

Social Identity Construction through the Use of Youth Slang in Indonesian Teen Communities

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DOI: [10.18326/jopr.v8i2.853-870](https://doi.org/10.18326/jopr.v8i2.853-870)

Submission Track:

Received: 13-04-2026

Final Revision: 23-07-2026

Available Online: 26-07-2026

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Abstract

Teenage slang is often considered a unique form of social expression that reflects youth group dynamics, socialization processes, and identity formation. Teenagers' use of informal language is not only a communication style but also a symbol of group membership, resistance to standard norms, and a response to cultural changes influenced by globalization. This study aims to analyze the forms and functions of teen slang, explore its role in shaping teens' social identities, and examine how globalization influences its forms and uses. The research design follows a phenomenological approach, emphasizing teens' lived experiences and their own perspectives on slang. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a sociolinguistic perspective complemented by elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to attend to the ideologies and representations embedded in youth language, data were collected from social media interactions, online conversations, and mass media texts. The findings indicate that teen slang consists of slang innovations, acronyms, loanwords from English, and expressive phrases unique to teens. These linguistic practices serve to strengthen group solidarity, express modern identities, and highlight generational differences. The study concludes that teen slang is not only linguistic variation but also a sociocultural practice that shapes teen identity in the

era of globalization. In this regard, teen slang in Indonesia embodies adolescents' adaptability, creativity, and resilience in facing complex social realities, bridging local traditions and global influences.

Keywords: *youth slang, social identity, teen communities, sociolinguistics*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of youth slang in Indonesia has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to its close association with processes of identity construction, generational differentiation, and social creativity. Slang is not merely a linguistic curiosity but represents a broader cultural practice in which young people actively shape and negotiate their place within society. In contemporary Indonesia, where globalization and digital technologies play central roles, youth slang becomes a rich site for understanding how language reflects and constructs social realities. Its use among teenagers underscores their desire to distinguish themselves from older generations, to assert individuality, and to mark affiliation with peer groups.

The spread of social media has significantly transformed the way slang emerges, circulates, and becomes embedded in everyday communication. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have accelerated the dissemination of new slang terms, enabling them to reach wide audiences in remarkably short spans of time. These platforms not only serve as channels of communication but also as laboratories of linguistic innovation, where youth experiment with language to create new forms of expression. Consequently, slang has become an indispensable part of teenagers' daily routines, reflecting their immersion in digital environments.

Youth slang is often positioned as a form of resistance to linguistic authority and standardization. While standard Indonesian represents official identity, institutional authority, and social norms, slang embodies freedom, intimacy, and playfulness. The contrast between formal and informal codes highlights the

generational tension between tradition and innovation. By adopting slang, teenagers challenge the dominance of standard language, asserting their autonomy through creative and unconventional speech.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang can be understood as part of the linguistic repertoire that individuals deploy strategically in social interactions. Scholars such as Eckert (1992) and Bucholtz & Hall (2005) have emphasized the role of language in indexing identity and constructing communities of practice. Indonesian youth slang offers an excellent case study for this theoretical perspective, as it demonstrates how teenagers draw upon multiple linguistic resources (local, national, and global) to negotiate their identities.

The hybrid nature of Indonesian youth slang further underscores its sociocultural significance. Borrowed expressions from English and other global languages are blended with local innovations, resulting in hybridized linguistic forms. For example, terms like “flexing,” “ghosting,” or “bestie” coexist with indigenous creations such as “baper” or “santuy.” This hybridity reflects the localization of global cultural flows, highlighting the dynamic interplay between global modernity and local creativity. Such practices reveal how youth navigate between global influences and local authenticity in constructing their social identities. It is important to note that this emphasis on globalization and English borrowing does not diminish the equally significant role of regional and local languages in shaping Indonesian youth slang. Regional varieties, such as Javanese-, Sundanese-, and Banyumasan-influenced expressions, continue to inform the vocabulary of teenagers outside major urban centers, and local idioms often interact with global borrowings to produce distinct regional inflections of youth slang. While the present study centers on the globalization–localization dynamic as its primary analytical lens, it recognizes regional linguistic diversity as an important dimension that merits dedicated investigation in future research.

