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AGE & SEX : LANGUAGE USE BY ONLINE STREAMERS

Teguh Tri Ananda[1], Maia Azeeza Audina[2], Leny Marsyananda Saragih[3], Shindy Aulia Putri[4], Margareta Epiphany Sitorus[5]

English Literature Study Progra, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Medan
correspondence: tananda1312@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Language reflects not only communication but also identity and social variation. In digital platforms such as YouTube, streamers present themselves to audiences while adapting their language according to social factors. This study examines how age and sex shape language use in online streamers, focusing on vocabulary and word choice during live streaming. The research applies Labov's Variationist Sociolinguistics, which views language variation as systematic and influenced by social categories, including age and sex. A qualitative descriptive method is used, with data drawn from clips of four streamers: two international (one male; Gen Z, one female; Millennial) and two local (one male; Millennial, one female; Gen Z) in their respective live session. Their clips of live sessions are observed and transcribed to identify linguistic variation related to age and sex. The study is expected to show the vocabularies or word choice differences between the male streamers with the female streamers and millennials with Gen-Z streamers.

***Keywords**: Age and Sex; Language Use; Online Streamers; YouTube; Sociolinguistics*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a tool for communication, it functions as a social marker that reflects identity, group belonging, and cultural norms of the speakers. In sociolinguistics, Labov's Variationist Sociolinguistics (1963; 2001) provides a framework to understand how language differs systematically according to the social categories such as class, age, sex, education, social status, etc. Labov's early studies on speech variation in New York and later work on gender variation demonstrated that language differences are not random but structured, tied to the speaker's position within society. He found that men often employ more vernacular or non-standard forms, while women are more likely to adopt standard or innovative linguistic patterns. Similarly, younger speakers frequently pioneer new forms of slang and non-standard expressions, while older speakers prefer more stable or conventional forms of speech (Tagliamonte, 2012; Eckert, 1997).

In the Coulma's book of Two or Three Graces (p.36) by Aldous Huxley, "In the eighteen century, the twentieth centuries has reversed the process. When logic and science were the fashion, women tried to talk like the men." Which indicates nowadays many women speak like men speak. Moreover, there is women's emancipation in which puts women in various position of jobs. It is possible for women

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to imitate people's speech in order to be easier to understand with others and specifically men. However, it contradicts the underlying theory; Labov (1990: 210) confirms women are more likely to use the standard variants more frequently compared to men. The reason why it contradicts because women's speech remains distinct or does not talk like men. Men tend to use non standard language meanwhile women is the otherwise. Men in English speech often shortens when they speaks for instance instead of saying the words singing, cooking, standing, etc they say singin', cookin' and standin'. (Trudgill: 1984) have another finding that in form is mostly used by male rather than female and the higher social status is the lower frequency of using in form. Therefore, Labov's variationist theory will be used to analyse facts in daily life as the findings of this paper. The goal is to understand whether this statement is in line with the findings or opposed instead.

Aside from Sex, gender also shapes linguistic form and variation. As people grow older, their speech becomes less dialectical and converges toward the standard. If it is used in Indonesia, it means that people around those ages (adulthood) tend to use Standard Indonesian rather than non- standard/dialectical Indonesian.

In the digital era, these sociolinguistic patterns extend into online interaction. Platforms like YouTube became a place for streamers to perform their identities in front of live audiences while simultaneously interacting with viewers. Streaming is not only about playing games but also about managing identity, building rapport, and entertaining an audience. Previous research has shown clear gender-based differences in streaming: Nakandala et al. (2017) observed that women streamers adopt more engagement strategies to connect with viewers, while men are more assertive and competitive; Fitrawati, Yuni, & Asri (2024) found that female Twitch streamers rely on hedges, fillers, and politeness strategies; and Poltorak (2022) noted distinct patterns of profanity and harassment across genders.

Many prior works look at general online interaction rather than speech within the same gaming environment. This study addresses this gap by analyzing four YouTube streamers, representing different ages (Millennial vs Gen Z) and sexes (male vs female) all while playing the multiplayer deduction game Among Us (or its mobile variant Super Sus). This shared context allows us to see how age and sex systematically influence vocabulary choice and the speech patterns during the gameplay.

