

Language of Youth on Media Platforms: A Comparative Analysis of Slang on Instagram and Facebook in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The use of slang has created creativity among young people in the social media platforms, which has altered the linguistic practices of the youth. The existence of the hybrid language in social media offers identity and cultural affiliation as a platform where English and Urdu can co-exist in Pakistan. This research seeks to determine the differences in frequency, function, and form of slang language used on Instagram or Facebook, it also compares the popular types of slang language used by the Pakistani youth on Instagram or Facebook. The mixed-method method was used to collect the data of 200 public posts and comments on Instagram and Facebook. The quantitative analysis was done to determine the frequency and types of slang, whereas the qualitative analysis was conducted to determine the purpose and context of slang by using discourse analysis. It is found that slang is more commonly and creatively used on Instagram by focusing on emotions, identity and connection, while it is more discursive and evaluative on Facebook. In the changing online communication in Pakistan, Slang is a linguistic identity of digital identity that is innovative, hybrid and youth culture.

Keywords: Language, youth, media platforms, comparative analysis, slang, Instagram, facebook, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Digital age has changed the way communication is done particularly among young people who rule the online platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Such sites can be considered as not only instruments of communication, but also linguistic laboratories in which new ways of expression develop and change, especially slang (Crystal, 2011). Slang also enables the young users to convey identity, humor, feelings, and social membership by bargaining power and popularity within the online communities (Eble, 1996). Social media language in Pakistan is a synthesis of English and Urdu which constitutes the hybrid forms like to chill karo or vibe check scene hai. This act of translanguaging illustrates how the Pakistani youth seamlessly combine the global and local language to express belongingness and modernity (García and Wei, 2014).

Researchers all over the world have observed that digital communication encourages linguistic innovation and identity performance (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). Though, the situation in Pakistan is unique, and it is the post-colonial environment of this country that is multilingual, so that

language is linked to the matters of classes, identity and globalization (Rahman, 2012). Thus, the interpretation of slang on these platforms is crucial in order to understand how the young people approach the digital culture using language.

Although, there has been an increasing research on digital discourse, the research on the use of youth slang on social media in Pakistan is limited. Although, both are popular, Instagram and Facebook are very different in the ways of communication: the former is characterized by visual conciseness and expressive captions and the latter encourages the use of more words and textual communication (Page et al., 2014). It is likely that these structural and functional variations affect the development and functionality of slang on any platform. However, the frequency, functionality and form of slang in both platforms in Pakistan is lacking in a comparative analysis. This gap is bridged and allows the explanation of how linguistic behavior of young users is influenced by platform-specific affordances.

Research Objectives

- To identify the difference in frequency, function and form of the slang on these two media platforms in Pakistan.
- To compare the common types of slang used by Pakistani youth on these two media platforms.

Research Questions

1. What is the difference in frequency, function and form of the slang on these two media platforms in Pakistan?
2. What are the common types of slang used by Pakistani youth on these two media platforms?

The study plays a role in the studies of digital sociolinguistics in that it investigates the way in which Pakistani young people employ slang to create identity and social interaction in online environments. It gives a glimpse of the influence that social media has on the innovation of language that reflects both international and regional adjustments. Another theory, the translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) and the notion of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) are further developed by the study presenting the ways in which bilingual youth combine English with Urdu in expressing the newfound sense of urban identity through social media. In practice, this study may enlighten the educators, linguists and communication scholars on the new trends in digital language and their consequences in communication, culture and education.