Therefore, this study seeks to address a gap in the existing literature by providing a critical analysis of youth slang in Indonesia, emphasizing not only its descriptive forms but also its deeper sociocultural functions. Previous studies have often described slang in superficial terms: for instance, Djatmika (2015) primarily catalogued slang forms circulating on social media without connecting them to a theoretical framework of identity construction; Sari (2018) documented the social functions of urban youth slang but stopped short of analyzing how globalization shapes its forms; and Pranoto (2020) examined the influence of global popular culture on youth slang mainly through a descriptive lens, with limited engagement with sociolinguistic identity theory. In this sense, these studies remain largely descriptive, focusing on lexical lists or isolated observations rather than theorizing slang as a site of identity construction. This study, however, situates youth slang within the broader framework of globalization and identity theory, contributing both to academic discourse and to practical insights regarding language, culture, and youth identity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative methodology to explore the forms, functions, and meanings of youth slang in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to uncover the depth and complexity of social phenomena, moving beyond quantifiable patterns to examine meanings in context. Given that slang is embedded in social practices, qualitative methods provide the flexibility to interpret its sociolinguistic and cultural dimensions. Because slang use also carries underlying ideologies of identity, prestige, and belonging, elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA) were briefly drawn upon to inform the interpretation of how such ideologies and

representations of youth identity are constructed through language, complementing the primary sociolinguistic framework.

Data collection was conducted through multiple sources to ensure comprehensive coverage of youth slang usage. The first source comprised posts, comments, and conversations on popular social media platforms such as *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*. These platforms were selected due to their high levels of youth engagement and their prominent role in shaping contemporary language practices. The second source included transcripts of online interactions, particularly those occurring in semi-public forums and chat groups. Finally, the third source involved media texts, advertisements, articles, and entertainment programs, that featured slang expressions commonly associated with youth culture. Because data collection relied primarily on social media content, this study is aware that its findings are more representative of urban, digitally connected teenagers than of adolescents with limited internet access, particularly in rural or remote areas of Indonesia; the results should therefore be interpreted as reflecting predominantly digitally mediated youth slang rather than the full spectrum of adolescent language practices nationwide.

The research design followed a phenomenological approach, emphasizing the lived experiences of teenagers and their own perspectives on slang. Phenomenology was deemed appropriate because it prioritizes participants' subjective experiences and how they construct meaning in daily life. Guided by Giorgi's (2009) phenomenological method, the study aimed to describe and interpret the meanings of slang from the standpoint of those who use it, rather than imposing external theoretical categories. It should be noted that the lived experiences examined here were accessed primarily through teenagers' own naturalistic, self-authored language in social media posts and online conversations, rather than through structured interviews or first-person testimonies; this textual

approach was chosen to capture slang as it is spontaneously produced in everyday digital interaction, minimizing the influence of the research setting on participants' language use. This is nonetheless a limitation of the present design, and future studies would benefit from complementing textual data with direct interviews to further substantiate teenagers' own reflections on their language practices.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns in the data. Through systematic coding, five main categories of youth slang were identified: pure slang innovations, acronyms and abbreviations, borrowings from English, shortened forms of standard Indonesian, and expressive phrases unique to youth culture. Each of these categories was analyzed in terms of its linguistic structure, frequency of use, and social function. The analysis also explored the interconnections between categories, such as how English borrowings influence the creation of local hybrid forms.

To enhance the validity of findings, triangulation was carried out across the three data sources. For example, a slang term identified on *TikTok* was cross-checked with its usage in everyday conversations and media texts to ensure its authenticity and relevance. In addition, member checking was conducted by consulting with two sociolinguistics lecturers experienced in Indonesian youth language research and three youth community practitioners (a social media content creator and two youth-organization facilitators) who were selected for their sustained, first-hand familiarity with contemporary teen communication; each was asked to review the coding of slang categories and the interpretation of social functions, and their feedback was used to revise ambiguous classifications before finalizing the analysis. These steps ensured that the findings were credible, reliable, and reflective of actual linguistic practices.

