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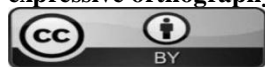
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PHONOLGICAL SHIFTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ON LANGUAGE

A B S T R A C T

The rise of social media has transformed linguistic practices, shaping phonological patterns in both written and spoken communication. This study examines how platforms—particularly Facebook and TikTok—drive phonetic innovations such as nonstandard spellings (yasss, gonna), regional accent transcription, and stylized prosody through capitalization, punctuation, and repetition. It also explores the role of emojis and symbols in phonological representation. Analyzing approximately 50 samples, the study identifies key phonological patterns contributing to informal language normalization, linguistic hybridization, and global communication. Using phonetic transcription, it documents how phonological shifts manifest in digital writing and compares spoken and written forms to assess phoneme substitution, assimilation, and elision. Unlike prior research that conflates phonological and orthographic shifts, this study distinguishes between them, offering a focused analysis of phonetic processes in social media discourse. Additionally, it situates these shifts within a broader discourse framework, examining how users strategically employ phonetic modifications to shape meaning, express identity, and engage in digital interactions. The findings underscore how social media fosters linguistic creativity, challenges phonological norms, and reflects broader sociocultural and identity dynamics.

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التحولات الصوتية في الخطاب على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي: تأثير الاتصالات الرقمية على اللغة

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المستخلص

لقد أحدث صعود وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تحولاً في الممارسات اللغوية، وشكل الأنماط الصوتية في كل من التواصل المكتوب والمنطوق. تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية قيادة المنصات - وخاصة فيسبوك وتيك توك - للابتكارات الصوتية مثل التهجئات غير القياسية (gonna, yasss)، ونسخ اللهجات الإقليمية، والعروض المنمقة من خلال استخدام الأحرف الكبيرة وعلامات الترقيم والتكرار. كما تستكشف دور الرموز التعبيرية والرموز في التمثيل الصوتي. من خلال تحليل ما يقرب من ٥٠ عينة، تحدد الدراسة الأنماط الصوتية الرئيسية التي تساهم في تطبيع اللغة غير الرسمية، والتهجين اللغوي، والتواصل العالمي. باستخدام النسخ الصوتي، توثق الدراسة كيف تتجلى التحولات الصوتية في الكتابة الرقمية وتُقدّم بين الأشكال المنطوقة والمكتوبة لتقييم استبدال الصوتيات، والاستيعاب، والحذف. بخلاف الأبحاث السابقة التي تدمج التحولات الصوتية والإملائية، تميز هذه الدراسة بينهما، وتقدم تحليلاً مركزاً للعمليات الصوتية في خطاب وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يضع البحث هذه التحولات ضمن إطار خطابي أوسع، ويدرس كيفية توظيف المستخدمين للتعديلات الصوتية استراتيجياً لصياغة المعنى، والتعبير عن الهوية، والانخراط في التفاعلات الرقمية. وتؤكد النتائج كيف تُعزز وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي الإبداع اللغوي، وتتحدى المعايير الصوتية، وتعكس ديناميكيات اجتماعية وثقافية وهوية أوسع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحولات الصوتية، التواصل الرقمي، التهجئات الصوتية، الإملاء التعبيري.

1. Introduction

Language development has always been influenced by communication mediums. In the digital age, social media platforms provide a unique space where phonological change is observable. Unlike conventional writing, digital communication fosters innovative expressions, such as phonetic spelling, abbreviation, and expressive orthography, which reflect spoken language patterns.

Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter serve as linguistic laboratories, offering real-time data on the transformation of written communication due to social and technological changes. This study focus on phonological shifts by addressing key methodological concerns and ensuring clear definitions of phonetic and orthographic changes.