In conclusion, this study underscores the fact that slang is not linguistic rot, but instead, an artistically adapted response that reflects the changing identity and social and cultural realities of Pakistani youth in the digital era. Comparing Instagram and Facebook, it illuminates the way the language innovations are indicators of greater cultural and technological changes in the media industry in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Communication and Introduction to Language

The advent of social media has changed the linguistic behavior of people around the world and has brought new type of communication that combines textual, visual and multimodal communication. The language used in online spaces has ceased to exist in the form of classic patterns; instead, it represents the dynamic, hybrid and creative language (Crystal, 2011). According to other scholars like Androutsopoulos (2011) and Page (2012), digital discourse can be regarded as a new sociolinguistic ecology in which identity construction and social interaction are carried out through the flexible linguistic practices. In this context, slang is a linguistic innovation which turns into a part of the youth culture, creativity, and opposition towards normative standards (Eble, 1996; Tagliamonte, 2016).

Slang and Youth Identity

Slang is profoundly engrained in the youth identity formation and works as a symbolic signature of in-group unity, defiance, and informality (Eble, 1996; Coleman, 2014). It allows youths to show modernity, jokes, and cultural sensitivity and, at the same time, isolate strangers (Matthews, 2018). Eckert (2012) observes that slang is a social dialect that is age and classification indexed and culturally affiliated. With online communication, this expressiveness is heightened because social media is immediate and visible. The youth slang then demonstrates the language play and the social negotiation as well wherein the users are able to play with identity and affect in the flowing online dynamics (Barton & Lee, 2013; Zappavigna, 2012).

The Social Media as a Linguistic Space

Various platforms provide different linguistic actions (Boyd, 2014). Instagram is a visual and ephemeral platform that may encourage brevity, formative aesthetics and emotive communication (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014), whereas Facebook enjoys a longer discursive communication, community talk, and diverse viewers (Androutsopoulos, 2015). The language on such sites is subject to audience design (Bell, 1984), i.e. users modify their language based on their perceived readers and situations. According to research conducted by Georgakopoulou (2017) and Benson (2015), social media slang integrates multimodal elements, namely, text messages, emojis, hashtags, to form novel semiotic meaning systems.

Digital and Global Slang

The spread of slang has been made easy through the globalization of the English language (Canagarajah, 2013). Through social media, young people borrow and localize global expressions in English like lit, savage or no cap and make them a part of local vernaculars. This effect is parallel to that of glocalization whereby global forms of language are localized identities (Kachru, 2006). However, translingual fluidity, incorporating the elements of several languages and media styles is a distinctive feature of the online slang (Androutsopoulos, 2011; Georgakopoulou, 2017). This process leads to the emergence of hybrid discourse in multilingual societies, and it turns into one of the characteristics of digital communication (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014; García and Wei, 2014).

Bilingualism, Code-Switching and Translanguaging

Code-switching and translanguaging play a crucial role in the practice of the online slang in the context of multilingual countries such as Pakistan (Mahboob, 2020; Rafi, 2020). Pakistani young people often mix Roman Urdu with English, creating such expressions as scene on hai or mood off hai. This imaginative bi-bilingualism is not a sign of linguistic incompetence but an inventive idea of making meaning (Garcia & Wei, 2014). As studies by Rahman (2022) and Manan and David (2020) show, English continues to have a strong symbolic capital of Pakistan, which can be linked to education and modernity, whereas Urdu is categorized as a measure of intimacy and localism. The overlap of these codes on the cyber space is a manifestation of linguistic hybridity, a major characteristic of postcolonial speech (Bhabha, 1994; Pennycook, 2007).

Slang: A Cultural Expression and a Culture of Resistance

Another way of cultural resistance is through the use of Slang. In informal discourses, young people use language to break linguistic structures and to be considered as an agent of digitality (Fairclough, 1995; Bucholtz, 2000). The hybrid slang permits the Pakistani youth to work through conventional and contemporary identities in the digital culture of the country, particularly under the socio-cultural conditions of restraint (Haider, 2023). According to feminist digital discourses, young women employ playful slang to feel empowered and challenge the gender norms (Zia, 2021). On the same note, according

to Khan (2022), male youth make use of slang to employ humor and irony to build up solidarity and dominance in their online communication. These conclusions are consistent with the perspective of Halliday, who believed that language is a social semiotic as it embodies the wider sense of society and cultural relations of power (Halliday, 1978).