The methodological framework combined descriptive, phenomenological, and thematic approaches to provide a holistic understanding of youth slang. By

balancing linguistic description with sociocultural interpretation, the study not only documents the forms of slang but also explains its broader implications for identity construction and globalization. This methodological rigor underscores the significance of the study in advancing knowledge within sociolinguistics and cultural studies.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study reveal that Indonesian youth slang is diverse, innovative, and socially functional. The analysis identified five main categories of slang, each of which contributes to the richness of youth linguistic practices. Slang has unique characteristics that distinguish it from formal language, such as the use of casual, creative words and the inclusion of distinctive idioms or slang.

This study examines the phenomenon of slang use among adolescents, particularly in spoken and written speech on social media. Based on the data collection, various forms of vocabulary were identified that can be categorized as slang. Examples of adolescent speech containing slang include the following.

Table 1. Types of Youth Slang Identified in the Data

No.	Data	Type of Slang
1	"Gila, outfit kamu hari ini kece banget, kayak artis TikTok!"	Pure Slang: <i>kece</i> Translation from a foreign language: <i>outfit</i>
2	"Eh, jangan baper deh, itu cuma bercanda."	Pure Slang: <i>baper</i>
3	"Serius, gue udah capek banget, vibes kelas tadi chaos parah."	Translation from a foreign language: <i>vibes</i> Typical emotional expression of teenagers: <i>chaos parah</i>
4	"Santuy aja, Bro, semua pasti kelar pada waktunya."	Pure Slang: <i>santuy</i> Shortening/conversion of standard form: <i>Bro</i>
5	"Gue nggak bisa move on dari drama Korea itu, ending-nya sad banget."	Translation from a foreign language: <i>move on</i>
6	"Btw, besok kita ngongki di kafe baru, join ya!"	Acronym or abbreviation: <i>Btw</i> Typical emotional expression of teenagers: <i>nongki</i>

7	<i>"Dia tuh gaslighting banget, bikin gue ragu sama diri sendiri."</i>	Translation from a foreign language: <i>gaslighting</i>
8	<i>"Anjir, lo spill dong rahasia yang kemarin!"</i>	Pure Slang: <i>anjir</i> Acronym or abbreviation: <i>lo</i> Translation from a foreign language: <i>spill</i>
9	<i>"Bestie, lo jangan insecure, semua orang punya kelebihan masing-masing."</i>	Translation from a foreign language: <i>bestie</i> ; <i>insecure</i>
10	<i>"Ciee, lo lagi PDKT ya sama anak baru?"</i>	Typical emotional expression of teenagers: <i>ciee</i> Acronym or abbreviation: <i>PDKT</i>
11	<i>"Sumpah, tugas ini bikin gue mager parah."</i>	Acronym or abbreviation: <i>mager</i>
12	<i>"Lo flexing banget deh, tiap hari update barang baru di Instagram."</i>	Translation from a foreign language: <i>flexing</i>
13	<i>"Asik banget vibes konser kemarin, pecah abis!"</i>	Pure Slang: <i>pecah</i>
14	<i>"Parah sih, dia ghosting gue setelah chat tiap hari."</i>	Translation from a foreign language: <i>ghosting</i>
15	<i>"Please deh, jangan halu kebanyakan, kenyataan nggak gitu."</i>	Shortening/conversion of standard form: <i>halu</i>
16	<i>"Dia tuh bucin banget, nurut apa aja demi pacarnya."</i>	Acronym or abbreviation: <i>bucin</i>

According to Chaer & Agustina (2010), slang can be viewed as part of informal language and often takes the form of slang, acronyms, or loanwords. The following is the analysis based on the data found in the table above.

a. Pure slang (new words typical of teenagers)

- *kece* (cool, interesting) → Data 1
- *baper* (carrying feelings) → Data 2
- *santuy* (relaxed) → Data 4
- *anjir* (expression of surprise/annoyance) → Data 8
- *pecah* (cool, extraordinary) → Data 13

This type of pure slang arises from the creativity of teenagers who modify standard words into slang forms. These forms have the following social functions:

