Sociolinguistic Exploration:

How Mobile Legends Shapes Social Language Variations Among Teenagers

Ferdiyansyah[1], Jaftiyatur Rohaniyah[2], Dinar Vincy Yunitaka Bahrudin[3]
[1,2,3] English Education Department, Universitas Islam Madura
Corresponding E-Mail: ferdiyansyah20167@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the sociolinguistic phenomenon of language variation among Indonesian teenagers influenced by the online multiplayer game *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through participant observation and surveys involving 15 teenagers aged 15–25 from Pamekasan, East Java. Guided by Labov's Variationist Sociolinguistics theory, the research investigates three core issues: (1) the types of language variations that emerge within the *Mobile Legends* community, (2) the influence of the game on teenagers' linguistic behavior, and (3) the impact of these variations on their social interactions. Findings reveal that *Mobile Legends* creates a distinctive linguistic environment characterized by gaming-specific jargon, slang, code-switching, and situational register shifts. These linguistic features reflect a hybrid style shaped by both global digital language and local vernacular practices. Importantly, this language extends beyond the gaming context, permeating daily conversations among peer groups. The use of in-game language serves not only for strategic communication but also as a marker of group identity and belonging. However, the study also identifies potential concerns, such as the normalization of vulgar language and a decline in formal communication norms. Additionally, linguistic variation in gaming contexts contributes to the formation of social hierarchies, reinforces group solidarity, and can lead to exclusionary practices toward non-gamers. These findings highlight the need for educational stakeholders to consider the impact of digital culture on adolescent language development, particularly within the Indonesian context.

Keywords: *sociolinguistics, language variation, Mobile Legends*

Introduction

The integration of digital games into the daily lives of adolescents has brought about major changes in their social interactions and language use. Mobile Legends Bang Bang (MLBB) a very popular multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game in Indonesia Sunarto (2019), stands out as a major force among adolescents. This game provides an interactive platform that shapes the way adolescents communicate and form social identities (Rahma and Fajar 2022)As digital platforms become more embedded in everyday life, online games can influence communication styles, language use, and the development of new social practices, especially among adolescents, because Mobile Legend users are dominant among school children ranging from elementary school children to college students (Hidayat and Qodat 2024)

One of the main characteristics of Mobile Legends Bang Bang is its demand for real-time communication and collaboration, which encourages players to develop a special lexicon. Commonly used terms such as "noob" (new or inexperienced player), "GG" (good game), and "AFK" (away from keyboard) have gone beyond the gaming world and entered everyday conversations among adolescents (Mussu, Olii, and Kamagi 2022)These terms illustrate how gaming culture influences everyday communication.   The linguistic evolution of the gaming community also reflects broader global trends, with local and international elements blending seamlessly. English jargon is often mixed with Bahasa Indonesia and regional languages, resulting in a distinctive form of language that demonstrates both globalization and local identity.

In Indonesia, a multilingual society, the phenomenon of code switching in Mobile Legends Bang Bang is very prominent. Players often switch between Indonesian, regional languages, and English during play, depending on the interlocutor and the context of the conversation (Trisdasari et al. 2023)This flexibility shows the dynamic and multifaceted nature of adolescent communication. Code switching not only facilitates more effective communication among peers but also serves as a tool to express group membership and social identity. This reflects the variation in language use in digital spaces and emphasizes how language can function as a marker of belonging in a gaming community (Yoga Pratama 2022).

Research (Zabrina Fitri Novi Amanda et al. 2024)on the impact of online gaming environments such as Mobile Legends Bang Ban shows that these environments also shape language politeness and the use of rude or offensive language in line with which states that the Impact of Mobile legends is not only limited to the amusement aspect, but also affects the Language Behavior of Today's Adolescents. (Nurdiansyah and Darma 2024)states that players usually use rude or

dirty words when they are angry and upset about something, such as defeat and so on. Such linguistic behavior highlights the influence of the virtual gaming environment on adolescent social behavior, as the boundaries between online and offline interactions continue to blur.

The competitive environment of Mobile Legends Bang Bang also motivates teens to improve their cognitive skills. Strategic thinking, quick decision-making, and effective communication are essential to success in the game. These skills not only benefit players in the virtual world, but can also be applied in real-life situations, helping teens navigate complex social environments. The experience of competing and collaborating with others fosters resilience, perseverance, and adaptability, all of which are valuable life skills. In addition to the benefits to individuals, Mobile Legends Bang Ban's popularity has led to the formation of online communities and forums. Players can talk about methods, share experiences, and meet other people who like the same things in these digital venues. By participating in these communities, teens can engage in identity formation, socialization, and cultural exchange. These online interactions shape their linguistic and social behaviors, which influence how they communicate both online and offline.

