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DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SLANG EXPRESSIONS IN TIKTOK AUTOMATIC SUBTITLES (ENGLISH–INDONESIAN)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines English slang expressions and their Indonesian automatic subtitles on TikTok from a discourse analysis perspective. It aims to identify slang types, explore their communicative functions, and analyze their contributions to meaning construction and social interaction. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected from selected TikTok videos containing English slang and their Indonesian automatic subtitles. The analysis draws on discourse analysis and sociolinguistic theories of language use, identity, and informal communication. The findings indicate that colloquial slang is the most dominant category, followed by social/identity, regional, and conversational slang. These expressions serve various functions, including expressing identity, solidarity, humor, intimacy, and group membership. They also contribute to digital discourse by creating informal and interactive communication that reflects contemporary online culture. However, automatic subtitles do not always accurately convey the contextual and social meanings of slang, potentially reducing their communicative functions and cultural nuances. This study highlights the significance of slang in reflecting social relationships, cultural values, and identity construction in digital communication. It contributes to discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and digital communication studies.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, slang expressions, TikTok, automatic subtitles, digital communication, sociolinguistics, social media discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for conveying information but also a means of constructing meaning, expressing identity, and establishing social relationships. In discourse analysis, language is viewed as a social practice that reflects cultural values, social norms, and communicative purposes (Fairclough, 1995). The way people use language in different contexts can reveal how individuals interact, negotiate meaning, and position themselves within society.

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed communication practices worldwide. Social media platforms have become important spaces where people create, share, and interpret messages. Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential digital communication environments, particularly among young people. Through short-form videos, users engage in various forms of interaction that often involve informal language, humor, creativity, and self-expression.

One prominent linguistic feature frequently found in TikTok content is slang. Slang is a form of informal language that develops within specific social groups and communities. It is often used to express solidarity, identity, intimacy, and membership within a particular social network. Unlike standard language, slang is highly dynamic and constantly evolves according to social and cultural trends (Eble, 1996). Therefore, the study of slang provides valuable insights into how language functions within contemporary digital discourse.

From a discourse analysis perspective, slang expressions are not simply lexical items but meaningful social practices that contribute to communication. The use of slang may indicate relationships between speakers and audiences, construct identities, express emotions, and create particular social meanings. In digital environments such as

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TikTok, slang has become an essential component of communication, helping users build engagement and connect with broader online communities.

TikTok's automatic subtitle feature further adds an interesting dimension to discourse. While automatic subtitles are intended to improve accessibility and comprehension, they may not always capture the contextual, social, and cultural meanings embedded in slang expressions (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). As a result, the original discourse functions of slang may be altered, simplified, or lost when represented through automated systems.

Despite the growing popularity of TikTok and the widespread use of slang in digital communication, there is still limited research examining slang expressions from a discourse analysis perspective, particularly in relation to TikTok automatic subtitles in the English–Indonesian context. Most previous studies have focused on translation accuracy or linguistic forms rather than the broader discourse functions and social meanings of slang.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze slang expressions in TikTok automatic subtitles using a discourse analysis approach. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the types of slang expressions used, examine their discourse functions, and explore how these expressions contribute to meaning-making, identity construction, and social interaction in digital communication. Through this analysis, the study is expected to contribute to the fields of discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and digital media studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Discourse analysis is the study of language in use and how language functions within social contexts. Unlike traditional linguistic approaches that focus on words and sentences in isolation, discourse analysis examines how meaning is constructed through interaction between speakers, listeners, texts, and social environments. According to Schiffrin (1994), discourse analysis investigates language beyond the sentence level and explores how communication is shaped by context, participants, and social practices. Similarly, Van Dijk (1997) argues that discourse is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a social phenomenon that reflects ideology, power relations, and cultural values. Through discourse, individuals construct meanings, negotiate identities, and maintain social relationships. Therefore, discourse analysis provides a useful framework for examining language use in digital communication environments such as social media platforms. In the context of social media, discourse analysis helps researchers understand how users communicate, express opinions, and create identities through language. Since TikTok encourages spontaneous and informal communication, discourse analysis is particularly relevant for examining how slang expressions contribute to meaning-making and interaction among users.

