Does Slang Threaten the Structure of the Mother Tongue? An Analysis of Generative Grammar in Indonesian Adolescent Language

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ABSTRACT

Background. Language is a dynamic and adaptive system that evolves in response to its users' needs. Among Indonesian adolescents, the rise of slang has raised public concern regarding its potential to disrupt the structural integrity of the Indonesian mother tongue. This concern stems from fears that informal variations may erode grammatical norms and weaken formal language proficiency.

Purpose. This study aims to determine whether the use of slang among teenagers represents a threat to the syntactic norms of formal Indonesian or constitutes a natural form of linguistic variation that aligns with social and cognitive development.

Method. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, focusing on data collected from popular social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. Purposive sampling was used to identify common slang expressions. The data were then analyzed using the frameworks of generative grammar and psycholinguistics to explore structural changes and their cognitive implications.

Results. Analysis of three representative slang-based sentences revealed that while slang tends to omit formal elements and compress sentence structures, essential syntactic patterns—especially the subject-verb-object (SVO) sequence—remain intact. From a psycholinguistic perspective, adolescents show cognitive flexibility in both producing and interpreting these expressions contextually, rather than relying strictly on formal rules.

Conclusion. The study concludes that adolescent slang does not undermine linguistic competence. Instead, it enriches expressive ability and serves as a marker of social identity. Slang is best understood as an adaptive form of linguistic creativity shaped by digital culture and generational shifts, rather than a degradation of language.

KEYWORDS

Generative Grammar, Indonesian Adolescents, Language Variation, Slang, Syntactic Structure

INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic system that continues to evolve to adapt to the needs of its speakers. Among the various linguistic phenomena that mark language change and adaptation, slang occupies a very prominent position in adolescent language. The rapid development of slang among Indonesian teenagers raises concerns of potential "damage" to the structure of the standard Indonesian language (Joko Suleman, Eva Putri Nurul Islamiyah, 2018). Terms such as "btw", "otw", 'kepo', 'baper', and "jomblo" are now commonly used in daily communication, especially on social media such as Twitter/X, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Alinsyah Aurorathursina, 2024).

This phenomenon raises an important question: does the use of slang really threaten the deep structure of the mother tongue, or is it a symptom of natural variation in language growth?

Teen slang is characterized by brevity, creativity and a tendency to modify word forms through shortening, acronyms and phoneme changes, often influenced by the Jakarta dialect (Euis Siti Setiasih Widuriani, 2007). Example sentences such as "I like him, he has weird vibes" or "You better gas now before it's too late" show that although vocabulary and word forms change, the main syntactic patterns-such as the Subject-Predicate-Object order-are maintained. From the perspective of Chomsky's generative grammar theory, the distinction between deep structure and surface structure is key: adolescents' language competence (internal ability to form grammatical sentences) remains stable, while language performance (actual use in social contexts) adapts to the environment and trends (Indonesian Logo Admin, 2023).

Most previous studies on slang in Indonesian focus on social, lexical, or morphological aspects, and rarely use a generative theory approach. In addition, there are still minimal studies that specifically examine the syntactic structure of slang used by Indonesian teenagers through the framework of generative grammar. This opens up research space to fill the gap and explore whether the use of slang is truly disruptive or instead shows the flexibility of the mother tongue grammatical system (Sokolovskaya & Perdana, 2025).

In the realm of linguistics, generative grammar - developed by Noam Chomsky - offers a powerful analytical approach to understanding the deep structure of language (Gil, 2020). This approach emphasizes a mental grammar that allows speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences. However, to date, very few studies have applied the generative grammar framework to nonstandard or slang forms of language, even more so in the Indonesian context. Therefore, the interaction between teenage slang and syntactic structure within a generative framework in Indonesian is still an unexplored area (Suhardianto, 2019).

This research aims to fill the gap by analyzing how slang used by Indonesian teenagers interacts with the syntactic and morphological structure of Indonesian based on the theory of generative grammar. Specifically, this study will examine whether the use of slang by teenagers modifies, simplifies, or deviates from the standard grammatical rules of Indonesian (Zen, 2020). Thus, this research seeks to answer whether slang is a threat to the structure of the mother tongue, or is part of the natural process of linguistic variation and innovation (Tompunu & Hula, 2022a).

