

Acronyms: a Representation of Language Play

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Abstract

This paper describes the use of acronyms in our daily activities, both in speaking and in writing. Acronyms are pervasive and created in various ways by different individuals. Language is used as the primary means of communication. Sometimes, it is simplified or set in various ways to make it easy to be spoken. This is qualitative descriptive research. Data were from speech and writing in the case of acronyms. Data then were collected by note taking. The technique of analyzing data was the matching technique. This research found that people use acronyms to show their ability in playing the language beside to make the word more efficient. This phenomenon is influenced by the sociolinguistic conditions of the community.

Keywords: Acronyms, Language Play, Sociolinguistic Condition

INTRODUCTION

Lately, the use of acronyms has become increasingly widespread across various groups, including children, young people, and the elderly. Acronyms are also common in billboards, advertising, and even in naming streets and foods (Trial et al., 2017; Jacobs, K., Itai, A., & Wintner, 2020). This phenomenon is prevalent globally and has seen significant growth in Indonesia, with acronyms being used frequently at both local and national levels.

People often use acronyms to reflect trends and simplify communication. Due to their frequent use, Indonesia has even been nicknamed a country full of acronyms. For instance, "TONGBES" combines "tong" (cob) and "besar" (big), while "TUNGSAR" is an acronym for "untung besar" (big profit).

The example above demonstrates language play using acronyms, as displayed in a television advertisement promoting corn seeds. Similar uses of acronyms are found in street names in Indonesia. For instance, "TORJA" is an acronym for "Tangerang Bintaro Jaya," a street in Jakarta. Similarly, "Monjali" stands for "Monumen Jogja Kembali," which refers to both a monument in Yogyakarta and the surrounding road.

The use of acronyms is particularly prevalent in naming many of the culinary specialties in the city of Bandung. Examples include "BATAGOR," derived from "bakso" (meatball) and "tahu goreng" (fried tofu); "BURJO," a blend of the first syllable of "bubur" (porridge) and the second syllable of "kacang hijau" (green beans); "CIRENG," which combines the second syllables of "aci" (tapioca) and "goreng" (fried); and "CIMOL," short for "aci digemol" (tapioca dough fried into small balls).

In Yogyakarta, for instance, a food stall presents its menu items using acronyms based on people's names. For example, "SUKATMAN" stands for sweet chocolate milk, "SUTEJA" refers to ginger egg milk, "ROBIN" playfully describes beautiful toast, "TAPERS" signifies throwing eggs, and "SUSI" represents milk syrup. These acronyms creatively incorporate people's names to promote the menu offerings at the stall, making them more appealing to consumers.

Such language plays are very easy to find everywhere and have become a trend for language speakers in Indonesia. Language is used by its speakers for various purposes, as experts say that language has various social functions (Borghi et al., 2019; Crystal, 2014, 2018; Anggriana, Ramli, & Fitri Ningsi, 2021; Ismail et al., 2024).

METHOD

Theoretical Framework

Language is dynamic, constantly evolving with time, and not static or monotonous. It serves a metalinguistic function, as noted by JJacobs et al., (2020), meaning it can be used to explain language itself. This characteristic allows humans to play with language as a means of expression.

Language use transcends age, social, and cultural backgrounds, adapting to any situation (Baskal et al., 2024). New situations or objects often require novel descriptions, prompting humans to exercise their creativity in language. This creativity manifests in the creation of new expressions, reflecting the productive nature of language. Various language variations emerge, including slang, teen language, bureaucratic language, and even children's language. Research on language as a playful tool has been conducted by several experts. Oemarjati (1978) explored the use of numbers to represent names, such as "23761" referring to the name Remysilado. Wijana, in his dissertation on humorous discourse, identified the use of "90" to mean "go." Crystal (1998) provided examples of language games involving vehicle

registration numbers that correspond to the owner's profession, such as "10PER8," meaning "I operate," a surgeon's vehicle.

One example of a language game that is no less frequent in daily use is acronyms. The use of acronyms has the effect of adding new vocabulary which aims to tickle people's ears, or even heat people's ears. These sociolinguistic phenomena are related to social groups in society. From these groups, the use of acronyms spreads across various activities and situations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Acronyms

An acronym is an abbreviation of a word which is usually taken from the first letter of each word. Take for example, NATO is an acronym for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ABRI for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia. These letters are typically capitalized. Generally, such abbreviations are known as acronyms. However, the process of creating acronyms is a subset of a broader process called 'lakuran' or blending. To emphasize the difference between 'lakuran' or blending and acronyms, it can be seen in the following opinion quote from Carstairs - Mc Carthy (2002: 65):

"Sporadic, however, we encounter a kind of compound where at least one component is reproduced only partially. These are known as blends...The most extreme kind of truncation that a component of a blend can undergo is reduction to just one sound (or letter), usually the first. Blends made up of initial letters are known as acronyms."

The opinion above indicates that acronyms are part of the blending process. There are opinions from linguists who say that it is difficult to determine whether certain words have undergone a processing process or not.