One important linguistic feature frequently found in digital communication is slang. Slang is a variety of informal language commonly used by specific social groups. According to Partridge (2006), slang consists of non-standard vocabulary that develops within communities and is often associated with youth culture, social identity, and group membership. Because slang evolves rapidly in response to cultural and technological changes, it serves as an important indicator of contemporary language practices. Allan and Burridge (2006) explain that slang performs several social functions, including expressing solidarity, creating intimacy, differentiating social groups, and signaling membership within particular communities. In digital environments, slang has become increasingly popular because it allows users to communicate efficiently while simultaneously expressing creativity and individuality. Social media platforms have accelerated the spread and development of slang, enabling new expressions to emerge and gain popularity through online interaction. Consequently, slang has become a significant element of digital discourse, particularly on platforms such as TikTok,

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where language often reflects current trends, cultural influences, and online identities.

The growth of digital communication has transformed the way people interact and exchange information. According to Tagg (2015), digital communication refers to communication that occurs through technological platforms such as social media, messaging applications, and online communities. These platforms allow users to communicate instantly across geographical and cultural boundaries. Social media discourse is characterized by informality, interactivity, creativity, and multimodality, as users combine text, images, videos, sounds, and symbols to create meaning. TikTok represents one of the most dynamic examples of digital discourse because communication occurs through a combination of spoken language, visual elements, music, and subtitles. Within this environment, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for identity construction and audience engagement. Content creators frequently use slang expressions to appear relatable, authentic, and connected to current social trends. As a result, slang becomes an important discourse feature that shapes communication practices on the platform.

The relationship between language and identity is another central concern in discourse analysis. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity is not a fixed characteristic but is continuously produced and negotiated through language use and social interaction. In online environments, individuals often use language strategically to present themselves in particular ways. Slang expressions can function as markers of age, social background, cultural affiliation, and group membership. The use of popular internet slang, for example, may indicate familiarity with online culture and contemporary digital trends. On TikTok, content creators frequently employ slang to establish connections with viewers and create a sense of shared identity. Through repeated use of specific expressions, users position themselves as members of particular communities or social groups. Therefore, the analysis of slang expressions can provide valuable insights into how identities are constructed and represented within digital discourse.

Another important aspect of TikTok communication is the use of automatic subtitles. Automatic subtitles are generated through speech recognition and artificial intelligence technologies and are designed to improve accessibility and facilitate communication. TikTok's automatic subtitle feature converts spoken content into written text, enabling audiences to follow video content more easily. However, automatic subtitle systems often encounter difficulties when processing informal language, especially slang. Koehn (2020) notes that machine-based language processing systems generally perform well with standard language but often struggle with context-dependent expressions, cultural references, and rapidly evolving vocabulary. From a discourse analysis perspective, subtitles are not merely written representations of speech; they also participate in meaning construction. When slang expressions are converted into subtitles, certain social, emotional, and cultural meanings may be altered, simplified, or lost. Consequently, automatic subtitles may not fully represent the discourse functions originally intended by speakers. This issue is particularly significant in TikTok content, where communication relies heavily on informal language and cultural references. Examining how slang expressions appear in automatic subtitles can therefore provide insights into the relationship between language, technology, and meaning-making in digital communication.

Previous studies have explored language use and discourse in digital media, highlighting the role of informal language, identity construction, and community building in online communication. Research on social media discourse has shown that

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digital platforms encourage creative language practices and facilitate the rapid spread of linguistic innovations. Studies focusing on TikTok have identified slang as an important marker of digital culture and online identity. However, much of the existing research has concentrated on linguistic features, translation issues, or audience engagement rather than on the discourse functions of slang. Similarly, studies examining automatic subtitles have primarily focused on translation accuracy and machine translation performance. Limited attention has been given to how slang contributes to discourse and how its meanings are represented through automated subtitle systems. Therefore, this study addresses an existing gap by examining slang expressions in TikTok automatic subtitles from a discourse analysis perspective. Rather than focusing solely on translation, the research explores how slang contributes to meaning construction, identity representation, and social interaction within digital communication environments.

This study is based on the assumption that slang expressions function as discourse elements that contribute to communication, identity construction, and social interaction within TikTok videos. Through a discourse analysis approach, the study investigates the types of slang expressions used in TikTok content, the functions they perform within digital discourse, the identities and social meanings they represent, and the ways in which they are reflected in TikTok's automatic subtitles. Furthermore, the study examines the role of automatic subtitles in shaping meaning within digital communication. By integrating perspectives from discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, digital communication studies, and social media discourse, this framework provides a comprehensive understanding of slang usage and its significance in TikTok automatic subtitles.

