Gen Z Era Linguistic Impoliteness on Using TikTok Social Media

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A B S T R A K
Kesopanan dalam berbahasa mulai memudar, terutama di kalangan Gen Z. Perkembangan teknologi dan digitalisasi memudahkan penyebaran bahasa yang tidak sopan, terutama di media sosial seperti TikTok. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bahasa yang tidak sopan di TikTok pada era Gen Z dengan fokus pada: 1) faktor penyebab ketidaksantunan; 2) bentuk penggunaan bahasa Gen Z yang tidak sesuai dengan kesantunan; dan 3) dampak media sosial terhadap perkembangan bahasa Gen Z. Metode yang digunakan adalah observasi, dengan analisis kolom komentar TikTok dari 15 pengguna selama lima bulan terakhir. Penelitian ini penting untuk memahami perubahan perilaku komunikasi di kalangan generasi muda dan diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan tentang penggunaan bahasa yang tepat dan implikasinya dalam konteks sosial.

A B S T R A C T
Politeness in language is fading, especially among Gen Z. The development of technology and digitalization facilitates the spread of impolite language, especially on social media such as TikTok. This study aims to analyze impolite language on TikTok in the Gen Z era with a focus on: 1) factors causing impoliteness; 2) forms of Gen Z language use that are not in accordance with politeness; and 3) the impact of social media on the development of Gen Z language. The method used is observation, with an analysis of the TikTok comment column from 15 users over the past five months. This study is important for understanding changes in communication behavior among the younger generation and is expected to provide insight into the use of appropriate language and its implications in a social context.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), language is an arbitrary sound symbol system used by people to work together, interact, and identify themselves. Speaking politely is very important in communication in society. The purpose of speaking politely or the politeness of language is so that people can produce polite speech to each other, so that there are no misunderstandings that cause an awkward atmosphere due to being offended by the language and words spoken. However, the politeness of language is now experiencing a significant decline, especially with the emergence of a variety of languages used by Generation Z on social media such as TikTok. Impoliteness of language has the aim of attacking the interlocutor (Fhitri & Yalmiadi, 2018). The use of this language has an impact on decreasing the standard of politeness in everyday communication.

When speaking and communicating with others, we should always pay attention to the principles contained in polite language so that misunderstandings do not occur and we do not

offend the person we are speaking to. But in reality, not everyone always pays attention to the principles of polite language in the communication process that occurs (Vani & Sabardila, 2020). As a result, it can cause disputes due to misunderstandings.

In the modern era, the development of digital technology has grown rapidly, causing the emergence of many social media platforms. The emergence of this social media has changed the way humans communicate little by little. Generation Z, or familiarly known as Gen Z, is a generation that grew up in the digital era and, of course, is very familiar with various social media platforms, especially the social media platform TikTok. TikTok social media is very useful for its users who want to express themselves and show their creativity freely through short videos that last 3-10 minutes. However, behind the popularity of the TikTok application, this application can also be a space where the trend of using informal language appears, often considered impolite.

The linguistic impoliteness that occurs on the TikTok platform has quite a negative impact on interactions in social life, especially among Generation Z. Linguistic impoliteness often triggers conflict and can damage a person's reputation (Hakim & Azizah, 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand all the factors that cause the emergence of the phenomenon of impoliteness in language and the impact of social media on language development. This study was conducted with the hope that society, especially Generation Z, can maintain politeness in language on social media.

2. METHOD

The research method used is qualitative with pragmatic studies (Melia, 2019). Conducting a factual description of the phenomenon in the form of 15 comments taken randomly based on viral comments that occurred on TikTok social media, which are related to the object of research, from the phenomenon, the meaning contained therein will be sought.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TikTok results reveal a significant decline in linguistic politeness among Generation Z, particularly in their interactions on TikTok. The findings underscore that TikTok, while offering a space for creativity and self-expression, has also become a platform where linguistic norms are often breached. Through a qualitative analysis of 15 viral comments on TikTok over five months, the study identified a prevalent use of impolite language characterized by sarcasm, ridicule, satire, body shaming, and discriminatory remarks. These comments are not merely expressions of humor or personal opinion; they often carry a pragmatic deviation from the norms of polite discourse, targeting the physical appearance, personal traits, or even disabilities of TikTok users in ways that demean and devalue them publicly.

A recurring pattern in the data is the normalization of linguistic impoliteness in Gen Z social media culture. Many of the analyzed comments mock public figures or ordinary users in ways that, while often veiled in humor, reveal a deeper disregard for empathy and respectful interaction. This trend can be attributed to several causal factors. Firstly, growing up in a digital environment, Gen Z tends to mirror online behaviors and trends, often without a critical understanding of their social impact. Secondly, technological platforms like TikTok, with their algorithmic emphasis on viral content, can unintentionally amplify and reward provocative or controversial language. Thirdly, the lack of exposure to formal language structures and ethics contributes to Gen Z's limited understanding of communication

boundaries. Furthermore, group dynamics and peer validation also play a role, as certain communities normalize or even valorize aggressive or impolite speech as part of their identity.