The Forms of Acronym

Acronym can form combined letter initial, combined syllables, or combined letters and syllables of series of words treated as a word. Elaboration from forms acronym the can seen as following.

- a. Acronyms, formed from the initial letters of each word in a phrase, are typically written in capital letters and read as a single word. Examples include:

UFO = Unidentified Flying Object

ABA = Akademi Bahasa Asing (Foreign Language Academy)

PAN = Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party)

- b. Acronyms consisting of a combination of syllables or a combination of letters and the beginning of the syllable are written in capital letters as seen in the following example.

PEMDA = Pemerintah Daerah (Local government)

UNIMA = Universitas Negeri Manado (Manado State University)

PERDA = Peraturan Daerah (Regional Regulation)

- c. Acronyms which are a combination of letters, syllables, or a combination of letters and syllables from a series of words are written entirely in lower case.

rapim = *rapat pimpinan* (leader meeting)

tilang = *bukti pelanggaran* (proof of violation)

sidak = *inspeksi mendadak* (sudden inspection)

diklatpim = *pendidikan dan pelatihan pimpinan* (leader education and training)

Use of Acronyms as Play Elements

The increasing use of language as an endless source of human creativity has led to the emergence of new vocabulary in the language vocabulary. There are ways to be creative, such as language games using numbers, numbers, puns, and even acronyms. This cannot be separated from one of the skills of humans as creatures who like to play to fulfil their needs, both mental and spiritual (Gasparatou, 2018). Because of this skill, humans are called creatures who like to play (*homo ludens*). Playing is carried out in a series of learning processes, as is done by children, or just as recreation, or both depending on the actors involved. Furthermore, Crystal (2014) stated that all people, regardless of age, social, economic and cultural background, play and respond to language games, although with different levels or intensity. Acronyms are one example that can be seen when used in a very high intensity. It was created to form a new vocabulary.

In English, the use of acronyms and similar abbreviations is a well-documented linguistic phenomenon that has been prevalent since the mid-20th century. An example is "Frigidaire," which blends "frigid" and "air." Similarly, in Indonesia, from the era of Bung Karno to Pak SBY, the use of acronyms has increased significantly. Initially, acronyms were predominantly used by specific groups, such as teenagers, who often created slang or simplified language understood only within their circles. For example:

Botol = *bodoh dan tolol* (stupid)

Fanta = *fanatik tapi agresif* (fanatic but aggressive)

Tapos = *tahu polos* (plain tofu)

During Bung Karno's era, acronyms such as "manipol" (a blend of manifesto and politik), "kotil" (komando tertinggi or highest command), and "bemo" (becak and motor or motorcycle) were common. This demonstrates that the use of acronyms is prevalent not only globally but also in Indonesia.

In the Soeharto era, acronyms became more complex and sometimes difficult for Indonesians to pronounce, partly due to the introduction of consonant clusters uncommon in Indonesian, such as tj (Ditjen), kb (Dikbud), pk (Kopkamtib), nw (Menwa), and tb (litbang).

During the SBY administration, the proliferation of acronyms continued across various fields. Examples include "alkohol" (alkohol keras or hard liquor), combining the first syllable of alkohol with the second syllable of keras;

"curanmor" (pencurian kendaraan bermotor or motor vehicle theft), formed by blending parts of the words; and "KURSI" (Kantor Urusan Distribusi or Distribution Affairs Office), combining the first and last syllables. These examples illustrate the diverse ways acronyms are formed.

The increasing frequency of acronyms shows their widespread use across different groups, not just among teenagers or specific circles but throughout society, from small communities to government officials. This reflects the sociolinguistic phenomena where social groups influence language use (Dathathri et al., 2019). Some acronyms have become standardized and are used in formal contexts, while others serve as playful language games, providing humor and entertainment.

Street/ Place Names

Several street and place names throughout Indonesia have been created in the form of acronyms. It could be that in the coming years, the acronym will be used even more intensely. This kind of abbreviation aims to make it easier to pronounce street or place names. Apart from that, this abbreviation is also intended to form new vocabulary that is easier to hear and more economical to use, as can be seen in the following example.

<i>Paris</i>	= <i>Parang Tritis</i>
<i>Karmen</i>	= <i>Karamenjangan</i>
<i>Aftador</i>	= <i>Afe Taduma Dorpedo</i>
<i>Typhoon</i>	= <i>Toboko Beach</i>
<i>Otista</i>	= <i>Otto Iskandar Dinata</i>
<i>Figure</i>	= <i>Fitako Guramadehe</i>

From the examples above, it is evident that street and place names have been created using acronyms at both local and national levels. The process of forming these acronyms varies: some combine the initial syllables of each word to represent the entire phrase, while others blend the first syllable of the first word with the last syllable of the next. The purposes for using these acronyms also vary, including saving words, making street or place names more appealing, or simplifying pronunciation by shortening the names.

