



The Trend of Loanwords Among Generation Z: Between Language Style and Social Identity

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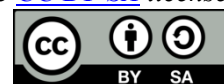
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ABSTRACT

Language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a vital marker of social identity and cultural affiliation. Among Generation Z, the adoption of loanwords has become a prominent linguistic phenomenon, reflecting the complex interplay between global cultural flows and local identity construction. This study investigates the trend of loanwords in the language practices of Indonesian Generation Z, focusing on how borrowed terms are integrated into everyday speech and social media discourse as expressions of style, identity, and community belonging. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, this research combines literature review and observations from various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. The findings reveal that Indonesian Gen Z actively incorporates loanwords from English, Korean, Japanese, and other languages, often transforming them through processes such as blending, clipping, and spelling modifications to fit local linguistic patterns. Words like *healing*, *vibes*, and *oppa* exemplify how loanwords acquire new cultural nuances and social functions in Indonesian contexts. Moreover, these linguistic choices serve as tools for signaling group membership, projecting cosmopolitan identities, and navigating digital social spaces. The study concludes that loanwords among Indonesian Generation Z are not merely linguistic borrowings but dynamic elements that contribute significantly to personal expression, social identity, and cultural interconnectedness in the digital age.

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ABSTRAK

Bahasa tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai penanda penting identitas sosial dan afiliasi budaya. Di kalangan Generasi Z, adopsi kata serapan telah menjadi fenomena linguistik yang menonjol, mencerminkan interaksi kompleks antara aliran budaya global dan pembentukan identitas lokal. Studi ini menyelidiki tren kata serapan dalam praktik bahasa Generasi Z Indonesia, dengan fokus pada cara istilah yang dipinjam diintegrasikan ke dalam percakapan sehari-hari dan diskursus media sosial sebagai ekspresi gaya, identitas, dan rasa kebersamaan komunitas. Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menggabungkan tinjauan literatur dan pengamatan dari berbagai platform media sosial, termasuk Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, dan Twitter. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Generasi Z Indonesia secara aktif mengadopsi kata serapan dari bahasa Inggris, Korea, Jepang, dan bahasa lain, seringkali mengubahnya melalui proses seperti penggabungan, pemendekan, dan modifikasi ejaan untuk menyesuaikan dengan pola linguistik lokal. Kata-kata seperti *healing*, *vibes*, dan *oppa* menjadi contoh bagaimana kata serapan memperoleh nuansa budaya baru dan fungsi sosial dalam konteks Indonesia. Selain



itu, pilihan linguistik ini berfungsi sebagai alat untuk menandakan keanggotaan kelompok, memproyeksikan identitas kosmopolitan, dan menavigasi ruang sosial digital. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kata serapan di kalangan Generasi Z Indonesia bukan sekadar peminjaman linguistik, melainkan elemen dinamis yang berkontribusi signifikan terhadap ekspresi pribadi, identitas sosial, dan keterkaitan budaya di era digital

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INTRODUCTION

Language constantly evolves, adapting to the social, cultural, and technological currents that shape human society. Generation Z, often characterized as digital natives, has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to absorb and repurpose linguistic elements from multiple sources, creating a linguistic landscape rich with innovation and diversity. The incorporation of loanwords into their everyday speech signifies more than mere lexical borrowing; it reflects an intricate interplay of identity construction, social belonging, and stylistic expression.

Generation Z's linguistic practices frequently transcend national and linguistic borders, driven largely by their ubiquitous engagement with globalized digital platforms. The prevalence of social media, streaming services, and online gaming communities provides fertile ground for linguistic exchange, where words from diverse languages flow into English or local languages with unprecedented speed. The adoption of loanwords is not merely accidental but is often intentional, signaling membership in certain cultural or subcultural communities and asserting a distinctive generational identity.

The notion that language both shapes and reflects identity has been a longstanding theme in sociolinguistics. As Labov in Victor (2025) contended, linguistic changes are not random phenomena but are deeply rooted in social factors, including age, peer-group dynamics, and cultural trends. For Generation Z, loanwords become tools for crafting unique linguistic repertoires that mark them as culturally savvy, globally aware, and socially connected. This generational group's linguistic creativity is visible in their willingness to experiment with words from Korean, Japanese, Spanish, Filipino, and many other languages, seamlessly integrating foreign terms into their everyday lexicon.

