Social Media and the Evolution of English: A Linguistic Study of Online Discourse and Language Change

Ashabul Kahfi Susanto[1], Fatimah Hidayahni Amin[2], Muhammad Fahri Jaya Sudding[3]

[1,2,3]English Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
*Corresponding Author e-mail: ashabul_susanto@unm.ac.id

Abstract: This article examines the impact of social media on the evolution of the English language through a qualitative methodology, specifically employing methods for literature review. In the digital era, social media has become a primary platform for communication, facilitating interactions between individuals and influencing language use and development. This research analyzes various forms of online discourse that emerge on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as how linguistic elements such as vocabulary, grammar, and writing style undergo changes with the increasing use of social media. The findings indicate that social media contributes to the formation of new terms and a reduction in formal sentence structures in everyday communication. Additionally, phenomena such as abbreviations, emoticons, and hashtag usage (#) have become distinctive features in online interactions that reflect contemporary linguistic dynamics. These findings provide insights into how information technology not only changes our communication methods but also affects overall linguistic development

Key Words: Social Media, Evolution of English Language, Discourse Analysis, Language Change, Qualitative Methods

Introduction

The rapid development of social media over the past decade has significantly transformed the ways in which individuals communicate and interact online. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become primary mediums for the exchange of information, ideas, and self-expression. This phenomenon not only influences social dynamics but also exerts a profound impact on the evolution of the English language within the context of digital communication. A study by Panjaitan & Patria (2024) highlights that social media fosters linguistic simplification through the use of phonetic abbreviations and altered spelling, driven by the need for expediency and character limitations inherent in online communication.

Language change is a natural phenomenon that unfolds over time, shaped by a range of social and cultural factors. However, with the advent of social media, the pace and complexity of linguistic change appear to be increasing. Research conducted by Di Marco et al. (2024) indicates that user-generated comments across various digital platforms exhibit a decline in text length and lexical richness, although users continue to introduce new vocabulary at a relatively consistent rate. These findings suggest that social media not only facilitates communication but also acts as a catalyst in transforming the structure and usage of the English language.

Although considerable research has explored the impact of social media on language, there remains a gap in understanding how linguistic variation develops within specific online communities. Lucy & Bamman (2021) emphasize the importance of characterizing language variation across diverse social media spaces, noting that each community may exhibit unique linguistic norms and practices. Therefore, further in-depth research is necessary to explore these dynamics within particular contexts.

Understanding the evolution of English in the context of social media carries significant implications for the fields of linguistics, education, and communication. For instance, Malik et al., (2025) reveals that social media fosters linguistic creativity through the adoption of new lexicons and the use of emojis, reflecting the flexibility and adaptability of language in digital environments. These insights are valuable for educators and communication practitioners, who must adapt their teaching methodologies and communication strategies in response to emerging language trends (Dembe, 2024).

Several studies have examined language change in social media. For example, research by Seargeant & Tagg, (2014) explores how words evolved into niche terms in the context of YouTube podcasts, highlighting the transformation of parts of speech such as pronouns, verbs, and adjectives into social media terminology. In a similar vein, Helmita (2022), analyzing shifts in language use and social context in both mass media and social media, observed that many individuals adjust their language according to the communication platform.

This study offers a novel approach by focusing on the linguistic analysis of online discourse to better understand the mechanisms driving language change in the context of social media. Through the application of discourse analysis techniques, it aims to reveal how digital interaction and communication practices shape and influence the ongoing evolution of the English language.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how social media influences the evolution of the English language through a linguistic analysis of online discourse. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Identify patterns of linguistic change occurring in social media communication.
2. Analyze the factors driving these changes.
3. Explain the broader implications of these changes for the use of the English language.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute significantly to the following areas:

1. Academia and Linguistic Research – By offering deeper insights into the dynamics of language change in the digital era.
2. Language Education and Practice – By informing the design of curricula and teaching strategies that reflect contemporary language developments.
3. Digital Communities – By increasing awareness of their active role in shaping and transforming language through online interaction.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design with a literature review approach to investigate the influence of social media on the evolution of the English language through online discourse analysis. The primary data sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and scholarly books published within the past five years, ensuring that the materials analyzed are both contemporary and relevant to the research topic.

