being discussed.

Twitter user 2
*"Relationship are risky **af** these day. Either you found somebody who's actually down or somebody that's just playing around "#$%.""*

Figure 3: Example of phrase abbreviation - 'af'

Another widely used abbreviations by the respondents were *"idk"* and *"idgaf"*. They were coined using a large group of lexical items to save time during online chatting. These are whole phrases and sentences which are abbreviated (Barseghyan, 2013). For instance, *"idk"* was used by social media users when they could not decide for something for themselves or when they were not clear about something. *"idk how much longer I can do this" and "I thought I'd share this dream I have in my notes from idk when"* were the examples of phrase abbreviation in a sentence used by the respondents in social media.

Furthermore, in the formal way of speaking, adults might usually construct utterances like "I don't mind if you want to leave the house". However, the same sentence could be re-constructed as "*idgaf* (I don't give a fuck) if you wanna leave the house" with an insertion of the abbreviation "idgaf" by social media users. The use of this abbreviation in the sentence indicates that the person was unhappy with someone's intention to leave the house. In another example (Figure 4), the user was expressing her deep thought towards her lover's priority in determining the degree of importance between her and the lover's friends. In this context, the term *"idgaf"* was used to express her anger and dissatisfaction.

Twitter user 5
"***Idgaf*** but who comes first? Friends or romantic partners?"

Figure 4: Example of phrase abbreviation - 'idgaf

As for *"lmao"*, the meaning of this phrase is similar to *"lol"*. *"lmao"* is often used to indicate a funny situation or thoughts, and sometimes it is also used sarcastically. For example, in a situation of a student who missed his online class right after he just finished his shower, he expressed his thought by saying, "*lawak dol, bgn join class gi mandi, habis mandi class pun habis lmao*" (This is funny. I went for a shower after joining the class, and the moment I finished my shower the class ended Imao).

Twitter user 3
"Alif satar & sherry sumpah lawak ***Imao***.()*+--+*().()+-."

Figure 5: Example of phrase abbreviation - "lmao"

Additionally, in the example above, the user conveyed that the two tv presenters were funny and entertaining to watch. The user's happiness was expressed by using "*lmao*" at the end of the sentence.

4.3   Word Abbreviation

Word abbreviation is a shortened version or form of a word or phrase. It is highly popular in informal writing. Word abbreviation is close to shortening. Mostly, the vowel letter will drop in word abbreviation. Same as other types of internet slang, word abbreviation is used to cut down the use of space and time in online platforms communication. Table 4 shows examples of the most common word abbreviations used by the respondents in social media.

Table 4: Word abbreviation

No	Word Abbreviation	Original word
1.	Thx	Thank you
2.	Ppl	People
3.	Pls	Please
4.	Msg	Message
5.	Pic	Picture
6.	Qt	Cutie
7.	Sry	Sorry
8.	Ofc	Of course
9.	Act	Actually
10.	Lil	Little
11.	Lib	Library

The example in Figure 6 shows how a Malaysian Facebook user is using word abbreviation in her post. The word "thx" was used instead of "thanks". Similarly, in Figure 7, "ppl" was used to replace the complete word "people". The meaning and structure of these two sentences remained constant, which implies that the use of word abbreviation did not interfere with the sentence structure and the meaning of the sentence.

Facebook user 1
"Bicycle kids pun ada! **Thx** awak singgah RJ HOBBY grab hadiah buat hero tersayang."

Figure 6: Example of word abbreviation - "thx"

Twitter user 4
*"Makan telur rebus like **ppl** always did."*

Figure 7: Example of word abbreviation - "ppl"

4.4   Inanity

Inanity is a style of writing which is regarded as lacking clear meaning and sense. Inanity is often used to show silliness and over-exaggeration in writing. According to Craig (2003), these words are "either neologisms, compositions of several slang categories, or simply nonsensical transmogrifications of other words" (p. 120). In this study, "lolz", "oks", "dats", "its" and "tingz" (Table 5) were the most common inanity used by the respondents in various social media.

Table 5: Inanity

No	Inanity	Original word
1.	Lolz	Laugh out loud (LOL)
2.	oks	okay
3.	Dats	That's
4.	itz	It is
5.	Tingz	Thing

Figure 8 shows an example of the use of inanity "lolz" in a sentence. In this sentence, the user wanted to express a feeling of being very funny towards an unexpected situation he encountered. The use of "lolz" here shows how the user exaggerated the humour and excitement with an element of sarcasm. Instead of using the phrase "lol", the user used the inanity "lolz" to express his thought.

Twitter user 5
"aku waved back pun excited ke haha **lolz**"

Figure 8: Example of inanity - "lolz"

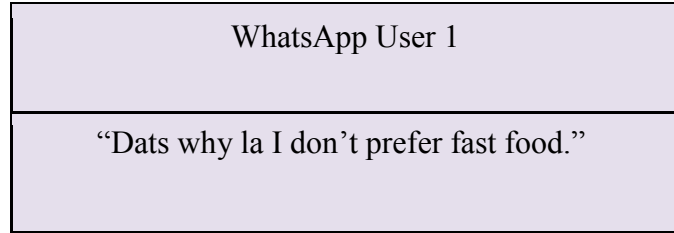| WhatsApp User 1 |
| :---: |
| "Dats why la I don't prefer fast food." |

Figure 9: Example of inanity - "dats"

Figure 9 shows the use of another inanity - *"dats"* in a sentence. The word *"dats"* is simply a replacement for the word "that". "That" usually acts as a complement in a sentence. In this case, the user purposely typed it as *"dats"* merely because the four letters used were close to each other on the keyboard.

5.0   Discussion & Conclusion

The usage of internet slang among Malaysians in social media leads to a major change in the style of writing. Some of the transformations resembled daily speech written down, while some transformations were found to have been exaggerated (Zulkifli Zulfati Izazi & Tengku Mahadi Tengku-Sepora, 2020). In the present study, the researchers found that Malaysians often use word-letter substitution and word-digit substitution when writing posts on social media**.** For example, they tend to change the words "thanks" to *"thx"* and "mate" to *"m8"*.

Besides that, the rampant use of internet slang in social media is greatly influenced by the setting imposed by some social media websites or applications. For instance, users are forced to simplify their writings due to the nature of Twitter which allows only 280 characters per tweet. Due to this reason, Twitter users make the most of their 'writing skills' to be as creative as they could to ensure that their messages, thoughts, or emotions could reach the intended audience exactly the way they want it to be (Zulkifli Zulfati Izazi & Tengku Mahadi Tengku-Sepora, 2020).

Although some internet slang, such as abbreviations, may not make sense in the first place, they do serve a certain function linguistically or socially, and they are used mainly to promote contact between 'those who understand'. Abbreviations have come into use to convey messages in short form and quickly. Such slangs may help users to save time in typing and provide instant

responses to the others they interact with. Meanwhile, the users could add some 'colours' and 'flavors' to their conversations as well as 'transferring' their everyday speech into writings.

In conclusion, the use of slang has become a trend among social media users in Malaysia and beyond. Regardless of social and age groups, internet users at all levels have adopted to a certain degree the new "writing styles". For instance, ever since social media becomes the main platform of communication, the elderly had no choice but to slowly adapt and being pressured in understanding the modern internet slang to keep up with the modern writing style. Thus, for further exploration of this topic, future researchers may consider analyzing the use of internet slang among individuals from different age groups, economic and socio-cultural backgrounds.

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