

Linguistic Play as Digital Prokem: A Case Study in the Facebook Group 'Omke Gams Vromtherhood'

Abdul Latief*¹
Otong Setiawan Djuharie²

¹²Islamic State University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
*e-mail: abdullatiefjr0@gmail.com¹, otongsetiawandjuharie@uinsgd.ac.id²

Abstract

This study explores linguistic play through the intentional insertion of the letters "M" and "N" in online captions posted by a user named Bayu in the Facebook group Omke Gams Vromtherhood. The modified spellings—such as "damri" for "dari" or "efisemnsi" for "efisiensi"—are analyzed as a form of digital prokem, a localized language style shaped by humor, subcultural identity, and social commentary. Using qualitative content analysis, the study identifies patterns in these orthographic alterations and interprets their function in group dynamics. The findings reveal that this language play strengthens group cohesion, reflects resistance to linguistic norms, and fosters a sense of digital solidarity. The research highlights the role of informal language innovation in shaping identity within closed online communities.

Keywords: Digital prokem, identity, Indonesian internet language, linguistic play, online community, orthographic variation

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital communication, language is not merely a vehicle for conveying information—it becomes a flexible, playful, and socially charged tool for constructing identities and fostering in-group belonging. Nowhere is this more evident than in the emergence of informal and non-standard language varieties on social media platforms. Within Indonesian digital culture, bahasa prokem has resurfaced and redefined itself through novel forms of linguistic manipulation, especially among youth communities and niche online groups. While traditionally associated with urban youth vernaculars of Jakarta in the late 20th century, prokem has undergone a digital transformation, giving rise to what may be termed digital prokem—a typographic and stylistic modification of standard language used intentionally to signal group membership and shared worldview.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), TikTok, and Instagram have enabled closed communities to develop localized "digital vernaculars," which function not only as internal jokes or coded messages but also as subtle acts of resistance to linguistic norms. In these spaces, users play with language orthographically—adding, omitting, or substituting letters to create new meanings or reinforce solidarity. This reflects a broader phenomenon documented in computer-mediated communication (CMC) studies: the breakdown of traditional language constraints and the emergence of performative linguistic choices (Herring, 2001).

Within this context, the Facebook group Omke Gams Vromtherhood represents a unique case of digital linguistic innovation. The group is known for its humorous and ironic tone, with members frequently modifying Indonesian words by inserting the letters "M" and "N" into everyday terms. For example, "dari" becomes "damri", and "efisiensi" becomes "efisemnsi". While these modifications may appear nonsensical to outsiders, they operate as powerful in-group signals, forging shared identity and cultural cohesion. Unlike widely known Indonesian slang (gaul) or Gen Z TikTok terms, these orthographic plays are intentionally opaque, forming a sociolect that reinforces insider status.

Several studies have noted that bahasa prokem is both functional and symbolic. It serves as a sociolect of resistance, parody, or affiliation (Istiqomah S Nugraha, 2018; Kiki S Muliana,

2023; Yuwono, 2023). Yet, these studies have largely concentrated on lexical innovations or phonological shifts in spoken or semi-formal written texts, leaving typographic manipulation in digital platforms understudied. This research seeks to fill that gap by focusing specifically on orthographic play as a performative act in a digital setting.

The subject of analysis is a user named Bayu, a prolific contributor to the Omke Gams Vromtherhood group, whose captions consistently feature M/N letter insertions. These playful yet deliberate typographic acts reflect what Bucholtz and Hall (2005) term “tactics of intersubjectivity”—linguistic strategies used to position oneself and others within social structures. By modifying spellings and subverting orthographic conventions, Bayu does not merely entertain but also participates in the construction of a distinct communal identity.