METHODOLOGY

Guided by Labov's Variationist Sociolinguistics, this study used the qualitative descriptive as the research method. The data was selected and collected from the platform Youtube to get the clear video and script of the conversation.

The samples of the study is consisted of four streamers that were selected to represent both age and sex based on the underlying theory. Windah Basudara as the representative of Millennial and Male, IShowSpeed as the representative of Gen-Z and Male, Valkyrae as the representative of Millennial and Female, and Jessica Jane as the representative of Gen-Z and Female. The data was chosen with transcripts from their respective YouTube videos while playing Among Us (or Super Sus) to ensure comparability. Their videos were transcribed, and the data were analyzed by identifying vocabulary, and speech variation. The analysis focused on how age (Millennial vs Gen Z) and sex (male vs female) systematically influence language use in a shared game context.

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RESULTS

3.1.1 Windah: Informal and Non-Conventional Language Usage

The speech of Windah frequently incorporates informal or non-standard linguistic elements. This is evident in several features, such as the phonological reduction of words in unscripted conversation (e.g., kedengeran instead of kedengaran, which involves a vowel deletion) and the use of offensive terms (goblok instead of bodoh) that are common in casual male vernacular. Furthermore, he employs the non-standard first-person pronoun gue (instead of saya) to maintain an informal tone, as well as the more casual conjunction biar rather than the formal agar. The use of interjections like woi alongside the pronoun gua further highlights an unmonitored communication style.

Time Stamp	Non-Standard Form	Conventional Form	Linguistic Feature and Validation
00:04	*kedengeran tuh dia ketawa-ketawa tuh*	*kedengaran*	Phonological/Lexical: vowel deletion typical in casual speech
00:10	*nggak papa bisa main lagi goblok*	*bodoh*	Lexical/Stylistic: use of an insult word common in male vernacular
00:47	*Kembali lagi bersama gue brando...*	*Kembali lagi bersama saya brando...*	Use of the non-standard pronoun *gue* for a casual tone
01:00	*biar tidak di spion*	*agar tidak di spion*	Lexical: *biar* is more informal compared to *agar*
04:00	*bukan gua woi bukan gua*	*bukan saya*	Use of interjection *woi* and pronoun *gua* indicating an unmonitored style

3.1.2 Windah: Standard and Formal Language Usage

Time Stamp	Stable/Conventional Form	Vernacular Form	Linguistic Feature and Validation
00:49	channel	kenel	Standard pronunciation of the English loanword
00:52	akan bermain	bakal main	Use of the formal future marker akan

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00:54	ini adalah gameplay	ini gameplay	Use of the copula adalah typical of formal Indonesian
19:30	Jadi itulah dia gameplay kemenangan Pertamaku	Ya udah itu dia gameplay menangnya	Formal concluding marker characteristic of monitored speech

Conversely, Windah also utilizes stable and conventional linguistic forms. Examples include the use of the formal future marker akan bermain (as opposed to bakal main) and the inclusion of the copula adalah in ini adalah gameplay are characteristics of formal Indonesian

3.2.1 Valkyrae: Conventional and Emerging Linguistic Styles (Female Speakers)

Valkyrae exhibits both standard and innovative language patterns, typical of female speakers. Standard or prestige forms are shown through adherence to clear grammatical structure and syntax, such as I'm eating a Nutri-Grain bar I found in the kitchen. However, she also employs innovative or vernacular patterns, including modern slang, like simp, which positions women as pioneers in linguistic evolution. Furthermore, her discourse utilizes innovative, engagement-based features, such as expressive, exclamatory phrases (e.g., Oh my god you scared me!).

Pattern Type	Linguistic Feature	Example	Validation
Standard/Prestige	Adherence to standard syntax	I'm eating a Nutri-Grain bar I found in the kitchen	Prestige form clear grammar and structure
Innovative /Vernacular	Use of modern slang	I was gonna simp for corpse but then he killed four	Women as innovators in linguistic change
Innovative /Discourse	Exclamatory phrases	Oh my god you scared me!	"Expressive, engagement-based discourse marker"

3.2.2 Conventional and Established Language Forms (Mature Speakers)

Mature speakers often rely on stable and conventional linguistic forms. This includes using traditional greetings, such as Hello hi good evening, which signifies adherence to linguistic etiquette. The lexicon used, even in casual settings, is often formal (e.g., But how is that profitable?), suggesting a conventional speech style. Additionally, mature speakers frequently use pragmatic framing strategies for clarity, such as explicit clarifications (e.g., Ordering or are you... we're just saying talking about sushi).