The study also highlights that impolite language on TikTok can result in serious implications for both individuals and the broader linguistic culture. For individuals, especially those targeted, such comments can affect mental well-being, self-esteem, and social identity. For the language community at large, this trend risks eroding standards of respectful communication, particularly when younger users begin to view impoliteness as acceptable or even desirable in online discourse. The findings reinforce the need for digital literacy interventions that not only teach technical competencies but also emphasize moral and ethical communication. It is crucial that educators, parents, and policymakers collaborate to instill awareness about respectful language use and to promote digital environments that encourage constructive engagement rather than derision or verbal hostility.

In essence, the study presents a vivid illustration of how technological advancement and cultural shifts are reshaping the linguistic landscape of younger generations. While TikTok remains a powerful tool for engagement and creativity, its role in influencing language use must be approached with caution and responsibility. The findings serve as a timely reminder of the importance of embedding values of politeness, empathy, and respect in digital communication, especially as it becomes the dominant form of interaction among youth in the Gen Z era.

Based on the research results, it was found that many writings in the TikTok social media comment column were not in accordance with polite language. There were several comments that experienced pragmatic deviations in meaning, such as curses containing ridicule, satire, sarcasm towards the account owner which were intended as jokes but were demeaning and bringing down. The data that has been collected from several comments on TikTok social media.

Forms of Linguistic Impoliteness

1. @★·: "lizards on the wall are secretly shivering". This tweet is a sarcasm that insults TikToker Vadel Badjideh who is dancing to a song titled "Cicaks on the Wall" with his sister, Bintang Badjideh.
2. @✨: "yesterday I was kicked out of the circle because I was caught taking a shower 😒😒😒". This comment is sarcastic towards punks because of the bad stigma of people who think that punks never take a shower.
3. @Mommy_una2: "Poor Vadel has to carry a tree every day". The meaning of this comment is actually belittling the account owner who has curly hair.
4. @zihaaaannn: "lice: the place is comfortable, spacious, the downside is frequent earthquakes". This comment is sarcastic by comparing the point of view of lice in Vadel Badjideh's hair.
5. @hopeless: "price of vadel hair per bunch". This comment is mocking the account owner and comparing it to a bunch of vegetables.
6. @ayund4: "just shaking like that but why did lolly get a njir charm from vadel😭😭😭😭". This tweet is meant to mock the account owner (Lolly) for being interested in Vadel who works as a dancer.
7. @itsme.4zyy: "Sis Gem expands when threatened". This comment is an insult that likens Sis Gem to having a large body shape like a pufferfish.

8. @GILDA PRIYADI OFFICIAL: "The bowtie is very visible ♡". This tweet is an assumption that the account owner has a personality like a woman that leads to sexual deviations such as LGBT, more precisely homosexuality.

9. @H ijume: "is this a video of the late man?". This comment is meant to be sarcastic, stating that the account owner (Agus sad) has died, when in fact Agus is still alive but has disabilities on his face and eyes.

10. @dey31: "Agus when he was a girl". This comment is an insult to Agus' condition before he experienced facial and eye deformities. The video shows Agus dancing but his movements are as agile as a woman's.

11. @K€¥🌷: "this is the mosting siph woy he can't see". This comment is intended to mock the account owner who currently has a disability in his eyes.

12. @Kazorla💌: "Ragil's aura is really thick". This tweet is mocking the account owner (Agus) for dancing gracefully like a woman. While Ragil is a man who has a sexual deviation (homosexual).

13. @wokeuplikethis shoes: "I am a child born in 2045 and I feel the same way 😳💔💔💔". This comment is a dig at the account owner born in 2017 who has complained about the weight of the world.

14. @oneræ: "how long does it take to boil sis gem". This comment is sarcastic towards the physical appearance of the account owner (Kak Gem) who has a large body.

15. @ayyara: "I'm so scared to give birth there". This comment is body shaming towards the physical appearance of the account owner who is dancing and has a large body.

Causal Factors

The factors causing impolite language on TikTok social media can be influenced by various aspects, ranging from the influence of technology to the normalization of impolite language by a group. Impolite language among Gen Z, especially on social media, has several causal factors, including the following:

The influence of technology, growing up in the digital era, affects the way Gen Z communicates on social media. Gen Z often uses impolite language, which can reduce the quality of communication and good and polite Indonesian. Driven by emotions towards the account owner. When Gen Z expresses impoliteness in language on social media, they express their emotions through these comments for the account owner who is controversial or has problems on social media. Lack of understanding regarding the language used and tends to follow the language trends that are being widely discussed.

