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Unraveling the linguistic features of Facebook comments amidst live press conferences

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Abstract

Over the years, online communication has become increasingly popular, evolving from purely text-based formats to multifaceted media. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, live streaming of press conferences and other events on social media has dramatically increased. However, there is a lack of studies investigating the linguistic features of netizens' online communication during live streaming of public events. Therefore, this study aimed to analyse the linguistic features of Facebook comments posted by Malaysian netizens during COVID-19 live press conferences and explore the functions of these linguistic features. In this study, a total of 1339 comments were collected during the live streaming of COVID-19 press conferences by *New Straits Times* on Facebook. The collected data were analysed following Crystal's (2006) list of netspeak features. The findings revealed that Malaysian netizens used abbreviations (21.9%), emojis (13.2%), stickers (5.5%), particles (5.2%), punctuation marks (3.6%), translanguaging (3.3%), capitalisation (1.8%), and repetitions of letters (1.6%) when commenting on the COVID-19 live press conferences. The functions of these linguistic features include time-saving, emotional emphasis, identity portrayal, and others.

Keywords: Facebook, Linguistic Features, Live Press Conferences, Online Communication, Live Streaming, Social Media Posts

1. Introduction

Over the years, online communication has become more popular, evolving from purely text-based to multifaceted modes. With the advancement of the Internet and social media, people communicate online more frequently through emails, chat rooms, Internet forums, instant messaging, and social networks.

In the online space, human creativity and novelty in language use are promoted (Farrah & Qawasmeh, 2018), resulting in a new kind of language variety labelled as netspeak. This form of communication is neither akin to face-to-face spoken nor traditional written language (Crystal, 2006). Netspeak is also known by various other names such as netlingo, text chat, electronic language, and cyber language (Chew & Ng, 2021). These terms describe the written speech found on the Internet, which has its own distinctive linguistic features, including abbreviations,

emoticons, emojis, unconventional punctuation marks, slang, and more (Deng & Tavares, 2013; Mišutková, 2014; Dino & Gustilo, 2015; Karmela et al., 2016; Malyuga & Orlova, 2017; Magworo, et al., 2018; Nasir & Al-Ghizzy, 2019).

Netspeak has been claimed to cause poor usage of language structure and grammar (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008; Farina & Lyddy, 2011) and is often deemed impolite and disrespectful when used in formal situations (Thangaraj & Maniam, 2015). However, researchers such as Dorda (2010) and Tong (2019) have argued that the development and use of netspeak represent language innovation and a new style of communication. People can express themselves freely in an engaging way, and the development of different languages and cultures could be further enhanced (AlGhamdi, 2018). Moreover, Čilić and Plauc (2021) perceived that the use of netspeak can improve communicative speed and efficiency by saving time and space. While some researchers have presented prominent linguistic features of netspeak such as abbreviations, acronyms, homophones, emoticons, and punctuation marks (Malyuga & Orlova, 2017; Magworo, et al., 2018; Nasir & Al-Ghizzy, 2019), the reasons for using these features remain underexplored.

In 2020 when the pandemic hit the world, daily live press conferences about COVID-19 in Malaysia were not only aired on television but also live-streamed on social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. These press conferences marked one of the first instances that large sectors of the Malaysian population engaged with livestreams. People from different physical locations were able to share their thoughts immediately in the chat section during these conferences. On this platform, netizens could convey their thoughts instantly while the press conference was ongoing. It is worth noting that people are more willing to communicate with other Facebook users who make good use of netspeak, as it makes communication more interesting and efficient (Thangaraj & Maniam, 2015). Despite this, the use of netspeak in live events is still underexplored, and there is a lack of studies examining the linguistic features of netizens' online communication during the live streaming of public events. Therefore, this study aimed to analyse the linguistic features of Facebook comments posted by Malaysian netizens during COVID-19 live press conferences and explore the functions of these linguistic features. Specifically, the research questions of this study are:

1. What are the linguistic features of Facebook comments posted by Malaysian netizens during COVID-19 live press conferences?
2. What are the functions of the linguistic features in Malaysian netizens' Facebook comments during COVID-19 live press conferences?