From an educational perspective, the social dynamics of Mobile Legends Bang Bang offer an opportunity to teach adolescents about language variation and code switching. In line with the opinion (Franzke et al. 2020)games are one of the rapidly developing technologies that can facilitate students to learn and gain new knowledge in an interesting way. Educators can leverage students' interest in games to introduce concepts about language change, the social function of language, and the role of communication in identity formation. By incorporating elements of game culture into the curriculum, educators can foster a more engaging and relevant learning environment for students. The increasing dominance of mobile games presents both opportunities and challenges for language research. As mobile games such as Mobile Legends become increasingly popular, they create unique social spaces where players develop new ways of communicating and acquiring new language(Mussu, Olii, and Kamagi 2022). This includes the evolution of in-game language, such as certain terms or abbreviations, that may not be readily understood by those outside the gaming community. Questions arise about how the linguistic practices in these games shape the everyday language of teenagers who spend a lot of time engaging in these games. The challenge lies in identifying the impact of these new forms of language on broader social interactions and understanding how this variation contributes to the formation of social identities among players.

Sociolinguistic variation refers to the differences in language use that occur across social groups, geographical areas, or contexts. The foundational framework for understanding this concept comes from **William Labov's Variationist Sociolinguistics Theory**. Labov's work emphasizes that gender, ethnicity, and social class.

William Labov's theory of variationist sociolinguistics posits that language variation is intricately linked to social factors such as age, gender, social class, and context. This framework is particularly relevant when analyzing the language used by adolescents in online gaming environments, such as Mobile Legends. The linguistic choices made by players can reflect their social identities and group affiliations, which are influenced by peer dynamics, gaming experience, and cultural backgrounds. In the context of Mobile Legends, players often exhibit distinct linguistic variations that can be attributed to their social interactions within the game.

For instance, the use of specific slang or jargon can serve as markers of in-group membership, reinforcing social bonds among players. This phenomenon aligns with Labov's assertion that language is a social tool that reflects the speaker's identity and social affiliations (Oladeji, 2022). Additionally, the concept of register, which refers to the variations in language use depending on the social context, is particularly salient in gaming environments where players   adapt their language to fit the informal and competitive nature of the game (Yoga Pratama, 2022).

Moreover, the variationist approach emphasizes the importance of understanding how language evolves within specific communities over time. In the case of Mobile Legends, the language used by players may change as new terms and expressions emerge, influenced by factors such as the introduction of new game features or shifts in player demographics. This aligns with the findings of Szmrecsanyi, who discusses the dynamic nature of language variation and the potential for cross-disciplinary research to enhance our understanding of these processes.

Furthermore, the interaction between language and social identity is crucial in understanding how adolescents navigate their linguistic choices in gaming contexts. As noted by Eckert, linguistic variables often carry social meanings that reflect the speaker's stance and identity. In Mobile Legends, players may adopt certain linguistic styles to project authority, camaraderie, or competitiveness, thus illustrating the interplay between language and social dynamics in a digital environment. In summary, Labov's theory of variationist sociolinguistics provides a robust framework for analyzing the linguistic variations observed among adolescents in Mobile Legends. By considering the social factors influencing language use, researchers can gain insights into how these variations reflect broader social identities and group dynamics within the gaming community.

Language variation is one of the important concepts in Sociolinguistics, which refers to the differences in language use between speakers. Language variation is the diversity of language forms used by a group of language speakers. According to

(Islamiyah et al., 2024) Language variation is the use of language by each person that is different from one another. "This language variation can be in the form of geographical, temporal, or social variation used by certain social groups. This language variation arises due to social, geographical, situational, and other factors. In the context of sociolinguistics, language variation on social media is a complex and interesting phenomenon to study, because it reflects various aspects of social interaction, cultural identity, and technological developments (Wahyudiantari, 2024). According to (Sulvia Aisyah Amimi, 2024) language variation in terms of speakers is divided into 4 groups, namely dialect, idiolect, sosiolect, and chronolect. Language variation in terms of usage is a variation of language related to the use of its speakers. Language variation in terms of formality consists of standard varieties, official varieties, business varieties, casual varieties, and intimate varieties. Language variation in terms of means is a variation of language that can be seen from the oral or written path when speaking.

According to (Ningsih & Harahap, 2024) language variation arises due to two main factors: who the speakers are and how they use the language.

1. Language Variation Based on Speakers
    A. Dialect

    Dialect is a variation of language used by a group of speakers who live in a certain area and have a common history. Dialects are often called accents. Although each speaker has their own dialect, those in the same dialect have similarities in speaking. For example, Minang speakers in Payakumbuh and Pariaman have different accents, but still understand each other because they use the same language. The main key to dialect is mutual understanding between speakers. If mutual understanding is lost, then their languages may be different.

    B. Idiolect

    Each individual has their own unique language style. This includes voice color, word choice, language style, intonation, emphasis, and sentence structure. Idiolect allows us to recognize someone just from their voice.

