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The Impact of Digital Media on the Linguistic Development of University Students (Students of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Vlora): A Sociolinguistic Approach

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of digital media on the linguistic development of undergraduate students at the Faculty of Humanities at “Ismail Qemali” University, Vlora. Using a sociolinguistic approach, the research analyzes the use of anglicisms, abbreviations, and visual symbols (emojis) in new forms of online communication that are shaping the students’ everyday language. Data were collected through questionnaires and content analysis of posts on social networks. The results show a clear trend toward language informalization of language and the impact of technology on the structure and pragmatics of spoken and written Albanian. The results show that digital media is not only a means of communication, but also a powerful factor in the transformation of linguistic structures and cultural identity. Ultimately, this study is indicative of how digital media has influenced lexical enrichment, syntactic

simplification, and the creation of a hybrid linguistic identity.

Keywords: *Digital media, New language, University students, Anglicisms, Emoji, Online communication, Sociolinguistics, etc..*

Introduction

The transformation of communication in the digital era has brought about noticeable changes in language use. University students, as daily users of technology, stand at the forefront of this shift. This study aims to analyze the impact of digital media on students’ linguistic development, focusing on the use of foreign words, new syntactic structures, and visual elements in communication. In recent decades, digital media has become one of the most

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influential factors in social and cultural transformation. Social networks, online communication platforms, and new technological tools have created a communicative ecosystem in which language is no longer merely a neutral instrument, but an element that shapes identity, belonging, and modes of interaction. This phenomenon is particularly evident among university students, who represent a social group highly exposed to cultural and technological globalization. David Crystal emphasizes that “internet language is a new linguistic variety, shaped by technology and social practices” [1 Crystal D. *Language and the Internet*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2006.]. In the Albanian context, and more specifically at “Ismail Qemali” University of Vlora, students of the Faculty of Humanities encounter, on a daily basis, the interplay between the Albanian language and foreign elements—primarily Anglicisms—as well as the use of emojis, which have created a new visual semiotic system.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this phenomenon is significant for several reasons:

- It demonstrates that language is sensitive to social and technological contexts and continuously adapts to them [2 Androutsopoulos J. *Language and digital media: Sociolinguistic perspectives*. Annu Rev Appl Linguist. 2014;34:46–72.].
- It reflects the process of cultural globalization, in which English emerges as the *lingua franca* of digital communication [3 Kress G. *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge; 2010.].
- It influences the linguistic and cultural identity of students, who construct a hybrid profile between local traditions and global practices [4 Thomason S, Kaufman T. *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1988.].
- It creates challenges for the standard norm of Albanian, which is often confronted with new

forms of informal communication [5 Dervishi Z. *The influence of social media on the language of Albanian youth*. Studime Albanologjike. 2019;12(2):55–70.].

Previous international studies have shown that digital media functions as a linguistic laboratory where new expressive forms emerge (Crystal, 2006 [1]; Androutsopoulos, 2014 [2]; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008 [6 Tagliamonte S, Denis D. *Linguistic ruin? LOL! Instant messaging and teen language*. Am Speech. 2008;83(1):3–34.]). In Albania, authors such as Dervishi (2019 [5]) and Hoxha (2020 [7 Hoxha A. *Anglicisms in the Albanian language: A sociolinguistic analysis*. Buletini Shkencor i Universitetit të Tiranës. 2020;15(1):88–102.]) have observed that the influence of social media is particularly evident among young people, resulting in noticeable changes in vocabulary and pragmatics.

This article aims to analyze this phenomenon in detail, focusing specifically on the students of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Vlora. Through questionnaires, interviews, and the analysis of online communication, the study seeks to provide a clear overview of:

- The extent of the use of Anglicisms and emojis;
- Differences according to departments and years of study;
- The impact of digital media on the shaping of linguistic identity.

This research not only contributes to the Albanian sociolinguistic literature but also provides a foundation for educational strategies that aim to maintain a balance between linguistic innovation and the standard norm.

Methodology

Participants: 60 students from four departments (Education, Law, Language and Literature—including students of Media and Communication, and Foreign Languages).

