Research Article

Recent changes and variations in the Vietnamese language used by young people in Vietnam

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Abstract

This study investigates recent changes and variations in the Vietnamese language as used by young people, focusing on the influence of globalization, digital communication, and social media. A quantitative approach was adopted through an online survey of 100 participants aged 15–30 from different regions of Vietnam. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis to identify new slang, hybrid expressions, and grammatical innovations. Findings show that over 80% of respondents frequently use slang or newly coined words, with social media platforms—particularly TikTok and Facebook—emerging as the primary sources of linguistic innovation. English loanwords such as chill, flex, and slay, alongside modified Vietnamese forms like "*khum*" and "*toang*", demonstrate a dynamic process of lexical creativity. Results also reveal that 68% of respondents recognize a generational language gap, and while many view linguistic change positively, they maintain respect for traditional Vietnamese. The study concludes that Vietnamese youth language reflects a balance between cultural preservation and global integration, illustrating the vitality and adaptability of Vietnamese in the digital era.

Keywords

Vietnamese youth language, slang, language variation, digital communication, linguistic change, globalization.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Languages have undergone significant changes in recent years, particularly among teenagers and young adults, reflecting broader societal transformations, including increased digital communication, global cultural influences, and evolving social norms. John McWhorter (2001) [1]

emphasized that the natural process of language change is not a sign of decay, but a fundamental aspect of a language's vitality.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The rapid evolution of the Vietnamese language, driven by social media, youth subcultures, and technological

advancements, raises concerns about the erosion of traditional linguistic structures and cultural identity. This includes the emergence of new slang, phonetic simplifications, and the incorporation of foreign terms, particularly from English. The rapid shifts, particularly among Gen Z and Gen Alpha, highlight the importance of linguistic evolution in any vibrant language. According to Veronika Deyanova Paoleti (2025) [2], the swift advancement of digital communication has significantly shaped younger generations' use of language. This study explores the recent linguistic variations among Vietnamese youth, their broader social and cultural significance, and their implication for language preservation and education.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) [3] emphasized that language, like all human institutions, is subject to the passage of time and inevitable change. Language exists in a constant state of flux (diachrony) even as it functions within a structured system (synchronic view). Thus, variation and change are natural and necessary features of any living language.

This study's significance lies in its focus on the recent changes and variations in the Vietnamese language used by young people, which sheds light on how modern communication is evolving in a digitally connected and globalized society. To language educators, understanding these linguistic shifts is essential for enhancing classroom communication and remaining attuned to students' linguistic realities. The motivation for this study emerged from the researcher's experience of struggling to understand students' conversations, which often included slang, abbreviations, and borrowed foreign words. This reflects a growing generational language gap, where young people's expressions increasingly diverge from traditional Vietnamese norms.

2. Literature review

2.1 Overview of the Vietnamese Language

Mark Alves [4], a linguistics professor at Montgomery College, has explored four major linguistic origins of Vietnamese. The Austroasiatic hypothesis, which classifies Vietnamese as part of the Mon-Khmer branch, is widely accepted due to its consistent phonological patterns and core vocabulary, for example, mẹ (mother), cha (father). The Austronesian hypothesis suggests a historical connection between Vietnamese and Austronesian languages, but this view lacks broad support. The Sino-Tibetan hypothesis, based on the presence of Chinese loanwords, such as học (學) and quốc (國), suggests a historical connection, but this may be due to prolonged cultural and political contact rather than a

genetic relationship. The Tai-Kadai hypothesis suggests structural and lexical parallels with Tai languages, but these are more likely due to areal influence rather than shared lineage.

For nearly a millennium, the Vietnamese language was influenced by Classical Chinese, leading to a massive influx of Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary in governance, philosophy, medicine, and literature. Yan Bao (2015) [5] explores the literary dimension of Chinese narrative patterns and themes imitated in Vietnamese fiction from the Middle Ages, demonstrating how complete literary frameworks, rather than just words, migrated and were localized.

Nguyen T. C. (2023) [6] states that Sino-Vietnamese morphemes were used in compound creation, particularly in technical and scholastic terminology, demonstrating systemic borrowing. Sino-Vietnamese morphemes were used in compound creation, demonstrating systemic borrowing. French influence peaked during the colonial period, with modernization and Westernization of vocabulary in fields like law, administration, science, cuisine, and fashion.

