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LANGUAGE VARIATION USED BY FOOD VLOGGERS ON TIKTOK AND ITS INFLUENCE ON AUDIENCE LANGUAGE USE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates language variation employed by food vloggers on TikTok and examines its subsequent influence on how audiences communicate in digital spaces. As short-form video content continues to reshape sociolinguistic norms among Indonesian youth, food vloggers have emerged as influential language agents who blend Bahasa Indonesia with English, deploy culinary-specific slang, and adopt trending expressions that resonate with younger audiences. Drawing on a qualitative descriptive approach, this research collected data from TikTok food vlogs, including video transcripts, captions, comments, and hashtags, from five prominent Indonesian food vlogger accounts throughout 2023 to 2024. The analysis was guided by sociolinguistic frameworks proposed by Labov (1972), Hymes (1974), Fishman (1972), and Trudgill (2000). Findings reveal four dominant patterns of language variation: code switching between Bahasa Indonesia and English, code mixing within single utterances, the use of culinary slang, and the appropriation of prestige language to construct social identity. Expressions such as "worth it," "creamy banget," "hidden gem," and "healing sambil ngopi" are not merely descriptive but serve as markers of modern, globally-oriented identity. Audience analysis further shows that followers increasingly replicate these linguistic patterns in their comment sections, suggesting a significant bidirectional influence between content creators and viewers. This study contributes to growing scholarly interest in digital sociolinguistics, youth language, and the role of social media influencers in shaping communicative norms.

Keywords: language variation, code switching, TikTok

A. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, has fundamentally altered how language is produced, shared, and consumed in everyday life. As of 2024, TikTok has amassed over one billion active users globally, a significant proportion of whom are young adults and adolescents who constitute the primary audience for food-related content (Statista, 2024). In Indonesia, TikTok has become one of the most widely used platforms, with food vlogs ranking among the most-viewed content categories. Within this digital

ecosystem, food vloggers function not merely as reviewers but as influential sociolinguistic actors who shape language norms through consistent and highly stylized communication.

Language on social media does not exist in a vacuum. It reflects and reinforces broader social processes, including identity construction, group belonging, and cultural aspiration. Indonesian food vloggers, in particular, demonstrate a distinctive and dynamic linguistic repertoire that merges local language with English borrowings, culinary jargon, and informal slang. This hybrid language has come to define a recognizable communicative style in the food vlogging community, one that audience members actively engage with and, increasingly, imitate.

The phenomenon of language variation in digital content creation has received growing scholarly attention in recent years. Researchers have examined how social media influencers use code switching and informal registers to build rapport with audiences (Androutsopoulos, 2020; Barton & Lee, 2013). However, there remains a relative gap in studies specifically focusing on TikTok food vloggers within the Indonesian sociolinguistic context, particularly in terms of how their language choices affect audience communication patterns.

This study is motivated by the observation that food vloggers on TikTok consistently employ a mixed-language register that departs significantly from standard Bahasa Indonesia. While this linguistic behavior is widely observable, its sociolinguistic underpinnings and its effects on audience communication have not been systematically analyzed. Specifically, it remains unclear which types of language variation predominate, what social motivations drive these choices, and to what extent audiences adopt and reproduce similar patterns in their own digital interactions.

This study aims to: (1) identify and classify the types of language variation used by food vloggers on TikTok; (2) analyze the functions of code switching and code mixing in food vlogging discourse; (3) examine the role of culinary slang and trending expressions in constructing vlogger identity and prestige; and (4) investigate the extent to which food vloggers' language influences the

communicative style of their audiences.

This research is significant for at least three reasons. Theoretically, it extends sociolinguistic inquiry into digital and multimodal contexts, where language use is shaped by platform affordances, audience expectations, and cultural positioning. Practically, it offers insights for educators, particularly in English Language Teaching, about how digital media literacy intersects with language acquisition and norm formation among young Indonesians. Additionally, this study contributes empirical data to the emerging field of digital sociolinguistics, which seeks to understand how online environments both reflect and reshape sociolinguistic realities.