Practices in Linguistics

A comparative study of platforms has shown that Instagram promotes affective, performative slang and Facebook promotes discursive, argumentative slang (Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). Slangs are usually accompanied by hashtags, emojis and focuses on emotions and self-identification on Instagram (vibes only, aesthetics, lit) (Benson, 2015). Slang on Facebook is used in lengthier threads or memes, as a form of humor, criticism, or commentary (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2021). Linguistic patterns depend on the structural affordances of a particular platform, such as the length of posts, their visibility to their audience and the type of interaction (boyd, 2014; Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Pakistani Online Identity

Language of the Pakistani youth on digital media is not thoroughly studied as compared to western settings. Nevertheless, new studies draw attention to such phenomenon as the development of digital multilingualism and the emergence of new slang (Rafi, 2020; Haider, 2023). Pakistani young people are tactical in their use of English, Urdu and regional languages to display the modern, urban and cosmopolitan identity (Mahboob, 2020; Manan and David, 2020). This fluidity in language is an indication of what Blommaert (2010) term superdiversity in which various semiotic resources interact with each other in a digital communication. In this regard, slang is used as a means of conveying humor, discontent, intimacy, and transgression across borders.

The study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013), Translanguaging Theory (Garcidea & Wei, 2014), and Sociolinguistic Identity Theory (Eckert, 2012). CDA puts slang into a wider context of sociocultural and power relations, whereas translanguaging describes how the young people spontaneously blend languages to construct meaning. Such frameworks demonstrate that slang on social media modes of speech serve simultaneous purposes of a linguistic performance and a social negotiation, and they also play a role in the change in the linguistic terrain in the digital sphere in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A comparative mixed-methods study was utilized in this research, combining the quantitative and qualitative methods, in order to analyze the use of slang by Pakistani youth in Instagram and Facebook. The mixed approach made it possible to understand the frequency of slang (quantitative dimension) and the role and form thereof (qualitative dimension) comprehensively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative analysis was aimed at the quantification of the usage and frequency of the slang terms in question, whereas the qualitative discourse analysis covered their communicative functions and meanings in context. Comparative design was the most suitable to find out the differences and similarities in the language practices in two well-differentiated settings of media with different affordances and different demographics of the audiences (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Data Collection

The sources of data were the publicly accessible posts, captions and comment threads on Instagram and Facebook collected in January and June 2025. In order to capture youth discourse, purposive sampling method was chosen which focused on posts and accounts of users who were between age 18-30. Out of these subjects, around 200 samples (50 of each platform) were taken according to the level of engagement and language relevance to the research questions. The ethical considerations were observed by not

including personal information and deanonymizing usernames which was based on the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) code of ethics (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). The gathered data were composed of textual and linguistic components (captions, comments), Roman Urdu-English code-mixing, emojis, hashtags and abbreviations. This emphasis on written text and not visual or audio contents is in line with the previous linguistic research of social media which examines language as a social practice (Fairclough, 2013; Page, 2012).

Data Analysis Procedure

The process of the analysis was in two stages

All the slang expressions were detected in the quantitative phase, classified and their frequency analyzed. Slang taxonomies (Eble, 1996; Tagg and Seargeant, 2014) formed the basis of creating a codebook that categorized slang under the following categories: abbreviations, borrowed slang, emotive slang and hybridized. Comparisons of the frequencies in Instagram and Facebook were then made in order to identify variations based on the platforms.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) and the Sociolinguistic Discourse Analysis (Gee, 2014) were used in the qualitative stage to investigate the roles and contextual meanings of slang. This methodology examined the way in which slang defines social identities, relationships and group memberships. The pragmatic and cultural aspects of language use were interpreted through the analyzed cases of code-switching, translanguaging, and humorous expressions (García & Wei, 2014). Triangulation was implemented by combining the two analyses, making them valid due to the convergence of both the quantitative and qualitative knowledge (Denzin, 2017). This was also in reference to researcher reflexivity because linguistic and cultural positionality was taken into account when doing the interpretation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data is devoted to the comparative application of slang by Pakistani young people on Instagram and Facebook with reference to differences in frequency, use, and form and determining the most frequent types of slang that are used on these platforms. The sample was chosen purposely with 200 public posts and comment threads of users between the ages of 18 and 30 and during the period of January to June 2025. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used: frequency and distribution were measured with the help of the quantitative analysis, and the qualitative analysis was focused on the social and functional meanings concealed in slang expressions (Fairclough, 2013).