Research Questions:

1. How do phonetic spellings on social media reflect spoken language patterns?
2. What role does expressive orthography play in replicating oral communication?
3. How do generational and cultural differences shape phonological trends in social media discourse?
4. How might emerging technologies and future trends influence these shifts?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Phonology and Digital Communication

Academic research has consistently examined how phonological structures transform within digital communication. Studies highlight that social media blurs the distinction between spoken and written language, fostering linguistic innovations such as phonetic abbreviations and expressive orthography. However, this study aims to address gaps in the literature by specifying how phonological shifts occur beyond mere spelling conventions.

Current studies demonstrate the Internet's contribution to the creation of a continuum between oral and written modes. Crystal (2006) highlights the rise of hybrid communicative forms in which, digital communication combines speech and writing conventions. (Tagliamonte and Denis, 2008) as they analyzed instant messaging, respectively describe phonetic equivalents and slang as characteristics of youth linguistic behaviors, behaviors paralleled in applications such as Facebook or Twitter.

Androutsopoulos (2015) compares multilingual realizations in social media, illustrating how linguistic loans and adaptations play a role in phonological change through the normalization of hybrid expressions. Baron (2008) discusses how online and mobile communication balance efficiency with expressiveness, shaping new language norms. Moreover, Sundqvist Sylvén (2016) investigate the contribution of digital environments to language learning by focusing on its impact on natural language learning and linguistic creativity.

Jones and Schieffelin (2009) discuss the effect of text messaging on language conventions, but also find similarities between types of writing produced on the Internet and naturalized oral rhythmic language produced in everyday conversation. Also, Lam (2004) studies youth multilingual activities in the online world and shows how linguistic and cultural components are mixed. O’Keeffe et al. (2011) highlight the process in which media drives the development of informal language, and thus, their forceful contribution to the speed of linguistic change through social media. Together, these research efforts offer a starting point for developing a theory about the relationship between phonological shifts and digital messaging.

2.2 Phonology and Language Evolution

Phonological developments are a key component of language evolution (Labov, 2001). Social media accelerates these changes, allowing phonetic spellings and expressive orthography to become normalized. However, existing studies have often conflated phonological shifts with orthographic trends, an issue this research seeks to clarify. (Crystal, 2006).

2.3 Digital Communication and Phonetic Representations

Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook exhibit unique phonetic spellings and prosodic features that mimic spoken interactions. For example, words like “yasss” and “gonna” reflect

users' attempts to bridge the gap between speech and text. In addition to the use of abbreviations such as "gr8" for "great" and "b4" for "before" (Baron, 2008), these linguistic characteristics, not only conforming to digital communication constraints, but also have the characteristic of mimicking the rhythm and intonations of speech. Bridging between written and spoken communication, these phonetic representations illustrate the changing status of digital platforms as creative force and evolving dynamo of phonetics. However, further research is needed to distinguish between true phonological shifts and stylistic choices in written language.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Data Collection

A dataset of 50 samples from Facebook and Twitter was analyzed, focusing on phonological modifications. The study improves transparency by specifying how samples were selected and categorized. Samples were selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure relevance to phonological shifts. The selection criteria focused on posts and comments that exhibited phonetic spellings, expressive orthography, and phonological modifications. This approach allowed for a targeted analysis of linguistic trends in social media discourse.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to investigate phonological shifts in social media discourse. The framework is based on sociophonetics, which integrates phonetic analysis with sociolinguistic factors to examine language use in digital contexts. The study also employs discourse analysis to assess how phonetic modifications contribute to meaning-making in online interactions.

3.2 Linguistic Demographics of Users

The study considered linguistic demographics, including:

- **Age Groups:** Younger users (below 30) and older users (above 30) to identify generational differences in phonological adaptation.
- **Regional Variation:** Users from different regions to examine how dialectal differences influence phonological shifts.
- **Dialectal Influence:** The study accounted for variations in standard and non-standard dialects, particularly differences in regional pronunciation and informal speech patterns reflected in social media writing.