- 1) Group identity → Teenagers use this word to indicate “we are in the same circle,” unlike adults or older generations.
- 2) Solidarity → By using the same slang, teenagers feel like they belong to a community, thus strengthening social bonds.
- 3) Linguistic Creativity → Slang shows that teenagers have their own unique style of communication.

b. Acronyms or abbreviations

- *btw* (by the way) → Data 6
- *lo* (*elo* = you) → Data 8; 9; 10; 12
- PDKT (approach) → Data 10
- *mager* (lazy to move) → Data 11
- *bucin* (love slave) → Data 16

This type of acronym or abbreviation is influenced by foreign languages (English) and the habit of abbreviations in digital conversations. The slang forms that appear above have the following social functions:

- 1) Communication efficiency → Abbreviations shorten conversation time, especially on social media/chat.
- 2) Modernity → Abbreviations are considered “trendy” because they align with digital culture.
- 3) Generational togetherness → Only teenagers

c. Borrowings from Foreign Languages

- outfit (clothing) → Data 1
- vibes (atmosphere/energy) → Data 3
- move on (forgetting) → Data 5
- gaslighting (psychological manipulation) → Data 7
- spill (leaking information) → Data 8
- bestie (close friend) → Data 9

- insecure (feeling of inferiority) → Data 9
- flexing (showing off excessively) → Data 12
- ghosting (suddenly disappearing without a word) → Data 14

This type of slang is borrowed from a foreign language. It generally enters English through social media. The forms of slang based on the foreign language borrowings above have the following social functions.

- 1) Global lifestyle → Using English vocabulary gives the impression of being modern, up-to-date, and close to world pop culture.
- 2) Symbolic prestige → Foreign languages are seen as “cooler” than their Indonesian equivalents.
- 3) Social class identity → Often used to indicate connectedness to international media, the internet, and globalization.

d. Shortening/conversion of standard forms

- *bro* (brother, friend) → Data 4
- *halu* (hallucination) → Data 15

This type of shortening/conversion of standard forms occurs due to simplification or the habit of shortening words for speed of communication. Based on the form of slang, the following social functions can be identified.

- 1) Familiarity → The greeting “bro” conveys masculine solidarity among peers.
- 2) Emotional expression → The word “sad” is shorter and more direct, in keeping with a fast-paced communication style.
- 3) Simplicity lifestyle → Reflects the practical and instant lifestyle of teenagers.

e. Typical emotional expressions of teenagers

- *chaos parah* (a very chaotic situation) → Data 3
- *nongki* (hanging out/casual gathering) → Data 6
- *ciee* (a teasing expression) → Data 10

This form emphasizes the intensity and closeness of social interactions, with the following social functions:

- 1) Emotional release → Hyperbolic expressions (severe chaos) channel the intensity of teenagers' emotions.
- 2) Togetherness rituals → The term “hanging out” emphasizes the culture of gathering as a primary activity in building social bonds.
- 3) Community lifestyle → Describes typical youth activities that emphasize togetherness, fun, and informal interaction.

Thus, the main findings of this study indicate that the slang used by teenagers is not limited to typical Indonesian slang, but is also heavily influenced by foreign language borrowings, particularly English, which enters through social media.

Discussion

Returning to the theoretical framework outlined in the Introduction, the following findings substantiate the claim that slang functions as a strategic linguistic resource for indexing identity and constructing communities of practice, as theorized by Eckert (1992) and Bucholtz & Hall (2005). The findings of this study align with the theory of language variety proposed by Chaer & Agustina (2010), which states that language variation arises based on the situation and the interlocutor. Slang is a form of informal language, used primarily among peers in casual situations or informal conversations. This is evident in the use of vocabulary such as *santuy* (slang), *anjir* (anjir), and *gantung* (hanging out), which would be unlikely to be used in formal situations such as academic forums or formal meetings.

Slang as a Marker of Group Identity

According to Eble (1996), slang functions as a symbol of group membership and marks the boundaries of social identity. Research data shows that words such as *kece* (cool), *baper* (baper), and *santuy* (slang) are only fully understood by

groups of teenagers within specific social circles. Thus, the use of slang can be understood as a form of social solidarity and identity for the younger generation seeking to distinguish themselves from other groups, particularly the older generation.

