Sociophonetics Analysis Of Youth Slang In Medan

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Abstract

This study explores the sociophonetics characteristics of youth slang in Medan, Indonesia, focusing on its linguistic features, origins, and social functions. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research investigates how slang is formed and used by teenagers which are gen z in Medan's urban communities. The analysis reveals that Medan slang is influenced by Malay, Hokkien, and Batak languages, alongside Indonesian and English, with unique phonetic shifts and word formation processes such as syllable alteration, abbreviations, and acronyms. The study also examines the types of slang using Allan and Budridge theory which are fresh and creative, flippant, imitative, acronym, and clipping. The data will be collected through questionnaires online. Then, some respondents will be interviewed so as to analyze the phonetic aspect of the slang. After the slang have been transcribed phonetically, they will be analyzed phonetically. By documenting the phonetic patterns and cultural significance of Medan slang, this research contributes to a broader understanding of language variation and change in multilingual urban settings.

Keywords: sociophonetics, youth slang, Medan, gen Z.

INTRODUCTION

The study of sociophonetics examines the relationship between social factors and phonetic variations in language use. In Medan, Indonesia, the youth have developed a distinctive slang that reflects their social identity and cultural dynamics. Understanding the phonetic characteristics of this slang is essential for comprehending the linguistic innovations and social interactions within this community (Paino, Lubis, & Hutagalung, 2024).

Recent research has delved into various aspects of youth slang in Medan. Muthi'ah and Rangkuti (Sadewo, Lubis, Ghifari, & Marpaung, 2024) analyzed the phonological processes in Medan adolescent slang, identifying phenomena such as assimilation and syllable structure modifications, including the use of specific vowels and the weakening of vowel sounds. Their findings suggest that generative phonology provides a valuable framework for understanding these linguistic patterns.

The variation of slang between different generations has also been a subject of study. Melissa et al. (Thomas, 2019) compared slang usage between Generation Z highlighting how technological influences and social contexts shape linguistic trends. They found that Gen Z's slang is often text-based, influenced by early internet culture, whereas Gen Alpha's slang is more visual and fast-paced, reflecting platforms like TikTok and YouTube.

The impact of slang on formal language proficiency among Indonesian youth has raised concerns. Paino et al. (Trudgill, 2020) observed a significant correlation between frequent slang usage and declining formal language literacy, affecting academic performance and intergenerational communication. They emphasize the need for balanced language education strategies that acknowledge youth linguistic identity while preserving formal literacy.

Similarly, Sadewo et al. (Melissa, Siregar, Shakira, Haz, & Rangkuti, 2024) investigated the influence of slang on Indonesian language skills among students at Medan State University. Their study revealed that while students are comfortable using slang in daily conversations, over half recognized the necessity of reducing slang usage in academic contexts to maintain formal language proficiency.

These studies underscore the dynamic nature of youth slang in Medan and its implications for language development and education. A sociophonetic analysis of this slang can provide deeper insights into the interplay between social identity and phonetic variation, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of language evolution in urban Indonesian contexts (Eckert, 2021).

METHOD

Research Method

This research uses the qualitative method in analyzing sociophonetically on youth slang in Medan, Indonesia. The researcher intend to find some youth slang used by gen z in Medan. The first data is to identify the gen z to be the respondents of the research. The second data are derived from the questionnaires sent to the youths in Medan (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Then after some analyzing, the researcher will interview some selected respondents to check the phonetic perspective (Eldridge, 2025). The data will be categorized on the type of slang they belong to and then the slang will be analyzed phonetically.The subjects of the research are gen z living in the city of Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia (Muthi'ah & Rangkuti, 2023).

Data and Source Data

The data of this research are taken from the responses of the google form sent as questionnaire. There will be interviews to selected respondents to analyze the phonetic aspect of the slang.

The Technique of Collecting the Data

The researcher will be taking the following steps:
1. Determine the gen z
2. Send the questionnaire to the selected generation z
3. Determining what phonetic changes occur in the slang.

