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Styles and Trends of Online Aggressive Language Among English Students in Their Blogging Activities

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Abstract

Online aggression is a prevalent phenomenon among university students because information and communication technology (ICT) is an inseparable part of their daily and academic lives. University students are a demographic that is reportedly little studied. Previous research studied popular social networking sites rather than Blog, and online aggression is rarely studied through the lens of linguistics. Therefore, this study covered these research gaps by exploring the language tendencies of English students who are engaging in online aggression in Blog. The research design is triangulation mixed methods with two data types, i.e., 43 online questionnaire responses as the quantitative data and 302 online aggressive blog comments as the qualitative data. The questionnaire results were analysed based on the percentages and scale leanings, whereas the documented comments were analysed with content analysis assisted with NVivo 12. The results revealed that online aggression among university students who are blogging is primarily done with the style of combining text and non-text elements. The trends of their online aggressive language are lowercase spellings, no proper punctuation, and frequent usage of emoji to fulfil multiple purposes, i.e., syntactic as punctuation and semantic as discourse particle or emblem gesture. This study contributed in exploring the online aggression experiences of a unique demography, specifically the linguistic tendencies of university foreign language students who are interacting aggressively non-anonymously on a social networking site that is little studied.

Keywords: online aggression, language styles, language tendencies, language trends, cyberbullying, blogging activities

Exploring the Internet Language Style of University Students

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education and Culture's Circular Letter No. 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education in Coronavirus Disease Emergency Conditions has required Indonesia's educational institutions to adhere to three rules for their online learning implementation. First, online learning must provide a meaningful learning experience without being burdened by the demands of completing all curriculum grade requirements (Saputra et al., 2021). Second, the lessons should emphasise pushing students to use life or practical skills (Vhalery et al., 2022). Third, activities should vary according to the students' conditions in consideration of the gap of access or learning facilities at home (Allo, 2020; Kanno, 2020). In the context of university students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), many lecturers are currently leveraging the ease of use and accessibility of information and communication technologies (ICT) to facilitate the students' foreign language e-learning (Andriani & Kasriyati, 2020; Arndt & Woore, 2018).

What interests this study is the fact that social networking sites (SNSs) offer students a very rich resource to facilitate their linguistic creativity. In the virtual world, students have written text as their words and a variety of visual elements as their gestures which can include text that is stylised to portray facial expressions. These resources are unique in the linguistics of online interaction (Chang & Lu, 2018). This study intends to contribute to the pool of knowledge on the language style of students, who are still learning a new and foreign language, in their online interaction. The results of this study hope to fill the gap discovered by an international systematic review on emoticon, emoji, and stickers studies from 1996 to 2017 by Tang and Hew (2019), which called for a more purposive exploration of how Internet language features are used in a naturalistic and authentic context.

According to Başöz (2016, SNSs offer a relaxed atmosphere for the acquisition and contextualisation of linguistic knowledge. SNSs also construct "a peaceful context for learners to talk liberally and express their ideas without any fear of awkwardness or lack of self-confidence" (Altam, 2020, p. 38). Rather than being under direct teacher supervision and the class judgement (Herlinawati & Rachmajanti, 2018; Marwa & Herdi, 2017), university students can learn from the comfort of their smartphones. Messaging fluency and social connections make SNSs a platform for active engagement (Mihai et al., 2022). Without being actively instructed or monitored to comply with proper grammar, students are much more creative in writing their thoughts and opinions of a given topic online than they do in the classroom.

Blog as a Unique Online Space

This study chose to focus on studying online language in Blog for several reasons. Blog is one of the least studied SNSs because it is easier to automatically collect abundant data from Facebook and Twitter pages. Yet, Blog is one of the most academically inclined SNSs because it emphasises publishing good content rather than distracting online users with constantly updating content. Interaction in blogs is done through the comment boxes below every post, and their default public nature makes Blog a source of rich data to study the kind of internet language in an academic online activity. Students evidently use blogs as their alternative learning media beyond the classroom to share multimedia material that they conceptualised and designed (Fithriani et al., 2019). Consequently, blogs have the potential to be the perfect area to train language learners' writing ability by writing different and any kind of posts in their target language. Since 2015, students' blog started its debut as an alternative teaching medium in some courses in the English Education Department (PBIG) in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) at Universitas Lancang Kuning (Unilak) (Hamuddin, 2016). Blog has been used as an alternative learning medium to improve their writing skills. A 5-year-survey by Hamuddin et al. (2018) found that students' e-learning is not maximal because there are EFL students who engage in online aggression when they interact during their online learning. This study aims to investigate this finding further due to three reasons.

Firstly, university students are understudied in online aggression research compared to secondary students, even though they are more involved in such incidents because higher education necessitates students to use ICT. Their age range had passed the threshold of adult age, which is specifically 17 years old for Indonesian citizens, meaning that they generally cannot claim immaturity when they engage in online aggression because they should be aware that it is not appropriate behaviour. Secondly, the online aggression engagement in blogs occurs between classmates who use their real names and real profile images because the blogs were created for their university coursework, meaning that the factor of anonymity is largely eliminated. Research has attributed user anonymity being an enabler for this behaviour for giving users a false sense of security, thus allowing them

to post things they would normally feel disinclined to utter face-to-face (Chakraborty et al., 2016), but there is a scarcity of studies that explored non-anonymous online aggression (Hosseinmardi et al., 2014). Three, the “rule-free zone” of SNSs does not only allow students to be less formal in their writing but also less appropriate (Lin et al., 2016). Cyberculture gives the students as online users the freedom to post their thoughts which content can bother, hurt, and even make others feel threatened accidentally or purposefully (Wheeler & Muwanguzi, 2022). Learning and using a foreign language can make any student acquainted with frustration at themselves or others, and students can lash out these feelings aggressively online when they are blogging. Consequently, online aggression changes SNSs from being “the perfect area” to train students’ ability in using a foreign language to “a warzone” of disturbing comments (Hamuddin et al., 2019). Considering that prior research has mostly gathered data on online aggression which occurs during normal online interaction, this study addresses educators’ quandary on the worth of utilising SNSs.