    C. Sociolect

    Also known as social dialect, this variation arises due to differences in status, class, and social class of its speakers. The language used by teachers will be different from the language of farmers. Likewise, the language of mothers is different from the language of fathers, and the language of children is different from the language of adults

    D. Chronolect

    This variation is caused by changes in language over time. The language used by a group of people in the past will be different from the language they use now.   There are words that are no longer relevant and there are also new words that appear. For example, Indonesian before and after 1972 (before and after EYD) has differences in writing and word

usage.
2. Language Variation Based on Usage

Language variation based on usage is also called characteristics, types, or registers. This change can be seen from the purpose or field of language use. Linguistic Variation is divided into 5 categories

A. Frozen: Used in solemn atmospheres, state ceremonies, sermons, and other official events. This is the most formal language variety.

B. Formal: Used in state speeches, official meetings, court hearings, lectures, and textbooks.

C. Consultative: Used in casual conversations, meetings, or discussions with an emphasis on results.

D. Casual: Used in informal situations, such as chatting with family or close friends.

E. Intimate: Used by speakers who have close relationships, such as family, friends, and partners.

Social factors influence language variation, this variation is related to the status, class and social class of the speaker. According to (Rizik, 2023) there are four factors that underlie the creation of language variation, as follows:

1 Social Status Factors Language

People with higher social status tend to use more formal and polite language, with correct grammar and extensive vocabulary. Meanwhile, people with lower social status tend to use more relaxed and informal language, with less strict grammar and more limited vocabulary. Language variety emerges as a result of social stratification in society, and in turn, this language variety strengthens social stratification.

2 Socio-Cultural Factors

The Indonesian language is used to carry out the regional richness of Indonesian culture. It is often known that the realization of cultural recipients is contingent upon the community using the language comprehending and upholding the culture. Since language is what enables culture, it is even frequently asserted that culture can exist in the presence of language. However, language is also a means of transmitting and expressing lifestyle, behavior, conventions, dress styles, and other aspects of culture. Only because knowledge is articulated through language can it be passed down to our kids and grandchildren as a component of culture. The circumstances and cultural norms of society have a significant impact on linguistic developments and changes.

3 Profession or Occupation Factors

Language is very important in the world of work because it is a very

important communication tool between people who work in an organization or company. So that work can influence the formation of language variations through the existence of different jobs in an area.

4 Situational and Environmental Factors

Person's personality can be reflected through their language behavior. There are several factors that influence language acquisition, such as family, environment, and friends. In certain environments, there is good language as well as negative and rude language. The use of good language can influence the surrounding environment, while rude language can have the opposite effect. Therefore, the language environment can influence the growth and use of language by its speakers.

Language variation is a natural phenomenon and is a reflection of the society that uses it. The following are forms of language variation:

1. Jargon

Jargon is a special vocabulary used by a particular group, such as a professional or hobby community. It facilitates efficient communication within the group but may be difficult for outsiders to understand. Jargon is a special term that is usually used in a particular field of life (environment). Jargon in the Mobile Legend Online Game, namely terms related to expressions in the game or those often said by players, such as "Midlane", ",Goldlane", "Explaner", "Roam", and others (Novrianti et al., 2023).

2. Slang

Slang is informal and often new language used by a particular group, especially young people. Slang is often expressive, trendy, and subject to rapid change. Slang is a subset of a language that typically deviates from conventional usage. It can include freshly created words or phrases as well as those that have been given new or enlarged meanings (Kandiawan, 2022). Slang is a common phenomenon in online gaming communities such as Mobile Legends Bang Bang, with new slang terms often appearing with each new season (Ambarwati, n.d.). Slang has a variety of functions, including conveying social meanings and creating group solidarity among players, such as "Revamp", "Solo", "Ganking", etc.

3. Register

Register is a variation of language used in a particular context or situation, influenced by factors such as topic, relationship between speakers, and level of formality. According to (Bahroni et al., 2024), register is a variation of language used according to a person's profession and has a specific purpose and has its own language characteristics. Register in Mobile Legends is a variety of social language used by certain players (Maysari, n.d.). Register in Mobile Legends is divided into word lingual units, and phrase lingual units in the form of noun of phrase, verb phrase, and Adverbial Phrase such as "WON" (Wind Of Nature), "Buyingt Time", and others (Putra et al., 2024).

4. Code Switching

The practice of speaking in multiple languages or dialects during a conversation is known as "code-switching." A complex linguistic phenomenon, code-switching involves exchanges between languages that vary according to linguistic characteristics and the languages involved. (Puspita & Ardianto, 2024). Code-switching can be situational, caused by a change in situation, or metaphorical, motivated by communicative effects. According to (Ameliza & Ambalegin, 2020), There are various forms of code-switching, including intra-sentential (changing languages within a sentence), inter-sentential (changing languages between sentences), and tag (adding brief remarks in another language). Code-switching functions to convey a message to a specific person, show the speaker's involvement, or meet lexical needs. Code-switching in Mobile Legends occurs when players switch between languages such as Javanese, English, and Indonesian in their dialogue (Trisdasari et al., 2023). This can involve single words or whole phrases such as "Harus win" (Must win), "Musuh no damage" (Enemy no damage), and others.