The theoretical grounding of this study draws on foundational frameworks in sociolinguistics. Labov (1972) established that language variation is systematically patterned and socially motivated, while Hymes' (1974) ethnography of communication approach particularly the SPEAKING model provides tools for analyzing language within specific communicative contexts such as TikTok. Fishman's (1972) concept of domain-appropriate language use illuminates why informal digital spaces favor mixed or non-standard registers, and Trudgill's (2000) analysis of overt and covert prestige explains the social value attached to different varieties. Regarding the phenomenon of code switching and code mixing, Myers-Scotton (1993) distinguishes inter-sentential from intra-sentential switching, and research in the Indonesian context has consistently linked English-Indonesian code switching with modernity and social prestige (Floris, 2021; Yulianti et al., 2022). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), as applied to digital environments by Georgakopoulou (2017), further highlights how language serves as a medium of identity performance among content creators. The multimodal and networked character of social media language has been documented by Crystal (2011), Herring (2013), and Baym (2015), while TikTok's specific role as an accelerator of lexical diffusion has been noted by Zeng et al. (2021). Studies on food vlogging discourse including multimodal analysis by Hu and Wang (2023) and work on Indonesian vlogs by Santoso et al. (2022), Dewi and Kurniawan

(2022), and Rahman et al. (2023) confirm that culinary language on social media is a rich site for identity construction, aesthetic expression, and community formation. Despite this growing body of work, systematic sociolinguistic analysis of TikTok food vloggers in Indonesia, particularly regarding how their linguistic choices shape audience communication, remains limited, a gap this study addresses.

B. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, which is appropriate for investigating naturally occurring language in its social context. Qualitative research allows for the in-depth analysis of linguistic phenomena without imposing predetermined categories, making it well-suited to the exploratory nature of this inquiry. The descriptive orientation means that the study aims to document and characterize, rather than test hypotheses about, the language variation found in the data.

The theoretical framework draws on the sociolinguistic theories of Labov (1972), Hymes (1974), Fishman (1972), and Trudgill (2000), as outlined in the literature review. These frameworks provide analytical lenses through which the data can be interpreted in terms of social function, communicative context, and prestige dynamics.

Data were collected from randomly selected Indonesian food vlogger accounts on TikTok, chosen on the basis of: (1) a minimum follower count of 100,000; (2) consistent food-related content production; (3) evidence of code switching or mixed-language use; and (4) active audience engagement as reflected in comment volume. The accounts are identified in this study by pseudonyms to respect privacy conventions.

A total of 30 TikTok videos were selected randomly, representing a range of food genres including street food, café reviews, restaurant recommendations, and home cooking content. The study period covered content posted between January 2023 and December 2024, ensuring contemporaneity of the data.

Data were collected through systematic observation and documentation of TikTok content. Specifically, the research collected: (1) video transcripts, produced through a combination of TikTok's automatic captions and manual

transcription to ensure accuracy; (2) written captions and hashtags accompanying each video; (3) the first 100 comments on each video, selected on the basis of highest engagement; and (4) screen recordings of comment section interactions to capture the interactional dynamics between vloggers and audiences.

Field notes were maintained throughout the data collection process, recording contextual observations about delivery style, emotional register, and the relationship between verbal and visual elements. These notes informed the interpretation of language choices in relation to their multimodal context.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in combination with sociolinguistic discourse analysis. The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, all transcribed and written data were read holistically to develop an initial familiarity with the corpus. Second, instances of language variation including code switches, code mixes, slang terms, and English borrowings were identified and coded. Third, codes were grouped into categories based on their linguistic form and social function. Fourth, categories were interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks outlined above, with particular attention to questions of identity, prestige, and audience influence.

Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking (where possible), peer review of coding decisions, and triangulation of data sources. Negative cases instances where language variation did not fit the emerging patterns were also noted and discussed to avoid over-generalization.

C. Finding and Discussion

Types of Language Variation in Food Vlogging Discourse

Analysis of the corpus revealed four main types of language variation in TikTok food vlogger discourse: code switching, code mixing, culinary slang, and prestige language use. These types are not mutually exclusive; rather, they frequently co-occur within the same utterance or video segment, reflecting the fluid and dynamic nature of digital language.

Code switching at the inter-sentential level was the most structurally transparent form of

variation observed. Vloggers would complete a thought in Bahasa Indonesia and then switch to English for a subsequent statement, often for emphasis or stylistic contrast. One vlogger, for example, reviewed a café with the comment: *"Tempatnya cozy banget"* Absolutely worth every penny. The switch to English here performs evaluative emphasis the positive judgment is delivered in English for rhetorical effect, positioning the speaker as both locally grounded and globally literate.