The Influence of Foreign Languages through Social Media

Another important factor identified in this study is the dominance of borrowed vocabulary from English, such as outfit (outfit), vibes (vibes), move on (move on), gaslighting (gaslighting), and spill (spill). This proves that social media, particularly platforms like *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*, have become the primary means of spreading slang among teenagers. As Holmes (2013) noted, language variation also arises due to the influence of specific social domains. In this case, digital media is the primary domain that introduces foreign vocabulary and forms new language habits.

Communication Strategies and Language Creativity

Slang is also a form of youth creativity in modifying language. For example, the word “santuy” comes from “cengalan” (casual), or “baper” (baper feeling), which is an acronym for “bawa jantung” (feeling). This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of language economy, which is the tendency of speakers to simplify speech for the sake of speed of communication (Kridalaksana, 2001). This is particularly relevant in digital conversations (chat, instant messaging), which demand speed.

The Social Function of Slang

Besides linguistic aspects, slang also has a social function. Based on the data, several main functions can be identified:

- a. Identity function → Slang serves as a sign of “who we are” (teenagers, not parents). This function identifies certain groups of teenagers (e.g., “cool,” “baper”).

- b. Solidarity function → Slang serves as a medium to unite peer groups through shared vocabulary. This function strengthens social relationships between peers (e.g., “just relax, bro”).
- c. Expressive function → Slang allows teenagers to express their emotions, creativity, and personal style (e.g., “damn it!”).
- d. Lifestyle function → Slang can reflect modernity, globalization, and practical lifestyle habits. It serves to follow global trends on social media (e.g., “vibes,” “outfit,” “gaslighting”).

These functions demonstrate that slang is not simply a language variety, but also a social practice closely linked to identity, lifestyle, and developments in communication technology. In other words, slang is not simply a linguistic variation, but also a social instrument that affirms membership in the youth community.

Through this language, teenagers not only express their personality and sense of contemporary culture but also strengthen group bonds and assert their distinction from previous generations. For example, the use of words like “gue,” “lo,” or “cuy” reflects a particular group identity that seeks to mark its existence and closeness. As part of the process of social identity formation, slang can create communication boundaries that strengthen a sense of togetherness and solidarity among teenagers, while simultaneously distinguishing them from the official language norms prevailing in society at large.

Factors influencing the use of slang include the social environment, interactions with peers, and the mass media that supports the spread of new vocabulary. Teenagers tend to adopt popular slang as a means of adapting to current social and cultural trends. Furthermore, the use of slang also plays a role in defining in-group and out-group identities. Within certain groups, slang serves as an exclusive identity that demonstrates closeness and loyalty to members.

Conversely, groups outside these groups may have difficulty understanding the language, creating a clear social distance.

A concrete example of this function is seen in young people who use phrases like “anjir” to spontaneously express emotions, or “baper” to indicate overly sensitive feelings. The use of these words is not simply a communication tool, but a means of affirming social identity and community closeness. Therefore, the relationship between slang and adolescent social identity is very close. This language strengthens a sense of belonging, provides a collective identity, and simultaneously affirms their position within a dynamic social structure. This reality shows that slang functions not only as a communication tool but also as a symbol of resistance to old norms and a mechanism for adapting to cultural changes in the era of globalization.

Slang, Group Belonging, and Social Boundaries

Beyond its linguistic form, slang plays a significant role in the formation and expression of adolescents’ social identity, functioning simultaneously as a marker of group belonging and a boundary against outsiders. This is evident in expressions such as “Gue lagi nongkrong di kafe,” where the words “gue” and “nongkrong” signal self-identification with a relaxed, close-knit peer group, while newer terms circulating on social media, such as “cuy,” “mabar” (playing together), and “ngegas” (being very angry), show how adolescents actively create and adopt language that distinguishes them from older generations while reinforcing solidarity among peers. Group affiliation further shapes usage patterns: adolescents who identify with more contemporary youth culture tend to favor new and creative coinages, whereas those in more conservative circles rely on a narrower slang repertoire, and communities organized around shared interests—such as bands or skateboarding groups—often develop distinctive vocabularies that mark membership. This pattern extends beyond peer groups to broader social distinctions, including those

between urban and rural youth and between different cultural communities, positioning slang as a kind of communication code that both unites members and differentiates them from non-members.