Frequency of Slang Usage

The first quantitative code involved finding slang was much more common in Instagram (68) than Facebook (42) in user-generated captions, comments, and replies to stories. This greater percentage on Instagram is in line with the visual and interactive capabilities of the system which facilitates informal and affective interaction (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). The focus on aesthetics and identity formation made by Instagram promotes the use of short and descriptive language, which is often summarized with the help of slang, abbreviations, and the use of emojis.

Facebook users in turn were less frequent in their use of slang, particularly in status updates and in comments to all, where the speech form was more inclined towards longer, semi-formal discourse. This variation indicates the demographic diversity of the platform Facebook still has younger audiences, such as family members and work colleagues, so young people use more restraining and careful words (Androutsopoulos, 2015). The evidence helps to prove that the linguistic behavior is influenced by media affordances (Page, 2012). On Instagram, posts that are brief and are based on graphics are favored, and

this promotes the use of lexical innovations. The text-heavy format of Facebook, conversely, perpetuates narrative discourse, with the use of slang, though it is not entirely absent, being contextually limited i.e. mostly in comment rows with close associates, but not in individual posts.

Slang and Functional Dimensions

The metafunctional model used in functional analysis is the one proposed by Halliday (1978), which comprises of the interpersonal, ideational and textual functions of slang. Slang behavior in either platform mainly played an interpersonal role of social bonding, humor and group cohesion. Terms such as lit, vibe check, lowkey, flex, and Urdu-English blends such as scene on hai or chil maar were used as a marker of in-group status and affective resonance on Instagram.

Contrastingly, Facebook slang frequently fulfilled evaluative and expressive purposes and more frequently than not, related to socio-political commentary or memetic jokes. Comment postings that used words like troll, savage, cringe, or burn also exemplify discursive creativity of social critique by including it in the language used to respond to public figures or viral posts (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2021). Moreover, the young people on Instagram were also using slang to create themselves online, in line with the fact that the language of the social media does identity work by Zappavigna (2012), using affective alignment. Such terms as no cap, bussin or POV presented the self-presentation as culturally literate and globally connected. Such is the symptom of glocalization- the mixture of global English slang and local linguistic behaviors (Canagarajah, 2013).

In Facebook, debate and humor were mediated with slang, especially in meme culture. As an example, Urdu-English mixed forms such as ghanta logic or jhakkas reply served as performative signs of sarcasm and group membership. This follows the concept of linguistic play as the method of negotiating power, humor and identity in internet space presented by Fairclough (1995) in the idea of language as a social practice when young people use linguistic play to negotiate power, humor and identity in the digital world.

Formal Characteristics of Slang

Slang used on different platforms varied significantly. The Instagram language was geared towards visual-verbal compression, which means using English abbreviations, emojis and Roman Urdu. They can be LO, vibes only, mood, OMG yaar and lag rha aesthetic. Roman Urdu is a typography representing a hybrid correspondence in which English alphabets are employed to convey Urdu phonology as an indication of bilingual ingenuity (Rafi, 2020). It is reflective of a move toward the adaptable multilingual identities of the Pakistani youth as evidenced in this translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014). Facebook slang was syntactically more intricate and metadiscursively commentative, e.g. bro, yeh logic kaun sa hai? or admin please enlighten. These formats retain the conversational qualities but are elaborated more contextually, which correlates with the assertion by Androutsopoulos (2011) that platform architecture affects the range of stylistic. The ability to extend the discussion and the comment threading, as well as discussions provided by Facebook allow a more in-depth phrasal slang than the crunchy tags and captions of Instagram.