This study thus aims to investigate how digital language practices, specifically the typographic insertion of “M” and “N”, contribute to identity formation and group cohesion in a niche online community. The research poses two central questions:

1. What orthographic patterns emerge from Bayu’s intentional insertion of “M” and “N”?
2. How do these patterns reflect group identity, humor, and solidarity within the digital community?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach grounded in sociolinguistic and computer-mediated discourse frameworks. By examining 20 selected captions, the research offers insight into how even the smallest linguistic deviations—such as a single added letter—can carry complex social meaning in a digitally mediated environment.

In a time when digital communication plays an increasing role in identity formation, understanding how language is transformed and weaponized in online spaces is essential. This study contributes to that understanding by offering a micro-level analysis of a linguistic phenomenon that bridges tradition (*prokem*) and digital innovation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Defining Prokem and Its Digital Evolution

Prokem is a form of Indonesian slang that originated in urban youth subcultures, particularly in Jakarta. It is characterized by phonological and morphological manipulation, often used to obscure meaning or create in-group identity. Istiqomah et al. (2018) define *prokem* as a deliberate modification of language structures used primarily for informal social interaction within certain communities. While initially oral, *prokem* has shifted into digital spaces, adapting its structure to new environments like social media.

Kiki et al. (2023) emphasize that *prokem* serves not only as a linguistic code but also as a social symbol of solidarity and identity. In digital environments, this role becomes even more pronounced, as users manipulate spelling, rhythm, and grammar to reflect subcultural belonging.

2. Social and Educational Impacts of Prokem

Scholars such as Sitompul et al. (2024) have raised concerns about the impact of excessive *prokem* usage on formal language competence among university students. Their study found that students who frequently used *prokem* online often displayed reduced proficiency in academic writing.

3. Linguistic Creativity in Digital Spaces

The rise of Gen Z and Alpha users on platforms like TikTok and WhatsApp has accelerated the creative adaptation of *prokem*. Huda and Agustini (2025) documented how users play with acronyms, deliberate misspellings, and typographic distortions to generate humor and stand out. Aryanti et al. (2023) similarly highlight the multimodal dimensions of *prokem* in school WhatsApp groups, where it is combined with emojis and meme culture.

4. Slang as a Marker of Identity and Resistance

Yuwono (2023) views slang—including prokem—as a form of youth resistance and identity assertion. Arifin et al. (2022) provide morphological insights into Indonesian slang, showing common processes such as syllable elimination, inversion, and vowel replacement, which are structurally similar to the M/N insertion patterns in this study.

5. Slang in Digital Communication

Lutviana and Mafulah (2021) analyze the use of slang in online learning and report that informal language, including prokem, can reduce social barriers and encourage active participation. Meanwhile, Irsyad et al. (2024) observe that teenagers in Palu blend slang with regional and Indonesian vocabulary, creating hybridized speech styles in daily WhatsApp conversations.

Research Gap

While prior studies have analyzed prokem in oral and phonological contexts or as part of digital youth communication, few have explored how orthographic manipulation—specifically letter insertion (e.g., M/N)—functions in identity construction within closed Facebook communities. This research addresses that gap by analyzing stylized spellings in the group Omke Gams Vromtherhood, highlighting how typographic play becomes a powerful sociolinguistic tool.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive method to explore the phenomenon of orthographic play as a form of digital prokem in the Facebook group Omke Gams Vromtherhood. The focus lies on the deliberate insertion of the letters “M” and “N” in Indonesian words found in the captions of a group member named Bayu. Rather than seeking to quantify occurrences, this study aims to interpret the social and linguistic meanings embedded in these stylized spellings.

The data consist of 20 selected captions posted by Bayu between January and June 2025. These captions were chosen based on three criteria: the intentional use of M/N letter insertion, high engagement (as indicated by likes, shares, or comments), and public visibility, ensuring ethical compliance. Each caption was transcribed and paired with its standard Indonesian equivalent to facilitate comparative analysis.

The analytical process involved close reading and manual coding of the captions to identify recurring patterns in spelling manipulation. Attention was given to the positional features of the inserted letters (initial, medial, or final), the frequency of insertions, and the types of words most frequently altered. Following this, each modified word or phrase was examined for its sociolinguistic function, such as creating humor, fostering group exclusivity, conveying satire, or expressing socio-political critique.