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study extends the application of generative grammar to informal language forms used by teenagers. Practically, the results of this study can provide insights for educators and language policy designers in language preservation and teaching efforts (Manurung dkk., 2022). Ultimately, this study aims to critically assess whether slang should be considered as a linguistic threat, or as a creative expression within the flexible boundaries of the mother tongue (Saputra dkk., 2023).

Punden in the Javanese cultural structure is known as a place that stores sacred values, symbols of ancestral descendants, and the center of spiritual activities of the village community. The function of punden as a marker of community history is not only rooted in the animistic belief system, but also becomes the foundation for the social structure of agrarian society (Besier, 2023). The existence of pundens is usually associated with the beginnings of the village, and is often complemented by founders' myths, heirloom artifacts, and homage rituals (Rahayu, 2024).

In the development of contemporary society, the position of punden began to undergo a shift in meaning. In some areas, punden is no longer solely treated as a sacred site, but also an object in social contestation, especially in the structure of power relations at the village level (Siregar & Yahaya, 2023). This transformation can be seen from how local actors utilize punden symbols and narratives

in the process of selecting village heads, formulating village history, and official ceremonial activities (Rahmadani, 2023).

The representation of punden has also begun to be drawn into the strategic realm through cultural and historical narratives claimed by certain groups. In genealogical narratives, for example, punden is used as authoritative evidence to claim a position as a "native citizen" of the village. On the other hand, other social groups often try to renegotiate the meaning of punden to expand the inclusivity of communal identity (Ndlovu, 2022).

Stuart Hall's theory of cultural representation explains that symbols such as punden never stand neutral, but are always shaped by power relations (COHN dkk., 2022). Representation not only conveys meaning, but also determines who has power over that meaning. In this context, the punden becomes a field of representation where narratives and symbols are used to shape and maintain local power (Surana, 2021).

Our understanding today of punden cannot be separated from the ever-changing historical, social, and political relations (Masykar dkk., 2023). The exploration of the transformation of the punden function opens up a new understanding of how local culture operates in the dynamics of power and community identity (Kiaer, 2023).

Research on punden has so far dwell more on its historical or archaeological aspects. There have not been many studies that have tried to dismantle how punden is used as a tool of political strategy and a symbol of identity in contemporary village society (Masykar dkk., 2023). The shift in meaning from sacred sites to tools of social legitimacy has not been the main focus in academic discourse (Surana, 2021).

The lack of attention to punden as a space for power representation and identity contestation has led to the emergence of gaps in the study of local culture (Masykar dkk., 2023). The dominant narrative associated with punden is often accepted as something natural, even though in practice it is the result of a process of symbolic selection and politicization of collective memory. This research is here to answer how punden is used to form identity claims by certain actors (Tompunu & Hula, 2022b).

There has been no in-depth research that explains how symbolic conflicts between indigenous people and immigrant citizens are mediated through punden narratives. This dynamic is important to understand because it concerns the role of punden in shaping social inclusion or exclusion. How these narratives are created, monopolized, or opposed is still an empty area in village political anthropology research (Indiani dkk., 2024).

James C. Scott's theory of cultural politics is relevant to understanding how symbolic practices—such as rituals or punden historical recognition—are used as cultural strategies in power negotiations. These symbolic actions often appear to be ordinary cultural expressions, but in fact contain a highly political logic of domination and resistance (Muhammad, 2025).

Filling the gap is important because punden has become a crucial symbol in the struggle for meaning and power at the local level. The transformation of the punden from a sacred space to a field of political representation marked a profound change in the way society defined the origins, authority, and validity of group identity. Understanding this process will open up space for re-reading the symbolic power of local culture in the context of social change.

The purpose of this research is to explain how punden is used as an instrument of identity politics by social groups in Badas Village. This research combines a critical ethnographic approach with cultural discourse analysis to capture the dynamics of representation that occur not only at the symbolic level, but also at the social praxis. The main focus lies in who is talking about punden, in what context, and for whose benefit.