The Technique of Analyzing the Data
1. Categorizing the slang into the 5 categories
2. Conducting interviews online and offline to analyze the phonetic aspect of the slang
3. Transcribing the slang
   Analyze the phonetic change in the slang

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Data

This research consisted of quantitative and qualitative data. The data were taken from several sources. First of all, surveys of Google Forms were sent to 50 Gen Z Students. Then, some students were interviewed to get the pronunciation and usage of the slang. From the Google form, the data were categorized according to Allan and Burridge's (Putri, Sukmaningrum, & Wahyuni, 2023) theory. Then the phonetic transcription was added according to the result of the interview with the student (Lestari, Jazeri, & Mukhlas, 2022).

Data Analysis

The data consisted of two kinds of data, quantitative and qualitative data. The data were taken from the sources. results of the Google Form application, and interviews of Gen Z students.

Classification of Indonesian Slang Types Based on Allan & Burridge (2006)

This chapter presents the findings of a study addressing the first research question, concerning the categorization of slang used by young people in Medan. Data collected from questionnaires and subsequent interviews have been carefully analyzed and classified according to the five categories of slang identified by Allan and Burridge (2006): Fresh and Creative, flippant, Imitative, Acronyms, and Abbreviations. The following table, which provides a comprehensive taxonomy of the slang terms found, along with their meanings in Indonesian and English, their contexts of use, and their phonetic transcriptions, provides a foundational perspective for further Sociophonetic studies (Pongsapan, 2022).

Table 1. Fresh and Creative

| No | Slangs | Meaning | | Context | Transcript |
		Indonesia	English		
I	**English Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				
1	Sigma	Keren (Idiomatik)	Cool	Used to praise someone who is considered cool, dominant, or even independent(usually used as slang in Gen Alpha).	/siʔ.ma/
II	**English Slang with English Pronunciation**				

2	Ate	Memuji/ Kekaguman (Idiomatik)	Show admiration	Used to show admiration/praise	/eɪt/
III	**Indonesian Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				
3	Gass	Ayo (Idiomatik)	Let's go	Used to invite/ask someone to do/start something	/gas/
4	Gemoy	Lucu/ Menggemaskan (Idiomatik)	Cute/adorable	Used to praise something cute/adorable	/gə.moj/
5	Jek	Teman (Idiomatik)	Bro	Used as a friendly address for a male friend	/dʒɛʔ/

Fresh and creative slang is the most dynamic category. Phrases like *sigma, ate, kuy, ngab, sabi, gemoy, mantul, ambyar* emerge quickly, spread through social media, online communities, and peer groups fast. Many of these expressions come from viral trends or global memes but quickly get new sound qualities once they reach local speech. One interesting phenomenon in this category is the use of reversed syllables, as can be seen in *kuy* from *yuk*, *ngab* from *bang,* and *sabi* from *bisa*; this feels playful and gives novelty, which perhaps explains their popularity. They also produce sound patterns that are rhythmically satisfying, making them fun to pronounce (Nuttal, 2025). The emotional expression, too, is strong in this category. *Ambyar* is heavily associated with sadness but is used in such a dramatic and humorous manner (Purba, Sinurat, & Herman, 2021). *Gemoy* expresses affection and sounds soft and tender. This creative manipulation of sound in these words well expresses the imaginative nature of youth language. Fresh and creative slangs reveal how linguistic innovation thrives among young speakers who enjoy bending and experimenting with existent rules. Altogether, the five categories of slang reflect several broader sociophonetic tendencies: even when slang in Medan originates from foreign or digital sources, young speakers continue to re-render its pronunciation in terms of local sound patterns. Intonation, rhythm, stress, and articulation all interact in meaning (Vajda, 2004). These aspects of phonetic specification add speakers' closeness, humor, irony, boredom, frustration, affection, and excitement.

