ARGOPURO

Bahasa

A MORPHOSOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ACRONYMISM IN INSTAGRAM COMMENTS: FORMS, FUNCTIONS, AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

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Abstrak

Linguistic phenomena in digital communication are rapidly evolving, particularly on social media platforms like Instagram, where users continually innovate to maintain efficient and expressive communication. One of the most noticeable and widespread practices is the use of acronyms in comment sections. These linguistic shortcuts not only help users manage the platform's character limitations but also reflect broader sociolinguistic trends among digital communities. This study aims to explore the types and communicative functions of acronymism found in user comments on Instagram. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected from interactions on three verified and highly interactive public Instagram accounts. The results revealed that acronymism on Instagram can be classified into three main categories: abbreviations, initialisms, and conventional acronyms. These types are used not merely for brevity but also as tools for emotional expression, the creation of in-group identity, and digital culture participation. The study highlights how digital language adapts to technological environments while still fulfilling core communicative needs. By analyzing these linguistic patterns, the research contributes to a better understanding of how language evolves in online spaces and offers valuable insights for the study of digital linguistics, especially within the scope of social media interaction.

Keywords: acronymism, Instagram, digital communication, online discourse, sociolinguistics, social media language

Abstrak
Fenomena linguistik dalam komunikasi digital berkembang dengan sangat cepat, khususnya pada platform media sosial seperti Instagram, di mana para pengguna terus berinovasi untuk menjaga komunikasi yang efisien dan ekspresif. Salah satu praktik linguistik yang paling mencolok dan tersebar luas adalah penggunaan akronim dalam kolom komentar. Akronim ini tidak hanya membantu pengguna dalam menghadapi batasan jumlah karakter yang ditetapkan oleh platform, tetapi juga mencerminkan tren sosiolinguistik yang lebih luas di kalangan komunitas digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji jenis-jenis dan fungsi

komunikatif dari akronimisme yang ditemukan dalam komentar pengguna di Instagram. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari interaksi pada tiga akun publik terverifikasi dengan tingkat keterlibatan yang tinggi. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa akronimisme di Instagram dapat diklasifikasikan ke dalam tiga kategori utama: singkatan, inisialisme, dan akronim konvensional. Ketiga bentuk ini tidak hanya digunakan untuk menyingkat pesan, tetapi juga sebagai sarana ekspresi emosional, pembentukan identitas kelompok, serta partisipasi dalam budaya digital. Studi ini menyoroti bagaimana bahasa digital beradaptasi dengan lingkungan teknologi, namun tetap memenuhi kebutuhan dasar komunikasi. Melalui analisis pola-pola linguistik ini, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam pemahaman evolusi bahasa di ranah daring serta menawarkan wawasan penting bagi kajian linguistik digital, khususnya dalam konteks interaksi media sosial.

Kata Kunci: akronimisme, Instagram, komunikasi digital, wacana daring, sosiolinguistik, bahasa media sosial

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the landscape of digital communication has undergone a significant transformation, largely driven by the growing influence of social media platforms. This shift has led to rapid changes in how language is used online. A notable linguistic trend emerging from this shift is **acronymism**—the use of shortened forms such as abbreviations, initialisms, and contracted expressions to simplify communication. On Instagram, these compact forms are particularly widespread in comment sections, where they serve to save space, convey emotion efficiently, and and establish social connections . (Crystal, 2006)

The increasing use of acronymic expressions is not coincidental. Platforms like Instagram impose character limits that prompt users to communicate ideas more concisely. As a result, acronyms like "LOL," "OMG," "BRB," and localized variants such as "tq" have become common, signaling not only linguistic economy but also alignment with informal digital norms (Kurniati & Rusfandi, 2021) This dual role—enhancing communicative efficiency while expressing identity—illustrates the interplay between technical constraints and the evolving social dynamics of online interaction.

Recent studies in the field of digital morphology have emphasized the innovative nature of social media language.(Kurniati & Rusfandi, 2021) Found that about 30% of the slang used in Instagram posts by EFL learners consisted of acronyms, often functioning as identity markers linked to youth culture. Similarly, (Rosiana & Afriana, 2022) Analyzed comments on celebrity posts and identified 24 acronyms formed through methods such as initialism, clipping, and standard acronym construction.

Additionally, (Di Marco & Singh, 2024) Identified a global pattern across online comment sections in which users increasingly rely on condensed language—such as acronyms and emojis—over full-length words. This growing preference for brevity and symbolic forms reflects a broader tendency in digital writing to prioritize immediacy and efficiency.