There is a negative desire to attack and demean personally, with the aim of damaging the image or good name of the account owner. There is different behavior, character, or action that causes the audience to want to insult the account owner and causes impoliteness in language on TikTok social media. There is normalization of impoliteness of language by certain groups that are considered normal and used as a joke, while in other groups it is considered impolite

DISCUSSION

The proliferation of TikTok as a dominant social media platform has fundamentally reshaped the linguistic landscape among youth, particularly Generation Alpha and Generation Z. The studies by Fatmasari et al. (2025) and Andika et al. (2024) illustrate a multifaceted

transformation in language practices—ranging from the emergence of innovative slang to a rise in impolite expressions—demonstrating how social media accelerates linguistic change, challenges traditional norms, and fosters new digital identities.

From a linguistic innovation perspective, TikTok provides a participatory environment where users, particularly Gen Alpha, construct and propagate slang as part of a larger social trend. As Fatmasari et al. (2025) observe, TikTok's content ecosystem, powered by algorithms and viral dynamics, facilitates the rapid spread of neologisms such as "rizz," "mewing," "delulu," and "drip." These terms often emerge from niche subcultures (e.g., gaming, K-pop, meme culture) and reflect a broader tendency among youth to assert distinct identity and group belonging through language.

These emergent forms of slang are primarily characterized by abbreviation, code-switching, and the borrowing of English vocabulary, reinforcing globalization's impact on local linguistic behavior (Azizah, 2024). This aligns with sociolinguistic theories suggesting that youth utilize language not just for communication but also for social positioning and differentiation (Nuraini & Pahamzah, 2021). However, while the fluidity and creativity of Gen Alpha's slang enrich the lexicon, it simultaneously complicates mutual intelligibility and can marginalize individuals unfamiliar with these evolving codes.

In contrast, the study by Andika Dwi N. et al. (2024) emphasizes a more problematic linguistic evolution: the normalization of impolite, offensive, or aggressive expressions among Gen Z users on TikTok. This includes body shaming, sarcasm, ridicule, and discriminatory comments. Unlike Gen Alpha's playfulness with language, Gen Z's discourse on TikTok, as shown in comment sections analyzed by the authors, reflects a tendency toward pragmatically deviant and socially harmful speech acts, often justified as humor or viral expression. This behavior is compounded by the lack of digital literacy and empathy in online interactions (Hakim & Azizah, 2024; Melia, 2019).

Both linguistic creativity and impoliteness stem from the same technological affordance: TikTok's participatory algorithm, which prioritizes engagement over civility or linguistic propriety. In this sense, TikTok is not just a neutral tool but an active medium shaping how language is produced, stylized, and interpreted. While slang serves identity and inclusion, impoliteness often serves exclusion and stigmatization, particularly when directed at marginalized groups or individuals with physical differences (Musakif et al., 2024).

The implications for the Indonesian language are significant. On one hand, the infusion of slang introduces fresh dynamism and cultural hybridity into Bahasa Indonesia. On the other hand, both excessive reliance on slang and the normalization of linguistic aggression risk deteriorating formal language standards, reducing intergenerational communication effectiveness, and undermining national linguistic identity (Riadoh, 2021; Khotimah & Sawardi, 2022).

Language, by nature, is adaptive and reflects its users' contexts. Yet, as these studies suggest, adaptation without regulation or ethical framing may foster linguistic behaviors that erode rather than enrich social cohesion. Therefore, educational stakeholders and policymakers must respond proactively. This includes integrating digital communication ethics and language awareness education into school curricula, promoting campaigns for digital civility, and encouraging critical reflection among youth about their online linguistic behavior (Cahyono, 2022; Vani & Sabardila, 2020).

The intersection of TikTok and youth language reveals both innovative and degenerative trends. Gen Alpha's slang exemplifies linguistic creativity and identity expression, while Gen Z's impoliteness marks a concerning decline in respectful communication. Both phenomena underscore the urgent need for enhanced digital literacy and ethical engagement in online spaces.

4. CONCLUSION

The Gen Z era can be marked by the widespread use of social media, especially TikTok, which allows freedom of expression. This freedom allows Gen Z to share their ideas and creativity. However, with this freedom, many comments on TikTok social media have begun to be found that are not in accordance with politeness in language. Among them are several comments that are negative and exhibit pragmatic deviations in meaning. Impolite language on TikTok social media is caused by several factors, such as the influence of social groups that normalise the use of impolite language. Lack of understanding of the language used. The existence of bad traits and behaviours causes the desire to belittle, attack, blaspheme, and damage the image of others. Therefore, efforts and awareness are needed from various parties as well as early digital moral and ethical education. In addition, socialization or input of materials regarding good and correct polite language according to EYD is also needed, especially for Generation Z.

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