2. Literature Review

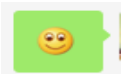
2.1 Computer-mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) refers to various forms of human communication through computers on the Internet (Lee & Oh, 2015). It includes both synchronous and asynchronous CMC and takes place through numerous electronic platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram. In CMC, the communicative context is actually 'created' by the users, affording them significant communication autonomy (Walther, 2011).

Based on Esteve-Gibert and Guellaï's (2018) research, spoken communication is accompanied by facial expressions, gestures, and prosody, which serve as sources of referential information. In CMC, this gap is filled by a particular use of emojis, punctuation, and capitalisation in online communication. Netspeak, the language used in CMC, has been widely embraced in the online context where a relaxed and casual communicative atmosphere allows for linguistic innovation to occur easily within existing languages (Merchant, 2001). Netspeak is guided by the principle of "e-grammar," which does not simply imply the existence of a single grammar for all CMC varieties (Herring, 2012, p. 1). In social network communication, the standard grammatical rules are often neglected, a phenomenon that enriches the creativity of language (Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012).

Table 1 shows some examples of netspeak and its meanings across different CMC platforms (Nasir & Al-Ghizzy, 2019; Magworo, et al., 2018).

Table 1. Examples of Netspeak and its Meanings

Netspeak	Meanings
2	to/too/two
R	are
L8r	later
Pls	please
CU	see you
	happy
.....	showing no words or speechless
???	showing confusion
Biz	business
4ever	forever
B4	before
ASAP	as soon as possible

Note. Samples adopted from Nasir & Al-Ghizzy (2019) and Magworo, et al. (2018)

While the language used by people in online communication tends to be shorter and more concise (Minyar-Beloroucheva et al.,2020), it can still convey the meanings that people wish to express. Common linguistic features of netspeak include abbreviations, deleted vowels, letter or number substitutions, capitalisation, clippings, emoticons, particles, punctuation marks, and code-switching (Al-Ahdal & Algouzi, 2021; Monderin & Go, 2021; Nasir & Al-Ghizzy, 2019). Izazi and Tengku-Sepora (2020) found that Malaysians often used code-switching and code-mixing in their online language, especially in colloquial expressions between Malay and English, including slang like *2r2* (*itulah tu* – a Malay phrase to show that one agrees), and *21ku* (*tuanku* – a Malay term used to address the king).

The current study employed Crystal's (2006) list of netspeak features as an analytical framework, encompassing abbreviations, capitalisation, punctuation marks, reduplication, slang, emoticons, and the dropping of vowels. According to Crystal (2006), the most common features of netspeak are found mainly in graphology and lexicon, where innovation and creation are relatively easy to introduce. He noted that abbreviations might appear in words, phrases, and even sentences, making their use highly common. The use of capitalisation, guided by the principle of saving keystrokes and adding extra emphasis, has become another notable feature of netspeak

(Nasir & Al-Ghizzy, 2019). Emphasis and the attitude of online users inform the exaggerated use of punctuation marks (Crystal, 2006), reflecting the playful use of language in online discourse. For example, placing ~ at the end of a sentence usually conveys a relaxed tone, rather than its traditional meaning (Ginting, 2018). The phenomenon of reduplication has become a distinctive feature of netspeak, along with variations in slang due to different language cultures. Non-standard spellings, such as *yup* (yes), *nope* (no), and *dnt* (don't), are also prevalent, allowing users to save space and time. Netspeak, mirroring functions found in written and spoken communication, leads to a new level of communication, creating "its own lexicon, graphology, grammar, and usage conditions" (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008, p. 4).

2.1 The Linguistic Features of Netspeak in Malaysia

There are several studies which focus on the linguistic features of online communication in Malaysia. Kadir et al. (2012) analysed the linguistic features used in a discussion forum by students undergoing distance learning in Malaysia. Data were collected from 110 messages posted by students to their friends and lecturers. The study found that the linguistic features used in their online discussions included letter or number homophones, eccentric spelling, capital letters, written-out laughter, emoticons, clippings, and code-switching.