Instruments: structured questionnaires with 12 questions regarding language use on social

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media, analysis of 80 social media posts, and short semi-structured interviews with students.

Analysis: comparison of the use of foreign words, abbreviations, and emojis across departments; statistical analysis of the frequency of linguistic elements; discourse analysis of the contexts in which they are used.

Method: a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Discussion Based on Interviews and Questionnaires

The results show that digital media has contributed to the informalization of students' language. The influence is more prominent in departments whose academic focus involves direct exposure to media content. This indicates a shift toward a new form of Albanian characterized by language mixing, linguistic economy, and visual expression. The findings clearly demonstrate that the use of Anglicisms and emojis is closely linked to exposure to digital media.

Students in Foreign Languages and Language-Literature/Media-Communication display the highest levels of usage, reflecting their continuous contact with other languages and global culture. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Androutsopoulos, who argues that "digital media reshapes sociolinguistic practices by introducing hybrid repertoires" [2].

By contrast, Law students maintain a higher degree of formality, suggesting that academic context influences communication practices. Kress emphasizes that the multimodality of modern communication places pressure on the standard language but simultaneously creates opportunities for new forms of expression [3]. This result suggests that the field of study is an important factor in shaping linguistic practices. An important finding is the progressive increase in the use of digital media across academic years. Third-year students spend more time online and more frequently employ hybrid linguistic forms. This trend is consistent with the studies of Tagliamonte & Denis on youth communication,

where electronic messages emerged as a site of linguistic innovation [6]. This suggests that time spent on social networks is a variable that directly influences linguistic change. In the Albanian context, Dervishi [5] and Hoxha [7] have noted that the influence of social media among youth is evident, producing noticeable changes in vocabulary and pragmatics. Our results support this, showing that students in advanced years and language-related departments are more likely to construct a hybrid linguistic identity.

This hybrid linguistic identity includes:




1. Lexical borrowings from English (e.g., "online," "chat," "like") [1][7].

Everyday use of Anglicisms: Example: a third-year student said, "*Do të kontrolloj link-un për detyrën*", naturally incorporating a borrowing from English. Foreign-language students frequently use expressions such as: "Let's meet online," "I'll send you the link," or "Check the deadline."

These borrowings are not merely occasional words; they show that English has become part of the academic and social discourse [1][7].

Multimodal expressions through emojis, which function as pragmatic elements replacing intonation and gestures [3][8]. Emojis as substitutes for intonation and gestures.

In fast conversations, students use emojis to express emotions:

-  for approval,
-  for sympathy,
-  for enthusiasm.

Example: a second-year student stated, "*When I'm happy, I don't write words; I just put 😊*." This is consistent with Kress's theory of multimodality, where communication relies not only on words but also on visual elements [3][8].

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Simplified Syntax.

This relates to the speed of communication and the nature of digital platforms [2]. Instead of complete structures, students often write: “Po vij tani” → “Po vij”, or “Shoh nesër” instead of “Do ta shoh nesër”. This simplification is particularly widespread in instant messaging and reflects the rapid pace of communication inherent to digital platforms, as noted by Androutsopoulos [2].

Changes by Academic Year.

First-year students use fewer Anglicisms, e.g., “Shihemi nesër në leksion”. In contrast, third-year students often say: “See you tomorrow in class”, mixing Albanian and English. This gradual change supports the idea that prolonged exposure to digital media increases linguistic influence [6].

Departments as a Differentiating Factor

Law students, due to the formal nature of their studies, prefer more standard communication: “Do të konsultohemi me profesorin”.

Students in Foreign Languages, and Language-Literature/Media-Communication, use hybrid forms: “Let’s talk with prof”.

Examples by year and department:

“Shihemi nesër në leksion” (Year I, Media & Communication) vs.