Observations from recent studies reveal that Generation Z's borrowing of foreign words often goes beyond simple translation. Words are frequently adapted, clipped, blended, or otherwise modified to fit phonological and morphological patterns familiar to their speech community (Grandez et al., 2023). These adaptations are not only linguistic but also social, as they carry connotations that resonate within peer groups. A borrowed term can signify insider knowledge, cultural appreciation, or an alignment with certain global trends. Thus, loanwords in Gen Z language become markers of social identity and cultural capital.

Online spaces play a pivotal role in this phenomenon. Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter serve as arenas where linguistic innovation flourishes



(Victor, 2025). Within these digital environments, loanwords rapidly circulate, propelled by memes, viral videos, and influencers who introduce new terms into the collective consciousness. The speed at which loanwords permeate Gen Z discourse underscores the role of technology in accelerating linguistic change, highlighting how the digital age compresses the timeframes of language evolution.

The concept of “coolness” and linguistic novelty also drives the adoption of loanwords. Generation Z places high value on originality, humor, and creativity in communication (Almeida et al., 2020). Employing foreign terms not only diversifies their expressive toolkit but also enables subtle displays of cultural knowledge and cosmopolitanism. For instance, Filipino Gen Z speakers might employ Korean terms like “oppa” or Japanese terms such as “kawaii,” both conveying layered social meanings tied to pop culture affiliations (Grandez et al., 2023). Such usage simultaneously projects a fashionable linguistic identity and fosters a sense of belonging to transnational fan communities.

In Indonesia, Generation Z’s enthusiasm for incorporating loanwords into daily speech is particularly evident in urban areas, where English, Korean, Japanese, and even Arabic words frequently intermingle with Bahasa Indonesia in both spoken and written forms. Terms such as *healing* to refer to leisure trips, *spoiler* to describe revealing key plot details, or *vibes* to indicate atmosphere and feelings have permeated everyday conversations, reflecting global linguistic influences reshaped into local contexts. This phenomenon demonstrates how Indonesian Gen Z speakers utilize foreign terms not only for practical communication but also to signal a modern, cosmopolitan identity. In addition, loanwords derived from Korean culture, such as *oppa* or *aegyo*, have entered colloquial Indonesian conversations, signifying admiration and affection, particularly influenced by the widespread popularity of K-pop and Korean dramas among Indonesian youth.

Sociolinguistic theory underscores that language use is inextricably linked to social identity (Tagliamonte, 2012). Loanwords, as part of Generation Z’s linguistic repertoire, are thus significant not merely for their semantic content but for their social semiotics. They enable Gen Z individuals to navigate multiple identities—local, national, and global—crafting speech patterns that reflect hybrid cultural affiliations. The same term might evoke different resonances depending on context, audience, and platform, illustrating the fluid and performative nature of Gen Z’s language practices.

Research such as that by Grandez et al. (2023) demonstrates how loanwords integrate into morphologically rich formations, often appearing in compounds, blends, or clipped forms that signal creative linguistic engagement. These processes reflect a generational tendency toward linguistic playfulness and efficiency, as Gen Z speakers tailor borrowed words to fit their communicative needs and stylistic preferences.

In examining the phenomenon of loanwords among Generation Z, one must consider not only linguistic mechanics but also sociocultural implications. Borrowed terms become vessels for shared experiences, digital cultures, and even political stances. Whether used to describe fashion, express humor, or engage in social commentary, loanwords function as powerful semiotic resources in constructing Gen Z’s social world.