Overall, this study addresses multiple research gaps. Previous studies have mainly characterised the language as offensive and mostly directed their studies to improve ICT efforts to automatically detect or predict the presence of online aggression in social networking sites. Compared to studying the textual part of the messages, little is known on online aggression messages using typographical icons such as emoticons or emoji. Moreover, current knowledge on the language of online aggression is primarily derived from typical interaction on social media, so there is a huge gap in our linguistic knowledge of this phenomenon within a more specific and purposive context (Tang & Hew, 2019). Current knowledge on online aggressive language is also primarily based on data collected from public forums and popular SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter. Thereby, there is also a gap of knowledge on online aggression within academic online activities. With these gaps, this study aims to fill them by studying online aggression as an internet language phenomenon within the specific context of EFL university students’ blogging activities. The research questions are formulated as (a) What are the online language styles of English students of FKIP Unilak in making their aggressive comments in Blog? and (b) What are the trends of online aggressive language of English students of FKIP Unilak in their blogging activities? The analysis of language styles within authentic online aggression blog comments is valuable for teacher’s planning on online EFL writing practices.

Online Aggression Studies in the Context of University

Cyberculture has influenced people to feel less social restraint in interacting, leading them to be freer in expressing their thoughts and feelings online, whether they are warranted or inappropriate (Pereira, 2018). Consequently, online aggression has become a persistent problem as it has permeated the generation that has grown up with ICT (Umesh et al., 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). This problem has the potential to be exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic where uncertainty and change are potent sources of frustration and aggression for the students.

In the early years of online aggression research, the most arguably prevalent theme is exploring the victims’ experiences. Besides determining the prevalence (MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010), the early 2000s research tended to document psychological consequences of the victims (Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010) and identify the predicting factors (Aricak, 2009; Zhang et al., 2010). As the local media started paying more attention to online aggression, the academic community increasingly focused on providing solutions for schools. Baldasare et al. (2012) was motivated by the shock of a suicide committed by one of their university students and conducted their research to listen to the students’ concerns on this phenomenon to create a comfortable campus culture. Walker et al. (2011) had proven that this phenomenon is a legitimate concern for university councillors to pay attention to, and Rafferty and Vander Ven (2014) called for sociologists to provide better solutions because bystander intervention is a rarity. However, merely educating students on online aggression is a rather ineffective solution because Francisco et al. (2015) found that university students tend to underrate their level of involvement.









To date, researchers continue to examine the prevalence of online aggression incidents with an attempt to be more inclusive in the spirit of diversity, such as black university students in a historically black US university (Johnson & Blackshire, 2019), university students who had been psychologically abused during their childhood (Zhang et al., 2020), or university students from a foreign nationality (Souza et al., 2018). This study contributes to the lacking depth of the studies on this phenomenon in Indonesia, which tends to be a repeating investigation of determining the prevalence (Nazriani & Zahreni, 2016; Safaria, 2016; Setiawan et al., 2020), factors (Handono et al., 2019; Wiguna et al., 2018), and text mining systems to detect aggressive behaviour

online (Margono & Raikundalia, 2014; Muzakir et al., 2022; Nurrahmi & Nurjanah, 2018). There is an emerging trend of highlighting the more extreme impact of online aggression as more studies are linking this activity with crimes (Erliyani, 2022; Nugraheni, 2021; Frensh et al., 2022), but seemingly none have pursued a purely linguistic investigation of this phenomenon within the context of language learning.

Language Styles on the Internet

There is a disembodied sense in terms of formal writing and speaking as people are intimidated by the blank page and the public gaze, but none of these apply when it comes to the informality of language on the Internet as people can write unfiltered messages all the time without fear of red inks and corrections from teachers with their gadgets. Unlike formal writing, informal writing has liberal use of acronyms and abbreviations (Derin et al., 2019). Although this textspeak started with the motivation to make language more efficient for people to convey messages (e.g., “btw” for “by the way”), a pragmatic study by McSweeney (2018) showed that acronyms have more functions beyond shortening words. The “lol” which originally meant “laughing out loud” is now an irony marker (e.g., “you look good at prom lol”), a signal for sympathy (e.g., “lol I’m writing my thesis”), or a way to soften a sentence that might sound like an accusation (e.g., “what are you doing lol”). In another instance, keyboard smashing, which only exists on digital writing, is an action of randomly smashing the keyboard to create a string of incomprehensible characters (e.g., alsdjfsjdfsndovbd) that represents a sense of being speechless from surprise or shock, but McCulloch (2019) proved that even random keysmashing has a dominant pattern of almost always beginning with “a” and “asdf” on QWERTY laptop or computer keyboard, almost never include numbers, and almost always only all uppercase or all lowercase.

Online language is unique in its typographical tone of voice. “Divorced from gestures, facial expressions, and prosodic features such as intonation, rhythm, and volume,” emoticons entered the cyberspace to infuse the text with emotions (Amaghloubeli, 2012, p. 348). None can pinpoint the exact moment when emoticons emerge, though Scott Fahlman’s (1982) proposal to use “:-)” and “:-(” as punctuation mark combinations meant to express two distinct emotions is marked as the birth of emoticons as an internet language (Asteroff, 1987; McCulloch, 2019). Credited as User Zero of the emoticon, Fahlman inspired Nicolas Loufrani to develop hundreds of different emojis representing moods, expressions, flags, celebrations, weather, and others in 1996, copyrighting them in 1997 to publish them online as .gif files in 1998 (Gallagher, 2019). From then on, digital society gave birth to increasingly innovative descendants of Fahlman’s joke marker and not-joke marker (Fahlman, 1982).