Beyond structure, acronymism fulfills key sociolinguistic purposes. (Indra & Marhamah, 2024) shows that Indonesian users often use acronyms to foster a sense of group belonging and maintain informal communication styles. (Wafa & Putri, 2022)) Further observed that acronyms help express shared feelings and reinforce community ties. These patterns are consistent with Androutsopoulos's (2014 (Androutsopoulos, 2014)) perspective on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which views

language in online spaces as a tool not only for exchanging information but also for performing identity and maintaining social cohesion.

Despite these insights, there are notable gaps in existing research. Much of the current literature focuses on captions, main posts, or general slang trends, leaving the interactive nature of comment sections—especially on verified and highly followed Instagram accounts—largely unexamined. These spaces are crucial because they offer insight into how everyday users, rather than influencers or brands, create spontaneous discourse and engage in creative language practices. Moreover, while studies have outlined various types of acronyms, they often stop short of analyzing how those forms relate to context-specific meanings, emotional tones, or social strategies, particularly in the Indonesian digital setting.

To address these gaps, this study investigates the use of acronymism in Instagram comment threads on high-visibility accounts. It explores both the morphological patterns and the communicative functions behind these expressions.

This investigation is guided by two key research questions:

- **RQ1:** Which morphological forms of acronyms (such as abbreviations, initialisms, blends, and standard acronyms) are most commonly used in Instagram comments?
- **RQ2:** What communicative purposes do these acronyms serve, such as increasing efficiency, expressing emotions, signaling group identity, or facilitating social interaction?

To answer these questions, the study applies a **descriptive qualitative method** with digital documentation techniques. A total of 150 comments were purposively selected from three verified public Instagram accounts, each with more than one million followers. The analysis involved:

1. Classifying acronym types using Crystal's (2006) linguistic categories.
2. Interpreting contextual functions through the framework of Androutsopoulos (2014), (Androutsopoulos, 2014) Focusing on identity and community expression.
3. Drawing on Tagliamonte's (2008) work on youth slang and linguistic minimalism to examine patterns of brevity and emotional tone.

Through this multi-layered approach, the research aims to contribute to the field of **digital linguistics** in three key ways: (1) by linking specific acronym forms to their communicative functions; (2) by enhancing understanding of how young, digital-native users perform identity and manage emotion through language; and (3) by validating Instagram comment sections as meaningful sites for linguistic and sociocultural analysis in the context of online interaction.

THEORIES AND METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand and describe linguistic phenomena in depth based on real-world data. This method was chosen as it aligns with the main objective of the research, namely to explore the forms and functions of acronymism found in user comments on the Instagram platform. The descriptive qualitative method emphasizes the process of interpreting data and understanding the meanings behind language usage, making it suitable for analyzing linguistic variation in digital environments.

 The research model used in this study is exploratory, focusing on revealing linguistic patterns related to acronym usage among Instagram users. Rather than testing statistical hypotheses, this study seeks to explore phenomena contextually. Such an approach allows the researcher to capture naturally occurring language behaviors within digital communities, free from rigid variable constraints.

 The data used in this research consists of user comments containing acronyms, collected from three verified public Instagram accounts with over one million followers and high interaction rates. These accounts were selected purposefully to reflect diverse content types such as entertainment, news, and public figures, ensuring a wide range of linguistic forms. The comments were gathered from posts published over the last three months, resulting in a total of 150 relevant comments that met the acronym

usage criteria. Each comment was documented along with its contextual information, such as the post's topic, time, and the surrounding interaction pattern.

The data collection technique applied was digital documentation. The steps included: (1) purposive selection of Instagram accounts and posts, (2) downloading and recording user comments that contained acronyms, and (3) transcribing and classifying the comments based on form and linguistic context. Throughout the process, the researcher also observed the communicative situation in which the acronyms appeared—whether they were used to express appreciation, criticism, humor, or emotion. All data were recorded manually and organized using classification tables for ease of analysis.

To analyze the data, this study draws upon two primary theoretical frameworks: morphological theory, to examine the structural forms of acronyms, and sociolinguistic theory, to analyze their social functions.

From a morphological perspective, this study adopts the theory of Crystal (2006a (Crystal, 2006)), who emphasizes that acronyms are a productive form of linguistic shortening in digital communication. Crystal classifies acronyms into three major types:

1. Abbreviation – a truncation of words without necessarily focusing on the initial letters (e.g., "pls" for "please"),
2. Initialism – the use of the initial letters of a series of words, pronounced letter by letter (e.g., "LOL" for "Laughing Out Loud"),
3. Conventional Acronyms – a combination of initial letters that are read as a single word (e.g., "NATO" or "SCUBA").

This classification is used to identify and categorize the types of acronyms found in Instagram comments.

From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, this study uses the framework developed by (Androutsopoulos, 2014) Which views language use in social media not merely as a communicative tool but also as a marker of social identity, group solidarity, and emotional expression. Language in social media is dynamic, flexible, and context-sensitive. Thus, the analysis of acronym usage in this study goes beyond structural forms to explore their social and emotional functions in digital interactions.

