



Localized English in Indonesian Social Media: Implications for English Language Learning

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Abstract. This study examines the emergence of localized English expressions in Indonesian social media discourse, highlighting how English is adapted and reinterpreted in multilingual digital contexts. While previous studies on English in Indonesia have primarily focused on formal domains such as education and language policy, limited attention has been given to informal online communication where linguistic innovation is highly visible. This study aims to analyze how English lexical items are re-semanticized and creatively transformed by Indonesian users on social media platforms. The study employed a qualitative approach using data collected from Instagram posts and comments, focusing on selected examples of English-derived expressions such as *boba*, *gas*, *voucher*, *server*, and *suamiable*. The analysis compares the conventional meanings of these terms in Inner Circle English with their localized meanings in Indonesian usage. The findings reveal that English functions as a flexible linguistic resource, undergoing processes of semantic shift, metaphorical extension, and lexical blending. These localized forms reflect users' creativity as well as their ability to adapt global linguistic resources to local cultural contexts. The study concludes that English in Indonesian social media is not merely borrowed but actively reconstructed, contributing to the dynamic development of English in the Expanding Circle.

Keywords: Digital discourse; Indonesian English; Lexical Innovation; Localized English; Social Media.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital communication has significantly influenced contemporary language use. Social media platforms have become important spaces where individuals interact, exchange information, and express identities through language. In multilingual societies such as Indonesia, these platforms facilitate contact between English and local languages, creating opportunities for linguistic innovation and experimentation (Jenkins, 2014; Jones et al., 2015; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). As a result, English words and expressions are frequently adapted and reinterpreted to suit local communicative needs and cultural contexts.

One notable phenomenon emerging from this interaction is the appearance of localized English expressions in social media discourse. Terms such as *boba*, *gas*, *voucher*, *server*, and *suamiable* illustrate how English lexical items may acquire meanings that differ from their conventional usage in standard English. These expressions are widely used and understood within Indonesian online communities, demonstrating the dynamic nature of language in digital environments. Rather than merely borrowing English vocabulary, users actively reshape and assign new meanings to linguistic forms in ways that reflect local experiences and cultural references (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Lee, 2020).

The increasing prevalence of such expressions suggests that social media has become a significant site of language change and innovation. However, research on English in Indonesia has predominantly focused on formal domains, including English language education, language policy, and language attitudes (Zein, 2019). Although previous studies have acknowledged the role of digital media in influencing language practices, relatively few have specifically examined how English lexical items are resemanticized and localized in everyday Indonesian social media interactions. Consequently, there remains a need for studies that explore how English-derived expressions are transformed and used in digital communication.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates localized English expressions found in Indonesian social media discourse. Specifically, it examines how selected English-derived lexical items are reinterpreted and assigned new meanings by Indonesian users. By comparing their conventional meanings in standard English with their localized meanings in social media contexts, this study seeks to identify the processes through which lexical innovation occurs.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on English use in multilingual digital environments. In addition, they offer insights into contemporary language practices that may be relevant to English language education in Indonesia. Understanding how learners encounter and use English beyond formal classroom settings can help educators develop greater awareness of authentic language use and the evolving relationship between global English and local linguistic practices (Canagarajah, 2013; Zein, 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The global spread of English has resulted in the emergence of diverse forms of the language across different sociocultural contexts. Rather than functioning as a single, homogeneous language, English has evolved into multiple varieties shaped by local histories, cultures, and communicative practices. This perspective is central to the concept of World Englishes, which recognizes the legitimacy of localized forms of English and challenges the assumption that Inner Circle varieties constitute the only acceptable norms (Kachru, 1992). Within this framework, linguistic variations are viewed not as deficiencies or deviations but as natural outcomes of language adaptation in different contexts (Bolton, 2019; Proshina, 2019).

Indonesia represents an Expanding Circle context in which English is primarily used as a foreign language while maintaining a significant presence in education, media, technology, and popular culture (Zein, 2019; Zein et al., 2020). As exposure to English continues to increase

through globalization and digital communication, English frequently interacts with Indonesian and local languages. This interaction often results in various forms of linguistic innovation, including borrowing, lexical adaptation, and the creation of hybrid expressions. According to Canagarajah (2013), multilingual speakers do not simply alternate between separate linguistic systems but draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning. Consequently, English may function as a flexible semiotic resource that is continuously adapted to local communicative needs.