The framework of the hegemony theory of Antonio Gramsci is used to analyze how domination and resistance take place through control over cultural symbols. Hegemony occurs not only through economic or political control, but also through cultural representations that are considered "natural" or "correct". In this context, punden is a means of reproducing power disguised in the form of cultural heritage and village history.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the influence of slang on the generative grammar of Indonesian teenagers. According to (Sugiono, 2008) that descriptive qualitative research is a research method based on the philosophy of postpositivism which is usually used to research on natural objective conditions where the researcher acts as a key instrument. This method aims to explain descriptively or describe in detail the problem of changes in the use of Indonesian language to slang in the era of modernization. The focus is on understanding the surface structure and deep structure of the language used by teenagers in informal digital interactions. Data is sourced from real-life examples of slang used by Indonesian teenagers on social media platforms, including Twitter/X, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Primary data consisted of written comments and posts, especially those reflecting typical teenage interactions (Zulkhaeriyah, Dede Rosyadi ZA, Tri Pujiati, 2023). Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation of public posts and comment sections, focusing on interactions that clearly reflected adolescent language patterns. Non-participant observation was used to capture the natural use of slang in digital conversations, and purposive sampling was used to select posts and comments that best represented the phenomenon under study.

For data analysis, this study utilizes a generative grammar framework to distinguish between surface structure (the outer form of slang) and deep structure (the underlying grammatical rules). Each example of slang was analyzed syntactically to determine whether basic sentence patterns, such as Subject-Predicate-Object, were maintained despite the use of nonstandard words. In addition, morphological and semantic analyses were conducted to explore how the slang words were formed-through affixation, borrowing, or blending-and whether their meanings remained logical and appropriate to the context (Ahmad Sirulhaq, Sukri Sukri, Syamsinas Jafar, Syamsinas Jafar, 2022). The analysis also considers the difference between linguistic competence (stable, internalized grammatical knowledge) and performance (actual language use influenced by social context), assessing whether the prevalence of slang disrupts or preserves the generative grammatical principles of Indonesian. This comprehensive approach enables a deeper understanding of the relationship between slang and the structural integrity of the mother tongue among Indonesian adolescents. This research is also examined in psycholinguistics to see how the mind processes slang.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data sekunder yang diperoleh dari profil desa Badas tahun 2023 menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas penduduk (72%) mengidentifikasi diri sebagai "warga asli" dan memiliki hubungan genealogis dengan tokoh pembabad desa. Sementara itu, 28% sisanya merupakan warga migran yang menetap pasca-Reformasi. Data ini menunjukkan adanya pembelahan identitas yang cukup signifikan di tingkat komunitas. Berikut adalah representasi data statistik penduduk berdasarkan klaim identitas:

Table 1. Population Distribution Based on Claims of Genetic Identity

Category	Population	Percentage (%)
Genealogical Citizen	1.152	72%

Non-Genealogical Citizens	448	28%
Total	**1.600**	**100%**

Secondary data also show that of the entire structure of village customary organizations, more than 80% are controlled by parties who have a direct affiliation to the genealogical narrative, either by lineage or through social relations such as marriage or ritual communion.

This study analyzed three representative slang sentences collected from social media platforms frequently used by Indonesian adolescents. The data include:

"OMG om dad sigma n mewing bgt"

This data is taken from the comments column of the @seccontol123 account on @sabrinachairunnisa's post on June 16, 2025 on Instagram social media.

"Wow. Begitu ya dok, ijin share ya dok"

This data is taken from the comments column of the @riama_72gar account on @dokter_atan's post on June 13, 2025 on Instagram social media.

"Liat cici kaya bocil gak percaya bakal jadi ibu, sehat-sehat ya cii"

This data is taken from the TikTok content caption by the @Cilaaa account on June 17, 2025.

Each sentence demonstrates different structural phenomena based on generative grammar principles and reflects psycholinguistic adaptation processes in informal contexts.