2.2 Language Change and Youth Language

Since the 1990s, English, which has surged as Vietnam's economy opened and globalization accelerated, has impacted youth language, business, technology, and pop culture. Phan, L. H., Bao, H., & Windle, J. (Eds.) (2024) [7] emphasize how English borrowings now reflect Vietnam's modern aspirations. English terminology is frequently adopted verbatim, indicating a status connected to global integration. Examples include "email", "fan", "like" (used in social media), hot girl/hot boy (slang). Moreover, some research pointed out that digital environments, technological advancement, and shifting cultural identities affected the youth's language.

2.3 Factors Influencing Language Variation

Many factors influencing changes in the Vietnamese language are linked to globalization, social media, and technology (Do & Tran, 2021) [8] .

First, research highlights the widespread use of English borrowings and hybrid phrases, especially among urban youth, reflecting the strong influence of global culture (Nguyen, T. T., 2019 [9]; Nguyen & Le, 2020 [10]).

Next, these trends represent a substantial shift in the informal register of the language, showcasing its dynamic nature and the ongoing interaction between global and local elements in Vietnamese teenage slang (Pham, Q., 2018 [11]; Nguyen, M. H., 2021 [12]).

In addition, the rapid pace of social and technological change in Vietnam, particularly the rise of digital communication, has accelerated linguistic innovation (Do & Tran, 2021) [8].

Finally, digital communication also integrates visual symbols and emojis into daily interactions, further transforming traditional text-based communication (Do & Tran, 2021). They stated that digital platforms have changed the Vietnamese language's structure and communication speed, encouraging creativity. However, it occasionally ignites debates about the language's enduring grammatical integrity.

2.4 Previous Studies on Vietnamese Youth Language

Previous studies have focused on documenting specific slang terms and their meanings, yet Tran L. (2019 [13] believed there is a gap in understanding how these linguistic innovations affect broader language usage and perceptions among the youth. Little research has explored the long-term implications of such changes on the Vietnamese language's standardization and educational policies (Le, V., & Vu, T., 2022 [14]). Research on Vietnamese youth language has traced its historical roots and evolving dynamics, with early studies highlighting informal language, including slang, as a vibrant part of urban youth culture (Nguyen Đinh Hoa,1997 [15]). The National Foreign Language 2020 Project has significantly boosted English exposure among Vietnamese students, leading to greater code-switching and the adoption of English-derived slang in daily interactions (Hoang Van Van, 2015 [16]).

Recent studies have examined how educational and social changes have accelerated the linguistic creativity of youth, emphasizing how digital communication tools have transformed slang into a fast-evolving hybrid of Vietnamese and foreign elements. These studies reveal a trajectory from traditional slang forms to a globally influenced, tech-driven youth language landscape (Phan, Bao, and Windle, 2024) [7].

Educators and policymakers express growing unease about the long-term implications of youth language trends on formal Vietnamese proficiency. Pham, Q. (2018) [11]provides a cultural perspective, examining how language change among youth intersects with issues of identity, raising concerns about the erosion of traditional cultural values. Tran L. (2019) [9] catalogs hundreds of new terms that have entered youth vernacular over the past decade, providing critical raw data for further analysis of patterns in slang formation.

Nguyen, T., and Le, H. (2020) [17] document the emergence of youth-specific slang, noting that new lexical items often arise in response to online trends and cultural imports. The following table is an example:

Slang	Meaning	Statement in Vietnamese	Meaning in English
• *Borrowed directly from English*			
Chill	To relax, hang out	Đi chill không?	Do you want to hang out?"
Crush	A person one has romantic feelings for	Mình có crush mới rồi!	I have a new crush!
• *Borrowed from English, used in a slang sense*			
Bestie	Best friend	Bestie của tao siêu dễ thương!	My bestie is super cute!
Auto	Instantly / definitely	Gặp là auto yêu!	See them and instantly fall in love!
• *A repurposed word from traditional Vietnamese*			
Xõa	To let loose, party hard	Cuối tuần này đi xõa đi!	Let's party this weekend!
Cày	To binge-watch or work hard	Tối nay cày phim tiếp!	Let's binge-watch movies tonight!