Table 2. Flippant

No	Slangs	Meaning		Context	Transcript
		Indonesia	English		
I	**English Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				
II	**English Slang with English Pronunciation**				
III	**Indonesian Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				

1	Jones	Jomblo Ngenes (Idiomatic)	Unlucky in love	Used to express someone who has been single for a long time or unlucky in love	/dʒo.nɛs/
2	Mabar	Main bareng (Idiomatik)	Playing together	Used to invite/ask someone to play a game together	/ma.bar/
3	Bucin	Budak cinta (Idiomatic)	Love slave	Used to refer to someone who is overly obsessed with their partner/lover	/bu.tʃin/
4	Sosik	Sok asik (Idiomatic)	Pretending to be fun	Used to refer to someone who tries hard to look like he is having fun	/so.sik/
5	Sokab	Sok akrab (Idiomatic)	Pretending to be familiar	Used to describe someone pretending to be close or friendly	/so.kap/

/tʃa.pər/
/sal.foʔ/
/tʃin.loʔ/
/de.tol/
/pan.sos/
/tʃə.gil/
/sa.si.mo/
/mʊ.lʊt.ɛm.bɛr/
/sɔ.tɔj/
/ga.bʊt/
/ga.mon/
/patɛn/
/lə.baj/

/rɛ.tʃɛh/
/ko.tʃaʔ/
/tʃə.pu/
/ki.tʃəp/
/rə.ba.han/
/san.tuj/

Flippant slang is another important category. These expressions are often used in teasing, light mocking, or humorous comments on someone's behavior. Words like *bucin*, *gabut, lebay, salfok*, and *caper* are very common among the youth (Relaño Pastor & Fernández Barrera, 2018). They are not neutral descriptions. Rather, they are evaluative in meaning that, crucially, depends on how they are pronounced. The sociophonetic dimension becomes crucial in this regard. A word like *lebay* is generally uttered with an exaggerated rise in intonation that enhances the notion of excessive conduct. *Salfok* is usually concluded with a determined glottal stop, which, again, suits the meaning of a sudden lapse of concentration (Harunasari & Halim, 2021). These details demonstrate that the youth do not depend only on the lexical meaning of a slang term but also on the prosodic features accompanying it. Flippant slang serves to establish group identity and to maintain social boundaries. Since it is mostly humorous in nature, it easily enables young people to criticize or tease others without sounding too harsh. Humor diffuses social judgment, and sound is crucial in shaping that humor.

Table 3. Imitative

No	Slangs	Meaning		Context	Transcript
		Indonesia	English		
I	**English Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				
1	Fakboi	Pria sialan (Idiomatic)	Fuck boy	Used to refer to a man who likes to play with women's feelings, the same as "Playboy"	/faʔ.boi/
2	Absurd	Tidak masuk akal (Idiomatic)	Nonsense/ absurd	Used to refer to something nonsense, absurd, or silly	/ap.surt/
3	Cikidot	Ayo mulai	Check it out	Used to ask/invite someone to start or do something	/tʃi.ki.dot/
4	Nolep	Tidak ada kehidupan	No life	Used to refer to someone who rarely socializes, or it	/no.ləp/

				could refer to someone who has no activities outside the home/house	
II	**English Slang with English Pronunciation**				
5	Auto	Langsung/ pasti (Idiomatic)	Instantly/ definitely	Used to state that something will happen certainly/instantly	/au.to/
6	Bestie	Teman dekat (Idiomatic)	Best friend	Used as a friendly address for a best friend	/bɛs.ti/
7	Pick me	Sipaling beda dari yang lain (Idiomatic)	Attention seeker	Used to refer to someone who tries hard to show they are different to attract attention from others	/pɪk.miː/
8	Slay	Cantik (Idiomatic)	Stunning	Used to praise a charming or impressive appearance	/sleɪ/
III	**Indonesian Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				
9	Ngegas	Marah (Idiomatic)	Mad	Used to refer to someone who is angry or speaking in a loud and fast tone	/ŋə.gas/

Imitative slang reveals the most playful side of youth language. It includes expressions that imitate sounds from the environment or the digital world, such as *dor*, *nging*, and *bruk*. Also to be classified as this type are digital-influenced laughter expressions like *awokawok*. These expressions rely almost entirely on phonetic performance. *Dor* is articulated with a sharp and sudden burst of sound to imitate the noise of an explosion or gunshot. *Awokawok* imitates the rhythm of online laughter and therefore carries the flavor of digital communication into spoken language (Wati & Zulaikha, 2019). Other expressions, such as *anjir*, *dih*, or *bah*, are emotional reactions and are pronounced in a manner that reflects surprise, annoyance, disbelief, or amusement. The immediacy of these sounds shows that imitative slang works like a direct emotional outlet. It blurs the line between spoken and digital communication and illustrates how young speakers are strongly influenced by online habits even when they speak offline.

