

## Online Forum Slang as National Cultural Identity in Cyberspace

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**Abstract:** Internet has proven to facilitate political movements and therefore can significantly support the ability of a community to meet its aims. A community may also be able to share its messages to a much broader audience. Kaskus users have created their own terms and jargons which has been slowly seeping through the daily Indonesian vocabulary. Kaskus act as a bridge that connects Indonesian values and practices across national boundaries. The need for belonging produced the creative language variety which is now spread not just in other Indonesian websites but also in real life. Kaskus language variety has become a cultural identity unique to Indonesians.

**Key words:** Culture identity, social media, online slang, political movement, Indonesia

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### INTRODUCTION

In the late 1990s, the internet was seen as a perfect place to open new business. This is due to the illusion of unlimited economic opportunities without regulations. However, the Yahoo! Case in France has ended this illusion (Cohen-Almagor, 2012). Corporations have to follow state regulations wherever they do business and internet legislation has since been improved. However, the internet revolution is beginning and it is still continuing until the present day.

The internet also has proven that new media, such as blogs, social networks, mailing lists and online forums are good organizational tools (Matthiesen, 2012). Internet has facilitated political movements and online protests throughout the globe. Presidential campaigns now include social networks as a tool to gain more votes for their respective candidates. Internet presence can significantly support the ability of a community to meet its aims. It also allows the community to share its messages to a much broader audience compared to before (Salter, 2011).

In this study, it is argued that Kaskus, an Indonesian online forum have created cultural impacts in linguistic anthropology. Kaskus users have created their own terms and jargons in communicating with each other through the use of the forums. The Kaskus jargon as mentioned in the Kaskus dictionary has been slowly seeping through the daily Indonesian vocabulary. Linguists should watch this phenomenon and understand the impact on translation studies.

The aims and objectives of this study are to discuss Kaskus slang formations and how it might be used to signify an Indonesian cultural identity in cyberspace.

**A new media for online movement:** Sima (2011) mentioned that internet technologies have effectively empowered resource-poor activists in their self-representation, information brokering, network building, public mobilization and construction of discourse communities. This fact has been supported by social phenomenon, such as the Iranian Internet social networks which is the source of heated debate against Iranian government use of censorship (Ameripour *et al.*, 2010). The majority of social scientists have not engaged research using publicly available search engines to analyze links in social networks, online discussion forums and the likes (Park, 2012).

Indonesia is not behind in the formation of online movements. Internet has proven instrumental to bringing an abrupt end to the regime of Suharto in 1998 (Basuki, 1998; Hill and Sen, 2000). Protests, such as Save Prita (a housewife who is jailed due to sharing her bad experience with her physicians at a private hospital) and Indonesia Unite (a campaign against the bombings made by fanatical terrorists) started in Twitter.

Social networks have been very popular in Indonesia. West (2011) said that as of 2011, Indonesian users are the second largest in Facebook. The Indonesian community has embraced social networks as a way of life in the modern era. Sales of social network access capable cellular phones are soaring as indicated by the number of advertisements featuring Facebook and Twitter as a built-in function. Social media brings a new way of creating public opinion which became a reference group in self assessment and attitude shaping towards certain situations (Prianti and Amaliah, 2012). E-commerce is also thriving due to the popularity of social media (Albert and Hersinta, 2012).

## CYBER AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Identity itself is studied and understood by each individual through socialization. Gudykunst and Kim defined ethnic and cultural identities as those views of ourselves that we assume we share with others in the in-groups (Samovar *et al.*, 2007).

Cultural identity can also be expressed through a specific or particular style which can be demonstrated through a variety of things, such as clothes, art and language. A language develops according to the particular needs of the people who live in a certain location at a certain period of time who share a way of life and culture. From this definition, it is clear that language is strongly intertwined with culture and identity. The language gives an opportunity to many people to share a way of life.