Styles	Brief Description	Examples
Emoticon	A portmanteau of “emotion” and “icon,” sometimes known as “emote”. A pictorial representation or typographic approximations of a facial expression using characters—usually punctuation marks, numbers, and letters—to express a person’s feelings or mood and is read sideways.	:-) :) <3 :’P
Emoji	The name means pictograph and is known as emoji from Japanese <i>e</i> (絵, “picture”) and <i>moji</i> (文字, “character”). Described as both ideograms and smileys. It is not to be confused with emoticons because it is a picture or colourful graphic rather than a typographic approximation.	    
Smiley	A basic ideogram or pictogram that represents a smiling face.	  
Kaomoji	Japanese emoticon, from <i>kao</i> (顔, “face”) and <i>moji</i> (文字, “character”), made up of the Katakana character set and grammar punctuations and can be understood without tilting one’s head to the left.	☺ ☹ ☺(ಥ_ಥ)☺ (益)
Anime-style emoticon	English-language anime blogs or forums adopted Japanese-style emoticons, such as the inequality signs “<” or “>” referenced as “Kirbys”, and likewise Japanese forums incorporated Western characters to better depict anime- or manga-styled faces.	<(-.’.-)> _(ツ)_/

Kigou	These non-linguistic symbols usually function as end-of-sentence punctuation with more visual impact and added meaning. The role of kigou as emoticons is to minimise the dry, businesslike atmosphere/tone of the message.	☆♪♡
Jamo emoticon	Korean Hangul letters are used to make emoticons. Korean emoticons' structure is somewhat similar with Japanese emoticons, but they have their own unique style. Korean emoticon use Korean <i>jamo</i> letters (ㄱ, ㅋ, ㆁ... and ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ,...) instead of other characters.	‘入’ ○ ㅏ ○

In this study, the blog comments may or may not include these non-text elements, so this study codes the findings based on three types: comments that only consist of text elements, only non-text elements, or combines both. The discussion on comments including non-text elements would pay attention to the function of whichever element is found as there is a considerable difficulty to determine the proper names for different styles of the internet language. Some describe them as digital facial representations or visual communicative elements while others use typographic symbols or pictorial emoticons (McCulloch, 2019). While emoticon is arguably the “original” internet language’s unique style, it cannot pose as an umbrella term for stickers or animated pixel arts. Table 1 alleviates the confusion by describing some styles that online users around the globe use on a daily basis with accompaniment examples. This study is valuable as it would also be a systematic attempt to address the huge overlap in how people use the terms emoticon, emoji, and smiley through its exploration of these language styles in an academic activity.

Method

The researcher designed this study with mixed method design; the qualitative data being blog comments, whereas the quantitative data was from online questionnaire responses. The separate strands of data types were triangulated to answer the two research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For the quantitative data, the researcher used random sampling on students Unilak in Indonesia, which was selected because the English Department implements Blog as an alternative teaching media for several subjects. From a population of 300 English students, 43 students (88% female, 12% male) voluntarily completed the Google Form which was distributed in the class social media groups. The distribution message included information of the questionnaire’s purpose and how the data would be used so the students would make an informed consent as they complete the questionnaire. From the 43 students, 88% are female, 65% are senior students in their fourth year (seventh and eighth semesters), 49% have been blogging for more than 24 months, and most of them blog on their smartphones and in their bedrooms.

The questionnaire (see Appendix) is designed based on three indicators, i.e., information and communication technology, online aggression, and language. Incorporating split questions (yes/no), frequency, and agreement questions based on a 10-point scale, the questionnaire probed how the students use blogs in their learning, implicitly asking whether they have seen or engaged in online aggression while blogging. This study analysed the data by interpreting the Google Form-generated graphics of percentages and scales: the pie charts of the percentages are interpreted based on the dominant numbers, while the bar charts of the scales are interpreted based on what end of the extremes, such as mostly to the left (never or do not agree at all) or mostly to the right (always or definitely agree with).

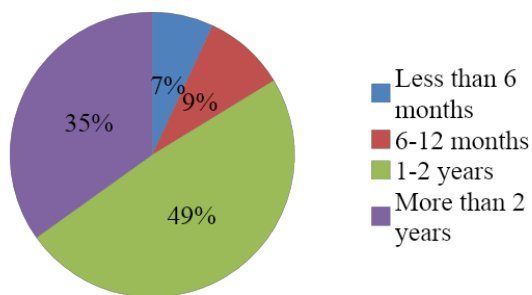
For the qualitative data, the researcher accessed the students’ blogs through the database of a lecturer who teaches their courses with blogs. From the accessible 251 blogs, this study extracted 302 blog comments which were validated to be aggressive comments. Afterwards, this study manually examined the comments one by one according to their language style: text-only (T), non-text-only (N) or both (B) and copied them into the corresponding separate folders. The qualitative data were captured in screenshots using content analysis and the software NVivo 12 to assist the qualitative data analysis. The researcher used the rhetorical content analysis approach (Hijmans, 1996) specifically because this approach focuses on the manifest or properties of the text/image (i.e., form, structure) rather than the latent or meaning of the text/image. Therefore, the researcher could make interpretations based on what the displayed lexical quirks (an interesting phrase or use of emoji).

Results

The English Department of Unilak has obliged their students to use English when they post comments in Blog as a way for them to practise their foreign language skills. From the database of Blog links that the researcher acquired from the FKIP Unilak lecturer, there are 251 blogs owned by 251 students. The researcher randomly sampled this population to voluntarily fill in the questionnaire and obtained 43 completed responses.

Figure 1

Percentages of Respondents Divided by Blogging Experience



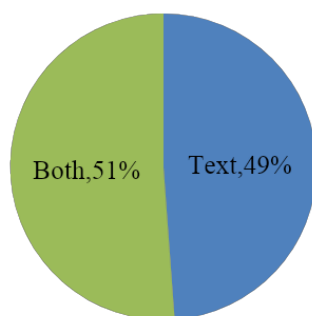
Nearly half of the university students have been blogging for more than 24 months (49%), while only a small minority have less than 6 months of experience (7%). These numbers mean that the questionnaire results proved that English Department students of FKIP Unilak regularly use Blog and reflect answers from university students who are highly familiar with Blog.

Styles of Online Aggressive Language

Figure 2

Students' Observations on the Language Styles of Blog Comments

27. Most of the comments I see are only...



It seems that there is an even half of presence between comments written in text-only (49%) and comments that used both text and non-text elements (51%). The presence of non-text-only comments can be considered negligible compared to the other two styles, according to the questionnaire data results.