The growing influence of social media has further accelerated these processes. Digital communication platforms provide spaces where language users engage in informal interaction, negotiate identities, and experiment with linguistic forms (Herring, 2013; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014b). Digital discourse is characterized by immediacy, multimodality, and extensive user participation, all of which contribute to the emergence of innovative language practices (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). In such environments, users are often less constrained by traditional linguistic norms and therefore more likely to manipulate existing linguistic resources creatively (Androutsopoulos, 2015). Social media platforms such as Instagram are particularly relevant because they combine visual and textual communication, creating opportunities for the rapid circulation and adoption of new linguistic expressions (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

One consequence of these developments is the increasing occurrence of lexical innovation. Lexical innovation refers to the creation of new lexical forms or the assignment of new meanings to existing words (Renouf, 2007). Such innovations are especially common in digital environments where communication is fast-paced and highly interactive. Existing words may undergo semantic change as users adapt them to new contexts, resulting in meanings that differ from those found in standard dictionaries. This process, often referred to as resemanticization, reflects the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and social practice.

Lexical innovation may occur through several mechanisms. One common mechanism is semantic shift, whereby a lexical item acquires a new meaning in a particular context. Another is metaphorical extension, in which words are transferred from one domain to another based on perceived similarities. Innovation may also involve lexical blending and hybridization, where linguistic elements from different languages are combined to create new expressions (Pitzl, 2018). These processes are particularly evident in multilingual digital environments, where users have access to multiple linguistic resources and can creatively combine them to express culturally relevant meanings.

Drawing on these perspectives, the present study examines how English lexical items are localized in Indonesian social media discourse. By investigating the meanings assigned to English-derived expressions in online interactions, the study seeks to contribute to discussions of World Englishes, digital discourse, and lexical innovation while highlighting the dynamic role of English in contemporary Indonesian communication.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the use of localized English expressions in Indonesian social media discourse. A qualitative design is appropriate because the study aims to explore how meanings are constructed, interpreted, and transformed in naturally occurring digital communication, rather than to measure frequency or test statistical relationships. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating language use in context and understanding meaning-making processes from the perspective of participants (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, this study draws on principles of discourse-oriented analysis, which emphasize the interpretation of language as social practice embedded in specific contexts (Gee, 2014).

The data for this study consist of linguistic expressions collected from whatsapp messages, Instagram posts and comment sections. Whatsapp and Instagram are selected as the data source because they are widely used social media platform in Indonesia where informal communication, creativity, and language mixing frequently occur. As noted in studies of Digital Discourse, online platforms provide rich sites for observing naturally occurring language use, particularly in multilingual and digitally mediated environments (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Jones et al., 2015; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). The data include whatsapp conversation, Instagram captions, comments, and short conversational exchanges that contain English-derived lexical items used in non-standard or localized ways. From a broader pool of observations, a set of representative examples was purposively selected based on their relevance to the research focus, particularly expressions that demonstrate clear shifts in meaning from their conventional usage in Inner Circle English (Etikan, 2016; Patton, 2014).

The data collection process was conducted through non-participant observation of publicly accessible social media content. The researcher identified and documented instances of English lexical items that appeared to carry localized meanings. These instances were then recorded, categorized, and compiled into a dataset. This method aligns with approaches in digital discourse research, where naturally occurring online data are analyzed to understand language use in context (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Jones et al., 2015). Ethical considerations

were maintained by using publicly available data where applicable, anonymizing identifiable user information, and ensuring that private conversational data were treated with confidentiality (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

The analysis was carried out using a qualitative interpretive method. Each selected lexical item was analyzed through a two-step comparison. First, the conventional meaning of the word was identified based on standard English usage, as represented in established dictionaries. Second, the contextual meaning of the word in Indonesian social media discourse was interpreted based on its usage within the specific interaction. This interpretive approach is consistent with qualitative analysis that emphasizes meaning-making in context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To further deepen the analysis, the data were categorized based on the type of linguistic transformation observed. These include semantic shift, metaphorical extension, and lexical blending or hybridization. This categorization reflects broader processes of lexical innovation and creativity in language use (Pitzl, 2018; Renouf, 2007). Through this analytical framework, the study seeks to reveal how English is not only borrowed but actively reshaped within Indonesian digital communication.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that English lexical items in Indonesian social media discourse are not used in their conventional Inner Circle meanings but are actively transformed through localized linguistic practices. Based on the analysis of the selected data, four major patterns of transformation are identified: (1) lexical blending and hybridization, (2) semantic shift, (3) metaphorical extension, and (4) pragmatic refunctionalization. These patterns demonstrate how English functions as a flexible semiotic resource that is continuously reshaped within Indonesian digital communication.

Lexical Blending and Hybridization

One of the most salient features observed in the data is the emergence of hybrid lexical forms that combine elements from English and Indonesian. These forms reflect both linguistic creativity and the influence of bilingual competence. It can be seen in the conversation below:

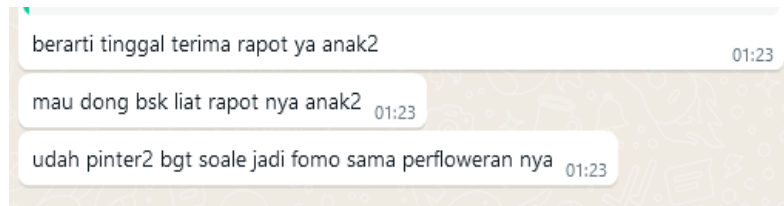


Figure 1. Lexical Blending in the Expression *perfloweran*.