Mobile Legends is a mobile multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game that was created and released by Shanghai, China-based Moonton (Rahma & Fajar, 2022). Released in July 2016, Mobile Legends quickly gained immense popularity, especially in Southeast Asia, becoming one of the most played mobile games globally. The game features two teams of five players battling in real-time, usually with short matchmaking times and match durations, appealing to a wide audience with its combination of attractive graphics, easy-to-learn controls, and fast-paced gameplay.

As a social media platform, Mobile Legends fosters virtual communities and facilitates social interaction between players. The game provides an avenue for players to connect and build relationships outside of the virtual environment through in-game communication tools such as chat and voice features (Riani Iskandar Batubara & Saragih, 2024). These tools enable effective online communication, fostering collaboration and understanding between players, which enhances the overall gaming experience.

Mobile Legends has evolved into a catalyst for social communities, providing emotional support and fostering solidarity through teamwork (Arifin et al., 2024). This allows players to forge connections and build relationships outside of the game. The sense of community is reinforced through regular tournaments and community events, further engaging players and strengthening their loyalty (Firdaus, 2023).

The language used in Mobile Legends is a dynamic mix of standard language, slang, and game-specific terminology. Effective communication in the game relies

on a shared understanding of these linguistic elements, which facilitates quick coordination and strategic play. This unique language fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie among players, enhancing their collective identity within the Mobile Legends community.

The dynamics of interaction among Mobile Legends players are characterized by cooperation and competition. Players collaborate to achieve common goals, such as winning matches, while also competing to improve their individual performance and ranking. These interactions are influenced by factors such as player skill level, communication style, and team dynamics, creating a complex social environment within the game (Setyowulan, 2018).

The impact of digital games on the language development of teenagers has emerged as a fascinating phenomenon in today's increasingly digital world. As technology continues to advance, digital games have evolved from simple pastimes to complex, interactive platforms that not only provide entertainment but also significantly influence the way young people communicate. Games like Mobile Legends, for example, have become more than just a source of enjoyment; they are now powerful tools that introduce new slang, abbreviations, and foreign expressions, which teenagers often incorporate into their everyday conversations. This dynamic shift in language usage highlights the broader impact that the digital gaming world has on the linguistic behavior of today's youth.

A study by (Priskila et al. 2024) revealed that a significant 47.05% of teenagers who play Mobile Legends are more likely to use coarse or offensive language, both within the context of the game itself and in interactions with friends and family. This tendency towards informal or inappropriate language reflects a broader trend of diminishing distinctions between formal and informal communication styles. Furthermore, the study suggests that digital games are playing a role in the gradual erosion of traditional communication norms, particularly when it comes to how young people speak to one another in various social settings. This shift towards informal language is concerning, as it suggests a weakening of formal speaking skills, which are essential for professional and academic settings.

In addition, (Fuaody et al., 2024) conducted a study that explored the broader implications of digital technology on teenagers' communication patterns. Their research suggests that excessive engagement with digital platforms, including online gaming, has led to a transformation in how teenagers interact with one another. Face-to-face communication is being gradually replaced by text-based messages, which are increasingly exchanged through digital platforms like instant messaging apps or social media. This shift towards digital text communication means that teenagers are spending less time engaging in real-world conversations, thus limiting opportunities to practice and develop their formal speaking abilities. Consequently, there is a growing concern that teenagers' ability to engage in professional or serious conversations, which require formal language and proper etiquette, is becoming underdeveloped.

However, despite these concerns, it is important to recognize that digital games

do not always have a negative impact on language development. In fact, several studies suggest that digital games, when used appropriately, can serve as valuable educational tools. For example, research by (Afaria et al., 2022) and (Anggraini et al. 2022) demonstrates that game-based learning platforms can significantly enhance both the interest and the language skills of young learners. Educational games like Digital Smart Board for Kids and similar interactive media have been shown to improve vocabulary and speaking abilities, making the learning process more engaging and enjoyable for teenagers. These games offer a more dynamic and interactive way to learn, allowing teenagers to expand their language proficiency in a manner that feels more like play than study.

Moreover, (Maharani et al., 2024) conducted a study showing that digital comic media can be effectively utilized to develop children's language skills. This approach holds great promise for teenagers as well, provided it is implemented thoughtfully. The potential of digital comics and other multimedia resources lies in their ability to immerse teenagers in new linguistic contexts, expanding their vocabulary and comprehension in an enjoyable and accessible manner. By incorporating such media into educational strategies, it is possible to create a balanced and engaging learning environment that fosters both language development and critical thinking.

Research (Miswaty et al. 2024)on how language evolves in digital communities remains under-explored, especially in relation to mobile gaming. While some studies have examined the role of language in online gaming communities, there is little empirical research that focuses on how specific games such as Mobile Legends influence language use in social settings. For example, research by explores the linguistic dynamics of online games in general, but their study does not investigate the specific impact of mobile games on adolescents' social language. Furthermore, while Mobile Legends' impact on social behavior has been discussed in popular media, little academic attention has been paid to how the game fosters linguistic innovation and variation within adolescent subcultures.