In a similar vein, Stapa and Shaari (2012) investigated the features of online communicative language in social networking environments. They collected a corpus of over 500,000 words from a year of Facebook conversations among 120 young Malaysians. The study revealed that the features used by these online users were combinations of letter and number homophones, omissions of vowels, the use of *z* for double *r*, the use of one letter to represent a word, playful jargon, abbreviations, and emoticons.

Similarly, Yeo and Ting (2017) examined the linguistic features of netspeak used by Malaysian students in Facebook communication. The data for analysis were taken from conversations in 24 participants' Facebook posts. The findings included homophones, dropping of vowels, word compression, the use of *x* for negation, punctuation marks, and code-switching.

Although these studies displayed similar findings, including homophones and emoticons, different netspeak features emerged in their results, despite all three studies being conducted in the Malaysian context. In particular, the use of one letter to represent a word was most frequently

observed in Kadir et al. (2012) study, while number substitution was predominant in Stapa and Shaari's (2012) research and the dropping of vowels in Yeo and Ting's (2017) study.

Generally, the language used by Malaysians in CMC possesses unique linguistic features. These features partially reflect the characteristics of face-to-face and written communication. For example, CMC uses the same language system as face-to-face and written communication, but with some creative use of language, such as the unconventional use of punctuation and emoticons (Bočková, 2019; Sampietro, 2020), arising from CMC. In the previous studies the explored the linguistic features of netspeak mentioned, researchers have mainly examined asynchronous communication on Facebook, such as looking at the linguistic features used in people's posts and comments. Little research has been done on the netspeak features used in synchronous communication, especially the features in the comments posted during live press conferences. To begin addressing this gap, this study investigated the linguistic features of Facebook comments posted by Malaysian netizens during live press conferences.

3. Methodology

The data for this study were collected from comments posted during the live press conferences on the *New Straits Times* (*NST*) Online's Facebook page, which covered COVID-19 updates. *NST Online*, a reputable Malaysian news and media website, shared these daily live press conferences during the Movement Control Order in 2020. Comments were available only during the live press conferences, providing a rich source of synchronous online communication for analysis. Facebook was chosen due to its widespread use and accessibility in Malaysia while the *New Straits Times* was selected as it regularly hosted COVID-19 press conferences in 2020. The press conferences were conducted by key government officials, including Malaysia's Director General of Health.

Comments were collected from eight days of discontinuous live press conferences held from October to November 2020, during the second outbreak of COVID-19 in Malaysia, which drew significant public attention. Each live press conference lasted about one hour. All publicly available comments posted during the chosen time frame were collected and copied into a Microsoft Word file. The data were anonymised after collection to ensure no individual's information was exposed. The comments were manually reviewed to confirm the presence of netspeak features based on Crystal's (2006) list and other emerging linguistic features, which were then coded.

This study involved both qualitative data from Facebook comments and quantitative data from the calculated frequencies and percentages of netspeak features. The frequency of each netspeak feature was counted, and the percentage of each feature was calculated in a spreadsheet. Each comment was coded, and the occurrence of each feature was tallied to determine the overall distribution. The data coding process involved categorising each comment based on the presence of specific netspeak features. Content analysis was employed using Crystal's (2006) list of netspeak features to examine the language used by Malaysian netizens on Facebook during the live broadcasts of COVID-19 press conferences. Other emerging features were also coded. The functions of netspeak features were analysed within the interactions among Malaysian netizens during the live press conferences. The classification of functions was based on literature review, considering the communicative context and the pragmatic use of each feature. Two independent coders reviewed the comments to ensure reliability, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. The analysis aimed to uncover the communicative purposes behind the use of different netspeak features, providing insights into their role in enhancing communication efficiency, emotional expression, and identity portrayal in a synchronous online setting.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results showed that 750 out of 1,339 comments displayed netspeak features from Crystal's (2006) list, as well as some new linguistic features. A total of eight linguistic features were identified: abbreviations (21.9%), emojis (13.2%), stickers (5.5%), particles (5.2%), punctuation marks (3.6%), translanguaging (3.3%), capitalisation (1.8%), and repetition of letters (1.6%). Some comments contained more than one netspeak feature. The most frequently used linguistic features were abbreviations (21.9%), followed by emojis (13.2%). Some new abbreviated expressions, such as *COVID-19* and *NAT* (nucleic acid testing), emerged in this study as it examined press conferences related to COVID-19. The least frequently used linguistic feature was the repetition of letters (1.6%). The use of letter repetitions aims to add additional emotion to the speaker's message, such as conveying abruptness and emphasising a point, or disambiguating a message (Houghton et al., 2018). However, the use of emojis, stickers, particles, and translanguaging was not included in Crystal's (2006) list but appeared in this study. The occurrences of each linguistic feature were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Linguistic Features of Facebook Comments Posted by Malaysian Netizens