Data collection was conducted through systematic searches in academic databases such as Google Scholar, using keywords including *language change*, *social media*, *discourse analysis*, and *evolution of the English language*. The selected literature was rigorously evaluated based on its relevance, credibility, and contribution to the topic under investigation.

For data analysis, a thematic approach was adopted. The selected studies were examined to identify recurring themes, patterns, and perspectives regarding the influence of social media on linguistic transformation. This analytical method enables a comprehensive understanding of how digital communication platforms contribute to ongoing changes in language use.

A study by Stuart & Géring (2022) provides a systematic review of discourse analysis methodologies applied in social media research, offering valuable methodological insights for this study. In addition, Seargeant & Tagg (2014) explore language change in the context of social media—particularly in YouTube podcasts—emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of digital language practices. By synthesizing findings from a range of relevant studies, this research aims to elucidate the complex interplay between social media usage and the evolution of the English language.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 Literature Review

No.	Author and Year	Article Title	Research Objectives	Research Methods	Key Findings
1	Di Marco et al. (2024)	The Evolution of Language in Social Media Comments	Analyzed the linguistic characteristics of user comments on various social media platforms over 34 years	Big data analysis from 300 million comments	A decrease in text length and lexical richness, but the introduction of new words remains constant
2	Karjus & Cuskley (2024)	Evolving Linguistic Divergence on Polarizing Social Media	Mapping linguistic divergences by political affiliation on social media	Analyze 1.5 million Twitter posts using machine learning methods	Significant linguistic divergence regarding topics and sentiments based on political affiliation
3	Panjaitan & Patria (2024)	Social Media and Language Evolution: The Impact of Digital Communication on Language Change	Examine the influence of social media on linguistic simplification and syntactic variation	Systematic review of the literature	The simplification of language is driven by the need for speed and character limitations; syntactic variations create new registers that are informal but effective
4	Lucy & Bamman (2021)	Characterizing English Variation across Social Media Communities with BERT	Characterizing English variations in the Reddit community	Data analysis using the BERT model on 474 Reddit communities	Significant variation in word usage and meaning between communities
5	Malik et al. (2025)	Transformative Impact of Social Media Platforms on Language Evolution: Creation and Adoption of Emerging Lexicon	Investigating language changes due to social media integration, particularly the use of new jargon	Quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews	Social media encourages language creativity and adoption of new lexicons, including the use of emojis

6	Seargeant & Tagg (2014)	Introduction: The language of social media	Explore language change in the context of YouTube podcasts	Qualitative descriptive approach	Transformation of speech parts into special terms of social media
7	Ding et al. (2023)	Same Words, Different Meanings: Semantic Polarization in Broadcast Media Language Forecasts Polarization on Social Media Discourse	Examining the relationship between the language of broadcast media and social media discourse	Data analysis from broadcast media transcripts and Twitter	Semantic polarization increased after 2016, influencing discourse on social media
8	Helmita (2022)	Language Change and Social Context in Mass and Social Media	Analyze changes in language and social context in mass media and social media	Qualitative method with content analysis	Many individuals change the language used when communicating through mass media and social media
9	Naqvi & Kapasi (2024)	Language Evolution in Social Media: Exploring English Transformations through Digital Communication	Investigating the impact of social media on the evolution of the English language	Analysis of linguistic data from various social media platforms	Linguistic adaptation and innovation are influenced by the unique communication context of social media
10	Putri et al. (2025)	The Influence of Social Media Language on Generation Z Identity in Indonesia	Exploring the impact of social media language on the formation of Generation Z identity in Indonesia	Qualitative approach with focused group interviews and discussions	The language of social media plays an important role in shaping the personal and collective identity of Generation Z

An analysis of the ten articles presented in Table 1 reveals key insights into how social media shapes the evolution of the English language. Di Marco et al. (2024) report a decline in text length and lexical richness within user comments on social media platforms. However, the consistent introduction of new words highlights the dynamic and adaptive nature of language in digital communication. This suggests that while brevity may constrain expression, linguistic innovation persists.