This paper seeks to explore how loanwords operate within the linguistic landscape of Generation Z, particularly as vehicles of language style and social identity. By leveraging data from literature and social media observations, it aims to uncover the morphological patterns, social



meanings, and identity-related functions that loanwords fulfill in Gen Z communication. Through this lens, the research contributes to understanding how globalization, technology, and social dynamics intertwine to shape contemporary language use among young speakers.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design, employing a literature review complemented by social media observation. A content analysis approach guides the examination of how loanwords are integrated into Generation Z's linguistic practices. Publicly accessible posts from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok were observed to identify loanwords, track their contexts, and note morphological adaptations.

Key linguistic studies and empirical findings from works like Grandez et al. (2023) and Victor (2025) informed the theoretical framing and analytical categories. Observational data focused on identifying loanwords, their frequency, contexts of use, and their integration into creative morphological processes, including blending, clipping, and affixation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A diverse array of loanwords emerges from Generation Z's digital communication, illustrating the group's linguistic agility and openness to global cultural influences. Analysis of social media posts and scholarly studies reveals that loanwords frequently appear in blended forms, acronyms, and spelling modifications, suggesting a generational penchant for linguistic innovation.

One prominent trend is the adaptation of Korean, Japanese, and Western pop-culture terms into local contexts. Words like “oppa,” “aegyo,” or “senpai” are widely used, often recontextualized to express admiration, cuteness, or respect (Victor, 2025). These terms carry nuanced social meanings, signaling participation in global fan cultures and fostering a sense of belonging among like-minded peers.

Filipino Gen Z speakers, as documented by Grandez et al. (2023), integrate loanwords creatively, producing expressions such as “forda ferson,” where English words undergo phonological adjustments to fit local speech patterns. Such transformations highlight how loanwords become not merely borrowed elements but reshaped linguistic artifacts that align with cultural humor and identity signaling.

Loanwords serve not only stylistic but also social functions. They often operate as in-group markers, distinguishing Generation Z speakers from older generations or outsiders. Terms like “stan,” “simp,” or “glow up,” discussed by Victor (2025), exemplify this dynamic. While these words have English origins, their contemporary meanings and emotional resonance are specific to Gen Z communities. Using these terms correctly implies social fluency and cultural membership.

Furthermore, the morphological creativity evident in Gen Z speech underscores the group's linguistic dexterity. Grandez et al. (2023) observed processes such as blending (“thursdate” from “Thursday” and “date”), clipping (“fav” from “favorite”), and spelling changes (“labyu” for “love you”). These transformations enhance brevity and novelty, aligning with the fast-paced communicative style prevalent on digital platforms.

Sociolinguistic theories support the notion that loanwords in Gen Z language are deeply intertwined with identity construction. According to Labov (1982), language change reflects social



forces and individual agency. For Generation Z, loanwords facilitate expressions of multiple identities, from local affiliations to transnational cultural belonging. The integration of borrowed terms into personal narratives, memes, and humor reveals how language becomes a site of both individual expression and collective identity.

Social media platforms amplify these dynamics. Victor (2025) highlights how different platforms foster specific linguistic trends. Twitter, with its character limits, encourages concise loanword use and inventive hashtags. Instagram pairs visual aesthetics with linguistic flourishes, while TikTok propagates terms rapidly through viral audio and video clips. Facebook, meanwhile, showcases more extended narrative forms incorporating loanwords into storytelling and community discourse.

Beyond mere fashion, loanwords among Generation Z signify sociocultural positioning. Employing certain terms can indicate a stance toward cultural trends, socio-political issues, or aesthetic preferences. For example, “woke,” initially an African American Vernacular English (AAVE) term, has been adopted globally to express social consciousness but also carries contested political implications (Victor, 2025). Such terms exemplify how loanwords acquire layered meanings as they circulate across contexts.

The interplay between linguistic borrowing and social identity suggests that Generation Z views language as a flexible, expressive tool. Loanwords are not static imports but dynamic elements reshaped to fit local phonology, social norms, and digital communication styles. This capacity for linguistic innovation reflects broader generational traits: adaptability, cultural curiosity, and a desire for unique self-presentation.

A recurring observation across studies is that Gen Z’s language practices often challenge conventional linguistic norms. Grandez et al. (2023) note that morphological processes applied to loanwords sometimes produce forms not documented in traditional grammar references. Such creativity exemplifies the generation’s tendency to prioritize expressiveness and community resonance over adherence to prescriptive rules.