Table 3

Percentages of Respondents Divided by Blogging Experience

Code	Styles	Number of Screenshots
B	Both text and non-text	171
T	Text-only	101
N	Non-text-only	30
Total		302

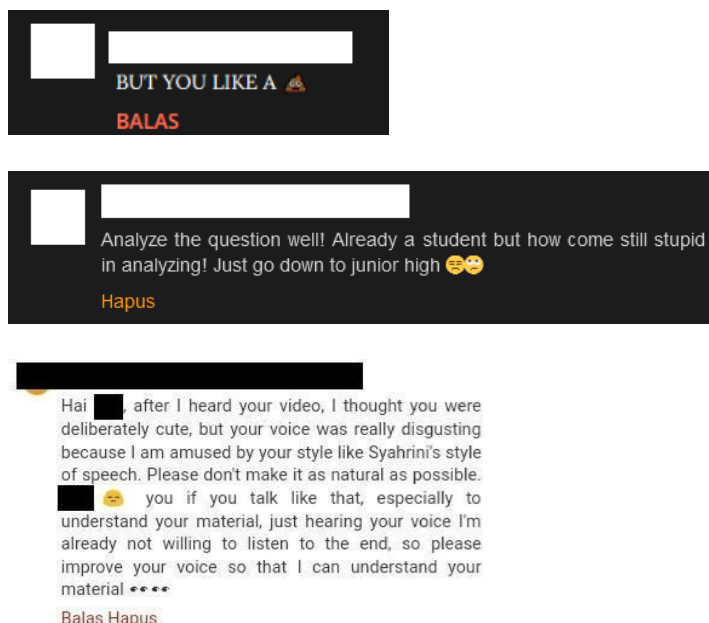
The pattern of disinclination to non-text-only comments is proven from the documentation results. Out of 302 blog comments, only 30 are found to use non-text-only features. The style coding also revealed that the students are more satisfied in combining text and non-text when they are engaging in online aggression rather than only relying on text, as shown by the 70 number margin between the 171 both styles and 101 text-only styles.

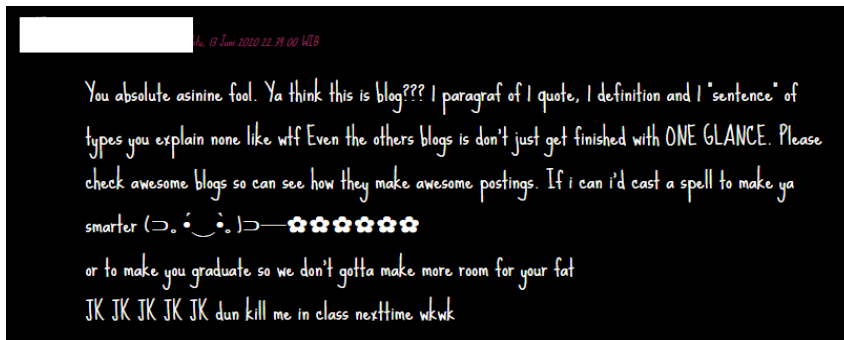
Comments Displaying Both Text and Non-text Elements

171 out of 302 combine elements of text (alphanumerical characters) with non-text, which are emoji and emoticons.

Figure 3

Coded Data Excerpts of Comments Displaying Both Text and Non-text Elements





Note: From top to bottom: Excerpt 1 (BF_005-B-B), Excerpt 2 (IS_079-B-B), Excerpt 3 (SS_005-B-B), Excerpt 4 (PD_055-B-B)

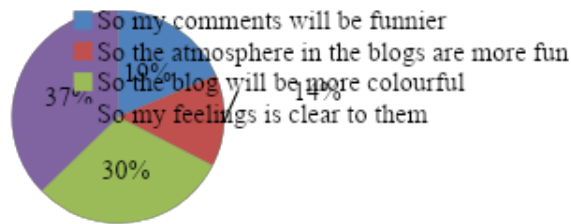
The face emoji are the most popularly used. Students tend to use emoji to end their comments, as shown on Excerpts 1, 2, and 3. This usage means that emoji is used similarly as the period punctuation, indicating that emoji has a syntactic function. Much like punctuations such as period and exclamation, the syntactic emoji do not appear at the beginning of a sentence. In fact, this study found no comment which starts with an emoji, unless the comment is entirely composed of emoji. Emoji can also be found in the middle of the comments, as seen on Excerpt 3's line "Please don't make it as natural as possible. [name] [deadpan emoji] you if you talk like that [...]s". The deadpan emoji serves to convey the writer's mood after calling out the other student's name. Instead of functioning as part of the syntax of a sentence, the emoji serves as an emblem, which is a universal gesture essential in informal conversations (Gawne & McCulloch, 2019). This is also reflected in Excerpt 4's emoticon, which expressed the specific action of "casting a spell." In Excerpt 1's line "BUT YOU LIKE A [poo emoji]", emoji is shown to be used to literally replace words rather than as punctuation. With its express purpose of visually representing a certain meaning or action, emoji and emoticon can also be said to have a semantic function.

The typical length of this style of blog comments varies widely; some consisting of 10 words, less than 5 words, or five complex sentences. What is interesting is the stark difference of aggression levels in comparison to the length of the words. From Excerpts 1 to 4, as the text shortens the message is blunter and more aggressive, whereas the more text is written out in the comment, the message is more polite. These longer comments often start with normal and polite greetings, which are Indonesian variations of "hello" to begin their comment before they proceed to insult the recipient, as shown in Excerpt 3. The student might backtrack at the end of their comment with an apology, such as Excerpt 4's "JK JK JK JK JK dun kill me in class nexttime wk". Students who type more words seem to produce significantly more polite hedges even when they are taunting.

Figure 3

The Reasons Students Use Emoji

I mostly comment with emoji and/or emoticon...



Students have several purposes for using non-text elements when writing their comments. 37% said that emoji makes their feelings clearly delivered to the recipient. 30% cites that emoji makes the blog more colourful. 19% specifically intended to make their comments funnier rather than conveying their feelings, while 14% intended to make the atmosphere of the blog more fun. All the respondents alluded to using emoji or emoticons for oddly positive purposes.

Comments Displaying Only Text

A third of the data (101 comments) showed no non-text elements, only text.

Figure 4

Coded Data Excerpts of Comments Displaying Only Text

██████████

I better 5 hours in toilet, than read this trash

Reply

██████████, you are blog is very bad for theme. because it make blind what are you fill although ppt. Your blog is like being in the trash and and unattractive. makes me feel bored so it is suitable to make us sleep bad theme blog ...

