

Textism in Digital Communication: Usage of Internet Slang in Social Media among Bilingual Malaysian Youths

SOO RUEY SHING*
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of communication technologies has transformed language use, leading to the widespread adoption of internet slang in social media communication. Among bilingual and multilingual youth, this phenomenon reflects innovativeness, creativity, informality, and a departure from conventional linguistic norms, often eliciting disapproval from older generations. This study explores how bilingual Malaysian youth utilize internet slang in e-discourse across various social media platforms. Employing a qualitative approach, naturally occurring conversations and posts from twelve participants were analyzed to decode the most frequently used internet slang and its intended meanings. The findings reveal seven classes of internet slang being used by the youths: phrase abbreviations, word abbreviations, derogatory adjectives, non-derogatory adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and verbs. Additionally, the internet slang was formed through various strategies such as abbreviating expressive phrases, simplifying words into shorter form, widening the meaning of existing words, borrowing words used in different contexts, and creating new words, which highlighted the interplay between creativity and linguistic economy in digital communication. The study underscores the role of internet slang as a tool for identity construction, social solidarity, and cultural expression among youth. While it challenges traditional notions of language standardization, it also offers unique insights into the dynamics of communication in bilingual communities. This research emphasizes the need for further investigation into the generational and intercultural implications of internet slang, as well as its potential impact on digital communication practices.

Keywords: *Textism, internet slang, youth, social media, digital communication.*

INTRODUCTION

On social media websites or applications such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp, it is a common scenario for bilingual or multilingual youths to socialise using more than one language at the same time and space (Saputra et al., 2023). Therefore, digital communication is recognized as a crucial 21st-century skill, integrating both technical proficiency and communication competence (Johari et al., 2022). Likewise, in Malaysia, nearly everyone is bilingual and uses both English and another language, be it Malay or other native language, in their daily communication. This could be done for the entirety of their communication on these platforms, encompassing various activities from posting messages, hashtags, and captions to giving responses to others' posts. This becomes more apparent ever since the number of social media users keeps growing and forms the largest virtual community in the world (Nor Azida et al., 2020).

Though their use of language in these applications is not always of perfect form in terms of grammar and spelling (Clark & Araki, 2011), it has brought about an incredible and positive change in young netizens' perspectives towards the value of the type of language used in the virtual world. This has further enticed them into exploring more about the communicative language. As a result of their creative exploration on the language, the

*Corresponding author: rssoo@unimas.my

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widening use of textisms among youths has become a trend in digital communication (Kemp et al., 2021; Vacalares et al., 2023), making their use of new media becoming more engaging and creative (Ismail, 2013).

Youths have created their own language to be used online alongside languages like English and Malay ever since the evolution of social media. When various applications were first introduced as an alternative means of communication, writing a text message had always been a constraint in terms of time and space, and causing pressure on users who strived to express so much within a limited space. As social media users have to adopt informal and creative writing methods to overcome these constraints (Ekundayo, 2014), various types of internet slang have been created unconsciously by them (Wan Adzrie Indera & Al Amirul Eimer, 2021). This practice continues in some forms till today as users still need to abide by the character limits on some of these platforms. Therefore, in a generalised digital communication context, the use of internet slang is deemed no different and is often considered to be of the same meaning as textism.

Young people actively participate in various social media activities to facilitate communication, and strengthen their relationships with others (Ismail, 2016). They actively utilise the virtual spaces in these platforms to interact with one another (Fung et al., 2023). In view of this, the use of slang will create solidarity among those who use it (Naumi & Tiani, 2024; Martin et al., 1997), and one is more likely to use slang with someone they feel more comfortable with. For youths, internet slang is a form of practice and significant knowledge for them to learn, as it helps them to fit in with native speakers and be part of the wavelength as them (Haggan, 2010; Rabab'ah et al., 2016). Nonetheless, such textism has its own spelling and syntactic system that is a departure from known patterns (Ekundayo, 2014) which can be difficult to understand for those who are new to it (Clark & Araki, 2011). Therefore, when internet slang has changed its role from a mode of communicative function to being a 'daily language' (Liu et al, 2019; RahmtAllah, 2020), and with the younger generations who are more prone to using this form of slang (Wray, 2015), it is becoming increasingly important to understand how internet slang is used among them. This argument is built on the view that the use of slang in communication among internet users can lead to certain problems and issues such as complicating communication and provoking conflicts (Hassan et al., 2024).