Furthermore, the existing literature often overlooks the role of the cultural and social contexts of games in shaping language use. Cultural influences in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, where Mobile Legends has a large following, play a significant role in shaping the language practices of its players. Studies such as (Rahma & Fajar, 2022) provide insight into how cultural elements influence language in digital communities, but do not address the specific linguistic outcomes of games such as Mobile Legends. This Research seeks to bridge this gap by incorporating a sociolinguistic framework that considers both global and local influences on language variation among adolescent gamers.

Sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field that bridges linguistics and

sociology to explore the complex relationship between language and society. Sociolinguistics is a dynamic field that examines the intricate interplay between language and society, encompassing a wide range of research areas and perspectives, and calling for a more active engagement with modern social theory (Batubara et al., 2024). According to Suprapti (2024), the terms *sociology* or *socio-* (meaning society) and *linguistics* (the study of language) are combined to form the term *sociolinguistics*. Therefore, sociolinguistics is a science that studies how language is strongly tied to social settings and situations. Social sciences and theories, particularly sociology, reinforce this relationship. Sociolinguistics highlights how language is used as a means of communication that reflects and influences social structures. Language is not only a sign system to convey messages, but also a complex social phenomenon where each element reflects social identity, groups, and individual status in society.

In a multilingual country like Indonesia, it is common for MLBB players to switch between Indonesian, regional languages (e.g., Madurese), and English. This practice reflects the flexible linguistic identities of teenagers and their ability to adapt to various social contexts (Trisdasari et al., 2023). On the other hand, the competitive and emotionally charged nature of the game has also been associated with an increased use of vulgar or impolite language, blurring the boundaries of formal linguistic norms and introducing exclusionary group codes (Zabrina Fitri Novi Amanda et al., 2024; Nurdiansyah & Darma, 2024).

Although existing research has examined the social and behavioral impacts of online gaming, few studies have specifically explored the phenomenon of social language variation—which includes forms like jargon, slang, code-switching, register use, and dialect—within the Mobile Legends community in Indonesia. This is an important gap, as these linguistic features significantly shape social dynamics, group solidarity, and status negotiation among adolescents.

To address this gap, the present study explicitly poses the following research questions:
What types of social language variation emerge within the Mobile Legends community among Indonesian teenagers?
How does playing Mobile Legends influence teenagers' linguistic behavior beyond the game?
In what ways does this language variation affect their patterns of social interaction?

To answer these questions, this research adopts a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through participant observation and surveys involving 15 adolescents aged 15–25 in Pamekasan, East Java. The analysis is grounded in William Labov's *Variationist Sociolinguistics* theory, which emphasizes how language variation correlates with social factors such as age, gender, social class, and communicative context (Labov, as cited in Oladeji, 2022).

This research aims to broaden the scope of sociolinguistic studies by focusing specifically on Mobile Legends and its influence on adolescents' linguistic behavior. The study will explore how in-game communication influences adolescents'

broader language practices, with an emphasis on the development of new linguistic forms, slang, and social codes. In doing so, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms, particularly mobile games, mediate social interactions and shape language.

This research will also address the challenges posed by the intersection of digital language and real-world communication. As adolescents increasingly engage with online platforms, the distinction between "online" and "offline" communication is becoming increasingly blurred. The study will investigate how players use game language in non-game contexts, both online and offline, and how this use reflects changes in social identity and peer group dynamics. This analysis will offer valuable insights into the broader implications of digital language for social interactions in contemporary society.

The primary aim of this study is to examine how Mobile Legends shapes teenagers' social language variation, with a focus on the ways in which new linguistic practices emerge within this digital community. The study aims to contribute to the understanding of the role of online games in language evolution, with an emphasis on the ways in which these changes influence communication patterns in offline social interactions.

Theoretically, this study will enrich the field of sociolinguistics by exploring the intersection of language, technology, and social identity in the context of mobile games. Practically, this study will offer valuable insights for educators, language policymakers, and game designers seeking to understand and navigate the evolving linguistic landscape of digital spaces.

Understanding how language evolves within digital communities such as Mobile Legends can help stakeholders adapt to the shifting linguistic realities of the digital age. The findings offer valuable insights into how digital environments influence adolescent linguistic development, providing a basis for designing more contextual language learning strategies and responsive policies for digital literacy.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design rooted in sociolinguistics to investigate how social language variations emerge among teenagers during interactions in the mobile game *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. The qualitative case study is suitable for capturing the depth and complexity of natural language use in a specific digital context, as emphasized by Creswell (2013). The study focuses on adolescents aged 15 to 25 years residing in urban and semi-urban areas of Madura Island. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: a minimum of one year of experience playing *Mobile Legends*, a gaming frequency of at least three times per week, and a diverse linguistic background including

Madurese, Indonesian, or a combination of both. This diversity allows the researcher to observe how multiple linguistic repertoires are mobilized in digital interactions.