Common Types of Slang

Qualitative classification determined that there were five common types of slang in both platforms:

a) Abbreviations and Acronyms: LOL, TBH, IDK, BTW, FOMO.

Most commonly used on both platforms, and more aesthetically integrated on Instagram, it often ends with the use of emojis or hashtags (e.g., #FOMO).

b) Borrowed and Hybrid Slang: e.g. scene on hai, chill karo, no tension bro.

Code-mixes and localizes English slang (Mahboob, 2020). However, the forms prevail on Instagram captions, they can also be found on Facebook memes.

c) Derived Slang of Pop-culture: such as main character energy, based, stan, savage.

Instagram shared posts often made references to the global media, and Facebook shared them in the commentary formats, which are indicators of intertextual consciousness.

d) Gendered/ Peer-Group Slang: e.g. babe, bro, queen, yaar.

Not in itself but to enhance solidarity and social alignment (Eble, 1996). Instagram was more used in affective tagging; Facebook was used in ironic or humorous address.

e) Emotive/ Aesthetic Slang: e.g. vibes, aesthetics, mood, goals.

Instagram is very common, which means that it would be oriented to visual-emotional discourse (Benson, 2015).

Comparative Interpretation

In general, the results show that Instagram encourages the innovation of languages, and Facebook still maintains the hybrides but discursively detailed slang. The difference in frequency is an indication of generational and platform-afforded features: Instagram with its youth-focused, visual, and impermanent design supports the rapid changes in linguistic tendencies whereas Facebook with its extended audience and text-based interactions maintains an uneven degree of formality.

Functionally, Instagram slang is mainly used in identity performance and peer bonding and Facebook slang is even used in social commentary and ironic critique. This disparity confirms the thesis by Van Dijk (2018), according to which digital discourse reflects the offline social stratifications and identity politics. Pakistani young people use both English and Urdu alternations not only as the style but as social indicators of urban modernity, education, and related cultural connectivity. Officially, the analysis demonstrates that translanguaging was a characteristic of the Pakistani youth discourse. Linguistic fluidity, i.e., the continuous mixing of English and Urdu (lagta aesthetic, vibe scene on hai), is also an example of the attempts to break code that cannot be strictly defined (García, 2014). Instagram is a representation of compressed multimodal slang and Facebook is an example of extended discursive slang both indicative of shifting digital literacies.

Sociolinguistic Implications

These results highlight the role of digital media platforms as linguistic environments, which inform the process of youth identifying and belonging (Crystal, 2011). The dominance of Roman Urdu-English mixes shows that there is a trend of linguistic hybridization in accordance with a postcolonial hierarchical system of linguistic dominance in Pakistan (Rahman, 2022). However, English is still a prestige language, its informalization in the form of slang is symbolic resistance and invention of localization.

Besides, slang in these platforms does more than entertain the people, it allows youth to negotiate through class, gender, and generational discourses. Playful or empowering slang is frequently used by female users, such as boss babe, queen energy, or any other phrases that indicate agency in a limited cultural context (Haider, 2023). Male users prefer to apply assertive or jovial slang language (bro, beta, savage) to affirm peer identity. Thus, slang becomes a language location of negotiation, the mediator of world digital tendencies and local sociolinguistic situations. The active interaction of global and local shapes on Instagram and Facebook are the examples of changing multi-lingualism in Pakistan in the digital sphere (Rafi, 2020; Kachru, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the analysis, it was found that there are enormous variations in the frequency, purpose, and form of slang employed by the Pakistani youth on Instagram and Facebook. Slang was more common on Instagram (68 percent) than Facebook (42 percent), which quantitatively shows that the setting of Instagram (its visual and informal one) facilitates linguistic creativity. This result aligns with the fact that more expressive and affective communication can be achieved on youth-oriented platforms (Tagg & Sargeant, 2014).