In line with the foregoing statements, this study was undertaken to decode the most often used internet slang among young bilingual Malaysians in various social media applications. This study addresses the following two research questions:

1. What are the classes of internet slang lexical items used by Malaysian youths in social media applications?
2. What are the intended meanings of internet slang used by Malaysian youths in social media applications??

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualization of Slang and Internet Slang

To understand the concept of internet slang, it is important to first explore the meaning of slang on its own. In one of its' earlier conception, slang is viewed as a 'restricted language' comprising a set of colloquial words or phrases characterised by its unique forms and functions, and it is only used and understood by a specific group of interlocutors in a social communication setting (Khatijah, 2006; Saputra & Marlina, 2019). Likewise, Liu et al. (2023) view slang as words or phrases that reflect the sociocultural aspects and the psychological state of an individual's communication in a specific time period. This conception was formed

from the point of its' social function in which people use slang to show attachment and maintain a particular social identity. However, its usage and style are sometimes disapproved of or unfavourable to the public (Shahraki & Rasekh, 2011). This could be attributed to the narrowed view towards slang which considers slang being non-standard, informal and socially lower than the standard language or dialect (Firooz & Noraini, 2014). This view has somehow gradually been replaced when slang continues to expand or flourish, and is even regarded as a clever alternative way of saying things (Hudson, 2000).

From a linguistic perspective, slang is generally understood as a lexical-semantic language variation stemming from a specific social group. This however fosters a debate on whether it can be considered as a variation of language among linguists (RahmtAllah, 2020), which puts forth the argument on two discourses of slang. On one hand, slang is being labelled as 'ugly' because it contains wrong vocabulary that could destroy language; on the other hand, some people regard slang as a beautiful or unique element that enriches language, mirrors and celebrates culture and even improves one's linguistic knowledge (Senefonte, 2014). It is important to note here that slang does not refer to aggressive messages as some may perceive. As stated by Martin et al. (1997), "slang differs from verbally aggressive messages in that there is no intention to hurt anyone by using slang. While certain slang words may be considered offensive by some, unless a person intentionally says a slang word to offend someone, using slang is not an aggressive communicative act" (p. 5). Instead, slang acts as a means of portraying a particular social identity with the use of specific or unique expressions (Vacalares et al., 2023).

The conceptualisation of slang would be more meaningful with reference to 'textism'. Textism refers to the use of symbols or shortened forms of words to save space, time and money (Thurairaj et al., 2015). Based on this notion, both textism and internet slang are fundamentally the same as users use both to "violate formal orthography, truncate and reorganise the features of the language in order to communicate as briefly as possible" (Ekundayo, 2014, p.127). Geertsema et al. (2011) concretize this idea by giving examples of forming slang and textism, in which "single or multiple words are condensed by means of replacing individual syllables and words with single letters or digits. Whole words may also be omitted" (p. 476). In relation to this, 'internet slang' refer to words or constituents that are commonly used in online conversations (Zulkifli & Tengku Mahadi, 2020), and shortcuts, alternative words, or even symbols used to convey thoughts in an electronic document (Rabab'ah et al., 2016). In some contexts, internet slang is defined as Internet short-hand, Cyberslang, SMS speak, netspeak or chat-speak (Wan Adzrie Indera & Al Amirul Eimer, 2021). In this paper, the terms textism and internet slang are used interchangeably.

Formation of Internet Slang

The creation of internet slang features various unique ways of word formation process (Liu et al., 2023). The formation of slang involves fundamentally either applying figurative meaning to the existing words by widening the original meaning or coining entirely new words (Khatijah, 2006). There are numerous ways to form slang which include replacing syllables with letters or digits, deleting end letters in words, deleting middle letters in words especially vowels, using number homophones in place of syllables, using letter homophones in place of syllables, and non-conventional spellings (Geertsema et al., 2011; Pewpalaplow et al, 2022). Apart from that, emoticons are also used as symbols to convey emotions and represent facial expressions. It is important to point out at this juncture that forming internet slang using these

ways does not imply that the social media users are less educated or less proficient as many educated writers of text messages are also found to redeploy letters, using colloquial expressions, and deleting articles along with those listed above, as well as removing phonemes, letters, and sounds to coin new words (Ekundayo, 2014).

The Effects of Internet Slang: Concerns of Language Learning and Communication

Multiple studies have explored the effects of internet slang usage on language learning among native or non-native speakers, and the results are often mixed. Among these, some researchers have expressed their concern towards the risk of the use of internet slang on students' academic writing (Geertsema et al., 2011; Wray, 2015). Many of these concerns can be attributed to the conventional view which highly emphasises on the attainment of 'accuracy' in language learning, thus leaving little room to explore the positive effects internet slang could have on language learning and communication.