Additionally, this research considers the concept of digital communication put forth by (. (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008) They argue that the emergence of abbreviated forms in online platforms reflects not only technical constraints (such as character limits) but also stylistic preferences for speed, responsiveness, and informality. According to their view, acronyms play a role in constructing new norms of digital interaction, where efficiency and emotional expression are equally important.

By combining morphological and sociolinguistic theories, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how acronymism operates in Instagram comments, both structurally and functionally. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing field of digital linguistics and offer valuable insights into how younger generations adapt and transform language usage in the context of social media communication.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 150 Instagram comments drawn from three verified public accounts reveals the dynamic and layered nature of acronymism in contemporary digital interaction. Although often perceived as casual linguistic shortcuts, acronyms in this context demonstrate complex patterns of morphological formation, pragmatic utility, cultural hybridity, and identity performance. This study not only reinforces theoretical frameworks within digital linguistics but also offers empirical evidence specific to Indonesian users engaging in a globalized online environment.

Morphologically, three dominant forms of acronymism emerged: abbreviations, initialisms, and conventional acronyms. Abbreviations such as "pls" (please), "u" (you), and "tmrw" (tomorrow) reflect the reduction of standard words to their essential phonetic or symbolic cores. Such abbreviations, as argued by (Crystal, 2011)They are not evidence of linguistic decay but rather illustrate the adaptive innovation of language under technological constraints. Initialisms like "OMG", "LOL", and "BTW" further illustrate this adaptation, representing condensed forms of longer phrases that are pronounced letter-by-letter and convey swift emotional or conversational reactions S. A. ; D. D. Tagliamonte, 2008) Meanwhile, acronyms such as "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out), "YOLO" (You Only Live Once), and "OOTD" (Outfit of the Day) are formed similarly but pronounced as full words. These tend to function as cultural signifiers within digital communities, indexing a user's familiarity with online trends and discourse norms.

One of the most striking findings is the dominance of English-language acronyms among predominantly Indonesian-speaking users. This pattern underscores the influence of English as a global digital lingua franca and highlights the integration of global elements into localized communication practices ((Androutsopoulos, 2014) The seamless code-mixing between Bahasa Indonesia and English-based acronyms exemplifies a form of digital bilingualism and hybrid identity construction, where users actively navigate multiple linguistic and cultural systems. This aligns with Blommaert's (2010) concept of "superdiversity," in which language choices become expressions of translocal belonging and individual positioning within globalized spaces.

Beyond morphology, the pragmatic and sociolinguistic roles of acronyms in Instagram comments were shown to be highly functional and context-sensitive. Acronyms offer communicative efficiency by allowing users to express ideas quickly and within platform constraints. (Crystal, 2006) They also act as affective markers, conveying emotional states and interpersonal tone in a medium lacking prosody or non-verbal cues. In addition, acronym use signals community belonging and cultural alignment. Terms like "ARMY" or "TBT" demonstrate shared cultural knowledge and fandom affiliation, reinforcing in-group dynamics. Moreover, frequent use of acronyms reflects a high degree of digital literacy, as individuals deploy them not just for brevity but also to align with specific stylistic and social expectations. (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011) Argue that such digital fluency constitutes a form of social capital in online environments, where mastery of platform-specific language can enhance status and relatability.

Informality also plays a key role in acronymism. The tone established by acronyms tends to be relaxed and accessible, reducing the social distance between users and figures of authority such as influencers or celebrities. This linguistic informality contributes to perceived closeness and interactional symmetry, which is increasingly valued in digital branding and online community-building. The study also

highlights contextual and generational variation in acronym use. Emotionally charged acronyms like "LMAO" and "OMG" were prevalent in posts related to entertainment and humor, whereas more serious or formal content attracted fewer acronyms. Generational differences were also notable: younger users exhibited greater creativity and confidence in using acronyms, often treating them as playful markers of cultural literacy (Tagliamonte, 2016). (S. A.

A particularly interesting phenomenon was the tendency for followers to replicate the language of public figures, a process known as linguistic mirroring. When influencers used acronyms in their posts or replies, fans often mimicked these styles in the comment section. This supports the notion that social media influencers function as linguistic role models, shaping language practices and discourse norms from the top down (Marwick & boyd, 2011)). It further illustrates how acronymism is not only a bottom-up expression of youth identity but also a top-down mechanism of community alignment.

These observations affirm David Crystal's (2006))Laim that acronymism is a creative response to the communicative affordances and limitations of online platforms. Simultaneously, the performative nature of acronym use reflects Androutsopoulos' (2014) assertion that language in digital contexts operates as both a tool of communication and a vehicle of identity construction, emotional alignment, and social affiliation) Acronyms thus function symbolically, enabling users to negotiate their presence, persona, and membership in digital communities.