Phinney (1989) proposed a three stage progression for ethnic identity development. This model explains that development is divided into three stages, namely:

- Unexamined ethnic identity where ethnic members do not have a sense of identity
- Ethnic identity search where the members start to establish certain norms and behaviors as their own identity
- Ethnic identity achievement where members have achieved a secure, confident and stable sense of identity. Although, achievement represents the highest level of ethnic identity development, Phinney recognizes that reexamination or reestablishment of identity may occur depending on experiences over time

## THE BIRTH OF KASKUS

Kaskus was founded in November, 1999 by three Indonesian citizens who is at time still undergraduates in Seattle, USA. They created it for their coursework yet they decide to continue the site for Indonesian students abroad. Kaskus started to be managed professionally from 2008 by having their first real office in Jakarta. They rebranded the site and decide to keep illegal content away by closing two forums, BB17+ (porn exchange forum) and fight club (debate club where anything goes). This action has proven to be beneficial since the number of members has increased to 30% in that year into 1.2 million users. Kaskus underwent a significant redesign in May, 2012 named appropriately Kaskus 2.0. Kaskus has now reached >4.5 million members (Kaskus networks). Kaskus ranks 8th in Alexa for Indonesian web traffic but the 2nd local company after detik.com (Table 1).

Table 1: Alexa ranking for internet traffic in indonesia per 29 May, 2013

Websites	Ownership	Type
Google	Foreign	Search engine
Facebook	Foreign	Social networking
Blogspot	Foreign	Blogging
YouTube	Foreign	Video sharing
Google.co.id	Foreign	Search engine
Yahoo!	Foreign	Search engine
Detik.com	Local	Online news
Kaskus.co.id/Kaskus.com	Local	Online forum
WordPress.com	Foreign	Blogging
Twitter	Foreign	Social networking

**Slang and jargons:** Slang refers to speech expressions used in a community to show attachment to a certain social identity (Shahraki and Rasekh, 2011). Shahraki and Rasekh (2011) examined slang usage among Iranian adolescents and they concluded that they use slang as a badge of identity showing their attachment to a social group. Amelinda (2013) differentiates slang and jargons. Lighter in Amelinda (2013) defines slang as informal, non-standard, non-technical vocabulary composed chiefly of novel sounding synonyms for standard word and phrases. While jargon is defined as a bunch of terms and expression used by a social group or particular profession but rather hard to understand by outsiders (Amelinda, 2013).

An example of slang is the bahasa gaul (roughly translated: Slang language) which is commonly used among Indonesian youth. Bahasa gaul expresses their aspirations for social and economic mobility and also an increasingly cosmopolitan, national youth culture (Smith-Hefner, 2008). A study in Brazil also found that slang is also generated from political vulnerability which is co-constructed with linguistic anxiety (Roth-Gordon, 2009).

Jargons are more commonly found in professional and academic communities where new terms and phrases are invented to express new knowledge and new practices gained (Montgomery, 2004). Jargons are also used to filter outsiders from insiders. The use of jargons in communication also signifies the community which the speaker wishes to be identified with.

## COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATIONS

Norms are socially constructed over time during the use of computer mediated communications. These norms are limited to the boundaries of the group (Postmes *et al.*, 2000). Thelwall (2009) examined comments in MySpace, a social networking site and found types of slang and jargons. These comments were used for friendship maintenance. They contained a combination of standard spelling, apparently accidental mistakes, slang, sentence fragments, typographic slang and interjections. Thelwall also found that several new spelling variants

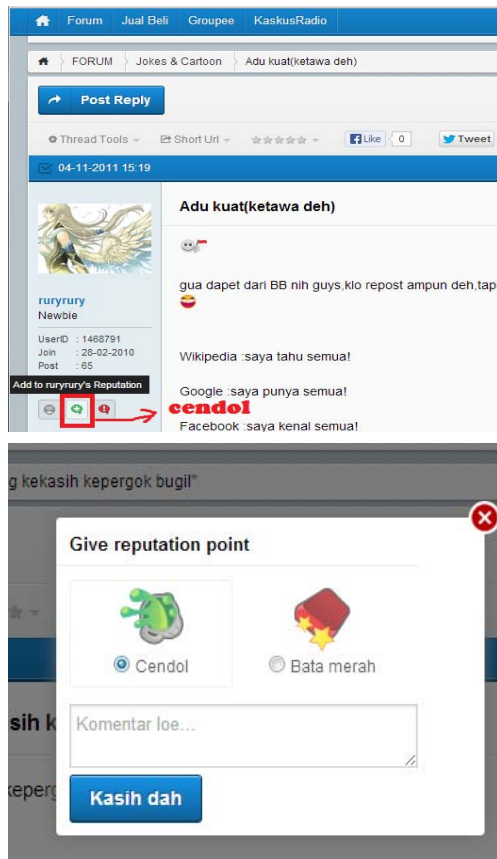


Fig. 1: Giving reputation points in Kaskus (personal browsing)