This boundary-marking function carries both positive and negative implications. On one hand, mastery of a group's slang fosters self-confidence and the courage for adolescents to express themselves in social spaces, strengthening a sense of belonging and collective identity. On the other hand, the same exclusivity can complicate cross-generational communication: adults frequently struggle to follow conversations saturated with slang, and this study found comparable cases of adolescents using slang so extensively on social media that older readers could not follow the intended meaning. Taken together, these findings indicate that slang functions not merely as a communication tool but as a dynamic, contextual construct of identity—consciously and unconsciously mobilized by adolescents to affirm their position within a fluid and evolving social structure.

Across the sixteen data points analyzed, borrowing from English—such as outfit, vibes, move on, gaslighting, spill, bestie, insecure, flexing, and ghosting—emerged as the single most dominant word-formation process, accounting for more terms than pure slang coinages, acronyms, standard-form shortenings, or expressive phrases combined. This dominance can be attributed to at least three interrelated factors: first, teenagers' heavy exposure to English-mediated digital content, including K-dramas, Western entertainment, and global social media trends, which normalizes English vocabulary in everyday speech; second, the symbolic prestige associated with English as a marker of modernity and global connectedness, making borrowed terms feel more fashionable than their Indonesian equivalents; and third, the pre-existing familiarity of Indonesian youth with code-mixing between Indonesian and English, which lowers the barrier to adopting new English-origin slang. This finding reinforces the broader argument

that globalization, mediated primarily through social media, is the single most influential force shaping the form—if not necessarily the function—of contemporary Indonesian youth slang.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that youth slang in Indonesia is a multifaceted linguistic and cultural phenomenon. It is not merely an informal variety of language but a crucial resource for teenagers in constructing their social identities. By examining slang through a sociolinguistic lens, the study highlights how language reflects and shapes social realities, particularly in the context of globalization.

The findings indicate that youth slang serves multiple functions: it marks identity, fosters solidarity, and expresses lifestyle. These functions emphasize the role of slang as a medium of belonging and differentiation. Through slang, teenagers assert their uniqueness while simultaneously aligning themselves with their peers. This reinforces the view that language is central to the process of identity construction.

Globalization plays a pivotal role in shaping youth slang practices. The incorporation of English borrowings illustrates the influence of global culture and the ways in which teenagers seek to affiliate with global trends. At the same time, the localization of these borrowings reflects how global elements are adapted into Indonesian contexts, creating hybrid identities that are both global and local.

The innovative forms of pure slang and expressive terms highlight the creativity of Indonesian teenagers. These forms demonstrate the playful and dynamic character of youth culture, where language is constantly reinvented to suit social needs and cultural practices. Slang thus emerges as a site of linguistic innovation that reflects broader cultural shifts.

The study also suggests important implications for education and policy. Recognizing youth slang as a legitimate form of language use could foster more

inclusive educational practices that validate teenagers' linguistic realities. Furthermore, cultural policies that appreciate linguistic diversity may contribute to greater understanding of youth culture and identity. Future research would benefit from complementing the present text-based approach with direct interviews or focus group discussions with teenagers, broadening data collection beyond social media to include adolescents with limited internet access, and extending the analysis to regional and local language varieties across different areas of Indonesia, so as to build a more comprehensive picture of youth slang as a national, rather than predominantly urban and digitally mediated, phenomenon.

In summary, youth slang in Indonesia embodies the adaptability, creativity, and resilience of teenagers in navigating complex social realities. It functions as both a linguistic innovation and a sociocultural practice that bridges local traditions and global influences. As such, it deserves recognition not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as an essential part of the sociocultural landscape of contemporary Indonesia.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, which has generously provided financial and institutional support for the implementation of this research. The sponsorship and facilitation offered by the university were instrumental in enabling the completion of the study, from data collection to analysis and manuscript preparation. Without this valuable support, the research would not have been possible.

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