Data collection was conducted over one month, in March 2025. Multiple qualitative methods were employed to ensure the richness and validity of the data. These included (1) direct observation of in-game chats during live gameplay; (2) documentation via screenshots of chat logs and in-game communication, a method validated by (Ridha et al. 2024)for its effectiveness in capturing real-time language use in digital discourse; (3) semi-structured interviews with participants to gain insight into their perceptions and language choices, particularly in multilingual contexts. These methods are consistent with digital ethnography approaches in sociolinguistic research, as discussed by Tagg (2015), and Varis & Hou (2021), which highlight the need for multimodal and contextual data in studying online language practices.

The sampling strategy used was purposive sampling, targeting individuals who met the specific linguistic and gaming behavior criteria, ensuring a heterogeneous sample for sociolinguistic analysis. The total number of participants was 15, which allowed for manageable yet meaningful data collection and in-depth analysis. This aligns with recommendations in recent sociolinguistic fieldwork literature that emphasize small, information-rich samples to explore language variation in detail.

Data analysis was carried out using a qualitative sociolinguistic framework, focusing on linguistic phenomena such as code-switching, code-mixing, slang, abbreviation, pragmatic markers, and localized expressions that appeared in digital communication. The analysis followed several stages: (1) data transcription, converting screen-captured chats into written text for coding; (2) open coding to identify linguistic patterns; (3) thematic grouping based on social roles (e.g., team leader, support player) and language background; and (4) interpretive analysis using the theoretical lenses of William Labov's variationist sociolinguistics and John Gumperz's speech community framework. Recent work by Blommaert & Rampton (2020) further supports the use of such frameworks in digital contexts by highlighting the dynamic interplay between language, identity, and mediated communication.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, triangulation was applied across different methods (observations, screenshots, interviews), while member checking was conducted with participants to verify interpretations. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, their identities were anonymized, and the confidentiality of chat data and personal information was strictly maintained. The study adheres to ethical standards for research involving human subjects in digital environments, following the guidelines proposed by the Association of Internet Researchers

This comprehensive methodological framework allows the study to capture the nuanced, context-dependent ways in which young players in Madura use

language as a tool for identity construction, group solidarity, and social negotiation in a digital gaming environment. Such insights contribute to ongoing conversations about language use in digital youth cultures and the localization of global gaming discourse.

Results
1. What are the language variations that emerge in the Mobile Legends community?

The study reveals that the Mobile Legends player community forms a distinctive and highly dynamic linguistic ecosystem. Interactions within the game serve not only as strategic communication but also function as a social space where norms, identities, and group solidarity are constructed and negotiated through language.

The linguistic variations that emerge in this community include the use of **technical jargon**, **community-specific slang**, **register shifts**, and **code-switching** between languages. These variations are not random but reflect the dynamic and multicultural nature of the gaming environment. Language in this context becomes a vital tool for shaping identity, values, and social norms in digital gaming communities.

- **Jargon and slang** are employed to facilitate rapid communication during fast-paced gameplay while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of in-group belonging. Terms such as *push* represent shared knowledge among players and foster subcultural cohesion.
- **Register shifts** between formal and informal styles indicate players' linguistic adaptability based on the interactional context. For example, players may use formal, directive language in strategic planning with strangers but switch to humorous or expressive tones when playing with close friends.
- **Code-switching** between Indonesian, English, and local languages (notably Madurese) demonstrates players' multilingual proficiency and flexible language practices. This phenomenon also reflects the sociolinguistic complexity of Indonesian youth, who navigate various linguistic repertoires depending on context, identity, and audience.

These variations illustrate how language is not merely a communication tool but a mechanism for **performing social roles**, **negotiating group membership**, and **constructing cultural identity**. The linguistic dynamics within the Mobile Legends community thus exemplify a contemporary **sociolinguistic microcosm**, where digital interaction shapes and is shaped by broader socio-cultural structures.

Table 1. Types of Language Variation in the Mobile Legends Community

Type of Variation	Examples	Sociolinguistic Function	Context of Use
Technical Jargon	*DPS, jungle, turtle, Lord, NF (No Flicker), NU (No Ulti)*	Enables quick and efficient in-game communication; shared lexicon reinforces group expertise.	Used during team strategy coordination and gameplay.
Community Slang	*Ngefeed, bar-bar, GG, Star of The show, epic comeback, Maniac, Savage*	Builds in-group identity and strengthens peer relationships.	Informal interactions among players, especially youth.
Register Shifting	Formal: "Focus on Farming, don't initiate unnecessary war" Informal: "Bro, that tank's so trash lol."	Reflects awareness of social norms and adaptability across interactional contexts.	Varies between play with close friends vs. anonymous teammates.
Code-Switching	"Gue tadi kena *gank*, terus dia malah farming." "Mon poteh terus, kalah tak abâ."	Indicates multilingual competence and identity expression; allows for nuanced emotional and tactical expression.	Common in multilingual players; context-dependent and identity-driven.
Regional Dialect (Madurese)	"Hyper norok War, Jhe' Ngebuff mloloh." (Hyper join War, don't keep Bufffing.) "MM tadek damageh." (MM no Damage.)	Maintains ethnolinguistic identity and strengthens local solidarity within a national or global game community.	Used among Madurese players or in regional groups.