Their study highlights the illustrations of English borrowings and hybrid phrases that have become widespread among urban youth. This aligns with broader global patterns, as Do, M., & Tran, P. (2021) [8] discuss the influence of digital platforms in reshaping national languages, underscoring how instant messaging and social media encourage brevity, code-switching, and creativity in expression. For example: 😣 (symbolized "Chán quá" -So bored), ❤️ ("yêu thích"- used for emphasis in expressions of love or friendship). Also, they illustrated some shortened words or phrases that Vietnamese netizens frequently use in messages to save time and space, or numbers to represent sounds similar to their pronunciation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach:

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate recent changes in the Vietnamese language used by young people and to capture current youth language practices. A survey was conducted through the online platforms, ensuring a diverse sample in terms of location and background. The survey included a combination of closed-ended questions to gather quantitative data and open-ended prompts to allow participants to provide examples of slang and hybrid phrases they commonly use.

3.2 Data Collection

To gather insights into recent changes and variations in Vietnamese language use among young people, a structured survey was carefully designed and distributed via Google Forms (see Appendix, page 17). The survey included multiple-choice questions and open-ended prompts, allowing participants to share specific slang words, hybrid phrases, and personal views on language evolution. The online format ensured accessibility and convenience, helping to reach a wide and diverse group of respondents across different regions of Vietnam. A total of 100 participants completed the survey over two weeks. The responses were automatically

compiled into a detailed Excel spreadsheet for systematic analysis (see Appendix, page 19), ensuring transparency in data processing. Additionally, ethical considerations were maintained by keeping responses anonymous and voluntary, with clear information provided to participants about the purpose of the study.

3.3 Participants

A total of 100 respondents participated in the study, coming from four locations: Hanoi (9%), Ho Chi Minh City (42%), Nha Trang City (45%), and rural areas (4%).
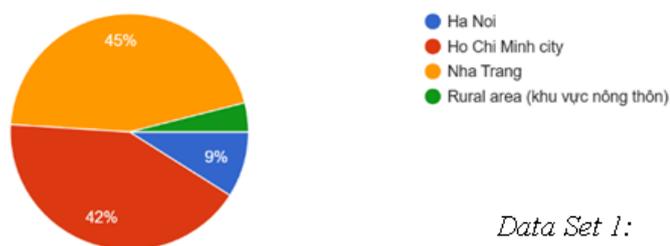
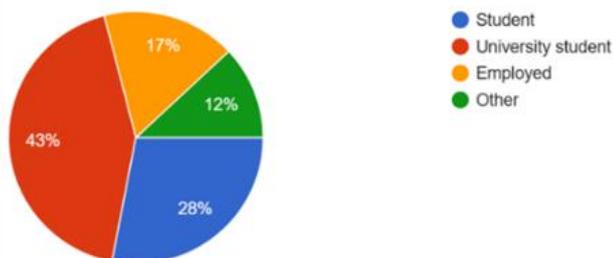Data Set 1:
Survey Respondent Locations

The participants ranged in age from 15 to 30 years old, with the following breakdown
- 20 students under 16
- 12 students aged 16–18
- 42 students aged 19–22
- 11 individuals aged 23–25
- 15 individuals over 25.
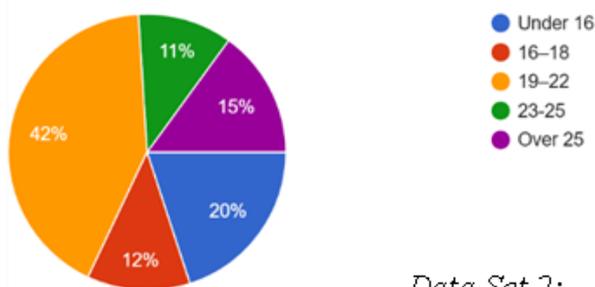
Data Set 2:
Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

In terms of occupation, the sample consisted primarily of university students (approximately 43%), with high school students making up 28%, and employed individuals accounting for around 17%. A small proportion of other workers made up the remaining segment of participants. The

Data Set 3:
Occupation Distribution of Survey Respondents

survey was distributed via Google Forms and was designed to be user-friendly and accessible

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were collected over two weeks and then compiled for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to identify key trends and patterns in the participants' responses. For the open-ended questions, a content analysis approach was applied to categorize common slang terms, newly coined words, and linguistic innovations mentioned by respondents. This mixed-method analysis provided quantitative measures of slang usage and qualitative insights into the types of slang and hybrid phrases prevalent among Vietnamese youth.

This mixed strategy provided numerical insights and qualitative examples that enrich understanding of how youth language is evolving today.