The expression *perfloweran* appears in the utterance “*udah pinter-pinter banget soale jadi fomo sama perflowerannya*”. The term is derived from the Indonesian word *perkembangan* (‘development’), in which the root *kembang* is directly translated into English as *flower*. However, this translation is semantically inaccurate, as *kembang* in this context refers to growth rather than a literal flower. The resulting form *perfloweran* thus illustrates a case of lexical blending combined with semantic misalignment.

Rather than being treated purely as an error, this form can be interpreted as a creative linguistic strategy. The user demonstrates awareness of both Indonesian and English lexical resources and manipulates them to produce a novel expression. This reflects what Pitzl (2018) describes as linguistic creativity in multilingual contexts, where speakers actively reshape language to suit communicative needs. The humor and playfulness embedded in such formations also suggest that social media environments encourage experimentation and non-standard usage.

A similar pattern is observed in the next example.



Figure 2. Lexical Hybridization in the Expression *suamiabile*.

The word *suami-able*, as in “*ciri-ciri lelaki yang suami-able*”. This term combines the Indonesian noun *suami* (‘husband’) with the English suffix *-able*, which typically indicates capability or suitability. The resulting form conveys the meaning of “suitable to be a husband” or “worthy of being a husband.” This hybrid construction demonstrates users’ familiarity with English morphological patterns and their ability to apply them creatively in a localized context. Such forms highlight how English morphology is recontextualized within Indonesian discourse, producing meanings that are both intelligible and culturally specific.

Semantic Shift

Another significant pattern identified in the data is semantic shift, in which English lexical items acquire new meanings that differ from their standard definitions. This shift is often influenced by local sociocultural practices and communicative needs.



Figure 3. Semantic Shift in the Use of voucher.

For example, the term *voucher*, which in standard English refers to a coupon or document for financial transactions, is used in Indonesian contexts to mean prepaid mobile credit. This specialized meaning reflects the widespread use of prepaid telecommunications systems in Indonesia, where users commonly purchase credit in the form of vouchers.

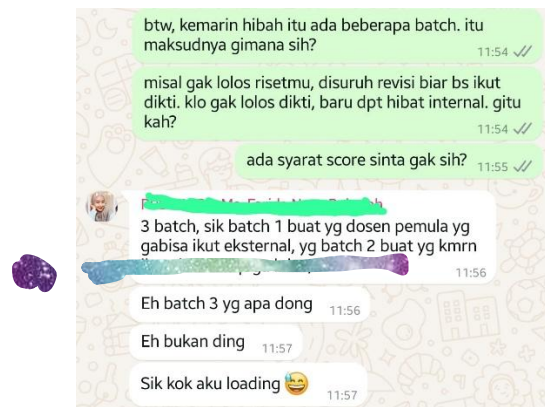


Figure 4. Semantic Shift in the Use of loading.

Similarly, the term *loading*, as in “*sebentar, kok aku loading*”, is used to describe a moment of thinking, hesitation, or temporary forgetfulness. While the original meaning of *loading* relates to technical processes in computing, its localized use draws on the experiential association of delay in digital devices. The term is thus reinterpreted to describe a cognitive process, demonstrating how digital experiences shape linguistic meaning in everyday interaction.

These examples illustrate that semantic shift is not arbitrary, but grounded in shared social experiences and technological contexts. As argued by Renouf (2007), lexical innovation often emerges from contextual adaptation, where existing words are repurposed to meet new communicative demands. In this sense, Indonesian users are not merely adopting English vocabulary but actively redefining it to align with local realities.

Metaphorical extension

Metaphorical extension is another dominant pattern observed in the data, where English lexical items are reinterpreted based on perceived similarities between different domains. A clear example is the use of *boba* in the expression “*beli hape boba*”.



Figure 5. Metaphorical Extension in the Use of *boba*.

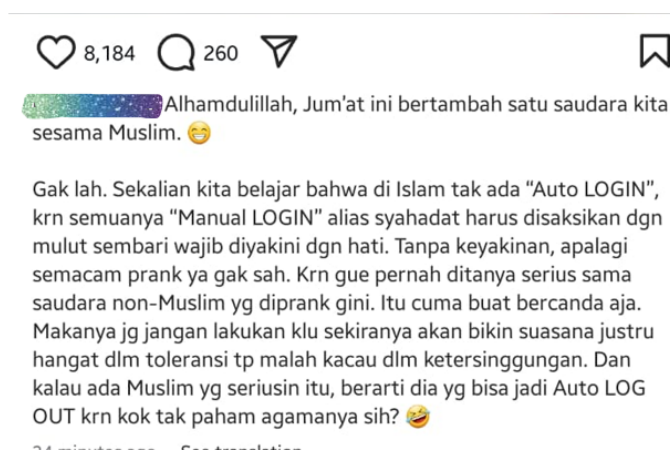
In its original sense, *boba* refers to tapioca pearls in beverages. However, in Indonesian social media discourse, it is used to describe iPhones with multiple protruding camera lenses, due to their visual resemblance to round boba pearls. This metaphorical mapping illustrates how visual perception plays a role in lexical innovation.