This research is informed by Bucholtz and Hall’s sociolinguistic identity framework (2005), which views language choices as performative acts of positioning within social groups. Additionally, Herring’s (2001) theory of computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides the basis for understanding how digital platforms encourage linguistic innovation by loosening conventional language constraints. These theoretical tools frame the typographic modifications not as random distortions but as purposeful linguistic strategies embedded in digital interaction.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, a number of techniques were applied. Peer debriefing was conducted with two linguists to review the preliminary coding structure. Member checking was also carried out by consulting two active group members—anonously—regarding the contextual accuracy of selected interpretations. These strategies were complemented by methodological triangulation, in which identified patterns were cross-checked against themes found in relevant literature.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research. All data were obtained from publicly accessible posts to avoid violating user privacy. Identifying information, such as profile names and links, was omitted, and the subject “Bayu” was anonymized in reporting. No visual content or metadata was included in the final documentation.

Through this qualitative framework, the study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how digital prokem emerges, operates, and reinforces identity within a closed online community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Bayu's 20 captions in the Facebook group Omke Gams Vromtherhood reveals a systematic and intentional use of the letters "M" and "N" as orthographic insertions. These modifications, while seemingly chaotic, display recurring patterns in both form and function. The results indicate three main findings: consistent orthographic strategies, identifiable sociolinguistic functions, and the role of linguistic play in constructing group identity.

The first and most apparent finding is the positional consistency in the insertion of the letters "M" and "N." Most modifications occur in the medial position of words, replacing or interrupting existing phonological patterns. For example, the standard Indonesian word "dari" becomes "damri", and "efisiensi" is stylized as "efisemnsi." In some cases, the letters are added at the initial or final positions, as seen in "mumncul" for "muncul" or "kamta" for "kata." While these changes do not follow conventional spelling rules, they exhibit internal consistency across multiple captions, suggesting a shared understanding among community members regarding acceptable deviations.

Secondly, the modified spellings serve multiple sociolinguistic functions. Humor is the most frequent, as the distortions often result in absurd or exaggerated word forms that evoke laughter or irony. For instance, in the caption "Imzazanya Emmang gamk amda" (a distorted version of "Ijazahnya emang gak ada"), the playful insertion of consonants contributes to the absurdity of the message. Another frequent function is exclusivity; many captions become intelligible only to members who are familiar with the group's linguistic style, effectively acting as a cultural shibboleth. This is evident in expressions like "Ngumrus kamtering" (from "ngurus katering"), which obscures meaning from outsiders while signaling in-group identity. The third function is political or cultural critique. Captions such as "Jomkowi" (from "Jokowi") or "pamjak" (from "pajak") encode satirical criticism toward public figures or institutions, using humor as a vehicle for dissent. Finally, generational satire appears in captions like "Bommer" (from "Boomer"), mocking older generations in a performative and exaggerated manner.

In addition to their functional roles, the orthographic choices also reveal deeper identity constructions. The group's linguistic behavior aligns with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) concept of "tactics of intersubjectivity," in which language becomes a resource for forming and negotiating social boundaries. The consistency in the use of M/N insertion suggests a semi-formalized

linguistic rule within the community, not enforced through written guidelines but performed collectively through repetition and recognition. Each modification, then, becomes both a creative expression and a symbolic act of allegiance to the group's identity and norms.

Interestingly, many captions exhibit multifunctionality. A single phrase can be simultaneously humorous, exclusive, and critical. For example, the caption "efisemnsi" serves not only to amuse but also to mock bureaucratic jargon, creating a double-layered interpretation. The same is true of "Amdem Amyem" (from "Adem Ayem"), which transforms a familiar idiom into a caricature of calmness, thereby recontextualizing the meaning through playful distortion.