3. METHODOLOGY

Discourse analysis is the study of language in use and how language functions within social contexts. Unlike traditional linguistic approaches that focus on words and sentences in isolation, discourse analysis examines how meaning is constructed through interaction between speakers, listeners, texts, and social environments. According to Schiffrin (1994), discourse analysis investigates language beyond the sentence level and explores how communication is shaped by context, participants, and social practices. Similarly, Van Dijk (1997) argues that discourse is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a social phenomenon that reflects ideology, power relations, and cultural values. Through discourse, individuals construct meanings, negotiate identities, and maintain social relationships. Therefore, discourse analysis provides a useful framework for examining language use in digital communication environments such as social media platforms. In the context of social media, discourse analysis helps researchers understand how users communicate, express opinions, and create identities through language. Since TikTok encourages spontaneous and informal communication, discourse analysis is particularly relevant for examining how slang expressions contribute to meaning-making and interaction among users.

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Previous studies have explored language use and discourse in digital media, highlighting the role of informal language, identity construction, and community building in online communication. Research on social media discourse has shown that digital platforms encourage creative language practices and facilitate the rapid spread of linguistic innovations. Studies focusing on TikTok have identified slang as an important marker of digital culture and online identity. However, much of the existing research has concentrated on linguistic features, translation issues, or audience engagement rather than on the discourse functions of slang. Similarly, studies examining automatic subtitles have primarily focused on translation accuracy and machine translation performance. Limited attention has been given to how slang contributes to discourse and how its meanings are represented through automated subtitle systems. Therefore, this study addresses an existing gap by examining slang expressions in TikTok automatic subtitles from a discourse analysis perspective. Rather than focusing solely on translation, the research explores how slang contributes to meaning construction, identity representation, and social interaction within digital communication environments.

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This chapter presents the findings of the study regarding the use of slang expressions in TikTok automatic subtitles (English–Indonesian). The analysis focuses on the types of slang expressions identified in selected TikTok videos, their discourse functions, their role in identity construction and social interaction, and their representation in automatic subtitles. The findings are interpreted through discourse analysis and sociolinguistic perspectives discussed in the previous chapter.

The analysis of the collected data reveals that slang expressions found in TikTok videos can be categorized into several types based on the classifications proposed by Partridge (2006) and Allan and Burridge (2006). The most dominant category identified in the data is colloquial slang. Expressions such as "my bad", "awesome", "yup", and "I get it" frequently appear in casual interactions and contribute to the informal nature of TikTok discourse. These expressions are commonly used in everyday communication and reflect the spontaneous communication style encouraged by the platform. In addition to colloquial slang, the data also contain social or identity slang, including expressions such as "mate" and "skint". These expressions function as markers of group identity and solidarity among speakers. The findings further reveal the presence of regional slang, such as "loo", "cuppa", and "dodgy", which originate from specific geographical and

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cultural communities. These expressions demonstrate how local cultural influences are reflected in language use within digital communication. Conversational slang is also found in the data, represented by expressions such as “howdy”, which are commonly used to initiate interaction and create a friendly atmosphere. Overall, the findings indicate that colloquial slang appears most frequently because TikTok encourages informal and spontaneous communication among users.

The findings also show that slang expressions perform several important discourse functions within TikTok communication. One of the primary functions is expressing identity. Many content creators use slang to present themselves as modern, relatable, and connected to contemporary online culture. For example, the expression “awesome” helps speakers project a youthful and enthusiastic identity. Another important function is creating solidarity between speakers and audiences. Expressions such as “mate” signal friendship and social closeness, allowing content creators to establish a more personal connection with viewers. Slang is also used to build intimacy in communication. The expression “my bad”, for instance, functions as a casual apology that reduces social distance and creates a more relaxed interaction. Furthermore, slang contributes to humor and informality within TikTok discourse. The use of expressions such as “skint” instead of more formal alternatives creates a lighter and more entertaining tone. In addition, slang serves as a strategy for attracting audience engagement because trendy and informal language resonates strongly with younger audiences and enhances relatability.

Another significant finding concerns the role of slang in identity construction. The analysis demonstrates that slang functions as an important marker of identity within TikTok discourse. Through the use of slang expressions, users demonstrate their membership in online communities, show familiarity with internet culture, and present themselves as socially connected individuals. Expressions such as “mate”, “awesome”, and “my bad” reflect a casual communication style commonly associated with younger generations and digital communities. By repeatedly using these expressions, content creators construct identities that align with contemporary online culture and strengthen their personal brands within the platform. This finding highlights the importance of language choices in shaping how individuals are perceived in digital environments.