4. Research Findings

4.1 New Words and Slang Used by Young People

When asked, "How often do you use slang or newly coined Vietnamese words in daily conversations?" over 80% of survey respondents reported that they sometimes or very frequently use such language. Only a small proportion (5%) indicated they never use slang or new words, underscoring the
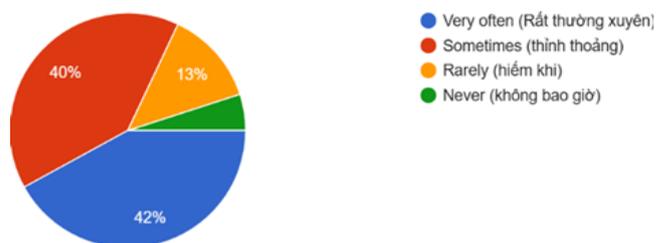

Data Set 4:
*Occupation Distribution of Survey Respondents*

widespread preference among young Vietnamese for incorporating slang and newly coined expressions into their daily speech.

With the question "Where do you mostly learn new slang or trendy language?", the survey results reveal that social media platforms (such as TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram) are far the dominant source of new slang and language trends among Vietnamese youth, with 86% of respondents identifying them as their main influence. Friends and peers rank second, cited by 58% of participants, highlighting the strong role of interpersonal communication in spreading new expressions. Online communities, including forums and gaming platforms, are also significant, with 34% of respondents mentioning them as a source of language

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influence. Movies (30%), game shows (22%), and celebrities (16%) were identified as less common but still notable sources of slang adoption.

Data Set 5:
Influences of Social and Media Environments on Youth Language
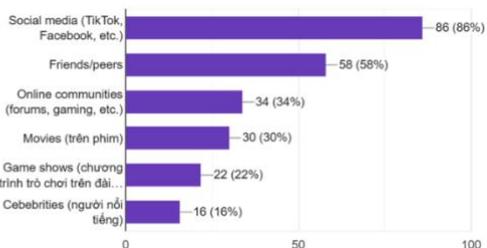
Moreover, nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that TikTok is a major platform that influences their language use, while around half identified Facebook as having the strongest impact on their communication. YouTube ranked third, cited by 25% of participants, and Instagram was the least mentioned platform, with 15% noting its influence.

Data Set 6:
Social Media Platforms Influencing Youth Language
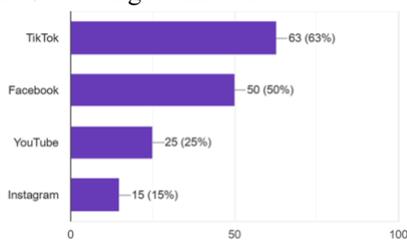
4.2 Influence of Foreign Languages (especially English)

Based on the survey on Google Forms, the researcher can make a list of new words and slang used by participants:

New Word/Expression	Meaning	Traditional Equivalent / Comparison
• **Borrowed directly from English**		
Aura	Cool, excellent (especially on social media)	Ngầu
New Word/Expression	**Meaning**	**Traditional Equivalent / Comparison**
Flex	Show off, brag (especially on social media)	khoe khoang
(Bu) Fame	(Based on) others' fame to make oneself influential	Đu theo người nổi tiếng
Go bananas	extremely angry	Bực mình
Manifest	Materialize targets or wishes	Cầu mong điều mình mong muốn thành hiện thực
Michelin Boy	Fallback man in relationship	chàng trai luôn sẵn sàng làm "dự phòng"

		trong các mối quan hệ
Peter (Pan)	The boy never grows-up.	Người trưởng thành nhưng vẫn giữ tâm lý trẻ con, né tránh trách nhiệm
Red flag	unstable relationship	mối quan hệ bất ổn
Slay	Impression, extremely good or nice	Điệu, gây ấn tượng
sugar dad/mom	A wealthy older person supporting a younger partner	Người yêu bằng tuổi cha hoặc tuổi mẹ
Trendy	Stylish, fashionable	hợp thời, sành điệu
Vibe	The mood of a place or a person that makes you feel	mê quá