The qualitative analysis revealed that the slang has different communicative purposes on the two platforms. In Instagram, the predominant use of slang was interpersonal and performative in order to create identity, express emotion, and group belonging. Most of the popular terms, including *vibe check*, *lowkey*, *scene on hai*, and *chill karo*, portrayed how young people create hybrid online identities with English-Urdu blending, which are signs of translanguaging activities (García and Wei, 2014). On the contrary, on Facebook, slang was more critical and discursive and was frequently associated with humor, commenting, and social criticism. The memes and comment thread featured expressions such as *savage*, *cringe*, or *gantha logic*, as a way to have wit and shared irony in the case of the notion of discourse as social practice conceived by Fairclough (2013).

Instagram slang when compared to Facebook ones was usually short, multimodal and Emoji-filled, whereas Facebook slang exhibited longer and syntactically complicated constructions. This is in accordance with the argument of Androutsopoulos (2015) that the linguistic styles are constructed according to the platform affordances. The findings also point to the fact that slang is a marker used by Pakistani young people to identify as digital and urban, and English as a marker of modernity and Urdu as a marker of locality. Comprehensively, the results show that slang is not a linguistic degeneration but imaginative adaptation, which demonstrates how young people are bargaining over identity and community in a digital environment. The two sites serve as the linguistic laboratories that combine the trends of the world with the locality, reflecting the changing sociolinguistic environment of Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The comparison of the use of slang in Pakistani youth on Instagram and Facebook offers important information on the effects of the digital space on linguistic behavior, identity formation, and socialization. The results show that slang is a living linguistic tool that allows young users to show their uniqueness, humor, unity, and social inclusion. Although the two platforms impose a similar effect of creativity and cultural hybridity, the technological and social affordances present desire the frequency, functionality, and nature of slang differently.

Instagram has become a linguistically creative and affective space that young people often use slang to achieve identity, mood, and sustain peer intimacy. The prevalence of Urdu-English mixture slang, which is Roman by nature, such as such phrases as *scene on hai* or *chill karo*, is the sample of the growing normalization of the idea of translanguaging in online communication (Garciana and Wei, 2014). This language hybridization is not only a way to bridge between the global and the local cultures but also a form of youth defiance of strict hierarchies of languages (Canagarajah, 2013). In opposition, Facebook encourages discursive and evaluative applications of slang, in which language is a means to humor, criticism and commentary, most prominently in meme culture and discussion boards. Such tendencies prove the argument made by Fairclough (2013) that language on the media platforms functioning is a kind of social practice which indicates the presence of certain power relations, attitudes of the generations and cultural changes. Another important point that can be made by the study is that slang is not a corruption of language, but an assertion of linguistic agency and social cultural creativity (Eble, 1996; Crystal, 2011). In Pakistani slang, young people are mocking the traditional standards of language and identity, by

declaring an urban, digitally fluent identity who moves in the realms of modernity across the globe and locality. This artistic blend of English and Urdu is a glocal linguistic identity (Kachru, 2006), where the global digital trends are localized with the use of cultural and contextual adaptation.

Altogether, the study can be used to learn more about how digital discourse influences the development of the language in Pakistan. It points out that the linguistic behavior of young people in social media is an indicator of more broad-based socio-technological changes, such as the growing globalization, digital literacy, and the mixing of cultures. Future studies could continue this discussion to the new platforms, like Tik Tok or X (ex-Twitter) to understand how visual and audio and algorithmic aspects further diversify linguistic practices. Finally, the youth language of the digital media portrays youth slang as a cultural reflection as well as a language boundary in that youth slang is the dynamic intersection of technology, identity, and creativity in a modern Pakistan.

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