The collective use of such linguistic practices points to the emergence of a digital vernacular that evolves in real time, shaped by internal rules and social dynamics. These modifications are not the result of individual error or personal eccentricity; they are, rather, performative and strategic, reinforcing community bonds while simultaneously challenging external linguistic expectations.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that orthographic manipulation through M/N insertion in Omke Gams Vromtherhood is a complex and layered practice. It reflects intentional creativity, enables insider communication, and reinforces group solidarity. More than just playful typography, this phenomenon serves as a sociolinguistic tool for identity formation and cultural positioning in a tightly knit online community.

The findings of this study affirm that the intentional manipulation of spelling—particularly through the insertion of "M" and "N"—functions as more than mere typographic play. Instead, it emerges as a distinct form of digital prokem, shaped by creativity, community norms, and shared sociocultural values. The layered functions of these modifications—humor, exclusivity, political critique, and generational satire—underscore the sophistication of linguistic practices within closed digital communities.

The consistent orthographic patterns observed in Bayu's captions reflect what Bucholtz and Hall (2005) refer to as "tactics of intersubjectivity." These tactics include the use of nonstandard language to perform social alignments, create in-group boundaries, and resist outsider interpretation. In this context, the intentional insertion of M/N is not random but guided by implicit group norms. Through repetition and recognition, these spellings become symbolic acts that demarcate social identity and foster solidarity among group members.

This performative function aligns with previous research that views prokem as a socially embedded variety of Indonesian (Istiqomah et al., 2018; Kiki et al., 2023). However, unlike traditional prokem which often relies on spoken or oral distortions, the Facebook group under study showcases a shift to visual-orthographic manipulation, adding a typographic layer to existing linguistic creativity. This adaptation reflects the influence of digital platforms in reshaping language practices, as suggested by Herring (2001) in her model of computer-mediated discourse.

Furthermore, the humorous and satirical aspects of these captions resemble the findings of Huda and Agustini (2025), who documented the rise of creative spelling in Gen Z's digital expression, particularly on platforms like TikTok. Similarly, the use of altered spellings for political commentary echoes Arifin et al.'s (2022) observations about slang being employed for subversion and criticism. In captions like "Jomkowi" or "pamjak", Bayu's orthographic choices become tools of subtle resistance and satire, echoing broader youth skepticism toward authority.

Another significant aspect of the analysis is the role of language as a gatekeeping mechanism. The use of distorted forms such as "Ngumrus kamtering" (for "ngurus katering") functions as a cultural shibboleth—understandable only to those familiar with the group's conventions. This aligns with Irsyad et al. (2024), who noted that slang and coded language often function to exclude outsiders and reinforce in-group intimacy. Within Omke Gams Vromtherhood, this linguistic style forms a collective identity, uniting members not just through shared interest,

but through a shared linguistic code.

These findings also contribute to the evolving conceptualization of digital vernaculars informal, community-specific language forms that develop within online spaces (Androutsopoulos, 2015). While much literature focuses on lexical innovations such as emojis, hashtags, or abbreviations, this study highlights the relevance of micro-level orthographic deviations. The deliberate insertion of consonants into familiar words demonstrates how even minimal linguistic adjustments can carry dense social meaning when embedded in the right context.

Despite the informal appearance of the linguistic style under examination, its structure and function are deeply social. The participants—especially Bayu—are not merely “breaking” language rules but are, in fact, creating new ones within the boundaries of group membership. The shared laughter, recognition, and satire fostered by these modifications indicate that language is being used as a medium of cultural expression and interpersonal bonding.

Taken together, these observations suggest that digital prokem in this community operates as a performative and socially meaningful practice. It blurs the lines between joke and critique, inclusion and exclusion, play and positioning. As such, it reflects not only linguistic creativity but also the adaptability of language to mediate identity and power relations in the age of digital communication

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the phenomenon of M/N letter insertion in digital captions posted by a user named Bayu in the Facebook group Omke Gams Vromtherhood, identifying it as a distinct form of digital prokem. Through qualitative analysis of twenty modified captions, the research has shown that this typographic play functions not merely as a stylistic device, but as a powerful tool for identity formation, group cohesion, and socio-political expression.