derived from previous forms of computer-mediated communication have become extremely common, including u, ur, :, haha and lol. The vast majority of comments (97%) contained at least one non-standard language feature, suggesting that members almost universally recognize the informal nature of this kind of messaging (Thelwall, 2009).

The language variety in Kaskus is a combination of slang and jargon which serves as an expression of a sense of togetherness. By using this language, users indirectly declare themselves as a part of the community which is different from others (Amelinda, 2013).

**Kaskus language variety:** Kaskus users have developed particular vocabularies which is unique to the community. There are 8 word formation process that appeared in the language variety, namely (acronyms, blending, derivation, borrowing, clipping, reduplication, language deviation and multiple processes). Acronyms and borrowing is the most common process (Amelinda, 2013). These vocabularies have 10 common functions, namely: Humor,



Fig. 2: How real cendol looks like

resistance against boredom, language enrichment, language/term simplification, euphemisms, revealing emotions, sarcasm, intimacy, differentiation with other groups and secrecy (Setiawan, 2010).

The 2 unique words which is very frequently used in Kaskus discussions are cendol and pertamax. Cendol, a green jelly like substance is a popular traditional food in Indonesia. Kaskus users uses cendol to signify good reputation points.

Figure 1 shows a green box below a user ID which when clicked will give a reputation point. Reputation point can be good (green) cendol or bad (red) bata merah. Figure 2 shows what cendol looks like in real life.

The second frequently used word is pertamax. It is constructed from “pertama” which means first and “x” which means times. Literally, it would mean first time, however Kaskus users use it to signify the first reply to a post (Fig. 3). Setiawan (2010) relates this habit to the trend in Indonesia where anything new is always considered fashionable and having high prestige. Users always try to obtain the first reply and the first reply will always contain the word pertamax. Since, it has homonym relation to a famous gasoline brand, some users with humor intent will try to insert images relating to gas stations or vehicles. Table 2 shows sample Kaskus words with its formation processes.

**Not just in Kaskus:** Kaskus language variety has expanded beyond its own website. Many other Indonesian website has exhibited use of the language variety. Most common is the use of pertamax, cendol and sundul. Sample of usage are depicted in Fig. 4 and 5.

**Indonesia cultural identity in cyberspace:** This study reveals how Kaskus, an online forum, act as a bridge that connects Indonesian values and practices across national boundaries. The need for belonging produced the creative

Table 2: Kaskus word-formation processes-modified from Amelinda (2013)

No. of stages	Specific process	Sample	Real meaning
Single process	Acronym	AKTB	Stands for Akses Kaskus Tanpa Banner (Kaskus Access without Banner) which is a privilege given to donators
	Blending	Barcen	Abbreviated version of "barter cendol" reputation points bartering
	Derivation	Alay-er	Alay (tacky) with the English suffix-er to define a tacky person
	Reduplication	Abu-abu	Literally means "grey". Used to signify the grey box below a nickname which indicates a user with no reputation
Multiple process	Language deviation	komeng	A deviation from "comment"
	Borrowing and acronym	BW	Stands for Bandwidth
	Borrowing and blending	nubitol	Stands for "newbie" and "tolol (stupid)"
	Borrowing and clipping	Agan	Short version of "juragan"
	Borrowing and derivation	Klonengan	A deviation for cloning indicating a cloned Kaskus ID
	Borrowing, acronym and derivation	IGO	Abbreviation of "Indonesian Girls Only" signifying beautiful Indonesian girl
Non-word formation	Borrowing, clipping and reduplication	mimin	Clipped version of "administrator"
	Not applicable	cendol	Good reputation points
		pertamax	Constructed from "pertama (first)" and "X (for times)". Indicates the first reply to a post