Conversely, other studies highlight the potential benefits of internet slang for non-native language learners, especially in English language learning context. Ekundayo (2014) argues that the value brought by textism has more advantages than its' disadvantages in students' language learning. In a study by Thurairaj et al. (2015), they discovered that the use of abbreviations in internet slang did not affect learners' language proficiency. This is due to the fact that the learners were able to apply different sets of words to the proper situations, knowing when to use textism and internet slang, and when not to, such as in academic work. In other words, it allows students to explore the varying levels of formality in language and discourse. Similarly, Wray (2015) revealed that students were in fact aware of when and when not to use textism or internet slang. In addition, Rabab'ah et al. (2016) likewise discovered that textism has a positive impact on students' spelling and writing, as well as their communication skills. Based on these numerous studies, internet slang are proved to be beneficial to youngsters' language learning and communication, allowing them to explore different formalities of the language and practise their communication skills in a more 'creative' way.

The consistent development of communication technology has no doubt tremendously impacted the younger generation's ways of communicating with each other. Despite being labelled as a 'broken' form of language, its' value in communication also receives equal attention from scholars. For instance, linguists encourage the teaching of slang to non-native English speakers due to its pervasiveness, insisting that it is vital for second language students to be able to communicate effectively in as many different contexts as possible (Senefonte, 2014). Senefonte (2014) continued to conclude that slang has importance in sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and cultural knowledge terms, which justifies why it is important to be taught to language learners. Furthermore, findings from studies such as Martin et al. (1997) and Senefonte (2014) emphasize the importance of integrating slang into language teaching, as it enables learners to navigate diverse communication contexts effectively. In this light, internet slang serves not only as a linguistic innovation but also as a sociocultural tool for identity construction and connection among youth. Thus, judging from the viewpoint that both technology in communication and slang are important to students' learning, it is safe to put forward the claim that internet slang has its place in language teaching.

While studies such as those by Geertsema et al. (2011) and Thurairaj et al. (2015) have examined the effects of internet slang on language skills and its role in informal communication, these works primarily focus on monolingual speakers or native language contexts. Limited attention has been given to how bilingual or multilingual youth navigate

internet slang, particularly in multicultural societies like Malaysia. Furthermore, prior research has often concentrated on either the structural features of slang or its perceived effects, overlooking the interplay between linguistic creativity and social identity. This study bridges these gaps by decoding the linguistic strategies employed by bilingual Malaysian youth in internet slang formation and analyzing its social and communicative functions within digital platforms.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative documentary research design to investigate the patterns and meanings of internet slang usage in digital communication among bilingual Malaysian youths. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for exploring the linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions of naturally occurring social media interactions, enabling an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Context and Data Collection

The data for this study were drawn from naturally occurring conversations and posts on social media platforms, including WhatsApp, X, Facebook, and Instagram. These platforms were chosen due to their widespread use among Malaysian youths and their facilitation of informal communication in bilingual and multilingual contexts. The sample consisted of 12 Malaysian youths (8 females and 4 males) aged between 13 and 30 years old. Participants were purposively selected to ensure their active engagement in bilingual social media discourse, reflecting a blend of English and another language in their communication. This purposive sampling approach was instrumental in capturing diverse linguistic behaviors while maintaining relevance to the study's objectives.

Given the sensitive nature of collecting personal social media data, strict ethical protocols were adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study's objectives, the use of their data, and their right to withdraw at any stage without prejudice. Special attention was given to ensuring transparency in data collection, particularly for private conversations or group chats, where explicit consent was obtained from all involved parties. Furthermore, to protect participants' privacy and maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in place of real names in all reported data excerpts. Additionally, identifying details, such as usernames and locations, were anonymized to safeguard participants' identities. The data collection focused primarily on publicly available posts, but for private interactions, a secondary layer of consent was secured.

Data were collected in the form of screenshots capturing conversations and posts containing internet slang. This approach ensured the authenticity of the data while allowing for detailed analysis of language use in naturalistic settings. The collected data represented a range of contexts, including public comments, public posts, private one-on-one messages, and private group chats. This diversity provided a comprehensive view of how internet slang is employed in both public and private domains. Only linguistic elements relevant to the study's focus - 'internet slang' were analyzed, while other linguistic features were excluded.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis, a systematic method widely employed in qualitative research to interpret textual data. The analysis began with an initial

familiarization phase, where the data were read multiple times to identify recurring patterns and themes. A coding table was then developed to categorize the data, facilitating organization and interpretability. Slang items were coded and grouped into categories based on linguistic features, following frameworks established in prior studies by Khatijah (2006) and Rabab'ah et al. (2016).