Culinary Names

Sundanese people always create new terms from combinations of words. Most of these terms are taken from various culinary names. These terms have developed throughout Indonesia as seen in the following examples.

<i>Batagor</i>	= <i>bakso tahu goreng</i> (fried tofu and meatballs)
<i>Colenak</i>	= <i>cocol enak</i> (delicious dip)
<i>Sukro</i>	= <i>suuk di jero</i> (nuts inside)
<i>Burjo</i>	= <i>bubur kacang ijo</i> (green bean porridge)
<i>Micelor</i>	= <i>mi celup telur</i> (egg-dipped noodles)

These terms are increasingly popular among street food vendors who create playful combinations of words for their menus, making them intriguing to customers. One vendor in Yogyakarta, for instance, uses acronyms that resemble people's names for food and drink items. For example, "SUKATMAN" stands for susu cokelat manis (sweet chocolate milk), and is not the name of a person. Similarly, "SUTEJA" means susu telur jahe (milk with egg and ginger), "PERAWAN" refers to susu perawan (milk mixed with soda water), and "SUSI" combines susu (milk) and sirup (syrup). Other playful menu items include "ROBIN," derived from roti indah (beautiful toast); "ROBET," from roti bakar cokelat (chocolate toast); and "TEPAR," a blend of telur (egg) and pakai roti (with bread). Some acronyms retain part of the original words, such as "SUPER FUN," where susu (milk) is combined with fun to create a unique name. These creative menu names not only pique customers' curiosity but also showcase the vendor's unique approach to language. By crafting acronyms, vendors attract customers and add a touch of humour to their offerings, highlighting the results of inventive language play (Triat et al., 2017).

Chatting via the Internet

In cyberspace, people often use acronyms to communicate. These concise forms make chatting more engaging, offering a sense of ease and humor (often called "funny acronyms").

ASAP	= As Soon As Possible
IMO	= In My Opinion
KISS	= Keep It Simple Stupid
UCLA	= the University of Civics and Lowered Acuras
FOMO	= Fear of Missing Out
YOLO	= You Only Live Once

Terms

Many terms that spread in electronic media and mass media use acronyms. If we look at the frequency of use, it can be said that around sixty percent of the words used are acronyms. The titles of soap operas or certain programs on television are also made in the form of acronyms. Puns and even slang terms appear sporadically and are used by various social levels. In political, government and academic circles which are always related to formal matters, acronyms have become something familiar.

KRIBO	= <i>Kriminal Heboh</i> (Exciting Criminal)
CUCU	= <i>Cuplikan Lucu</i> (Funny Snippet)
CAGUR	= <i>Calon Guru</i> (Teacher Candidate)
BOLANG	= <i>Bocah Petualang</i> (Adventure Boy)
JADUL	= <i>Jaman Dulu</i> (Old Times)
CALEG	= <i>Calon Legislatif</i> (Legislative Candidate)
BALO	= <i>Bakal Calon</i> (Prospective Candidate)
PUREK	= <i>Pembantu Rektor</i> (Assistant Chancellor)

SERDOS = *Sertifikasi Dosen* (Lecturer Certification)

Names of Medicine

Drug names often take the form of acronyms, designed to facilitate easier recall, due to convenience, or for efficiency, contributing to the trend of abbreviation. Even in drug marketing, names are often abbreviated. For instance, "pamol" refers to a drug containing paracetamol, while "ismo" stands for isosorbide mononitrate. Some drug names are derived from their function; for example, "batugin" indicates its purpose in treating kidney stones.

Product Promotion

Language plays are increasingly prevalent in various daily activities (Sbisà, 2014), including the promotion of products. In franchise businesses, for example, many food packages are creatively named using attractive acronyms. For instance, "pahe" combines "paket" (packet) and "hemat" (save), while "panas" blends "paket" and "nasi" (rice). These names are often tailored to fit specific contexts, such as special menus offered during Ramadan. An example is "Komandan," derived from "kombo" (combo), "asyik" (fun), and "Ramadhan." The acronym is formed through blending, combining the first syllables of "Kombo" and "Asyik" with the last syllable of "Ramadhan." This approach aims to promote the product, capture consumer interest, and ensure easy pronunciation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Acronyms are a representation of language plays that are increasingly used in various fields and activities, as well as from various groups and levels of society. The creation of playing with language through acronyms is the God-given human ability to produce new words. This is supported by one of the essences of language, namely that language is productive. By exploring the linguistic mechanisms, historical evolution, and contemporary applications of acronym-based wordplay, we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of language and its role in shaping our world. However, there is a negative view which states that the use of acronyms shows symptoms of the user's laziness. Speakers tend to express their speech economically. This principle is known as the principle of ease of articulation. There are various forms of acronyms used and with varying purposes. The creativity of acronym forms can be said to be determined by the sociolinguistic situation in society. It is likely that the use of acronyms will increase in frequency in the future, both in Indonesia and in the world. For addition, It is likely that the use of acronyms will increase in frequency in the future, both in Indonesia and in the world, so more studies on acronyms is strongly recommended.

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