Table 4. Acronym (Akronim)

No	Slangs	Meaning		Context	Transcript
		Indonesia	English		
I	**English Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				
1	OOT	Gak nyambung (Idiomatic)	Out of topic	Used to state that the thing that's being discussed is irrelevant	/ɔ. ɔ.te/
2	OOTD	Pakaian hari ini	Outfit of the day	Used to show off about the clothing worn that day	/o.o.te.de/
3	OTW	Sedang dalam perjalanan	On the Way	Used to inform that someone is on the way to a destination	/o.te.we/
4	BDW	Ngomong ngomong	By the way	Used to change the topic of conversation	/be.de.we/
5	GWS	Cepat sembuh ya	Get Well Soon	Used to wish someone who is sick a speedy recovery	/ge.we.ɛs/
6	BRB	Sebentar ya	Be right back	Used to inform that someone will return shortly after a brief absence	/be.ɛr.be/
7	PAP	Meminta foto	Post a Picture	Used to ask someone to send a photo/photos	/pe.a.pe/
8	GG	Permainan bagus	Good game	Used in online gaming to	/ge.ge/

					appreciate a good match	
9	OVT	Berfikir berlebihan	Overthinking		Used to refer to a condition/ habit of overthinking about something	/o.ve.te/
10	CMIIW	Koreksi jika saya salah	Correct Me If I'm Wrong		Used to ask to be corrected if the information given is wrong	/tʃm.I.eɪw/
II	**English Slang with English Pronunciation**					
11	OMG	Astaga (Interjection)	Oh my God		Used to express surprise, admiration, or even disbelief	/o.ɛm.dʒ̃i/
12	LOL	Tertawa terbahak bahak (Interjection)	Laugh Out Loud		Used to express loud laughter in response to something funny	/ɛl.oʊ.ɛl/
13	FYI	Buat info aja	For Your Information		Used to provide additional information	/ɛf.wai.ai/
14	FOMO	Takut ketinggalan sesuatu yang sedang tren	Fear of Missing Out		Used to describe the anxiety or worry about missing out on a trend/event	/fo.mo/
III	**Indonesian Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**					

15	YTTA	Yang tau tau aja (Idiomatic)	Only those who know Will know	Used to mention something that is only known by a particular group of people, or it could be used to say something secret	/je.te.te.a/

Acronym slang is one of the most salient categories in this study. Most of the acronyms used by young people are taken from English expressions that spread widely over social media and messaging applications (Jane Ra, 2019). The most interesting thing is the phonetic adjustment of these acronyms when they are used in everyday speech in Medan. Expressions like OTW, OOT, GWS, or BRB do not use an English pronunciation but follow an Indonesian reading pattern instead. Young speakers pronounce them letter by letter and produce syllables that are fully incorporated into Indonesian phonology (Purba, Sulistia, & Lelyana Br. Manurung, Herman, 2021). This means that even globalized expressions are localized enough to make them sound natural to the speaker. Acronym slang then represents a conscious renegotiation of global linguistic material, while this renegotiation makes the language expression between the global influence and the local identity. Such expressions also carry interpersonal warmth in communication. A short message like GWS may serve as an expression of concern, while BRB signals a brief absence in an online conversation (Larasati & Simatupang, 2022). Though brief, such utterances maintain social contact.