3.3 Analytical Model

This study employs **sociophonetic analysis** to examine phonological shifts in digital discourse. The analytical model consists of:

- **Phonetic Transcription:** Using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to document phonetic spellings and pronunciation shifts.

- **Comparative Analysis:** Examining spoken vs. written language to assess how phonetic representations mimic oral communication.
- **Phonological Processes:** Identifying substitution, assimilation, and elision patterns in social media text.
- **Discourse Analysis:** Investigating how phonetic modifications contribute to digital interaction, social identity, and linguistic creativity.

3.3 Criteria for Data Selection Data selection was based on:

- **Phonetic Spelling:** Expressions like "cuz" for "because" and "wanna" for "want to."
- **Expressive Orthography:** Capitalization, punctuation, and repetition for emphasis (e.g., "LOOOOVE it!!").
- **Phonological Shifts:** Evidence of spoken language influencing digital text, such as phoneme substitution, assimilation, or elision patterns.

3.4 Limitations

The scale of data collection was limited by privacy factors and ethical data use. Data was included for analysis from publicly available posts to prevent violation of the user's consent, and to maintain compliance with data privacy laws. Although it guarantees the ethical soundness, it can also curtail the diversity of potential linguistic being covered in the private or limited conversation. The study acknowledges that the small sample size may not capture all variations of phonological shifts. Future research should incorporate a larger, more diverse dataset to enhance validity. With this adopted model, the study ensures a structured and systematic approach to analyzing phonological shifts in digital communication.

4. Data Analysis

This study analyzes case studies of specific social media posts, comments, and interactions to illustrate the diverse manifestations of phonological shifts in digital communication. Key trends were discussed in the form of detailed accounts, and supported by summary tables, spanning across phonetic transcripts, expressive orthography, generational variations and linguistic mixing.

4.1 Phonetic Spellings and Abbreviations

Phrases like 'ure' (you're), 'bgt' (banget, meaning 'very' in Indonesian) show up in Twitter comments because of the platform's brevity constraints. Both Facebook users as well as Twitter users don't seem to mind such restrictions, who use the phonetic spelling to emulate their conversational prosody, signifying a preference for informality between platforms.

Examples such as “gonna” (going to) and “wanna” (want to) illustrate phonetic representations of speech in digital communication. These forms, while common, require differentiation from simple orthographic conventions.

Table 1: Frequency of Phonetic Spellings Across Platforms

Platform	Common Examples	Frequency (%)
Twitter	"ure," "bgt"	48%
Facebook	"ure," "lolz"	37%

4.2 Prosodic Features and Expressive Orthography

Long words ("WOWWWW!") It emulates spoken intonation, and adds an emphasis to emotion (or 'yasssss'). And while these features are apparent in written form, they are particularly common in Facebook's longer posts and viral Twitter threads, which are created by users attempting to imitate prosodic features like stress and elongation. Capitalization and repetition are widely used to replicate phonetic emphasis, akin to spoken prosody. For instance, "SOOO happy!!!" mimics elongated speech.

Table 2: Usage of Expressive Orthography by Age Group

Age Group	Common Examples	Frequency (%)
Below 30	"OMG! Looove ittt!!!"	65%
Above 30	"This is amaaazing!!!"	35%

4.3 Generational and Regional Variations

Younger users favor nonstandard expressions (e.g., "Yesssss!!!" or "Omg lolll"), while older users incorporate a mix of standard and expressive forms . They employ grammatical conventions for some expressions while blending them with nonstandard expressions, for instance, such hybrid forms as 'Genial!'. Regional dialects also impact phonetic representations. They illustrate age related differences in linguistic adaptability and social media usage.

Table 3: Phonological Trends by Generational Group

Feature	Younger Users (%)	Older Users (%)
Phonetic Spellings	72%	45%
Expressive Orthography	82%	53%
Hybridization	38%	60%

5. Results and Discussions

The data collected from Twitter and Facebook were analyzed and revealed phonological shifts in digital communication that mirrors the spoken language more and more. The shifts show up in many key categories, in which we see the interplay between platform affordances, user preferences, and linguistic innovation.