The subsequent analysis involved identifying specific linguistic patterns and reporting findings based on the types of internet slang observed. By categorizing slang into phrase abbreviations, word abbreviations, adjectives (both derogatory and non-derogatory), adverbs, nouns, and verbs, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the creative and functional dimensions of slang use among bilingual Malaysian youths.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings on how Malaysian youths use internet slang in various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, X, Facebook and Instagram. The analysis reveals seven classes of internet slang: phrase abbreviation, word abbreviation, derogatory adjective, non-derogatory adjective, adverb, noun, and verb.

Phrase Abbreviations

Abbreviations start to emerge from the conversations among youths in online communication due to the constraint of space in social media posting. Furthermore, the usage of abbreviations becomes widespread when more users turn to platforms such as Twitter, which impose the policy of limiting its users to be able to write in 140 characters only. It can be seen that the use of abbreviations such as phrase abbreviation has become a regular practice among youngsters when simplification of terms becomes a need in online communication.

Table 1: Phrase abbreviation

Abbreviation	Meaning and usage
smh	Shaking my head (typically used when something is obvious, plain old stupid, or disappointment)
rn	Right now
nvm	Never mind
ngl	Alphabetism for 'not gonna lie'. It is used when someone admits something that may be considered strange. It is sometimes regarded as equivalent to 'just saying' or 'no offence'.
fsr	For some reason
lmao	Alphabetism for 'laughing my ass off'. It is sometimes regarded as a stronger version of 'laughing out loud'
omfg	Oh my fucking God (a more dramatic version of omg, Oh my God)
btw	By the way
tfw	That feeling when (describing a particular emotionally changed experience, whether positive or negative)
af	As fuck (to clarify things or to replace words like 'very' or 'really')
idk	I don't know
jk	Just kidding
lol	laugh out loud or lots of love
tbh	To be honest
idgi	I don't get it
fml	Fuck my life (used in a sense of despair)
idgaf	I don't give a fuck (showing an expression of not giving something any attention)

The phrase abbreviations presented in Table 1 are part of the internet slang used by the participants. These abbreviations are mostly expressional phrases. Among these, 'smh', 'lmao', 'af' are the most frequently used abbreviations by the youths to express their views or thoughts in a certain way that is contrary to adults. For instance, a teenager would use the abbreviation *af* (*as fuck*) instead of a word *very* to amplify the adjectives. The two posts below were taken from a public discussion group in Facebook, shown that there are differences in terms of the sentence construction but both are directed to the same meaning. Facebook user 3 (FU3) used the abbreviation *af* after the adjective *rude* to express his anger towards the lady. Whereas the adult used a more formal word, *very* (adverb), to emphasise *rude*.

Teenager: The lady was acting rude af. (Facebook user 3/ FU3)

Adult: Ya ya. The lady was acting very rude.

Another example of the use of the abbreviation *af* was found in FU7's post. Similar to the example above, here, she used *af* after the adjective *happy* to express her feeling of excitement.

So last two weeks bought my tempered glass for 4.50 with 4.50 shipping
and received it today..... so happy af. (FU7)

Another three phrase abbreviations which are commonly used by Malaysian youths are *idk*, *idgi*, and *idgaf*. These are originally three-, four- and five-word phrases but coined into one abbreviation. The abbreviations *idk* and *idgi* were used by the youths when they were saying something unclear to themselves. For example, "*idk* how this machine works" or "*idgi* why he decided to skip the class". The abbreviations are widely used as they help to cut down the number of characters used but still deliver clear meanings of the sentence. Additionally, in the traditional way of speaking, adults would usually say something sounding like "I wouldn't mind if he wants to leave the table". The youths would, instead, say it differently by adding an abbreviation like "*idgaf* if he wanna leave the table". The abbreviation *idgaf* is used in situations where a person is unpleasant. More examples are shown below.

Tbh right after he rejects mine, *aku macam* okay u f pricks.

Ya *idgaf*, repeat *pun* repeat *lah*. (Twitter user 9/ TU9)

(Read: To be honest right after he rejects mine, I was like okay you fucking pricks.