Table 5. Clipping

No	Slangs	Meaning		Context	Transcript
		Indonesia	English		
I	**English Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				
1	Halu	Halusinasi (Idiomatik)	Hallucination	Refers to someone being unrealistic or daydreaming	/ha.lu/
II	**English Slang with English Pronunciation**				
III	**Indonesian Slang with Indonesian Pronunciation**				

2	Sans	Santai aja (Idiomatic)	Just relax	Used to tell someone to stay relaxed	/sans/
3	Cans	Cantik (Idiomatic)	Beautiful	Used to compliment someone's looks	/tʃans/
4	Japri	Jalur pribadi (Idiomatic)	Personal contact	Used to ask for a private chat	/dʒap.ri/
5	Gaje	Gak jelas (Idiomatic)	Not clear	Used to describe something unclear or confusing	/ga.dʒe/

The last category of slang is clipping. This is the kind of slang that involves shortened forms of Indonesian words, which speakers reduce to make the conversation more efficient. Examples include *sans* from *santai*, *cans* from *cantik*, *notif* from *notifikasi*, and *ulang tahun from ultah.* These reduced forms demonstrate a desire for simplicity and speed in the language of youth. The spoken interaction tends to be fast among young people, so clipped forms support that rhythm in conversation (Shu, Center, & Radio, 2019). A lot of the clipped expressions in Medan also reflect deeper cultural practices. Words such as *bang*, *dik*, and *bu* continue to function as polite forms of address that express respect while still sounding friendly and youthful (Maharani, 2019). Their presence shows that while speakers of the young adopt modern expressions, they also maintain linguistic habits that carry social value from an older generation. Thus, clipping serves two functions: it minimizes phonetic effort while simultaneously creating a sense of proximity and familiarity in social interaction. The sound of clipped slang tends to be light, simple, and easy to articulate; therefore, it is more suitable for informal talk.

Percentage Distribution of Slang Types Based on Allan & Burridge (Muziatun, Achmad, & Samidu, 2020).

In calculating the percentages of the types of each slang type, this formula is used:

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$$

Definition of symbol:

1. P : Percentage
2. *f* : Frequency
3. *N* : Nominal

Fresh and Creative : $P = \frac{25}{131} \times 100\% = 19.08\%$

Flippant : $P = \frac{24}{131} \times 100\% = 18.32\%$

Imitative $\qquad$: P = $\frac{25}{131}$ × 100% = 19.08%

Acronym $\qquad$: P = $\frac{23}{131}$ × 100% = 17.56%

Clipping $\qquad$: P = $\frac{34}{131}$ × 100% = 25.95%

This section presents the descriptive analysis of the collected slang data, classifying them into the five categories proposed by Allan and Burridge (2006) to answer the first research question.

Types of Slang	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Fresh & Creative	25	19.08%
Flippant	24	18.32%
Imitative	25	19.08%
Acronym	23	17.56%
Clipping	34	25.95%
Total	131	99.99%

Discussion

The research findings confirm that all five types of slang defined by Allan and Burridge are actively used by young people, especially Gen Z in Medan, collectively totaling 99.99%. This distribution indicates that youth slang is a dynamic and multifaceted linguistic system, not dominated by a single pattern.

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the sociophonetic features of slang used by young people in Medan (Sumarsih, Siregar, Bahri, & Sanjaya, 2024). Slang here is not treated merely as casual or playful vocabulary. Instead, it is understood as a linguistic practice that appeals to sound, identity, creativity, and social interaction. The analysis shows that the slang used by young speakers in Medan can be grouped into several broad categories, such as acronym slang, clipping slang, flippant slang, imitative slang, and fresh and creative slang. Each of these categories reflects different aspects of youth culture and demonstrates unique phonetic features. All of them together demonstrate how the language of young people keeps changing and adapting within the social and digital ecology in which they interact (Amin, 2020).

Medan is linguistically dynamic. Children grow up in this city amidst multilingual contact, popular culture, digital communication, and urban social dynamics; therefore, their language practices are complex and in state of perpetual flux. For them, slang is a prime marker of identity (Batau, Muliati, & Rampeng, 2022). It is through slang that speakers can sound modern, display intimacy to co-associates, distinguish themselves from older generations, and affiliate with global youth culture while maintaining locality (Blommaert, 2010). Because of this, slang becomes an invaluable site for observation in sociophonetics: the manner with which slang is pronounced carries social meaning in and of itself, be it attitude, emotional proximity, humor, and even group affiliatio

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and comprehensive discussion presented in the previous chapter regarding the sociophonetic analysis of youth slang, especially Gen Z in Medan, the following main conclusions are drawn.