“See you tomorrow in class 😊” (Year III, Foreign Languages)

This indicates that the academic discipline influences communication practices [5][7].

a) Examples from Interviews

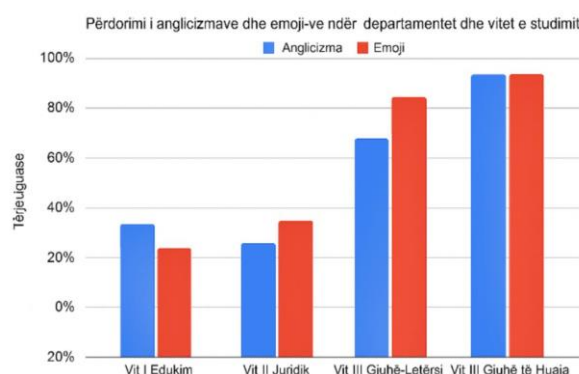
- First-year student (Education): “I usually write in Albanian, but sometimes I use words like ‘online’ or ‘deadline’ because they are shorter and understandable for everyone.”
- Second-year student (Language-Literature): “When we chat, I often use emojis to express emotions. For example, instead of saying ‘I’m happy,’ I just put 😊.”

- Third-year student (Foreign Languages): “We use a lot of English in communication, e.g., ‘Let’s meet tomorrow in class.’ It feels more natural because we read and speak English every day.”
- Second-year student (Law): “I try to avoid Anglicisms because formal language is required in our field. However, in quick chats I use emojis to save time.”

b) Analysis of Examples

- First-year students are more careful and use Anglicisms only when necessary.
- Second- and third-year students show a progressive increase in hybrid language use, treating English as a natural part of communication.
- Emojis appear as pragmatic elements, replacing intonation and gestures, making communication more expressive.
- Law students maintain higher formality, while language-related departments are more open to linguistic innovation.

These examples support the international literature, where Crystal [1] and Tagliamonte & Denis [6] emphasize that online communication



serves as a linguistic laboratory where new forms of expression emerge. In Albania, Dervishi [5] and Hoxha [7] have noted that young people are more likely to use hybrid language, reflecting the influence of social media.

This phenomenon should not be viewed solely as a threat to the standard language but also as a sign of linguistic vitality. Thomason & Kaufman [4] highlight that language contact always

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produces new forms, which is part of the natural evolution of language. In this sense, digital media functions as a linguistic laboratory where Albanian is adapting to new cultural and technological realities.

However, it is important to note that this process also presents educational challenges. Educational institutions should raise students' awareness of the distinction between standard language and the hybrid language of online communication. This is essential for maintaining a balance between linguistic innovation and the standard norm, recognizing that language is a living system that continuously adapts [1][5].

Based on the concrete examples, we can conclude that:

- Anglicisms have become an integral part of everyday vocabulary.
- Emojis serve a pragmatic function, replacing gestures and intonation.
- Simplified syntax is a result of the rapid pace of online communication.
- Academic year and department influence the extent of hybrid language use.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concludes that digital media is a key factor in the linguistic transformation of university students. Its impact is evident in several areas:

Vocabulary: Students use Anglicisms such as *deadline, link, chat, online*, which have become part of everyday communication.

Syntax: Sentence structures are often simplified due to the rapid pace of communication.

Pragmatics: Emojis are used as expressive elements that replace intonation and gestures.

Changes by Academic Year: First-year students use fewer Anglicisms and emojis, whereas third-year students use them more frequently.

Departments as a Differentiating Factor: Law students maintain higher levels of formality, while students in Foreign Languages are more open to linguistic innovation.

Key Observations and Implications:

- Digital media is creating a new variety of Albanian that requires academic attention.
- Integration of modules on digital language in university curricula is necessary.
- Awareness campaigns should be developed to preserve standard Albanian in formal contexts.
- Further research in this area is recommended to monitor the evolution of language in the digital era.

Recommendations

In Teaching: Professors should raise students' awareness of the distinction between standard language and the hybrid language of online communication.

In Language Policy: Educational institutions may establish guidelines for the use of Anglicisms, accepting necessary borrowings while maintaining a balance with the standard norm.

In Media Education: Students should be trained to understand the role of emojis and multimodality in communication, without allowing them to fully replace written language.

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