1. Phonetic Spelling and Abbreviations

The use of **phonetic spelling** as the most prominent trend has to do with a way of writing that seems to balance written language with spoken sounds. There were plenty of examples, like 'gonna,' for 'going to;' 'wanna,' for 'want to;' and 'kinda,' for 'kind of,' which felt like I should say, but I wouldn't have been that authentic. In fact, these forms are not only ways of communicating more quickly, but also mirror larger phonological trends to favor informality.

Also, **abbreviations** such as "gr8" (great) and "b4" (before), even organizing the above mentioned; this further made it easier on platforms like Twitter, that comes with the character limit and so on. Moreover, these abbreviations testify to a phonological change of simplifying written language in order to approximate conversational forms better.

Example from Twitter:

"I'm soooo tired, gonna crash now, b4 I pass out."

One such example is 'soooo', but it elongates the vowel sound to sound like spoken intonation and more importantly makes the message sound more emotional.

2. Prosodic Features in Written Text

Prosodic features such as repetition, capitalization and punctuation are used by social media users to reproduce intonation, rhythm and emphasis that are otherwise conveyed by vocal stress. On both platforms, captions, comments, and replies were especially marked by these features.

- **Capitalization:** Used to signal loudness or excitement, mirroring vocal emphasis.
 - Example: *"THAT'S AMAZING!!!"*
- **Repetition:** The repeated use of letters or words conveys elongated speech or heightened emotion.
 - Example: *"YAAAAASSSSS!!!"* or *"SOOOO GOOD!"*

Users paired these textual features with videos or images on Facebook. For example, a pause in a video could be captioned, like, "Wait for it..." It's followed by emojis (😏 🌸 ⌚ 🎯) to create suspense, and mimic spoken delivery.

3. Emotional and Expressive Elements

Emojis, Gifs and other visual element integrate with digital communication and bring such emotional and prosodic qualities. In particular, emojis are non-verbal cues, that mimic facial expressions or vocal inflections to give life to written text.

Example from Twitter:

"That was so funny 😂😂 I can't stop laughing!!"

In such a case, the crying and laughing emojis add to the humorous tone and they simulate the laughter, thus close the gap between literate and oral interaction.

4. Platform-Specific Variations

Distinct phonological trends emerged across platforms, reflecting their unique constraints and affordances:

- **Twitter:** Character limits encouraged the use of abbreviations and condensed phonetic spellings.
- **Facebook:** Repetition, capitalization, and emojis were heavily relied upon by users, and users integrated these with visual content to make immersive phonological representations.

Key Trends Identified

1. Social Media as a Linguistic Accelerator

Social media normalizes informal expressions, embedding them into everyday communication and fostering rapid linguistic innovation.

2. Phonetic Representation

Phonetic spellings act as a bridge between spoken and written language, capturing speech patterns in text.

3. Global Influence

Multilingual users contribute hybridized expressions, enriching digital discourse and reflecting the global nature of social media.

This analysis shows how social media platforms are linguistic laboratories where phonological shifts that reconfigure the boundary between written and spoken language are both fostered and accelerated. The findings highlight the part that digital communication plays in defining the nature of contemporary language practice, and more generally in the context of sociolinguistic dynamics and global trends.

6. Conclusion

This study clarifies the distinction between phonological shifts and spelling innovations in social media discourse. Phonological shifts must be distinguished from mere spelling conventions. Social media accelerates phonological change, normalizing informal expressions. Phonetic representations act as a bridge between spoken and written language. By refining methodological transparency and ensuring precise definitions, the research provides a clearer picture of how phonetic elements influence digital language. The findings emphasize that digital communication serves as a linguistic accelerator, reshaping phonological norms in informal discourse. Future studies should expand datasets and apply robust phonological frameworks to deepen the analysis of these shifts.

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