Direct Quotes from Participants:

P1 (Male, 24): "When I'm pushing rank, the language immediately changes. Sometimes I speak Madurese to be more expressive, like 'Ngebuff teros, jhe' norok war!'"

P6 (Male, 22): "Usually when playing with close friends/Squad, the language

becomes very relaxed. But when playing randomly, it's more polite, more strategic."
P9 (Male, 20): "Saying 'GG' or 'noob' is like it's automatic, like a password if we're in the same circle."

2. How Mobile legend influences language variation among teenagers?

The game Mobile Legends has a significant influence on the language variation patterns of teenagers. The use of technical terms and typical expressions in the game slowly become part of everyday conversation, even outside the context of playing. This indicates the process of internalizing the game language into the linguistic identity of the players. In other words, Mobile Legends has formed a linguistic subculture of its own that has its own norms and rules of communication.

Teenagers who actively play tend to adopt terms such as "ulti ready," "lag," "solo kill," or "feed" in social interactions at school or in the neighborhood. This language becomes a group marker, where only fellow players understand the meaning and context of the term. This process is in line with Labov's theory of sociolect and variationist sociolinguistics, where language becomes a reflection of social membership and group dynamics.

Mobile Legends influences teenage language through:

Lexical Adoption: Game-specific terms like "ulti ready," "lag," and "solo kill" are regularly used in school and community settings, reflecting the internalization of in-game lexicon.

Sociolect Creation: Game language becomes a subcultural code among peers. Those unfamiliar with the terms may struggle to integrate socially.

Emotional Framing: Emotional highs and lows during matches influence language choices. Terms like "Goblog" or even stronger language are often uttered in frustration.

Code-Mixing Stimulation: The prevalence of English terms encourages casual code-mixing, which was frequently observed:

P5 (Male, 22): "Tadi kalah karena dia afk, gue bilang aja langsung 'so useless lah,' padahal biasanya gue ngomong Indo."

In addition, previous studies have shown that most teenagers who play Mobile Legends more often use rude or impolite language, especially when experiencing defeat or frustration in the game. The emotional conditions formed by the competitive atmosphere in the game also have an impact on teenagers' language choices. This shows that digital forms of interaction can weaken formal communication norms and strengthen aggressive and impulsive communication styles.

In addition, the dominant use of English in the game interface and terminology encourages teenagers to engage more frequently in **code-mixing**. This phenomenon presents an opportunity for the enhancement of multilingual

competence indirectly, yet it also poses challenges to the preservation of formal language and standard grammatical structures within educational settings.

The influence of gaming on language variation reflects a shift in social communication norms, where the boundaries between formal and informal language are increasingly blurred. Teenagers tend to prefer forms of communication that reflect their **digital identities**, rather than adhering to conventional social norms.

3. How Language Variation Influences Social Interactions of Teenagers

Language variation that emerges as a result of active involvement in the Mobile Legends game has a major impact on the social interaction patterns of teenagers. Game language becomes an important tool in forming social cohesion and group solidarity. In many cases, the use of certain jargon and slang becomes a kind of "social password" that strengthens intimacy among members of the playgroup. This is in line with the view that language is not only a means of communication, but also a means of negotiating identity and social acceptance.

On the other hand, this language variation also has the potential to create linguistic exclusivity and segregation. Those who do not understand game terms or are not involved in the ML community often feel alienated in certain social environments. This phenomenon shows that language can be a barrier to social interaction if not managed inclusively.

In addition, the use of harsh or offensive language that is carried over from the game to real interactions affects the quality of adolescent interpersonal relationships. Words such as "stupid," or other curses are often used as a form of expression of frustration or jokes, but in the wrong context, can trigger conflict or reduce empathy between individuals.

Interestingly, the use of language variations from the game also creates a social hierarchy in the playgroup. Players who are fluent in jargon, have good communication skills, and are able to coordinate game strategies are often considered leaders in the group. This shows that linguistic competence in the digital community also determines the social position of teenagers in their social networks.

Finally, this phenomenon reflects that the digital world, especially games like Mobile Legends, has become a new space for the formation of social identity, communication norms, and linguistic roles of teenagers. In this context, language plays a role not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument for forming social relations, group status, and the dynamics of today's adolescent culture.

Language use in Mobile Legends creates social structures:
➢ In-Group Bonding: Shared slang and jargon serve as social markers of inclusion.
➢ Exclusivity: Non-players or casual users often feel excluded from conversations heavily embedded with ML terms.

P4 (Male, 18): "Kalo ada temen gak main ML, kadang dia bengong aja dengerin kita ngobrol."