Analysis Generative Grammar

Table 2. Structural and Grammatical Analysis of Adolescent Slang Expressions

Sentence	Type of Slang	Phrase Structure Transformation	Grammatical Shift
1	Lexical blend + internet slang	Deep structure compressed into interjectional VP	Reduced formality; subject omitted
2	Formal slang + elliptical form	Subjectless imperative + minimal VP	Informal politeness; intact comprehension
3	Social register slang	Mixed NP + VP + embedded clause	Code-switching and emotive tag structure

In Sentence 1, the structure omits syntactic elements such as a clear subject and verb agreement, relying instead on shared cultural references ("sigma", "mewing") and identity-based codes. The surface structure is highly compressed, yet interpretable within the social context.

In Sentence 2 illustrates the blending of formal politeness with elliptical phrasing. Though grammatically simplified ("ijin share"), the sentence preserves interpersonal meaning, functioning well in a digital interaction setting.

In Sentence 3, code-mixing and informal tag usage ("cici", "bocil") exhibit the speaker's emotional closeness and personal reference framing. The structure remains recognizable but informal, showing flexibility in how mother tongue grammar is applied in casual exchanges.

The results show that while slang modifies surface structures and introduces new lexical forms, the core grammar of the Indonesian language remains intact. The phenomenon reflects register shifting, not structural erosion. Slang may enrich expressive capacity and social belonging, but overdependence could reduce sensitivity to formal grammatical norms in writing and formal speech.

Observasi selama kegiatan ritual punden memperlihatkan bahwa hanya kelompok tertentu yang memiliki akses penuh terhadap persiapan dan pelaksanaan upacara. Simbol-simbol seperti sesaji,

bendera adat, dan narasi lisan dipresentasikan secara eksklusif oleh pihak yang mewakili kelompok "trah pendiri desa". Sementara warga non-genealogis hanya dilibatkan sebagai peserta atau penonton.

Wawancara dengan tokoh pemuda non-genealogis menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan partisipatif yang dirasakan dalam kegiatan adat. Mereka mengakui tidak dilibatkan dalam forum-forum pengambilan keputusan terkait pelestarian punden atau narasi sejarah desa. Kondisi ini menimbulkan rasa tidak memiliki dan mendorong terbentuknya komunitas alternatif berbasis generasi dan kelas sosial.

Hasil dokumentasi arsip desa juga memperlihatkan adanya pengakuan administratif dari pemerintah kolonial Belanda terhadap salah satu tokoh pendiri desa, tetapi narasi ini justru tidak dijadikan rujukan utama dalam praktik ritual. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh administratif kalah kuat dibandingkan dengan struktur sosial yang menguasai praktik budaya.

Analysis Psycholinguistics

If we look at the way today's teenagers speak on social media such as TikTok, Instagram, or Twitter, we can see how fast and concise they convey things. Sentences like "OMG om dad sigma n mewing bgt" or "ijin share ya dok" might sound strange to people who are used to standard Indonesian. But interestingly, their brains can still understand the meaning of these sentences very quickly - even though the wording is incomplete or even contains a lot of slang words. In psycholinguistics, this is called proof that our brains have a great ability to complete, adjust and understand meaning from context, not just from rigid language rules.

Today's teenagers have many new terms in their "mental dictionary", such as the words bucin, baper, gaskeun, and so on. They know when and to whom these words are appropriate. So, even though their grammar is sometimes "off", it doesn't mean they don't know the correct language-they are aware that they are speaking in a casual and informal situation. Even when the subject of the sentence is omitted, as in "ijin share ya dok", the interlocutor still knows who is being referred to. That means they rely on social logic and digital language habits, not just sentence structure.

This shows that the use of slang does not make them lose their ability to speak Indonesian, but instead shows how flexible the brain is in responding to changes in communication methods. They still understand their mother tongue, but adjust the way they convey it to suit the atmosphere, platform and interlocutor. So we can say that slang is not a threat to language, but a reflection of the creativity and ingenuity of the younger generation in speaking in the digital era.