The study also examines how slang expressions are represented in TikTok automatic subtitles. The findings reveal that the subtitle system generally succeeds in conveying the basic semantic meaning of slang expressions. However, the subtitles often fail to preserve the broader discourse functions and social meanings embedded in the original expressions. For example, the expression “my bad” is translated as ”tu salahku”, which successfully communicates the basic meaning but reduces the casual and interpersonal tone of the original expression. Similarly, “mate” is translated as “kawan”, preserving the general meaning while weakening the sense of social intimacy conveyed by the English slang term. In some cases, such as “awesome”, the translation “keren banget” successfully maintains both the meaning and the enthusiastic tone. However, expressions such as “howdy” experience a partial shift in communicative function when translated into Indonesian. These findings suggest that TikTok’s automatic subtitle system primarily focuses on semantic equivalence rather than contextual, social, and pragmatic meanings. Consequently, discourse functions related to humor, intimacy, solidarity, and identity representation may become less visible in the subtitle output.

The findings demonstrate that slang expressions play a significant role in TikTok discourse and function as more than simple informal vocabulary. The dominance of colloquial slang supports the view that TikTok is characterized by casual and spontaneous communication. Users prefer informal language because it creates a conversational atmosphere and encourages audience engagement. This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the

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informal nature of social media discourse and the importance of linguistic creativity in online interaction.

The study also supports Allan and Burridge's argument that slang functions as a marker of social identity and group membership. Expressions such as "mate" and "skint" are not merely linguistic choices but also social signals that communicate relationships between speakers and audiences. Their use helps establish a sense of belonging and solidarity among members of digital communities. Furthermore, the findings reinforce discourse analysis perspectives that view language as a social practice. Through slang, TikTok users construct identities, negotiate relationships, and create meanings within digital environments. These findings suggest that language use on social media is closely connected to broader social and cultural processes.

Another important implication of the findings concerns the nature of meaning in discourse. The analysis reveals that the meanings of slang expressions extend beyond dictionary definitions and often include emotional, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions that depend heavily on context. This observation supports Schiffrin's view that discourse meaning emerges through interaction rather than isolated linguistic units. The findings therefore highlight the importance of considering contextual and social factors when analyzing language use in digital communication.

The study further reveals the limitations of automatic subtitle technology in representing discourse meaning. Although the subtitles generally communicate the denotative meanings of slang expressions, they often fail to capture pragmatic meanings and discourse functions. As a result, important aspects of communication such as humor, solidarity, intimacy, and identity may be weakened or lost in the subtitle output. This finding demonstrates the challenges faced by automated language-processing systems when dealing with informal, context-dependent, and culturally embedded language forms.

Overall, the findings indicate that slang expressions function as important discourse resources within TikTok communication. They facilitate interaction, strengthen social relationships, construct identities, and contribute to meaning-making processes in digital environments. At the same time, the study demonstrates that automatic subtitle systems still face significant challenges in preserving the full discourse meanings of slang expressions within multilingual social media contexts. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, identity, technology, and communication in contemporary digital discourse.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that slang expressions play a significant role in TikTok discourse. Rather than functioning merely as informal vocabulary, slang serves important communicative, interpersonal, and social purposes. This finding is consistent with Jose et al. (2025), who identified slang as an important linguistic resource for expressing impressions, establishing intimacy, and creating a relaxed communication atmosphere on TikTok. Similarly, Manihuruk et al. (2025) demonstrated that slang reflects linguistic creativity and adaptability among Indonesian social media users.

First, the dominance of colloquial slang supports the view that TikTok is characterized by casual, spontaneous, and interactive communication. Users tend to employ informal expressions because they create a conversational atmosphere and encourage audience engagement. This finding is consistent with Jose et al. (2025), who highlighted the role of slang in establishing familiarity and strengthening social relationships among TikTok users. The frequent use of informal expressions also reflects the dynamic nature of digital communication, in which language adapts to the interactional expectations of online communities.

Second, the findings support Allan and Burridge's (2006) perspective that slang represents an important aspect of informal

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language use and social relationships. Expressions such as mate and skint are not simply linguistic choices but may also function as social signals that communicate familiarity, interpersonal relationships, and particular cultural associations. This interpretation is reinforced by Darvin (2022), who demonstrated how TikTok users employ digital communication practices to perform identities and establish a sense of community. Furthermore, Weninger and Lim (2025) found that linguistic features in TikTok videos function as resources for expressing social identities, stances, and relationships.