The findings of Karjus and Cuskley (2023) draw attention to ideological influences on language use, highlighting substantial linguistic divergence between partisan groups. Such polarization may hinder mutual understanding, reflecting how sociopolitical divisions manifest linguistically in online discourse. This raises important questions about the role of language in reinforcing or bridging ideological divides.

Panjaitan and Patria (2024) point to the economic pressures of digital communication—such as speed and character limits—which contribute to the simplification of language. Their observation that non-standard grammar is not only tolerated but strategically employed suggests a shift in stylistic norms, where informality enhances communicative efficiency and relatability. This challenges traditional notions of linguistic correctness in favor of functional pragmatism.

The study by Lucy and Bamman (2021) adds a sociolinguistic dimension, showing that linguistic distinctiveness is particularly prominent in medium-sized online communities characterized by strong user loyalty and dense interaction networks. This finding implies that community structure and user engagement significantly shape language variation, emphasizing the interplay between social dynamics and linguistic practices.

Malik et al. (2025) contribute to this discourse by highlighting how social media fosters linguistic creativity through the incorporation of novel lexicons and visual elements such as emojis. This reflects not only the adaptability of digital language but also the active role users play in co-constructing emerging linguistic forms.

Collectively, these findings illustrate that social media platforms are not merely passive conduits of communication, but active sites of linguistic transformation. Language evolution in these contexts is driven by a complex interplay of technological constraints, social affiliations, and cultural dynamics. The simplification, divergence, and innovation observed in digital discourse underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of language change in online environments—one that accounts for both the affordances of digital media and the sociocultural identities of its users.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Language Change

In recent years, the widespread use of social media has accelerated, accompanied by notable transformations in the structure and usage of the English language on a global scale. Di Marco et al. (2024) found that, despite a decline in text length and lexical richness within user-generated comments, new words continue to emerge at a consistent rate. Terms such as *finsta*, *simp*, and *ratio*, which originated within online communities, exemplify how digital platforms serve as fertile ground for linguistic innovation. These developments emphasise the role of social media as an expansive and evolving space for the creation and dissemination of novel linguistic forms.

Language, however, is not merely a tool for communication—it also functions as a reflection of social and ideological positioning. Karjus and Cuskley (2023) highlight linguistic divergence between partisan groups on social media, suggesting that language can reinforce ideological boundaries and contribute to communicative fragmentation. This supports the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which posits that language shapes perceptions of reality (Ahmed, 2024). In this context, social media emerges as a discursive arena where political and social identities are both performed and contested through linguistic choices.

Another salient impact of social media is the simplification of language. As observed by Panjaitan and Patria (2024), digital discourse often employs non-standard syntactic structures and informal grammar, which are increasingly recognized as legitimate within online registers. This linguistic shift mirrors the concept of *creolization* in sociolinguistics, whereby languages exposed to sustained social contact undergo simplification to enhance communicative efficiency. Such changes suggest that the digital environment fosters not only linguistic creativity but also pragmatic adaptability in everyday communication.

Online Communities and New Linguistic Identities

Communities on social media, social media communities, as observed by Lucy and Bamman (2021), function as linguistic laboratories where distinctive forms of language emerge and evolve. Platforms such as Reddit, Discord, and TikTok fandoms demonstrate how language is tailored to reflect the values, norms, and communicative needs of their users. This aligns with Swales' (1990) Discourse Community theory, which posits that each social group develops its own patterns of communication as markers of shared identity and purpose.