Ya I don't give a fuck if I have to repeat for the subject)

In the above tweet, TU9 implies that he no longer cares about his assignment being rejected by his lecturer. And that the abbreviation *idgaf* was used to express his ignorance. In another instance, although the work 'fuck' is used in the abbreviation *Fml* (Fuck my life), the role is not the same as the abbreviation *idgaf* as it is used for unpleasant events. *Fml* is an expression used to show a sense of despair or hopelessness. In the example below, the user implies that she will no longer be trusting anyone. This is a downward motion of feeling that is highlighted with a sense of despair at the end of the sentence with the abbreviation *fml*.

After this, *aku tak nak percaya siapa-siapa*. *Fml*. (TU10)

(Read: After this, I would not trust anyone. Fuck my life.)

Word Abbreviations

Sharing similar features like phrase abbreviation, word abbreviations are also used in textism among the youths. Abbreviated words in textism involve simplifying words into its shorter form. The flourishing in the use of word abbreviation in textism is the result of the pressure of expressing many information or thoughts within a small and limited space in social media applications. As a consequence, writers are forced to adopt informal and creative writing methods to overcome such constraints (Ekundayo, 2014).

Table 2: Word abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
Sus	Short for suspicious
tmr	Tomorrow
Pls	Please
Cuz	Because
Thx	Thanks
m8	Mate

One of the most frequently spotted word abbreviations in the samples' messages or posts is *pls*. Although the original word *please* contains only six characters, social media users still shorten it by removing the vowels in the word, as seen in the following excerpt. Besides *pls*, a few other words were too being abbreviated by the user, such as *ofc* for office and *tq* for Thank you.

I'm in my ofc until 12.00 noon. Pls inform this matter to those who want to come for consultation. Tq. (WhatsApp user 5/ WU5)

A: *Katne nak cari satay eh kat sini2?* (WU6)

(Meaning: Where to find satay near this area?)

B: *Ada dekat Tanjong Karang satu – Satay Hut.*

Dekat Sungai Buloh ada gak satay tapi satay minang.

(Meaning: There is one near Tanjong Karang called Stay Hut.

There is also one near Sungai Buloh area but selling Satay Minang.)

A: Noiss. Thx!

B: No problem m8.

In the conversation above, WU6 (a youth) is asking user B (an adult) about buying satay (a type of traditional food in Malaysia). Besides English abbreviated words like *thx* (Thanks), some Malay words were also being abbreviated such as *kat* for '*dekat*' (near) and *gak* for '*jugak*' (also). The purpose of using word abbreviations here seems to be consistent which is to limit its characters in the posts. Although WhatsApp application holds no word number-restriction policy, the abbreviations are still being used in this platform. It is interesting to note that the above conversation was captured during a supposedly formal discussion held via an official department WhatsApp group. This implies that the usage of abbreviations are not limited only to informal context, and older users seem to have also adapted to this new way of textism. As exemplified in the dialogue, user B, who is above 50, used the abbreviation *m8* (mate) when replying to WU6, who was much younger than her. This establishes the view that the use of abbreviations could foster solidarity among social media users of different age groups.

Derogatory Slang Adjectives

Slang adjectives, which are sub-divided into derogatory and non-derogatory terms, are largely used to reflect the speakers' (including social media users) perceptions or attitude regarding the mental and psychological characteristics of the targets (khemlani-David, 2000, cited in Khatijah, 2006). To be specific, adjectives that are meant to be insulting and disapproving are called derogatory adjectives. Below are some of the most common usage of derogatory slang adjectives by Malaysian youths on social media.

Table 3: Derogatory slang adjectives

Adjectives	Meaning
Cursed	When someone or something bears bad luck. It may refer to something that someone finds scary and possibly he/ she might become cursed just by seeing, saying, smelling, hearing or making it.
Troll	A way of response used to annoy or to make people angry.
Noob	A noob is a person who really 'sucks' (weak or bad) at something. It was initially used for low-skilled gamers.

Derogatory adjectives used by youngsters are sometimes hardly understood by adults. One of the reasons being that most of these terms are created among teenagers. These adjectives are initially used for specific purposes. However, when more people discover the meaning of these terms, their usage becomes wider. For example, the term *noob* was first emerged among gamers. This word is used to label low-skilled gamers, and it is considered an insult among them. When more youths start engaging through social media applications, this term is also brought into their conversations or messages, but carries a more generalised meaning of insult. For instance, for someone who knows very little about anything is labelled as *noob*; an uncreative student is *a noob*, a poor driver is *a noob*, and a bad cook is *a noob*. In short, though the usage of the word can be found in different contexts, its meaning is still maintained. In the sample below, person A (FU4) is defending himself from being called *a noob* by another person when he was not the one who lost the match. This situation clearly states that being called *a noob* can be an insult as it holds a negative connotation. In the second post update, the word *noob* was not used the same way as FU4 did. This user (TU8) is talking about how another person goes through her life. From her perspective, making announcements on everything about oneself makes a person lack maturity.