Third, the study supports the perspective that discourse is a form of social practice through which individuals construct identities, negotiate relationships, and produce contextual meanings. Slang enables TikTok users to position themselves as members of particular online communities and cultural groups. Similar patterns were identified by Muhsyanur et al. (2025), who examined how Indonesian TikTok creators negotiated linguistic identities through the interaction of global and local language practices. Shofiyah et al. (2026) also highlighted the relationship between slang, linguistic creativity, identity, and social interaction among Generation Z TikTok users. These findings suggest that slang contributes to the construction of digital identities and the development of shared cultural expressions.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that discourse meaning extends beyond dictionary definitions. Slang expressions frequently contain emotional, cultural, and interpersonal meanings that depend on the context in which they are used. This observation supports Schiffrin's (1994) perspective that discourse should be understood through language in interaction rather than through isolated linguistic units. In digital communication, the interpretation of slang may depend on the relationship between speakers, the communicative situation, and the cultural knowledge shared by participants. Weninger and Lim (2025) similarly demonstrated that linguistic features in TikTok content acquire social meanings through their contextual use and their association with particular identities and communicative stances.

The findings also highlight the limitations of automatic subtitle systems in representing slang expressions accurately. Although Indonesian automatic subtitles may communicate the general or denotative meanings of English slang, they do not always preserve the pragmatic meanings and discourse functions embedded in the original expressions. This issue is consistent with Alshaye (2025), who identified semantic challenges in TikTok's automatic translation of colloquial expressions, particularly concerning contextual and referential meanings. Similarly, Rahmi (2025) emphasized that translating slang requires attention to cultural references, humor, emotional nuances, and pragmatic functions rather than relying solely on literal equivalence. Consequently, meanings associated with humor, solidarity, intimacy, and identity may be reduced or lost during automatic subtitle generation.

Additionally, the findings reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of digital communication. TikTok provides opportunities for users to create, modify, and circulate slang expressions that reflect contemporary cultural practices and social identities. Manihuruk et al. (2025) identified various forms of slang on TikTok, demonstrating how users develop creative linguistic expressions in online interactions. Furthermore, Muhsyanur et al. (2025) explained how Indonesian content creators combine global and local linguistic resources to negotiate their identities in digital environments. These findings indicate that slang is not a static linguistic phenomenon but an evolving resource shaped by technological developments, cultural influences, and social interaction.

Overall, the findings indicate that slang expressions in TikTok function as important discourse resources that facilitate communication, construct identities, and strengthen social relationships. The study extends previous research on digital slang by examining not only the types and communicative functions of English slang

but also how their meanings are represented in Indonesian automatic subtitles. It highlights the importance of considering contextual, pragmatic, and sociocultural dimensions when evaluating automatic subtitle translation. Therefore, understanding slang in multilingual digital environments requires attention to both linguistic meaning and the social functions embedded in online communication.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of slang expressions in TikTok automatic subtitles (English–Indonesian) through a discourse analysis perspective. The analysis focused on identifying the types of slang expressions used in TikTok videos, examining their discourse functions, exploring their role in identity construction and social interaction, and analyzing their representation in automatic subtitles.

The findings reveal that colloquial slang is the most frequently used type of slang in TikTok discourse, followed by social/identity slang, regional slang, and conversational slang. This finding reflects the nature of TikTok as a digital platform characterized by informal, spontaneous, and interactive communication. The prevalence of slang demonstrates how users adapt language to create engaging and relatable content for online audiences.

The study also found that slang expressions perform various discourse functions. They are used to express identity, create solidarity, build intimacy, convey humor, and attract audience engagement. Rather than serving merely as informal vocabulary, slang functions as a communicative resource that helps users establish social relationships and participate in digital communities. Through the use of slang, content creators construct particular identities and position themselves within contemporary online culture.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that language plays a significant role in identity construction within TikTok discourse. Slang expressions enable users to present themselves as modern, approachable, and connected to current social trends. The use of slang also reflects group membership and shared cultural knowledge among members of online communities.

Regarding automatic subtitles, the study found that TikTok's subtitle system generally succeeds in conveying the basic meanings of slang expressions. However, the system often struggles to preserve the broader discourse functions, social meanings, and cultural nuances embedded in the original expressions. As a result, certain aspects of identity, humor, solidarity, and interpersonal relationships may become less visible in the subtitle output.

Overall, this study demonstrates that slang expressions are important discourse elements within TikTok communication. They contribute to meaning construction, identity representation, and social interaction in digital environments. The findings also highlight the challenges faced by automated language technologies in representing context-dependent and culturally embedded forms of language.

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