The consistent orthographic patterns and multifunctionality of the modified spellings—ranging from humor and satire to insider signaling—demonstrate that language innovation in digital communities is deeply structured and socially meaningful. These practices reflect a broader trend in digital sociolinguistics: the transformation of informal language into cultural capital within closed, online communities. In this case, language becomes performative and political, enabling members to express solidarity, resist mainstream norms, and maintain a shared vernacular.

Theoretically, the study supports the view that language is not fixed but negotiated through social interaction (Bucholtz S Hall, 2005) and enabled by the affordances of digital media (Herring, 2001). The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on digital vernaculars by emphasizing the role of orthographic play—rather than only lexical or phonological variation—in the construction of group identity.

While this study focuses on a single user and community, it opens the door for further research into typographic practices across other platforms and digital subcultures. Future studies may consider multimodal analysis, longitudinal observation, or cross-platform comparisons to better understand how digital language evolves and how communities continue to shape it.

In an era where online spaces define much of our social interaction, recognizing the linguistic innovations that occur within them is essential. The playful yet strategic manipulation of spelling examined here reveals how even the smallest linguistic deviations can encode meaning, perform belonging, and articulate resistance in the digital age.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Androutsopoulos, J. (2015). Networked multilingualism: Some language practices on Facebook and Their Implications. *Pragmatics*, 25(4), 573–594.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.25.4.06and>

-
- Arifin, M. B., Hefni, A., S Purwanti, P. (2022). Slang dalam Bahasa Indonesia: Kajian Morfosemantik. Jurnal Diglosia. <https://doi.org/10.30872/diglosia.v5i1s.402>
- Aryanti, Y., Indarti, M. D., S Priyanto, A. (2019). ANALISIS PENGGUNAAN BAHASA PROKEM MELALUI MEDIA SOSIAL WHATS APPLICATION (WA) PADA SISWA SMA. Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, 2(3), 305–312.
- Bucholtz, M., S Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. Discourse Studies, 7(4–5), 585–614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605054407>
- Goziyah, S Yusuf, M. (2019). Bahasa gaul (prokem) generasi milenial dalam media sosial. Dalam Prosiding Seminar Nasional Bulan Bahasa (Semiba).
- Herring, S. (2001). Computer-mediated discourse. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, S H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), The Handbook of Discourse Analysis (pp. 612–634). Blackwell.
- Istiqomah, D. S., S Nugraha, V. (2018). Analisis penggunaan bahasa prokem dalam media sosial. Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, 1(5), 665–674.
- Kiki, M. A., S Muliana, H. (2023). Penggunaan bahasa prokem: Kajian sosiolinguistik. Jurnal Konsepsi, 12(1), 112–124.
- Lutviana, L., S Mafulah, S. (2021). The use of slang words in online learning context of EFL class. English Journal of Merdeka, 6(1), 55–62.
- Huda, F., S Agustini, V. D. (2025). Fenomena Slang dan Gaya Bahasa Gen Z di TikTok dalam Membangun Identitas Sosial (Analisis Kompetensi Linguistik di Ruang Digital).
- Sitompul, Y. L., Ananda, A. A., S Tansliova, L. (2024). Pengaruh Penggunaan Bahasa Prokem Terhadap Eksistensi Bahasa Indonesia di Kalangan Mahasiswa Pendidikan Geografi Universitas Negeri Medan. Jurnal Ilmuan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris, 2(2).
- Irsyad, B. U. C. A, Triyono, R. Y., Nurjadin, R. A., Al Wafa, A. F., Ulwan, A. N., S Sholihatin, E. (2024). Analisis bahasa slang pada postingan akun media sosial X Yupien Fess. <https://doi.org/10.30651/bisa.v1i1.26>