BALAS HAPUS

██████████

waw ██████████ you just put one reference? you are COPASMAN? what a worse from that, so POOR knowledge!

Balas

██████████

██████████ i think you has the IQ of a jellyfish!

You're caught now, so far you've always copied from other people's pages, that's really your big plagiarism huh

Hapus

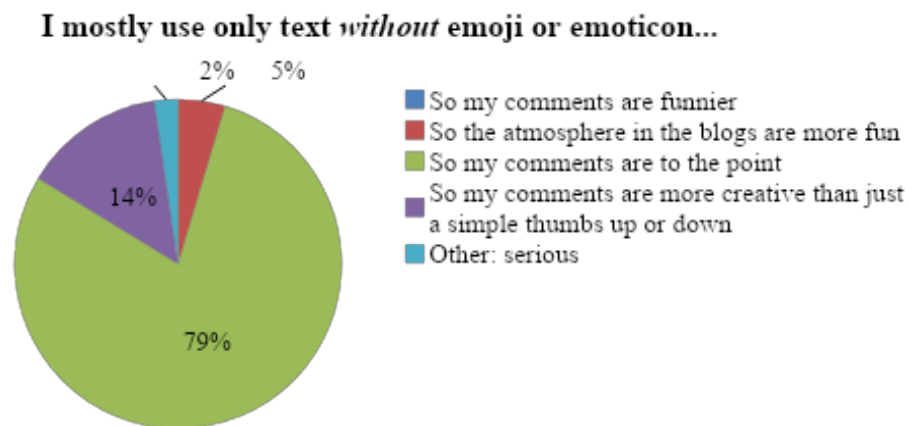
Note: From top to bottom: Excerpt 5 (BF_017-B-T), Excerpt 6 (DD_003-B-T), Excerpt 7 (IS_010-B-T), Excerpt 8 (IS_047-B-T)

Targeting the blog is the most common topic found among the online aggressive comments. Some students would settle for insulting the blog with one word, such as Excerpt 5's "[...] read this trash" and Excerpt 10's "[...] like being in the trash [...]", which is the common buzzword that students tend to use to insult other students' blogs. Some students would type more words to elaborate their negative opinions of the blogs by blaming the blog for having a bad theme colour or font and causing readers to be bored. Boredom is also a frequently used word among the comments, often used as the reason or justification for their name-calling.

As shown in Excerpts 7 and 8 many students insinuated other students to be less intelligent, with varying name-calling that imply stupidity. The students justify their insults by calling out or accusing the contents of the blog post to be plagiarism. Unlike the combination style comments that often end with emoji, text-only comments have an erratic pattern for their closings. In Excerpts 5 and 8, some are void of period punctuation at the end of the sentence. Like Excerpt 6, some use a string of dots, which can be interpreted as the typographical tone of trailing off at the end of an utterance. Some use exclamation marks like in Excerpt 7, not to indicate excitement but to emphasise a rising tone.

Figure 4

The Reasons Students Do Not Use Emoji



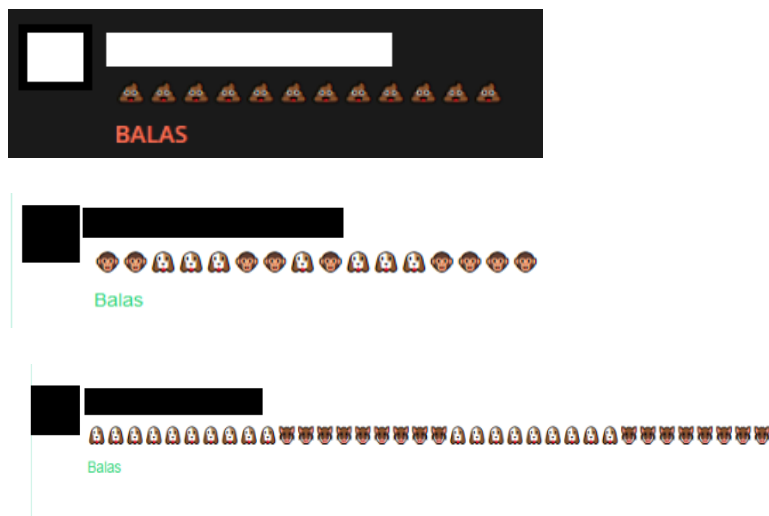
When asked why students purposefully comment without using the emoji feature built-in their smartphones, a huge majority (79%) stated that they want their comments to be "to the point." In contrast, only 14% consciously tried to be creative in writing blog comments and 5% thought that text-only comments make the blog interaction atmosphere fun. Driving the point further is the finding that none (0%) of the students believe that writing text-only comments will make their comments funnier.

Comments Displaying Only Non-text Elements

With only 30 non-text-only comments identified among 302 screenshots, this style of comment is clearly the least preferred style when it comes to commenting on blogs.

Figure 5

Coded Data Excerpts of Comments Displaying Only Non-text Elements



Note: From top to bottom: Excerpt 9 (TA_001-B-N), Excerpt 10 (TA_009-B-N), Excerpt 11 (TA_022-B-N)

From the few data available on non-text-only comments, the obvious pattern found is that they all only consist of emoji. None of the 30 coded data displayed emoticon-only comments. Students who use this comment style rarely employ the face and hand emoji. Instead, they often use emblematic emoji (McCulloch, 2019), which is akin to emblem gestures in which they have precise forms and stable meanings that are arbitrary and culturally specific. Much like how the middle finger is rude in America but is normally used to press elevator and microwave buttons in Japan, the animal emoji in Excerpts 10 and 11 reflects the students' culture. This is because calling people as "dogs" or "monkeys" in Indonesia is rude, though both are frequently used among Indonesians since young.

Excessive repetitiveness is also a dominant tendency for students who use this style of comment. Some are pure repetition, as depicted in Excerpt 9, while others are heterogeneous strings of thematically similar emoji, as displayed by Excerpts 10 and 11. In this respect, emoji do not act as or replace words like Excerpt 1's poo emoji and does not behave as a sentence because there is no emoji ordering that can be equivalent to word ordering. These repetitive emoji are more like when people emphasise a word by extending the letters. In human gesture studies, this repetitiveness is known as beat (McCulloch & Gawne, 2018), which is the repetitive gesture that people are prone to create when they talk. The findings on non-text-only comments showed that emoji has the same rhythmic tendency as beat gestures, such as multiple thumbs up or blowing multiple kisses.