In this context, social media also serves as a powerful site for the expression of cultural and personal identity. Malik et al. (2025) found that social media fosters lexical innovation not only through the coinage of new words but also through the creative use of emojis and symbols. This phenomenon resonates with Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2001) Multimodal Discourse Theory, which emphasizes that meaning-making is achieved through multiple semiotic modes—not limited to written language but extending to visual and symbolic elements

Further supporting this perspective, Putri et al. (2023) demonstrate how Generation Z in Indonesia actively constructs their digital identities through linguistic choices on social media. The use of abbreviations, inventive vocabulary, and emojis are not merely stylistic preferences but function as identity markers that distinguish them from earlier generations. As Bucholtz & Hall (2005) assert, language is not only a medium for conveying information but also a key mechanism for performing identity in interaction—particularly within the digital sphere.

Social, Educational, and Future Research Implications

Social media now operates as an active agent in the evolution of language. Within the framework of Croft's (2000) theory of Language Evolution, the linguistic variations that emerge on social media undergo processes of social selection, where forms that are perceived as efficient, expressive, or socially appealing tend to persist and proliferate. In this sense, social media can be conceptualized as a dynamic linguistic ecosystem—constantly evolving and adapting in real time.

Moreover, the traditional boundaries between formal and informal registers have become increasingly porous. English used in professional contexts has begun to incorporate elements of informal digital discourse, including memes, emojis, and acronyms. This shift reflects a broader trend toward the desacralization of formal language styles, favoring more accessible, human-centered, and conversational modes of communication.

These changes carry profound implications for education. English language curricula must evolve to reflect contemporary linguistic realities. Instruction should move beyond a narrow focus on conventional grammar to include skills such as interpreting informal and multimodal texts, reading digital contexts, and navigating online registers. In this regard, digital literacy becomes a critical component of modern language education, equipping learners to communicate effectively across diverse platforms and audiences.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight a rich area for continued scholarly inquiry. Future research should adopt cross-cultural and cross-platform perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of language change in the digital era. Additionally, it is important to investigate the impact of digital language use on formal language development, critical thinking, and intergenerational communication. As a global lingua franca, English is entering a compelling phase of digital evolution—one that warrants sustained observation, analysis, and pedagogical reflection.

Conclusion

The findings of this literature review suggest that social media has become a pivotal agent in the ongoing evolution of the English language. Across various platforms, linguistic expression is no longer constrained by traditional norms but has adapted to the fast-paced,

dynamic, and multimodal nature of digital communication. As identified in multiple studies, this transformation is evident in the simplification of syntactic structures, the rise of non-standard grammar, the creation and adoption of novel lexicons, and the integration of emojis and visual symbols alongside textual communication. These developments point to the emergence of a new, informal yet functionally effective linguistic register that facilitates meaning-making and emotional expression in online communities.

Moreover, the review highlights that linguistic variation on social media is significantly shaped by social context, community identity, and ideological polarization. Discourse patterns increasingly reflect the communicative norms of specific online groups—such as those on Reddit, TikTok, and other platforms—demonstrating how distinctive linguistic styles serve as markers of affiliation and belonging. These patterns support theoretical frameworks such as Swales' Discourse Community theory and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, both of which underscore the interrelationship between language, cognition, and group identity. In this regard, social media not only mirrors but also reinforces social and ideological boundaries, positioning language as a central medium for constructing identity and sociopolitical alignment in the digital era.

Given these findings, further research is warranted to explore the cross-cultural and multilingual dimensions of language evolution on social media. Longitudinal studies are particularly needed to investigate how digital language practices influence formal language acquisition, literacy development, and intergenerational communication. Additionally, there is a growing imperative to examine the pedagogical implications of these linguistic shifts. Future work should explore how curriculum design can meaningfully incorporate digital literacy and informal registers to better prepare learners for authentic communication in an increasingly digitized and linguistically diverse society.

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