Pattern Type	Linguistic Feature	Example	Validation
Stable/Conventional	Formal greetings	*Hello hi good evening*	Traditional greeting shows adherence to linguistic etiquette
Stable/Conventional	Use of formal lexicon	*But how is that profitable*	Adult lexicon in casual context indicates conventional speech
Stable/Conventional	Pragmatic framing for clarity	*Ordering or are you.. we're just saying talking about sushi*	Explicit clarification strategy typical of mature speakers

3.3.1 Speed: Informal and Non-Standard Language Usage (Male Speakers)

The speech of Speed is characterized by vernacular or non-standard features, typical of male speakers. This includes the frequent use of non-standard contractions such as ain't and gonna in place of are not and going to. Dialectal variation is noted with the non-standard pronoun y'all

(for you all), and a high occurrence of expletives in his casual speech. Grammatical irregularities, like how do you killing instead of how do you kill, are indicative of unmonitored speech. Furthermore, he uses dog as a non-standard vocative, which is characteristic of urban slang.

Time Stamp	Non-Standard Form	Standard Form	Linguistic Feature and Validation
00:26	*you ain't gonna tell*	*you are not going to tell*	Non-standard contraction *ain't* and *gonna*
04:10	*y'all*	*you all*	Non-standard pronoun indicating dialectal variation
04:13	[expletives]	(appropriate	High frequency of
04:21	*how do you killing*	*how do you kill*	Grammatical irregularity typical of unmonitored speech
10:35	*dog*	*sir/friend*	Non-standard vocative indicating urban slang

3.3.2 Contemporary Slang and Informal Terms (Youth/Gen-Z Speakers)

Younger, or Gen-Z, speakers frequently utilize new slang and non-standard expressions. This includes the use of clipped words like sus (meaning suspicious), which originates as gaming-related slang (e.g., Among Us). Acronym-based slang common in streaming, such as L's in the chat (signifying losses/shame), is also prevalent. Technical jargon from gaming, such as the compound term stream snipers, is also used. Emotional intensifiers and peer solidarity markers, like the vocative bro, are employed, as well as phonological reductions typical of youth speech, such as gonna for going to.

Time Stamp	Expression	Meaning	Linguistic Feature and Validation
09:35	*sus*	suspicious	Clipping slang from gaming context (Among Us)
10:15	*L's in the chat*	losses/shame	Acronym-based slang common in streaming
06:32	*stream snipers*	players watching stream for advantage	Compound gaming jargon
00:22	*bro*	vocative	Emotional intensifier and peer solidarity marker
00:26	*gonna*	going to	Phonological reduction typical of youth speech

3.4.1 Jessica Jane: Standard and Emerging Linguistic Features (Female Speakers)

Jessica Jane's speech demonstrates both standard and innovative linguistic patterns, in line with characteristics observed in female speakers. She adheres to Labov's Principle I, showing clear standard grammar and minimal use of stigmatized forms, as seen in Oke Guys, kita pertama kali main langsung jadi impostor. However, she also exemplifies an innovative change from below (Principle II), utilizing social interactional features such as hedges and intensifiers, for instance, Aku curiga ya sama Jeni tahu.

Labov Principle	Feature	Example (Indonesian)	Validation
Principle I	Clear Standard Grammar	*Oke Guys, kita pertama kali main langsung jadi impostor*	Use of standard Indonesian, few stigmatized forms
Principle II	Use of hedges/intensifiers	*Aku curiga ya sama Jeni tahu*	Innovative change from below; social interactional feature

3.4.2 Contemporary Slang and Non-Standard Vocabulary (Youth Speakers)

Youth speech is marked by contemporary slang and non-standard vocabulary. This includes the use of common Gen-Z exclamations for emotion, such as Astaga. Lexical intensifiers like gila, used to mean 'crazy' or 'wow', are also characteristic. Simplified pronunciations, such as the contractions gak and tau for tidak and tahu, are typical. The use of English loanwords like impostor and report indicates globalized, gaming-related slang. Furthermore, common abbreviations in youth casual speech are observed.