Overall, despite being emoji fluent, the students could not hold an interaction in only emoji. Emoji has syntactic and semantic functions when it is combined with text, but it seems they cannot stand alone for a blog interaction to occur. The combination style is considered more fun to use, the text-only style is mostly used if the students want to give a clearer point, while the non-text-only style is not enough for the students to express their opinions. In engaging with other students online, aggressively in the context of this study, it can be concluded that students are more comfortable when they can combine text and emoji.

Trends of Online Aggressive Language

While analysing the language styles of the comments, this study observed several themes within the comments and questionnaire that are trending when it comes to expressing aggression while blogging.

Figure 6

Coded Data Excerpts of the Trends of Online Aggressive Language

Note: From top to bottom: Excerpt 12 (DD_031-B-T), Excerpt 13 (BF_077-B-B), Excerpt 14 (PD_003-B-T), Excerpt 15 (SS_001-B-T), Excerpt 16 (PC_002-B-T), Excerpt 17 (BF_003-B-T), Excerpt 18 (BF_004-B-T)

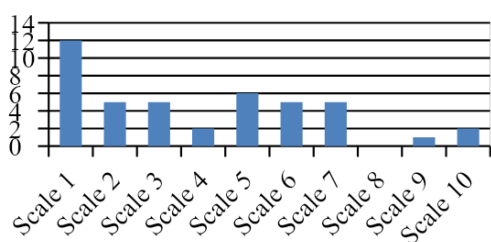
As the text composition is purely lowercase and without the most accurate punctuations (Excerpt 12), the students wrote with the typical texting or chatting style, regardless of the blog post's identity as an academic platform for them to practice English. This comment starts with a polite tone, given by the greeting "hallo", yet it quickly turned negative with several name-calling instances, i.e., "lazy," "trash," and "boring." The writer of this comment seems to use "boring" as a justification for their aggression, indicated by the line "your blog [...] make me bored." Similar to Excerpt 12, the writer of Excerpt 13 did not bother writing the foreign language in a proper or formal manner expected of a university-level assignment. They used multiple emoji representing a facial expression, yet despite the seemingly friendly tone of the emoji, the whole message contains rude words, such as "crap" and "bullshit." The commenter is clearly aggressive towards the other student by using these explicit words to mock the other's post and comment.

Interestingly, this study found that not all aggressive comments contain insults or incendiary vocabulary. Quite many can be particularly creative when they insult their classmate's post, such as Excerpt 14 which features the use of simile in the line "this blog looks like it's made by my grandma after an earthquake [...]". Rather than emoji or emoticon, they used the hash sign to connect the content to a specific theme, and the use of "#bully" makes it obvious that the student is perfectly aware that they are being aggressive. Excerpt 14 also shows that the student who wrote the aggressive comment followed their bullying message with "#peace", as if they are saving face from getting attacked in retaliation. The students are clearly aware that they are using aggressive language, as 70% of the respondents have responded with a "Yes" to a questionnaire item "have you posted a blog comment that may upset your friend."

Moreover, they are doing it non-anonymously because their real names are shown when they post, especially because they are blogging for university assignment purposes in the first place. The non-anonymous nature of online aggression in Blog is also highlighted when students involve other students by "tagging" their names (Excerpt 15). While this study did not find any data that hints on power struggles, there are some blog comments that showed university students sanctioning, in other words allowing, aggressive language in their blogging activities. Excerpt 16 shows an explicit promotion of online aggression with the line "[...] that silly woman, let's attack her [...]".

Figure 7

Sample Responses to the Item "I Write Negative Comments (e.g., Insults) to Make the Atmosphere More Fun."



For a question item that asked students to rate their agreement to the statement "I write negative comments (e.g., insults) to make the atmosphere more fun," the majority disagrees with the statement, indicating that entertainment is not a predictive factor for aggression. However, this is only true if this study only relied on questionnaire data. The blog documentation revealed that students react aggressively. Excerpt 17's line "[...] i will block your blog later" shows blocking as a reaction in response to online aggression. Excerpt 18 is another example of students fighting back with equally insulting language: the original comment is "[...] waste like this must be discarded [...]" and the reply is "[...] dirty like trash [...]" But the closing non-text element of crying laughing face emoji indicates that the student who posted the comment considers the original comment's insult as humorous, despite the mean tone. Fighting back while still conveying friendly gestures through emoji is a popular trend within the comments.

Overall, EFL university students in FKIP Unilak do practise using the foreign language when they are blogging as their courses require, but the students not only write freely as if they are texting casually, but they also interact in a harmful manner.

Discussion

The current study has answered the formulated research questions, (a) What are the online language styles of English students of FKIP Unilak in making their aggressive comments in Blog? and (b) What are the trends of online aggressive language of English students of FKIP Unilak in their blogging activities? The overall results contributed to online aggression research, specifically within the theme of exploring the phenomenon among a unique demography within a rarely studied social networking site. The uniqueness of the demography creates an interesting picture on this online phenomenon which is almost always presented as dangerous and suicide-inducing, yet a normal part of the Internet culture. A preliminary study conducted by Hamuddin et al. (2019) had studied this phenomenon among the same population of English students at Unilak, but this research supported the previous study by using content analysis on 302 online aggressive comments in blogs rather than relying on survey responses or interview results, which can be very biased due to students' possible reluctance to admit that they are involved in this activity.