A: *Dah kalah, boleh kata orang noob?* (FU4)
 (already lost, but still can call people as noob)
 B: Syafi ke Saufi?
 (Do you mean Syafi or Saufi?)
 A : Syafi.

Kalau boleh, otw pergi toilet pun kau nak update kan? Jangan jadi noob boleh?
 Please, *orang lain pun ada kehidupan masing-masing.* (TU 8)
 (If possible, on the way to the toilet also you want to update right?
 Don't be a noob or not? Please, other people also have their own life.)

Another slang adjective, 'troll' is used to annoy or to trigger anger in someone. This term is normally captured in argumentative statements posted by social media users, not to bring up better ideas but to make the argument worse by annoying other parties. *Troll* could also mean being playful. For instance, as captured in a twitter post, a user (TU10) said "Stop trolling people". It was uttered to remind another person to be serious.

Non-Derogatory Adjectives

Contrary to the derogatory slang adjective, non-derogatory adjectives are expressions used to denote a speaker's admiration and approval of certain behaviour, characters or event. The non-derogatory adjectives shown in Table 4 are used by Malaysian youths to describe something positive to them.

Table 4: Non-derogatory adjectives

Adjectives	Meaning
Smol	Something extremely small and cute
Baby	Refer to someone who did something cute and wholesome (usually a celebrity, character, or someone's friend or partner.) It is used without a determiner.
Chonky	An affectionate way of referring to animals that are "chunky," or slightly overweight.
Lit	Fashionable or trendy.

I'm still thinking about that smol *anak kucing* (kitten) at school... (TU1)

In this tweet, TU1 implied that she's thinking of a kitten she saw at her school. The usage of *smol* gives the readers a description of the kitten to be very small and extremely cute. Although the pronunciation of *smol* is as close as 'small', it gives deeper meaning to the subject spoken.

Taehyung is such a baby (Instagram user 2/ IU2)
My brother listens to One Direction. Lit *gila* (extremely crazy)! (TU11)

In the above, IU2 was describing her favourite celebrity as being cute for what he (Taehyung) was doing. *Baby* in this context does not mean that the subject is a baby or little kid, instead it refers to the subject's actions which are deemed adorable. In the second excerpt, the use of *Lit* (TU11) in this context gives the meaning of being trendy. The slang *Lit* also use in different categories of slang but in this context is to show admiration to one's doing.

Slang Adverbs

The findings also reveal that Malaysian youths use certain slang as adverbs to strengthen their expressions in social media posts. Table 5 shows some of the most frequently used adverbs by the Malaysian youths.

Table 5: Adverbs

Adverbs	Meaning
Hella	It is commonly used in place of "really" or "very" when describing something.
Lit	Something that is amazing in any sense, or extremely intoxicated
Noice	Beyond the boundaries and exceeding the limits of 'nice'. It is spoken with emphasis when describing something particularly awesome.
Yikes	Used instead of 'shit' or in a manner that denotes a slight disgust.

The slang listed in Table 5 are adverbs used by the social media users to describe something in a more convincing way. Among these, the adverb *'hella'* was the most frequently used internet slang. This can be seen in the 3 excerpts presented below. For another slang *'lit'*, such as the post "Dude, this place is panas (hot) *lit lit*", the sentence means that the place appears to be too hot, and that people are glued to it. In another instance, *'noice'* is used as a better version of saying 'nice'. For example, in this post "I cannot convince you more but this lasagne is *noice*", it emphasises that the Lasagna is extremely delicious. These terms, when used in the contexts like above, could be difficult for adults to decipher because they deviate far from their original meaning.