• *Similar to the sound of a foreign language*		
Big C	Very annoyed	Bực (big = bự + C = bực)
Bro	you	Cách gọi thân mật với người đang nói chuyện
Chu pa pi mô nha nhỏ	I don't know	tôi đâu biết gì đâu
Lemôn	Posh	Chảnh (chanh + hỏi)
Nà ni	What	Là cái gì
Pha-ke	Fake	Hàng giả, hàng nhái, giả dối
Fen	Friend	Cách gọi thân mật với người đang nói chuyện
• *Used the characters in Chinese stories*		
Hồng Hài Nhi	Male Younger lover	Người yêu nhỏ tuổi hơn (Nam)
Ngưu ma vương	Male Older lover	Người yêu hơn tuổi (Nam)
Nhị lang thần	the same age (for boy)	Người yêu bằng tuổi (Nam)
Tôn Ngộ Không	A mischievous urban boy	Anh trai phố tỉnh nghịch
Tứ Hải Long Vương	A group of close friends	Một nhóm bạn thân
Tiểu tiên nữ	pretty, naïve younger girl	Cô gái nhỏ tuổi, xinh, ngây thơ

4.3 Trends in Grammar or Syntax Changes

• *Create new words or phrases*		
New Word/Expression	**Meaning**	**Traditional Equivalent / Comparison**
phải gọi anh bằng số điện thoại	A respects/ looks up to B	Nể phục
Bánh bèo	A gentle girl	cô gái nhẹ nhàng, yếu đuối
cà khịa	To provoke, tease, mock playfully	chọc ghẹo, gây sự
Cạn phước	Unlucky, unfortunate	Xui, xúi quẩy
chưa đủ wow	Not enough to be surprised	Chưa xuất sắc
Chằm Zn	depression	Trầm Cảm
Cột sống	Life	Cuộc sống
Đu trend	Follow a trend (online, fashion, etc.)	bắt chước xu hướng
Đỉnh nóc kịch trần bay phấp phới	Excellent, top of the world (funny exaggeration)	Quá giỏi
Đọc stk đây	Thanks for the appreciate.	Cảm ơn vì đã khen
Gòy soq	I am so done.	rồi xong
Hơn cả khu tự trị	cruel	Ác độc
Khum	Used in a Yes/No question.	không
Lò vi sóng	the state of breaking up and getting back together constantly.	Nói về cặp đôi từng chia tay nhưng lại tái hợp và tình trạng đó cứ diễn ra nhiều lần
Lớp trưởng	Fallback man in relationship	chàng trai luôn sẵn sàng làm "dự phòng" trong các mối quan hệ
Mlem mlem	Yummy, delicious	Ngon
Nhà bao việc	Very busy	Rất bận, không có thời gian
Nửa đời sau lên núi ở	Embarrass	thể hiện sự ngại ngùng, xấu hổ trước một tình huống nào đó
Phanh xích lô	Kiss	Hôn
Sin lũi	Sorry	Xin lỗi
Sit rịt	Lucky or unlucky	tình huống hiếm gặp có thể là vui vẻ, bất ngờ hoặc có thể là không may mắn
Toang	Broken, failed, totally done for	hỏng rồi, thất bại
Tôi là nạn nhân của	Attraction into something	bị cuốn hút" hay "quá thích"
Thăng đời	Flex, lucky	Khoe khoang về những thành công

New Word/Expression	Meaning	Traditional Equivalent / Comparison
Thua Gia Cát Lượng mỗi cây quạt	Intelligent	Thông minh
Trí thông minh giản dị	Not intelligent enough	Ngu ngốc
Tôm sống thủy tức sứa biển	stupid	Ngu ngốc
Trmúa hmề	Very funny	Người gây cười
Tuyệt đối điện ảnh	Handsome/ beautiful	Đẹp
Ủa em?	What's wrong with you?	có điều gì đó không ổn khiến tình hình trở nên tồi tệ hơn
Vãi	too	quá
Vượt mức pickleball	Over limit to suffer	hơi quá rồi đó

Xu cà na	Unlucky, unfortunate	đen đủi, xui xẻo
Xịt keo	stun	Đơ, cứng người

- *Used numbers or abbreviated words*

Numbers/ abbr. words	Meaning	Meaning in Vietnamese
8386	Wish to be wealthy	Phát tài phát lộc
667788	ugly	xấu xí
IDK	I don't know	Tôi không biết. Thể hiện sự bất ngờ hoặc bối rối
J dz tr	What?	Ôi trời, chuyện gì thế?
Uci	OK, all right	Ổn. Được.

| Ultr	Oh my god!	Ui là trời
sml	Getting badly beaten or losing hard	thất bại nặng nề (sắp mặt luôn)