Coding the styles of all 302 comments into three groups, the researcher found that most students express their aggression by combining both text and non-text elements (N = 171 comments), followed by using only text (N = 101 comments). Only a minority of the comments were in non-text-only style (N = 30 comments), and these are only in emoji and not in any other non-text elements as listed in Table 1. As writing lacks body language, emoticons and emoji naturally fell into the void of embodying emoticons with words as they work with language the same way as facial expressions, gesture, and tones do (Wirza et al., 2020). In combination style, students tend to use emoji to close sentences in place of periods, to tell something in place of a word, to convey feelings as discourse particles, and to signal precise meanings as an emblem gesture. Students often repeat their emoji, either by repeating purely the same emoji or using multiple thematically similar emoji, to emphasise their meanings as beat gestures. The data on the syntactic and semantic functions support Arafah and Hasyim's (2019) WhatsApp message analysis on the linguistic functions of emoji. Unlike Arafah and Hasyim (2019), this study has yet to code all the individual emoji in all 302 comments to provide quantitative proof on which specific feeling that students tend to convey, but observation on the overall contents of non-text emoji revealed that students tend to use dog, monkey and pig emoji, which are insults and semi-taboo words in their Indonesian culture.

When students forgo using any non-text element, they stated that they use text, so their messages are "to the point," which is evident from the pointed name-calls and insults. Calling other students' blogs as "trash" and explaining, however ruddily, that their mean tone is because the blogs "made them bored" are the most common themes. This is a unique finding as previous studies cite religion, death, appearance, and sexual hints as the predictors of aggression (Felmlee et al., 2018; Hosseinmardi et al., 2015).

Against what is expected of Internet writing, textspeak (excessive abbreviating) is rarely encountered. It is a commonly circulating idea that media apps are "ruining" the young generation's language skills, and texting has received the most disparagement as many gargantuan media outlets such as the BBC ("Is txt ruining," 2003) and The Daily Mail (Thomas, 2012) posted articles decrying textspeak. However, this study's findings found that students, despite writing on their smartphones and expressing aggression, rarely employ textspeak in their comments. Textspeak is done mostly by instinct to make language more efficient by selecting just a few important letters or symbols, but its lacking presence in this study may be due to the students using a foreign language that they are not wholly fluent in. The students would not find it easy to recognise which alphanumerical characters they can keep and delete, and they also would not trust other students to easily understand a string of unpronounceable letters. Thus, the students still tend to write with full words.

In line with Il'ia et al. (2018), insults containing profanity are found many times in the blog comments. This is an expected finding as bad words can be considered as a hallmark of aggression (Phan & Tan, 2017). Many comments displayed highly creative use of language (Excerpts 2, 3, 8), which Allison et al. (2019) distinguished as roasting. Students often fight insults with insults, but their laughing face or crying laughing face emoji hinted at humour. The comments are very casual and pay little attention to proper capitalisation or

punctuation rules, even though they were writing in Blogs for their university course's purposes. When it comes to Internet writing in an academic setting, much of the narrative has painted SNSs in a bad light for influencing university students to write too informally for assignments (Olivia-Dumitrina et al., 2019; Vasilopoulos, 2019). Although the researcher acknowledged the influence, the researcher leans toward the view that Internet writing is simply treated differently depending on the format. Typing is only a normal habit for people around the world in the last 20 years. Most people started learning to type through formal education to produce essays and reports, but people only became fluent in typing when they started adapting to instant messaging. Thus, despite the academic context, the students' main choice of medium, i.e., smartphone, heavily influenced their typing to be unedited and unfiltered. Despite being obliged to use a foreign language that they are not quite proficient at, the students very rarely employed code switching in their writing. Considering the frequent grammatical errors and poor syntax, the fact that students do not fear making mistakes in Blog unlike writing in the classroom shows that Internet-based learning can be a very useful playground for foreign language students.

The findings of this study also presented another view that contrasts the popular and heavily supported argument that online aggression only occurs among anonymous users. An article illustrated that anonymity equals bad behaviour, suggesting websites must remove the layer of anonymity first to enable users to engage in the "trolling" behaviour, which sole purpose is to cause disharmony. Once users lose the protection of anonymity, the rules in real life would be considered (Invisible online, 2013; Kizza, 2023). However, this study proved that students were aware that their comments can hurt others' feelings and even explicitly use real names and nicknames, either to address the targets of their aggression directly or to talk about them negatively to another student.

An odd finding is the tendency to start their blog comments with polite greetings ("hi" or "halo") which precedes their insults. These greetings are often found in comments that are longer than 15 words. Longer comments also often contain polite hedges where the students backtracked from their aggressive words by jokingly asking for forgiveness or giving advice to improve the blog. As stated by McCulloch (2019, p. 123), "people who were more fluent at typing used their increased facility to be more polite, just as polite as they would have been while talking." This has a very useful implication in foreign language teaching context. Aggression is a normal feeling for students, and tech-based solutions such as detecting and censoring aggressive languages is not a feasible solution for most educators, but rather than enforcing university students to write correctly and properly in Internet-based learning, lecturers may instead ask students to write more than 20-30 words when they give feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018; Hyland, 2019) to assignments posted in SNSs. The better typist the students are, the higher their ability to make the extra effort of using polite hedges and honorifics.

Blog seems to be the perfect academic spot for students to play around with foreign language at their current level of English skills, as they are not actively supervised to adhere to proper grammatical rules of formal writing. The online interaction in their blogging activities is as natural as possible so the results of this study showed how students "talk" in a situation where they are forced to use a language that is foreign to them. The overall results revealed that the students seem very unsatisfied to express their aggression with only one style. The students do not have much room to convey their aggression if they only use non-text. They have more room to drive their feelings if they use text, but they are mostly satisfied if they can use language with emoji.

Conclusion

In the practice of using SNSs to improve EFL writing, this study contributed unique insight on the language styles and trends of university students who engage in online aggression in their blogging activities. The most popular style to express their thoughts is through combining text and non-text elements. Many would use only text to convey a clear point, but surprisingly very few used only emoji. The trends include the tendency to use only lowercase, misspelling, insulting language, and interestingly politeness cues when their messages are particularly lengthy and with heavy use of syntactic emoji in place of punctuations and emblematic emoji to convey that they were having fun while writing in an aggressive language. The students in this study created their blogs as a requirement of their university subjects to practice their English skills, but the lack of supervision allowed them to write their thoughts and opinions freely enough for some to express aggression in their comments. The novelty of this study lies in its linguistic approach to analyse online aggression.