In Indonesia, slang and loanword usage among Gen Z has been widely documented not only in informal social contexts but also in educational settings. Rajagukguk (2022) highlights how students in junior high school during the COVID-19 pandemic frequently incorporated English loanwords and slang into their Facebook posts, revealing how online learning and social media have accelerated linguistic borrowing even among younger adolescents. Similarly, Rezeki and Sagala (2019) observe that the Millennial and Gen Z cohorts on Instagram adopt English slang terms like *OOTD* (outfit of the day), *fomo* (fear of missing out), and *squad*, not just as stylistic expressions but as identity markers signaling belonging to global youth culture.

The dynamic between loanwords and social identity becomes even more pronounced in digital contexts. Romero et al. (2023) found that lower English proficiency did not deter students from using loanwords in social media, suggesting that the adoption of foreign terms fulfills a social rather than purely linguistic function. This insight underscores how loanwords among Indonesian Gen Z serve as tools for social participation and group identity, regardless of the speaker’s formal language proficiency.

An illustrative example from Indonesia includes the widespread use of the English word *healing*, which has been adopted into Indonesian slang to describe short trips or leisure activities meant for relaxation or stress relief. Unlike its original English meaning, which typically pertains



to recovery from physical or emotional wounds, *healing* in Indonesian Gen Z speech has acquired a specific social nuance, often tied to lifestyle trends showcased on social media. Posts on Instagram frequently caption leisure photos with phrases like “Lagi healing nih,” highlighting how the loanword operates as a cultural marker of modern urban youth life.

Another prominent example is *spoiler*, used by Indonesian Gen Z speakers to indicate revealing plot twists or secrets about movies, series, or even personal stories. The term’s use has become so embedded that it appears in hashtags such as #NoSpoiler or #SpoilerAlert, blending English loanwords with Indonesian content seamlessly.

Moreover, words from Korean pop culture, like *oppa* (older brother, used affectionately) and *aegyo* (cute gestures), have been embraced among Indonesian Gen Z, often appearing in conversations both online and offline. Phrases like “Dia tuh oppa banget gayanya” showcase how loanwords not only cross linguistic boundaries but also serve as expressions of social admiration and shared cultural references.

Loanwords in Indonesian Gen Z speech also undergo morphological adaptation. For instance, the English word *vibes* often appears in Indonesian with local grammatical constructions: “Vibes-nya enak banget,” where the English word receives the Indonesian possessive suffix *-nya*, demonstrating morphological integration.

These examples illustrate that in Indonesia, loanwords do not simply coexist with the local language but become embedded into linguistic structures and social practices, reflecting both global influences and local adaptations. The phenomenon underscores how Indonesian Gen Z speakers strategically employ loanwords to perform social identities, align with global trends, and participate in digital cultures.

CONCLUSION

The investigation into the trend of loanwords among Generation Z reveals a linguistic landscape rich with creativity, identity signaling, and sociocultural engagement. Generation Z’s adoption and adaptation of foreign terms reflect not only linguistic curiosity but also a strategic deployment of language to navigate global cultural currents and forge distinct generational identities.

Loanwords serve as versatile instruments through which Gen Z individuals articulate affiliations, express humor, and signal membership in transnational communities. The integration of these terms into unique morphological structures underscores the group’s innovative spirit and their responsiveness to the digital environment’s rapid communicative demands.

As demonstrated by recent research and social media observations, the linguistic choices of Generation Z illustrate a deep interplay between language, culture, and social identity. Their language practices challenge traditional linguistic boundaries, offering insights into how globalized communication continues to reshape not only vocabularies but also the ways in which people perceive themselves and their communities.

The Indonesian context exemplifies this dynamic vividly, as words like *healing*, *spoiler*, and *vibes* undergo adaptation and recontextualization, signaling the intersection of language, technology, and social identity among young speakers. Such developments reveal how Indonesia’s linguistic landscape is not only influenced by global currents but also actively reshaped by local youth into a unique expression of identity and community.



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