The broader implications of this study are significant. Academically, it supports the expansion of linguistic inquiry into emerging digital forms and highlights the need for further research on acronymism within frameworks of digital morphology, translingual practice, and youth language. Pedagogically, it suggests that language education should recognize and incorporate digital literacy, legitimizing the communicative role of acronyms and similar forms. For practitioners in digital marketing, social media strategy, and online community management, understanding acronymism can enhance authenticity, engagement, and resonance with target audiences.

In sum, acronymism on Instagram reflects a major linguistic and cultural shift in how people relate to each other in the digital age. It encapsulates the evolution of language toward greater efficiency, expressiveness, and identity-based interaction. Far from being peripheral or trivial, acronyms constitute a powerful lens through which the practices, values, and relationships of online communities can be understood.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to investigate the phenomenon of acronymism in Instagram comments, focusing on its structural types, communicative purposes, and sociolinguistic implications within the context of digital discourse. Drawing upon 150 Instagram comments sourced from three verified public accounts, the study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze how acronyms are utilized by users, particularly among digital natives, in a linguistically hybrid and socially dynamic environment. The findings reveal that acronymism is not a random or superficial linguistic behavior, but a systematic and meaningful practice embedded within contemporary digital communication.

The analysis identified three primary forms of acronymism present in the data: (1) abbreviations, such as "pls" (please), "tmrw" (tomorrow), and "u" (you), which involve the shortening of individual words by omitting letters or syllables; (2) initialisms, such as "OMG" (Oh My God), "LOL" (Laughing Out Loud), and "IDK" (I Don't Know), which are pronounced letter by letter and often used to express emotion or

reaction; and (3) conventional acronyms, like "YOLO" (You Only Live Once), "FOMO" (Fear of Missing Out), and "OOTD" (Outfit of the Day), which are pronounced as words and carry cultural or symbolic meaning. These types not only differ structurally but also function differently in discourse depending on the intention, audience, and situational context.

Functionally, the use of acronyms in Instagram comments was found to serve multiple communicative purposes. On a pragmatic level, abbreviations are employed primarily for the sake of convenience and efficiency, especially on platforms where brevity is valued. However, acronyms and initialisms often go beyond mere efficiency. They express emotional nuance, convey reactions, denote humor or sarcasm, and reflect socio-digital trends. This reflects the idea that acronyms serve both linguistic and affective roles, allowing users to express themselves concisely yet effectively in fast-paced digital interactions.

Moreover, acronymism plays a sociolinguistic role in constructing identity and fostering online group belonging. The repetition and shared use of popular acronyms among users create a sense of in-group familiarity, reinforcing a collective digital identity. In this way, acronyms act as semiotic markers of membership in specific communities or cultural spheres, such as fandoms, fashion, or internet humor. These observations support the sociolinguistic claim that language is not only a medium of communication but also a means of social alignment and identity performance, particularly in online spaces where visual cues are limited.

A striking finding of the study was the prevalence of English-language acronyms within Indonesian-language comments. This suggests a linguistic hybridity—a fusion of global and local elements—characteristic of today's digital environments. While the base language of the comment may be Indonesian, users frequently embed English acronyms to signify modernity, global awareness, or simply to align with trending digital expressions. This phenomenon demonstrates how language on social media platforms reflects not just personal choice but also broader patterns of globalization, media influence, and cultural exchange. It is an example of glocalization, where global linguistic forms are adapted into local communicative practices.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing field of digital linguistics, which examines how technology influences the evolution of language. It supports the view that digital communication is not degrading language, as some critics claim, but instead reshaping it, introducing new norms, creative forms, and expressive strategies. Acronymism, in this context, represents an innovative linguistic adaptation to the affordances and constraints of digital platforms. It is a manifestation of linguistic economy, affective expression, and symbolic interaction rolled into one compact form.

Furthermore, this study affirms that seemingly minor linguistic features—such as acronyms—can offer rich insights into contemporary communication trends, user behavior, and cultural values. In virtual communities, where interaction is fast-paced and multimodal, acronyms provide users with tools for both utility and nuance. They not only shape how messages are sent and received but also influence how users connect, relate, and construct meaning together.

In conclusion, acronymism in Instagram comments reflects the intersection of language, technology, and society. It exemplifies how digital communication reshapes linguistic practices, enabling users to express themselves in ways that are efficient, emotionally resonant, and culturally embedded. Far from being trivial, acronyms reveal a sophisticated linguistic phenomenon that carries implications for morphology, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. As digital media continues to evolve, so too will the forms and functions of acronymism, making it a valuable subject of continued academic inquiry in both linguistic and cultural studies.

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