Though it is limited to representing the campus Blogs specific to this community, this study confirms the complexity of online aggression in an academic setting. A closer look into their posts and responses indicates that their aggression is a sort of language exaggeration for EFL students who possess limited competence in English when they interact online, and it is mainly an act of linguistic wordplay that they find easier to do than structuring their thoughts and opinions with proper lexicon and syntax. The comment section can be a perfect area to train their ability in writing but does require proactive approach to address and redirect the students' approach. It is crucial to steer them away from the habit of crafting aggressive, insulting, and savage comments, and instead, guide them towards more productive and positive forms of creative writing. While it is tempting to believe that engaging in heated exchanges and verbal sparring may yield language improvements, the potential benefits are greatly outweighed by the long-lasting consequences of leaving a track record of such comments on the internet. Educators must recognise that teaching students about cyber ethics is now more important than ever. By providing comprehensive guidance, they can ensure that students do not unknowingly cross the boundaries of what may appear as "friendly aggression." It is imperative to help students understand that even seemingly harmless banter can quickly escalate, leading to severe and lasting damage to their friendships and reputations. Balancing the need for linguistic growth with the importance of responsible digital behaviour, lecturers can encourage students to engage in constructive and meaningful online discussions.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Items

Questions	Measurement	Total
Demography		
Age	Short answer	7
Gender	Male/Female	
Semester	Multiple choice	
Program Route	Regular (full-time) vs Non-regular (part-time)	
How long have you had a blog? (blogspot, wordpress, other blogging platforms)	Multiple choice - Less than 6 months -6-12 months -1-2 years -More than 2 years	
The most frequently used gadget for blogging? Sort from smartphone (1), laptop (2), then computer (3).	Multiple choice 1 – 2 – 3 1 – 3 – 2 2 – 1 – 3 2 – 3 – 1 3 – 1 – 2 3 – 2 – 1	
The place most often used for blogging	Multiple check-boxes - Bedroom -Campus (empty class) -Campus (classes still have other people, library, canteen) -Cafe -Cafe - Campus library -Anywhere (home, office, street, meatball place, toilet, etc.) that is important is free -Another place? *write down	
Why do you often blog in these places?	Short answer	
Information and Communication Technologies		
1. I love using blogs to help with my college studies	Agreement 10-scale	6
2. Writing and publishing posts about class material on a blog helps me understand the material	Agreement 10-scale	
3. For subjects that use blogs, how often do you open blogs on a daily basis?	Frequency 10-scale	
6. For subjects that use blogs, how often do you write comments on blogs?	Frequency 10-scale	
8. For subjects that GET blogs, how often do you get comments on blogs from your friends?	Frequency 10-scale	
9. For subjects that use blogs, how often do you REPLY to friends' comments on blogs?	Frequency 10-scale	
Online Aggression		
10. Have you ever written a comment that didn't please your friends, or maybe hurt their feelings?	Yes/No	20
11. How often do you write comments that don't please your friends, or maybe hurt their feelings?	Frequency 10-scale	
17. How often do you get unpleasant/offensive comments ON YOUR BLOG?	Frequency 10-scale	

18. How often do you get comments on your blog that make you feel embarrassed?	Frequency 10-scale
19. How often do you get comments that seem provocative on your blog?	Frequency 10-scale
20. How often do you read ON YOUR FRIENDS' BLOG comments that are less pleasant/offensive to YOU?	Frequency 10-scale
21. How often do you read comments on your friend's blog that make you feel embarrassed?	Frequency 10-scale
22. How often do you read provocative comments on your friend's blog?	Frequency 10-scale
23. Sometimes I write comments that are mocking/insulting/chiffing just to get attention	Agreement 10-scale
24. I write mocking/derogatory/chiffing comments because they feel upset	Agreement 10-scale
25. I write mocking/offensive/chip comments only to those I don't like	Agreement 10-scale
26. I write comments that are mocking/offensive/chiffed for fun/joking	Agreement 10-scale
33. If I get an offensive comment on my blog, I respond back with a funny, teasing comment	Frequency 10-scale
34. If my blog gets a comment that offends him, I respond back with a comment that will offend him too	Frequency 10-scale
35. If my blog gets a comment that offends me, I respond kindly and politely	Frequency 10-scale
36. If my blog gets a comment that offends me, I just ignore it	Frequency 10-scale
37. If my friend's blog gets a comment that seems to offend him, I respond back with a comment that will offend him	Frequency 10-scale
38. If my friend's blog gets a comment that seems to offend, I give it a nice and polite comment	Frequency 10-scale
39. If my friend's blog gets a comment that seems to offend, I respond with a funny comment so that there are no misunderstandings when we meet on campus	Frequency 10-scale
40. If my friend's blog gets a comment that offends me, I just ignore it	Frequency 10-scale
41. I write negative comments on blogs just for fun to relieve stress with campus assignments	Agreement 10-scale
42. I write mocking comments because I am jealous of another friend	Agreement 10-scale
43. I write mocking comments because I don't understand the material on the blog	Agreement 10-scale
44. I write mocking comments because I want to make noise in the chat, not just in class	Agreement 10-scale
45. I understand that the comment I write in blogs can make others offended or hate me	Agreement 10-scale

Language

4. Do you use blogs to practice your English skills?	Yes/No	14
5. Do you use the blog comment feature to practice your English skills?	Yes/No	
7. How often do you write comments in English on the blog?	Frequency 10-scale	
12. When responding to comments in English, how often do you use your native/regional language?	Frequency 10-scale	
13. When responding to comments in English, how often do you also use English?	Frequency 10-scale	
14. When writing comments on blogs, how often do you only use text/words?	Frequency 10-scale	

15. When writing comments on blogs, how often do you only use emoticons or emojis?	Frequency 10-scale
16. When writing comments on blogs, how often do you combine words with emoticons or emojis?	Frequency 10-scale
27. Most of the comments I get on blogs are in words	Agreement 10-scale
28. Most of the comments I get are just emojis or emoticons	Agreement 10-scale
29. Most of the comments I get are a combination of words and emoticons or emojis	Agreement 10-scale
30. When I get a comment that is ugly and offends me, I think the comment is just funny or an insult that makes me laugh.	Agreement 10-scale
31. When I receive comments that are ugly and offend me, I feel irritated or angry	Agreement 10-scale
32. When I receive comments that are ugly and offend me, I feel sad and hurt	Agreement 10-scale