It can be seen that a wide variety of contemporary slang and hybrid expressions were reported in the survey. The most frequently cited term was the English slang "chill," mentioned by about 11% of participants, followed by the duplicated Vietnamese interjection "cũng cũng" (approximately10%). Other common terms include English-derived buzzwords like "slay" (nearly 8%) and "flex" (about 5%), and a mixed-language phrase "chưa đủ wow" roughly 5%. Each of several purely Vietnamese colloquialisms, for example "toang" or the casual negation "khum", was mentioned by around 3–4% of respondents, as was the humorous phrase "bà nói thiệt hả bà thơ." Reduplications and onomatopoeias also appeared: expressions like "mlem mlem," "cũm cũm," and slang intensifiers such as "vãi" were cited in multiple answers.

Overall, over 80% of respondents said they use slang at least occasionally (42% "very often," 40% "sometimes"). These findings indicate that young Vietnamese blend English loanwords, for example, "vibe," "cool," "hello," with new Vietnamese coinages, often using repetition or altered spellings. The prevalence of dozens of distinct terms reflects an active trend: youths creatively mix languages and innovate expressions for emphasis and humor.

5. Discussion

## 5.1 Interpretation of the Findings

Looking at datasets 5 and 6 (page 9), recognizing that the data underscores the dominant role of social media in shaping Vietnamese youth language, reflecting global trends where platforms like TikTok and Facebook act as hubs for linguistic
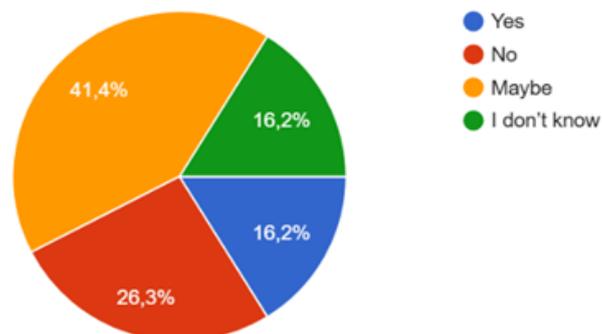
Data Set 7:
Young People's Thoughts on Future Changes to the Official Language

creativity and rapid slang adoption. This influence results from the digital, suggesting that youth culture is increasingly shaped by online rather than traditional cultural spaces. The significant mention of friends and peers (58%) highlights that despite the shift to digital, face-to-face social interaction remains a vital channel for language change. The 68% who perceive a clear generational language gap confirm concerns that slang and hybrid phrases are marking a distinct linguistic identity for youth, possibly creating barriers with older generations. Moreover, when asked whether the new variations of Vietnamese will become part of the official language in the future, a figure for 41.4% said "maybe" and only 16.2% said "yes", indicate that while youth are enthusiastic adopters of slang, they remain realistic about its long-term integration into formal language. These insights suggest innovation and ambivalence in young people's approach to linguistic evolution.

5.2 Impact on Vietnamese Language and Culture
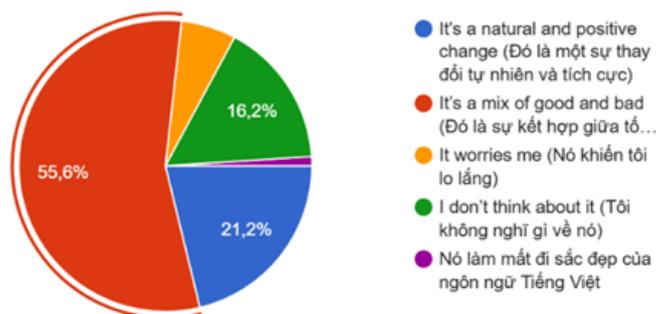
Data Set 8:
Feelings of Young People Regarding the Development of Vietnamese

Some individuals thought that speaking foreign words in daily Vietnamese communication is a natural and positive change (21.2%), while a figure for mixed feelings accounted for 55.6% of respondents who view it as good and bad. Only a small portion (6%) expressed concern that these changes might be harmful.