Feature	Example (Indonesian)	Validation
Youth Slang/Interjections	*Astaga*	Common Gen-Z exclamation for emotion
Lexical Intensifiers	*gila*	Used as intensifier 'crazy' or 'wow'
Simplified Pronunciation	*gak, tau*	Contraction of *tidak* and *tahu*
English Loanwords	*impostor, report*	Gaming-related borrowings indicating globalized slang
Shortened Forms	*gimana, deh*	Abbreviations typical of youth casual speech

DISCUSSION

The analyses presented in this compilation demonstrate the dynamic interaction between sociolinguistic variation and digital-age discourse, confirming the continuing relevance of William Labov's Variationist Theory in the context of online communication. Across multiple speech samples, ranging from Millennial and Gen-Z speakers to gender-based distinctions, the data reveal consistent alignment with Labov's principles of linguistic stratification, gender paradox, and change from below.

First, the data reaffirm Labov's Gender Paradox, showing that female speakers, such as Valkyrae and Jessica Jane, display both a preference for overt prestige forms and an active role as linguistic innovators. Their discourse features a high degree of grammatical accuracy, clear articulation, and pragmatic framing for social cohesion hallmarks of stable prestige forms (Principle I). Simultaneously, their frequent use of slang, intensifiers, and interactive hedges ("ya tahu," "oh my god," "gila") signals women's leadership in linguistic innovation, especially in informal and digital settings. This combination demonstrates the dual role of female speakers as both preservers and agents of linguistic change, supporting Labov's observation that women lead in language change while also maintaining social norms of correctness.

In contrast, male and younger speakers embody the vernacular dominance characteristic of informal, peer-group communication. Their frequent use of reduced forms ("gonna," "ain't," "gue," "biar") and expletives marks spontaneous, unmonitored speech that reinforces group solidarity and masculine identity through what Labov calls "covert prestige." The linguistic behavior of these speakers emphasizes authenticity, humor, and resistance to overt norms values often celebrated in male-dominated or youth-centered digital spaces such as gaming communities. This supports Labov's Principle I (men using more nonstandard forms) and reflects how vernacular speech functions as a performative marker of in-group belonging.

Age-based variation further illustrates Labov's findings on stable versus innovative variables. Millennial speakers show balanced use of conventional and innovative linguistic strategies, using traditional greetings or formal lexicon in casual contexts, yet embracing new forms like "simp," "bro," or "sus." This hybridity reflects generational negotiation between linguistic stability and innovation. Meanwhile, Gen-Z speakers exhibit accelerated linguistic change driven by digital media, incorporating

global English slang, gaming terminology, and rapid code-switching between English and Indonesian. These hybridized linguistic forms represent the digital-era version of "change from below," where innovation emerges unconsciously from online peer interaction rather than institutional authority.

Culturally, the blending of English and Indonesian across the data suggests a transnational dimension of linguistic change. The pervasive use of English loanwords ("stream sniper," "report," "impostor") not only reflects global media influence but also signals a redefinition of linguistic prestige in multilingual societies. Prestige is no longer determined solely by adherence to a national standard but also by fluency in globally circulated digital vernaculars. This finding extends Labov's theory into the realm of globalized sociolinguistics, where linguistic change is both local and translocal, shaped by online communities rather than geographic boundaries.

the combined results affirm that Labov's theoretical framework remains a robust tool for analyzing language variation in digital and multicultural contexts. Female speakers maintain prestige norms while innovating from below; male speakers assert covert prestige through vernacular solidarity; and generational shifts reflect ongoing, rapid linguistic evolution influenced by global media. The interplay of gender, age, and digital culture thus demonstrates that linguistic change today is not merely a social process but also a technological and transnational phenomenon anchored in Labov's foundational concepts yet dynamically evolving within 21st-century communication practices.

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