Istg* this *pakcik* is hella funny. *Aku tak tahu lah ni anak dia main ke apa* but hmm (TU9)

(Istg, this uncle is hella funny. I am not sure if his son is fooling around or what hmm)

[* A common internet slang used among Malaysian Muslims which carries the meaning 'I swear to God'. It is relatively similar to the expression of OMG (Oh My God)]

Aku tak tahu lah nak cringe ke apa but I'm hella impressed he looks more like a girl than I do lol. (TU8)
(I don't know I want to cringe or what but I'm hella impressed he looks more like a girl than I do lol)

I'm so hella tired (IU2)

Slang Nouns

Noun is another class of internet slang being used by Malaysian youths in a way that has never been used before or in a conventional way. They are often used to indicate a connotative meaning. Three examples of the use of nouns as internet slang were captured in the present study which are 'tea', 'ship' and 'feels'. Firstly, following its' denotative meaning, 'tea' is a type of drink. However, when used as an internet slang, it brings about a connotation of 'gossip'. It emerges from an internet meme, depicting a subject who is holding a cup of tea waiting to hear gossip. In relation to this, whenever a social media user mentions the word *tea* in his/her posts, readers who are familiar with the meme could swiftly interpret it as 'gossip'. For instance, "Who started this tea?" (TU1).

Secondly, the slang 'ship' derives from 'relationship'. However, its usage is flexible in which it can also act as a verb besides a noun. Like in the example, "I don't know about y'all but I ship MGK with Halsey" (FU12), the word 'ship' is used to indicate that he (FU12) supports the relationship between MGK and Halsey. The meaning is completely different from the original meaning of 'ship', a type of transport. Lastly, the word 'feels' denotes that a certain emotion is felt but cannot easily and literally be explained. As exemplified in the excerpt "This feels gives me chills" (IU6), usually people would say, "This anxiety makes me more nervous.". The emotion is clearly stated. But for some social media users, they will use the word 'feels' for unexplainable emotions they experience.

Slang Verbs

Another class of words that are frequently used as internet slang is verbs. These words, originally used for different functions, have transformed into verbs when internet slang is coined among social media users. The samples of internet slang verbs used by the participants include 'shade', 'slay' and 'protecc'.

First, the word 'shade' means to diss, insult or downgrade someone. As shown in the example below, TU1 implies that she was not dissing Shakira but Jennifer Lopez did it better at the Superbowl performance. In other words, it is a form of acting in a casual or disrespectful manner towards someone. On the other hand, 'slay' means to look beautiful, to be on point, to kill it or to excel in something. For example, someone may say "You *slay* in the finals!" which practically means to excel in the final exam. As shown in the example below, 'slay in Baju Kurung' as uttered by WU5 means to look extremely good in the attire. In addition, FU7 used the word 'protecc' in the sentence to mean protecting at its best. It's a more creative version of 'protect' and it gives extra meaning to the word. In short, these slangs are put to such a degree that no adverb is needed to act as a modifier for the verb used.

I'm not shading at Shakira but can we talk about
how Jennifer ate that Superbowl? (TU1)

Girl, you slay in that Baju Kurung (Malay traditional costume).
Good luck for your presentation! (WU5)

He protecc, he attacc, But most of all, he hella fat (FU7)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal not only the linguistic creativity of bilingual Malaysian youths in their use of internet slang but also the broader sociodynamics at play in digital communication (Naumi & Tiani, 2024; Pewpalaplow et al., 2022). Also, the findings highlight the multifaceted nature of slang as a tool for digital identity formation, social interaction, and cultural expression in digital communication.

In light of the trend of digital communication among youths, various types of newly created expressions such as internet slang has emerged as a creative or adapted form of communication (Kemp et al., 2021). This includes various means that are employed to express their feelings, emotions and thoughts. The creation of these internet slang is driven by the creativity, emotionality and figurative dynamics of the youths (Robbin, 2020). Part of the reason is that a lot of expressions are rather explicit. Being that the youths just want to communicate with their peers and to be less detectable by others like the elder generation while having fun doing it (Vacalares et al., 2023), so abbreviations and other expressions are created for the purpose. Khatijah (2006) observed that Malaysian youths are always looking for ways to have clean fun, and they perceive that using a creative language that is understood only by their peers appears to be a fun thing to do.

The use of phrase and word abbreviations among Malaysian youths reflects their need for linguistic economy and efficiency in digital communication (Naumi & Tani, 2024). For example, abbreviations like *idgaf* ("I don't give a f***") or *tmr* ("tomorrow") allow for rapid expression while maintaining meaning. Beyond practicality, these abbreviations also serve as markers of digital identity. Their use signifies membership in an online youth subculture that values creativity and efficiency (Pewpalaplow et al., 2022). However, the generational divide

becomes apparent in the interpretation of such slang. Older users who are unfamiliar with abbreviations like *smh* ("shaking my head") or *af* ("as f****") may struggle to grasp the intended tone or meaning, creating potential barriers to intergenerational communication. This highlights how internet slang not only reflects linguistic innovation but also delineates social boundaries between age groups.