Regarding foreign word usage, most participants are pragmatic, with 81% agreeing that using foreign words is acceptable in certain contexts, and 15% considering it useful and modern. Only a small minority (4%) see it as harmful to the Vietnamese language. This indicates that the Vietnamese are highly adaptive and globally oriented, balancing pride in their native language with openness to linguistic innovation.
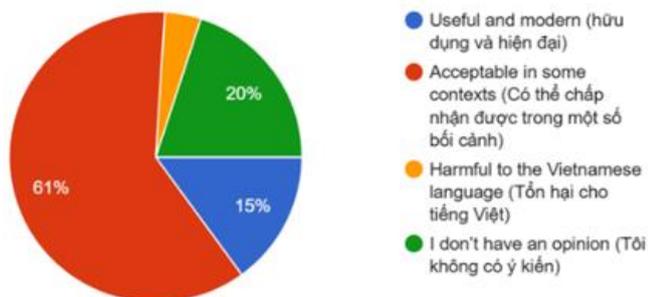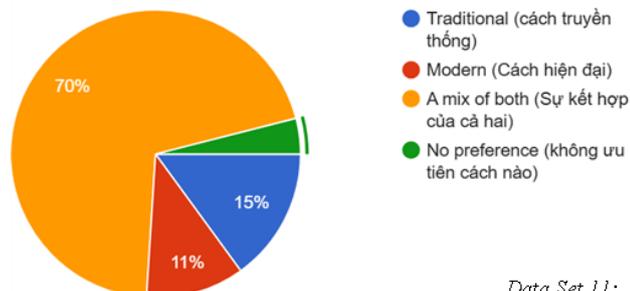

Data Set 9:
Young People's Opinions on Foreign Word Usage in Everyday Vietnamese Language

Their reported use of slang (76%), foreign words (74%), abbreviations (67%), and even shifts in sentence structure (24%) shows that Vietnamese is becoming more flexible and expressive, particularly in informal settings.
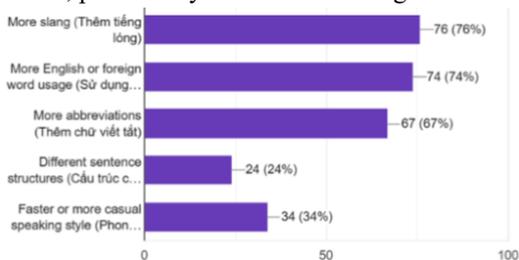
Data Set 10: Main Differences in the Language Use of Vietnamese Youth

5.3 Youth Identity and Expression Through Language

Data Set 11:
Youth Preferences for Traditional vs. Modern Vietnamese in Everyday Communication

To respond to the question "Do you prefer traditional Vietnamese or modern variations in everyday communication?", 70% of respondents chose a mix of modern slang and traditional Vietnamese in conversations, while only 15% stick mainly to conventional forms and 11% lean toward fully modern expressions. This blend reflects a desire to maintain cultural roots while also signaling modernity.

Moreover, 34% noted shifts toward a faster or more casual speaking style, reinforcing the thought that youth language is not just about new words but also evolving conversational norms (Data Set 10). This creativity and adaptability in language allow young people to express individuality, align with global trends, and differentiate themselves from older generations, highlighting how language change is deeply tied to youth identity and social dynamics.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated recent changes and variations in the Vietnamese language used by young people, who have deep ideas about new slang, hybrid expressions, and the increasing use of foreign loanwords.

The findings revealed that social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram play a pivotal role in spreading new language trends, echoing earlier research by Nguyen and Le (2020) [17], who emphasized the transformative effect of digital communication on youth language. Friends, peers, and online communities also emerged as significant influences, supporting Phan, Bao, and Windle's (2024) [7] observation that digital and interpersonal networks contribute to linguistic innovation. The study confirmed a clear generational divide, with 68% of participants acknowledging that youth language today differs significantly from older generations. This reflects broader societal shifts and is in line with Do and Tran's (2021) [18] analysis of rapid language change in the digital age. While some participants expressed concerns about the future of Vietnamese, the majority viewed these changes as a natural evolution, balancing modernity with tradition. Limitations of the project include a sample size of 100 participants and a focus on selected urban and rural areas, which may not represent the full national picture. Additionally, reliance on self-reported survey data may have introduced subjective bias.

For future research, it is recommended to broaden the demographic scope and conduct in-depth interviews or longitudinal studies to gain deeper insights. Overall, the findings align with McWhorter's (2001) [1] assertion that "all living languages change," highlighting Vietnamese as a dynamic, living language. Encouragingly, the evidence points toward a positive linguistic future, where Vietnamese youth continue to innovate while maintaining respect for the

language's cultural roots, ensuring its vitality in an increasingly globalized world..

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