Figure 6. Metaphorical Extension in the Expressions server.

A similar process can be seen in the phrase *cinta beda server*, where the term *server* is used metaphorically to represent religion. In digital contexts, a server refers to a system or network that operates independently. By extending this concept to social life, users conceptualize religious differences as belonging to separate “systems” or “networks.” This metaphor not only simplifies complex social realities but also reflects the influence of digital culture on everyday language.

Figure 7. Metaphorical Extension in the Expressions log in and log out.



The use of *log in* and *log out* in religious discourse further reinforces this pattern. These terms, originally associated with accessing or exiting digital systems, are used metaphorically to describe entering or leaving a religion. Such usage demonstrates how technological terminology is recontextualized to express abstract social and spiritual concepts. According to Androutsopoulos (2015), digital discourse often facilitates the blending of technical and social meanings, resulting in innovative forms of expression that resonate with contemporary users.

Pragmatic Refunctionalization

In addition to semantic and metaphorical changes, the data also reveal pragmatic refunctionalization, where English lexical items are assigned new discourse functions. The term *gas*, for instance, is used as an expression of agreement, enthusiasm, or readiness to act, as seen in “*oke gas*”. This usage departs significantly from its literal meaning and instead functions as a pragmatic marker within interaction.



Figure 8. Pragmatic Refunctionalization in the Expressions *gas*

This shift can be understood as a form of discourse-level adaptation, where lexical items are reinterpreted to fulfill communicative functions such as expressing stance or alignment. The popularity of *gas* among younger users suggests that such expressions are shaped by peer interaction and shared cultural norms within online communities.

Figure 9. Pragmatic Refunctionalization in the Expressions pure blood.

Another example is the use of pure blood to describe individuals from professional family lineages, particularly in the medical field. While the original meaning relates to genetic purity, its localized use emphasizes inherited status and social identity. This transformation illustrates how lexical items can acquire indexical meanings, signaling social position, privilege, or group membership.

The patterns identified in this study highlight the dynamic nature of English in Indonesian social media. Rather than functioning as a stable and standardized system, English is actively reshaped through processes of localization, creativity, and contextual adaptation. This supports the perspective of World Englishes, which emphasizes that English exists in multiple forms shaped by sociocultural contexts (Kachru, 1992; Proshina, 2019).

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the significant role of Digital Discourse in facilitating linguistic innovation. Social media environments encourage experimentation, allowing users to blend languages, reinterpret meanings, and develop new expressions. As a result, English becomes integrated into local communicative practices, reflecting both global influence and local identity.

Importantly, the transformations observed in this study should not be viewed as linguistic deficiencies. Instead, they represent legitimate and meaningful practices within a multilingual context. Indonesian users demonstrate agency in appropriating English, adapting it to their cultural and communicative needs. This suggests that English in Indonesia is continuously evolving, shaped by everyday interaction in digital spaces.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that English lexical items in Indonesian social media discourse undergo systematic transformation through localized linguistic practices. The analysis identified four main patterns: lexical blending and hybridization, semantic shift, metaphorical extension, and pragmatic refunctionalization, which illustrate how English is actively adapted to fit local communicative needs and cultural contexts. Rather than maintaining their conventional Inner Circle meanings, English words are reinterpreted, recombined, and repurposed by Indonesian users to produce new, context-specific meanings.

These findings indicate that English in Indonesia functions as a flexible and dynamic resource within a multilingual repertoire. The use of English on social media is not merely imitative, but creative and agentive, reflecting users' ability to integrate global linguistic forms into local meaning-making practices. The study therefore supports the perspective of World Englishes, which views English as plural and evolving across sociocultural contexts.

In addition, the role of Digital Discourse is crucial in shaping these developments. Social media platforms provide an environment that encourages linguistic experimentation, allowing users to innovate and negotiate meanings in real time. As a result, English in Indonesian digital communication continues to evolve in ways that reflect both technological influence and local identity.

From an English language teaching perspective, these findings suggest the importance of incorporating authentic digital language use into classroom practice. Exposure to localized English expressions can help learners develop critical language awareness, enabling them to distinguish between standard and non-standard forms while understanding the sociocultural contexts in which such forms emerge.

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