Code mixing at the intra-sentential level was even more pervasive, appearing in nearly every video in the corpus. This form of mixing involved the insertion of English words or phrases into Indonesian syntactic structures, producing hybrid utterances that are characteristic of the "Inggris- Indonesia" register common among urban Indonesian youth. Examples such as "*Teksturnya super crunchy dan literally meleleh di mulut"* (The texture is super crunchy and literally melts in the mouth) illustrate this pattern, where the English adjectives "super crunchy" and the adverb "literally" are embedded within Indonesian grammatical frames.

English Culinary Terms and Their Functions

A particularly striking feature of the corpus is the systematic use of English culinary terminology, even where Indonesian equivalents exist. Terms such as "brunch," "comfort food," "food pairing," "authentic taste," "comfort taste," and "hidden gem" appeared repeatedly across the five accounts analyzed. This preference for English over Indonesian culinary vocabulary cannot be attributed to a lack of local alternatives; rather, it reflects deliberate linguistic choices that serve specific social functions.

First, English culinary terms function as markers of modernity and cosmopolitan identity. When a vlogger describes a dish as a "comfort taste" rather than *rasa penghibur*, they position themselves and the food within a global, English-mediated food culture. This aligns with Trudgill's (2000) concept of overt prestige, whereby the use of a socially valorized language variety signals status and sophistication.

Second, these terms serve an aesthetic communication function. The sound and feel of English terms their phonological texture, their associations with international food

media add a particular quality to the vlogger's discourse that Indonesian equivalents cannot fully replicate. Expressions like "brunch vibes" or "*healing sambil ngopi"* are carefully crafted to evoke a specific aesthetic experience, blending English aspiration with Indonesian intimacy.

Third, English culinary terms help construct what might be called a "digital food culture" identity that resonates particularly with younger audiences who follow international food trends through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. The vlogger who uses terms like "food pairing" and "authentic taste" implicitly presents themselves as someone who is knowledgeable about global culinary discourse, thereby enhancing their credibility and relatability within their target demographic.

Culinary Slang and Trending Expressions

Beyond technical culinary vocabulary, the corpus contained a rich inventory of slang and trending expressions that are specific to TikTok's food culture. These included expressions that are partially or fully Indonesian but have acquired new meanings or intensified usages within the platform's ecosystem. *"Recommended parah,"* for instance, literally translates as "painfully recommended" but is used to mean "highly recommended" the word *"parah,"* which typically connotes severity or badness, has been semantically reappropriated in youth slang to function as an intensifier of positive evaluation.

Similarly, *"gila enak"* (crazy good) and *"giliran aku yang baper"* (now I'm the one getting emotional) reflect the emotional and hyperbolic register characteristic of food vlogging discourse. These expressions draw on affective language to create a sense of shared experience and sensory participation, inviting viewers to vicariously experience the food being described.

Trending English expressions *"worth it," "hidden gem," "aesthetic," and "good vibes"* appear with high frequency across the corpus. Their repetition suggests that they have become part of a shared lexicon for TikTok food content, functioning almost as genre markers. Hymes' (1974) concept of genre is useful here: these expressions belong to the recognizable "food vlog" genre on TikTok, and their use signals genre

membership and communicative competence within that community.

Language as Identity and Prestige Construction

One of the most significant findings of this study is the degree to which language choices in food vlogs are implicated in the construction of social identity and prestige. As noted above, the use of English culinary terms and cosmopolitan slang serves as a form of identity work, positioning vloggers within a global, digitally fluent community of food enthusiasts. This positioning is not merely personal but relational it works by differentiating the vlogger from those who are less globally connected or less digitally savvy.

Labov's (1972) framework of linguistic prestige is directly applicable here. In the TikTok food vlogging community, the prestige variety appears to be a hybrid register that combines Standard Indonesian with English, seasoned with platform-specific slang. Vloggers who command this register fluently are perceived as credible, cool, and authoritative. This is consistent with Fishman's (1972) observation that language choice in multilingual contexts is deeply shaped by domain-specific prestige norms.

The concept of covert prestige (Trudgill, 2000) is also relevant, particularly with respect to Indonesian slang and informal expressions. While overt prestige attaches to English and standard varieties, covert prestige the social value attached to non-standard speech as a marker of group solidarity explains the persistent use of informal Indonesian registers, colloquialisms, and even deliberately "incorrect" usages.

The expression *"recommended parah,"* for example, derives its social power precisely from its non-standard semantics, which marks the speaker as an insider in youth digital culture.