The use of slang adjectives such as *noob* (a novice or inexperienced person) and *lit* (trendy or fashionable) also reveal how youths use slang to express both disapproval and admiration. The appropriation of gaming terms like *noob* into general discourse reflects the influence of digital gaming culture on broader linguistic practices. At the same time, terms like *smol* (cute and small) and *chonky* (affectionately chunky) underscore the playful and affectionate tone that youths often adopt in their communication (Kemp et al., 2021).

These linguistic choices are tied to digital identity construction, as they allow youths to position themselves within specific subcultures or communities (Saputra et al., 2023). For instance, the adoption of affectionate slang may signify alignment with a more playful, inclusive identity, while derogatory terms can assert social hierarchies or critique behaviors within peer groups. From a positive perspective, internet slang allows youths to craft a distinct digital identity that aligns with their peer group and cultural context (Kemp et al., 2021; Naumi & Tianj, 2024).

The findings also underscore the adaptability of internet slang within Malaysia's bilingual context. Terms like *tea* and *ship* are recontextualized alongside Malay and English expressions, demonstrating the seamless integration of global linguistic trends into local communication practices. This adaptation not only enriches the linguistic repertoire of Malaysian youths but also highlights the dynamic interplay between global and local influences in shaping digital communication (Pewpalaplow et al., 2022).

Having been influenced by internet users' styles, culture and views, textism may appear in various forms in which some are distinctive and some have shared features. Farina and Lyddy (2011) found that the most frequently occurring features of e-discourse are unconventional spellings and word combination; whereas the less frequently occurring features include emoticons, word-letter replacement and word-digits replacement. In this study, bilingual Malaysian youths were found to frequently use word-letter replacement and word-digits replacement. For example, changing "Thanks" to "Thx" and "Mate" to "m8". This outcome can be attributed to the perceptions of Malaysian youths towards long and constructed discourse. Due to the advancement in communication technology, and the need for digital communication, they have been influenced into believing that a long and properly constructed communication is irrelevant to the current practice (Khatijah, 2006).

The use of textism among youths in digital communication, particularly with reference to its 'unique' language features, has triggered multiple degrees of social (un)acceptability. Some negatively view textism as a hindrance to communication, so much so that it would affect youths' mastery of 'formal' language use. On the contrary, some defend that the rampant use of internet slang in various social media or electronic applications is merely a social evolution in the world of communication, and in fact people are still keeping in touch using a mode that has changed a bit. The emergence of these two extreme views could be attributed to the older generation's concern that the younger generation is no longer communicating. In view of this, Ekundayo (2014) asserts that communication, like others, will change and develop over time, giving us an array of innovations, displacements and replacements. On this note, one needs to be aware that communication sometimes need to

be carried out using forms that are fully and comprehensively uttered and written, and at certain times a few missing vowels or abbreviated terms will do just as well. Thus, in order to keep up with the revolution in social media communication, it is important to learn and understand how internet slang is formatted and used in this context, which reflect the stance and rationale of the present paper.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that bilingual Malaysian youths create internet slang by abbreviating expressive phrases, simplifying words into shorter forms, widening the meaning of the existing words, borrowing words used in different contexts, and creating new words that strike their fancy to communicate their thoughts and emotions. The compiled internet slang items are categorised into seven classes, which are phrase abbreviation, word abbreviation, derogatory adjective, non-derogatory adjective, adverb, noun, and verb. Overall, the need of shortening the language is important to the youths as it holds concrete reasoning for them to do it. Although the findings suggest that the usage of slang is consistent among the youths, the frequency of individuals in using internet slang vary from one another. This is because most people have different social circles in their lives and tend to be picky with their audience before they use a certain type of slang. It is vital to note here that the present study has its own limitations as it could only obtain a small amount of data from the samples. Thus, the report on the internet slang use does not represent the majority of Malaysian youths. Further research in this field is needed to be carried out to obtain more information on internet slang use across bilingual or multilingual contexts. This includes the potential misunderstanding and misinterpretation of messages in the communication between younger and older generations. Findings from such research will inform the extent to which communication between generations has been bordered by the transformation of language use.

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BIODATA

Soo Ruey Shing is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Jln Ensuarai, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak. His research interests include instructional communication, Applied Linguistics, teacher education, ESP/EAP and educational psychology. Email: rssoo@unimas.my

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