➢ Conflict Risk: Harsh language often leaks into real-world interaction, affecting empathy and group harmony.

P11 (Male, 19): "Sering banget debat gara-gara bilang 'noob' ke temen sendiri, padahal maksudnya bercanda."

➢ Social Hierarchy: Linguistic fluency (jargon use, clarity, bilingualism) influences in-game leadership roles.

P12 (Male, 23): "Yang bisa atur strategi dan jelas ngomong, biasanya jadi shot-caller, yang lain nurut."

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the intricate relationship between online gaming—specifically within the Mobile Legends community—and the evolving linguistic behaviors of Indonesian teenagers. The emergence of distinct language variations, including technical jargon, community-specific slang, register shifts, and code-switching, reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics influenced by digital interaction.

The prevalent use of code-switching among Mobile Legends players, particularly between Indonesian, English, and regional languages like Madurese, highlights the community's multilingual proficiency. This linguistic flexibility aligns with findings from (Trisdasari et al, 2023) who observed similar patterns of code-switching and code-mixing in Mobile Legends dialogues, driven by factors such as speaker intent, audience, and conversational context. Such practices not only facilitate effective communication but also serve as markers of group identity and solidarity.

The integration of gaming terminology into everyday language among teenagers indicates a shift in linguistic norms and social interactions. Terms like "ulti ready," "lag," or "feed" transcend the gaming context, becoming part of the vernacular in educational and social settings. This phenomenon mirrors the observations of (Alnadi, 2024), who noted that code-switching in gaming communities often reflects a negotiation of local and global identities. However, the adoption of such language also raises concerns about the potential erosion of formal language structures and the blurring of boundaries between informal and formal communication.

Language variation within the Mobile Legends community also influences social dynamics among teenagers. Proficiency in gaming jargon and effective communication skills can elevate a player's status within the group, establishing informal hierarchies based on linguistic competence. Conversely, those unfamiliar

with the gaming lexicon may experience social exclusion, highlighting the role of language as both a unifying and divisive force. This dynamic is consistent with the findings of (AlAfnan, 2025)who explored how language use in online gaming can reinforce power structures and social stratification.

Theoretically, these findings extend the theory of language variation (Labov) and online community identity, and add the virtual dimension as a new domain in sociolinguistics. Practically, teachers and policymakers need to accommodate this digital language reality in language education, for example through the development of a digital literacy curriculum based on the context of adolescents.

This study has limitations in terms of regional coverage and representation of regional languages. In addition, ethical and privacy constraints are challenges when accessing authentic data. In the future, comparative studies between games or between countries and longitudinal research on the long-term impact of game language on formal literacy are highly recommended.

These findings are also cross-culturally relevant, reflecting the process of glocalization of global adolescent digital language. Linguistic skills in games strengthen digital literacy that includes the ability to understand social context and multimodality. Therefore, educational policies must integrate digital language awareness and support pedagogical approaches that are adaptive to the development of digital-era communication.

Conclusion

The linguistic variations emerging from the Mobile Legends community reflect a broader and increasingly influential impact of digital media on the language behavior of teenagers. As one of the most popular mobile games among youth in Indonesia and globally, Mobile Legends has created a digital communicative space that is rich in sociolinguistic practices, ranging from technical jargon and slang to code-switching and register shifting. These language practices are not only tools for efficient in-game coordination but also act as mechanisms for identity formation, social negotiation, and the reinforcement of group membership.

The research demonstrates that language within the Mobile Legends ecosystem functions as more than a utilitarian means of communication—it becomes a medium for constructing social roles, expressing emotions, building solidarity, and signaling expertise or status. The widespread use of English, alongside local languages such as Bahasa Indonesia and Madurese, illustrates the multilingual reality of Indonesian youth and showcases how linguistic repertoire is constantly shaped by global digital culture.

Moreover, the adoption of gaming language into everyday conversation, particularly among teenagers, highlights the process of language internalization where digital jargon becomes part of the speaker's daily sociolinguistic identity. While this promotes creativity, adaptability, and the strengthening of digital cultural literacy, it also presents challenges to the maintenance of formal language norms, especially in educational and institutional settings. Teenagers' preference

for informal, expressive, and identity-driven language use often blurs the boundaries between conventional and contemporary modes of communication.

In light of these findings, it becomes evident that educators, linguists, and policymakers must pay closer attention to how digital environments are reshaping language practices among the younger generation. The Mobile Legends phenomenon offers a compelling case study for understanding the evolving dynamics of language use in the digital era. It calls for the development of pedagogical strategies that are inclusive of digital linguistic practices while still preserving the integrity of formal and standard language education.

Ultimately, the intersection of gaming, language, and youth culture underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of linguistic change. Mobile Legends is not merely a source of entertainment but a living sociolinguistic laboratory where new norms, expressions, and identities are constantly being created and negotiated. As such, it serves as a powerful reflection of how language adapts to, and is shaped by the digital age.

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