Influence on Audience Communication Style

Perhaps the most socially significant finding of this study concerns the influence of food vloggers' language on the communicative behavior of their audiences. Comment section analysis revealed clear patterns of linguistic imitation and adaptation, with viewers adopting the expressions, mixing strategies, and evaluative vocabulary of the vloggers they follow.

In comment sections, phrases like *"worth it banget," "harus coba nih," and "hidden gem detected"* appeared frequently, often mirroring the vlogger's own phrasing. This "linguistic echo" phenomenon, whereby audience members reproduce the language of content creators, suggests that food vloggers function as language models in the sociolinguistic sense their speech norms diffuse into their community of followers and become part of a shared communicative repertoire.

This finding has implications for understanding how language change operates in digital communities. Unlike traditional models of language diffusion, which follow geographic or social network patterns, TikTok's algorithm-driven distribution means that a single vlogger's expressions can reach millions of viewers rapidly, potentially accelerating the spread of new lexical items and linguistic patterns. Zeng et al. (2021) similarly observed that TikTok functions as an "accelerator" of language trends, particularly among younger users.

Fishman's (1972) domain theory is useful for understanding why these linguistic influences are so pronounced. The TikTok food vlogging domain has established clear norms about appropriate language use norms that are modelled by influential creators and then reproduced by audiences as a form of domain-appropriate behavior. To participate competently in TikTok food culture is, in part, to speak the language of that culture.

Youth Culture and Digital Lifestyle

The language variation documented in this study is inseparable from the broader context of Indonesian youth culture and digital lifestyle. Food vlogging on TikTok is not simply a form of content creation; it is a cultural practice that articulates particular values informality, aesthetic sensibility, global awareness, and communal sharing through linguistic and visual means.

The hybrid language of TikTok food vloggers reflects what might be called a "glocal" identity: simultaneously global in its aspirations and local in its affective anchoring. Expressions like "healing sambil ngopi" combine the English wellness discourse term "healing" with the Indonesian word "ngopi" (having coffee), creating a hybrid expression that captures a distinctly Indonesian

take on global café culture. This kind of creative hybridization is characteristic of how young Indonesians negotiate their identities at the intersection of local tradition and global modernity.

Furthermore, the aesthetic dimension of food vlogging language its careful attention to sound, rhythm, and connotation reflects a broader digital lifestyle in which self-presentation and content creation are key modes of social participation. As Barton and Lee (2013) argue, digital writing (including vlogging) is a form of "textual identity work" in which individuals craft and project versions of themselves through their language choices. For Indonesian food vloggers, this means deploying a linguistic repertoire that is simultaneously knowledgeable, relatable, stylish, and authentic.

D. Conclusion

This study has examined language variation in TikTok food vlogs and its influence on audience communication, drawing on data from 30 videos across five Indonesian food vlogger accounts. The analysis identified four main types of language variation code switching, code mixing, culinary slang, and prestige language use and demonstrated that these phenomena are not merely stylistic but are deeply embedded in social processes of identity construction, prestige negotiation, and community formation.

English culinary terms such as "comfort food," "brunch vibes," "authentic taste," and "hidden gem" function as markers of modernity, global literacy, and aesthetic sophistication, while Indonesian slang expressions like "recommended parah" and "healing sambil ngopi" index youth culture membership and digital community belonging. Together, these linguistic strategies constitute a distinctive register for TikTok food vlogging that is simultaneously global and locally grounded.

The study also found evidence that food vloggers' language exerts a measurable influence on how their audiences communicate, with comment sections showing clear patterns of linguistic imitation and adaptation. This suggests that food vloggers function as influential agents of language norm formation in digital communities, accelerating the diffusion of new expressions and

mixing strategies among young Indonesian users.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study's focus on five accounts limits the generalizability of findings, and the comment section analysis, while revealing, cannot fully capture the complexity of audience language behavior outside the platform. Future research might employ longitudinal methods to track the diffusion of specific expressions over time, or conduct interview studies with vloggers and viewers to access their metalinguistic awareness of these practices.

In conclusion, this study affirms the importance of digital platforms as sociolinguistic environments in which language variation, identity, and community are actively negotiated. Food vloggers on TikTok are not simply talking about food they are participating in and shaping a broader linguistic landscape that reflects the dynamic, hybrid, and creative nature of contemporary Indonesian youth culture.

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