1. Slang Classification and Distribution: The study successfully classified 131 instances of youth slang into the five categories proposed by Allan and Burridge (2006). The distribution of the data reflects a language repertoire that prioritizes both linguistic efficiency and social creativity:
   a. Clipping (25.95%): This is the most dominant category, emphasizing the high demand for phonetic economy and speed in youth communication.
   b. Fresh and Creative (19.08%) and Imitative (19.08%): These two categories are equally strong, indicating a balance between pure linguistic innovation (creating new words) and the adaptation of sounds from the social and digital environment.
   c. Flippant (18.32%): This substantial percentage confirms the significant social function of slang as a tool for delivering humorous commentary and light-hearted mockery within peer interactions.
   d. Acronym (17.56%): The least frequent category, which is nonetheless vital for studying the adaptation and localization of global linguistic influences.

2. Sociolinguistic Function of Clipping: The high frequency of Clipping (25.95%) suggests that this form of slang is not merely driven by efficiency, but also serves to manage social distance and intimacy. The phonetic reduction in terms of address (e.g., *Bang, Dik*) is a mechanism that allows speakers to retain culturally ingrained respectful value while simultaneously adopting a relaxed, face-paced style, thereby strengthening in-group solidarity without entirely discarding social hierarchy.

3. Meaning Amplified by Sociophonetics: The study concludes that the full social meaning of slang is often not solely determined by its lexicon but is significantly amplified by prosodic features (sociophonetics). Specifically, the meaning of humorous sarcasm and attitude in the Flippant (18.32%) category is transferred through exaggerated intonation and heightened stress on specific syllables (e.g., in the word lebay). This evidence confirms that the affective performance of sound is crucial in understanding youth communication.

4. Innovation and Phonetic Localization: Slang innovation in Medan involves two concurrent processes: internal creation and external adaptation.
   a. Fresh and Creative (19.08%) slang, which involves syllable reversal (metathesis), demonstrates the speakers' creativity in establishing unique internal identity markers.
   b. Conversely, Acronym (17.56%) slang derived from global sources (English) undergoes a significant process of phonetic localization. These acronyms are consistently articulated by pronouncing the individual letters according to the Indonesian alphabet (e.g., OTW realized as /o.te.we/). This process concludes that speakers consciously negotiate global terms to fit their local phonetic system, making the expression feel intimate and locally assimilated.

The results in this study illustrate that slang is not a random selection of popular catchwords; instead, it constitutes a systematic and meaningful linguistic domain influenced by young people's needs and identity. Overall, Medan youth slang, especially Gen Z, is a sound culture that is alive and under constant evolution; it brings global influences into local features, and digital habits into everyday speech. It is with slang that young people build their own linguistic identity. They express emotions through pronunciation to strengthen social bonds and to be creative. Slang keeps changing rapidly, with every shift reflecting the dynamic life of the community that uses it. Sociophonetic analysis helps show the depth of this phenomenon by showing how much meaning lies not only in the words themselves but in how those words are spoken.

Suggestion

1. Future studies can benefit from an expansion of research in sociophonetics by incorporating a wider array of participants with different generations, such as Gen Alpha or Millennials, in order to compare cross generationally in regards to slang usage.
2. In future studies, it is recommended that researchers utilize tools such as Praat to appropriately quantify the different acoustic properties of phonetic elements such as vowel duration, pitch, stress, and intonation.
3. Further research might include other sociolinguistic factors such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and digital media to see how they affect phonetic variation in youth slang.
4. Comparative research emphasizing local languages such as Batak, Malay, Hokkien, and global languages such as English is urged to gain further insight into language contact and phonetic adaptation of Medan slang.
5. Teachers are instead challenged to see teen talk as a linguistic resource rather than a linguistic problem because it can serve as a tool to teach students about language variation, register variations, and sociolinguistics.
6. Language teachers can make use of classroom programs to include conversations on slang in order to educate students on informal language usage without undermining their linguistic identity.
7. Curriculum designers and planners have been urged to incorporate sociolinguistic and sociophonetic views in language education to cover present-day language shifts in multilingual cities.

Future research in sociophonetics on Indonesian contexts is highly advised since presently available research on youth slang among Indonesian speakers remains minimal but holds great prospects.

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