One of the important case studies is the internal conflict in the election of the Chairman of the Village Customary Institution in 2021. One of the candidates comes from a non-genealogical family that has social competence and higher education, but has experienced rejection from traditional leaders on the grounds that they "do not have a lineage of the village founder". This rejection sparked a public discussion and went viral on local social media.

Data tracing shows that the reasons for rejection are never attributed to formal or institutional rules, but rather are entirely based on symbolic legitimacy and spiritual heritage. The candidate eventually withdrew from the candidacy and formed a cross-family youth forum as a form of resistance to the symbolic domination of the older group.

This event is concrete evidence that the punden and its accompanying customary structures are not only spiritual symbols, but also social barriers that limit other residents' access to strategic roles in the village. This transformation confirms that cultural symbols also have a function as guardians of power exclusivity.

Previous research such as those conducted by Koentjaraningrat and Clifford Geertz has largely discussed punden in the context of sacredness and agrarian rites as a reflection of local belief systems. The results of this study expand this perspective by highlighting how the punden symbol is actively

used in the political space of village identity. The focus is no longer on spiritual functions alone, but on how punden is used as a symbol of the struggle for social legitimacy.

Similar research by Sairin (2005) and Setyawati (2018) places punden as a cultural heritage that is passive and needs to be preserved. This research shows that preservation does not always mean conservation, but also risks becoming a symbolic hegemony. A striking difference can be seen in how the punden in Badas Village becomes a tool to determine who is considered "native" and who is "immigrant".

This study expands the discourse by using the framework of critical ethnographic and cultural hegemony theory, which has not been widely used in punden studies in Indonesia. This allows for the disclosure of power relations and narrative conflicts that occur behind seemingly harmonious cultural practices. This study shows that cultural symbols can be spaces for conflict and representation that are highly political, rather than just a neutral collective memory.

The results of this study are a sign that in contemporary village societies, heritage symbols are no longer only cared for but also contested. Punden is not merely a guardian of history, but a tool for negotiating social positions in a more complex village structure. The existence of such symbols shows that cultural meanings are not fixed, but liquid and reproduced according to the context.

The phenomenon in Badas Village marks a shift from community relations to more competitive representative relations. Each group seeks to establish legitimacy based on claims to ancestral history and spirituality, even if administratively or historically not necessarily valid. This suggests that collective memory can be manipulated as a source of social authority.

This situation reflects how local communities respond to the decentralization of power and the disclosure of information in a very local way. In that context, punden is not just a cultural heritage, but a mirror of identity politics that continues to move. Representations that were originally considered sacred turned into a very strategic social instrument.

The results of this study occurred because the social structure of the village is still greatly influenced by the patron-client relationship and the hereditary system. Groups that have access to spiritual symbols and rituals automatically also have authority in interpreting the history and identity of the village. This process strengthens their position in the village power structure without having to go through formal or legal channels.

The dominance of genealogical narratives is reinforced by the absence of widely accessible historical documentation. Weaknesses in historical literacy allow symbolic domination to take place without meaningful resistance. Non-genealogical citizens do not have enough symbolic capital to match the dominant narrative that continues to be strengthened in traditional activities.

Rituals and symbols such as punden have a strong vitality in the social imagination of the village community. The repetition of rituals and the involvement of certain figures in public forums create the impression of legitimate authority. In such situations, social legitimacy is not formed through archives or documents, but through narratives that are constantly consolidated in the local public space.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the structure and processing of slang language by Indonesian teenagers on social media, it can be concluded that the use of slang does not directly threaten the structure of the mother tongue, but shows an adaptive and contextual shift in communication style. From a psycholinguistic perspective, teenagers still have an understanding of the correct language structure (deep structure), but prefer quick, concise, and emotionally relevant forms of expression (surface structure) in digital interactions.

The adolescent brain has been shown to be able to manage changes in language form through rapid access to the mental lexicon, context-based meaning processing, and the ability to fill in missing elements in sentence structure. This shows that they do not lose language competence, but rather develop more efficient and appropriate ways of communicating with the times. Therefore, the use of slang needs to be understood not as a breakdown of language, but as a form of linguistic evolution that reflects the creativity, social identity and cognitive abilities of the younger generation.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

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