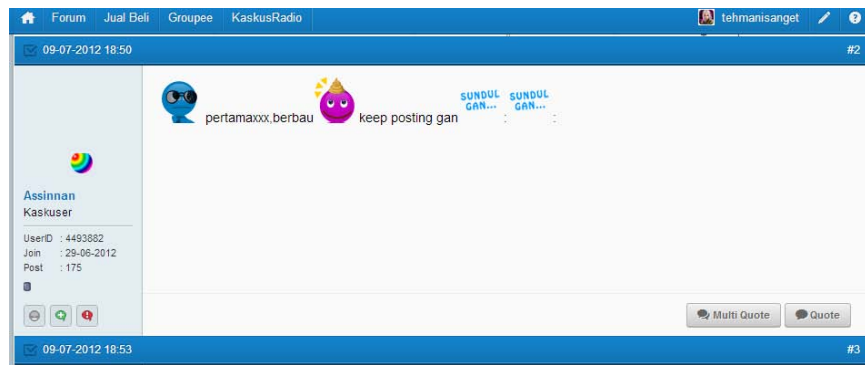


Fig. 3: The first posting mentions Pertamax (personal browsing)



Fig. 4: Sample use of Kaskus language variety in Facebook forums (personal browsing)

language variety which is now spread not just in other Indonesian websites but also in real life. This finding is in line with a study of Caribbean websites which preserved Creole cultural values and practices in their designs (Plaza, 2009).

The spread of this language variety is also similar with the spread of local music across boundaries.

Community identity is found through notions of local sounds (Leyshon *et al.*, 1998). Songwriters frequently write songs with themes, such as their homeland to situate their music (Roy, 2008).

Kaskus language variety has become a cultural identity unique to Indonesians. This phenomenon has to be examined further by linguists to determine impact on

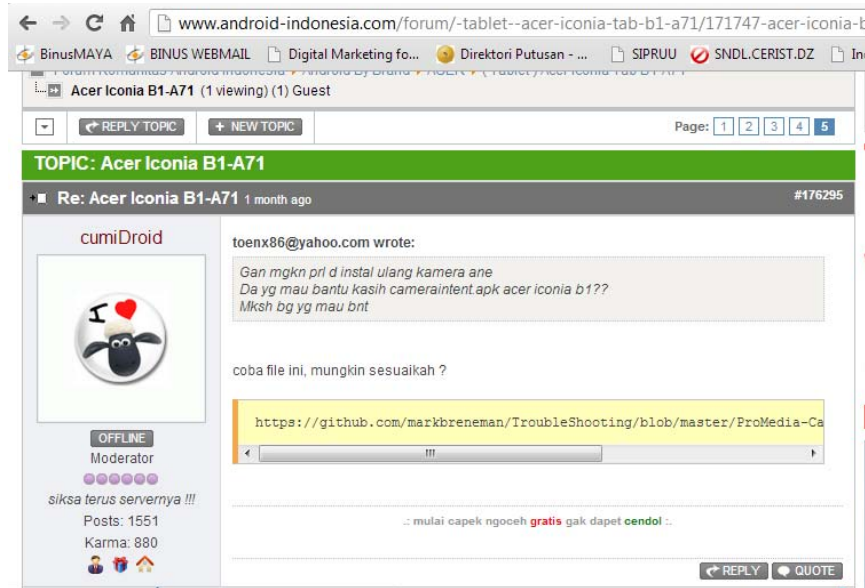


Fig. 5: Usage of cendol in Android Indonesia forum (personal browsing)

current spoken and written language. Vocabulary from Kaskus may enter the Indonesian official dictionary in the future. That would be a final signal of acceptance from the linguistic society. However, it would need to enter the common society beforehand.

## CONCLUSION

Kaskus members use a unique language variety with embodied metaphors. Cultural influence on social bonding can be shown when culture is operationalized in terms of cognitive schemas that operate within the group discourses (Ignatow, 2009). Kaskus members also tries to operate outside their boundaries. This has made the vocabulary expand to other forums/web places. Phinney's identity development model reconigze this stage as the ethic identity search. Some words, such as "maho" (stands for 'manusia homo homosexual) is commonly used now in the street to ridicule others. This also signifies that the identity development is halfway through the third stage where Kaskus language has become a cultural identity in cyberspace, the Indonesian cultural identity.

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