Categories	Number of Occurrences	Percentages (%)
Abbreviations	**293**	**21.9**
- *Initialisms*	98	7.3
- *Vowels Omission/Middle Clipping*	57	4.3
- *Acronyms*	52	3.9
- *Clippings*	43	3.2
- *Homophones*	43	3.2
Emojis	**177**	**13.2**
Stickers	**74**	**5.5**
Discourse Particles	**69**	**5.2**
Punctuation Marks	**48**	**3.6**
Translanguaging	**44**	**3.3**
Capitalisation	**24**	**1.8**
Repetition of letters	**21**	**1.6**
TOTAL	**750**	**56**

4.1 Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase with parts omitted, yet the meaning remains unchanged. According to Crystal (2006), the various abbreviated forms found in netspeak are among its most distinguishing features. Abbreviations are commonly used in informal written texts to save time and space. Out of the 1339 comments collected, 293 (21.9%) contained abbreviations. Five types of abbreviations were identified: initialisms, acronyms, vowel omissions, clippings, and homophones. However, some abbreviations found did not fit into these five categories. Interestingly, abbreviations were found to occur more often in Malay than in English. Examples include *org* for *orang* (people) and *bhsa mlyu* for *Bahasa Melayu* (the Malay language). This observation is supported by Kassim et al. (2016), who noted that Malay often removes its affixes, clitics, and particles from derived words according to the rules of word stemming.

4.1.1 *Initialisms and Acronyms*

Example 1: *Should lock down **asap**!!*

An initialism is the abbreviation of a phrase or short sentence using the initial letter of each word, typically written in capital letters. Initially, initialisms were primarily used to denote the names of organisations and scientific discoveries (Marchand, 1969). However, with the rise of netspeak, initialisms have broader applications and can function to convey the tone of the utterance and facilitate quicker communication (Kinsella, 2010). Initialisms can appear not only in words but also in phrases or entire sentences (Crystal, 2006). For instance, the phrase *as soon as possible* was abbreviated to *asap* in Example 1. This signalled the urgency of the Facebook user's request for a lockdown. In the data collected, initialisms were employed in 70 comments, reflecting the urgent tone of netizens' request for a lockdown and indicating the serious situation of COVID-19.

According to Crystal (2006), an acronym is another abbreviated form found in netspeak. It is defined as "a sort of clipping in which a phrase is replaced by a word based upon the first letters of its words" (Hudson, 2000, p. 242). Initialisms and acronyms can be easily confused; the distinction is that an acronym is pronounced as a new word, not as individual letters. Bauer and Laurie (1983, p. 237) clarify this with the example of Value Added Tax: if pronounced /vi: ei ti:/, it is an abbreviation, but if called /væt/, it becomes an acronym.

Acronyms are common in netspeak (Crystal, 2006), but in the current data, no examples were found other than the abbreviation for *Coronavirus Disease 2019* and proper nouns like *NAT* (nucleic acid testing) and *SARS* (severe acute respiratory syndrome), totalling 52 occurrences. Specifically, *Coronavirus disease 2019*, shortened to *COVID*, appeared 26 times. As the acronym COVID is now widely recognized, it is used frequently to enhance understanding (Deliani et al., 2020).

4.1.2 *Vowels Omission/ Middle Clipping*

Example 2: ***Pls*** *take care of yourself too*

Vowel omission, or middle clipping, involves the dropping or deletion of the vowels within a word. In Example 2, a Facebook user utilised vowel omission at the beginning of the message, omitting the vowels *e* and *a* from the word please, which may express his or her concern for the spokesman. Notably, the abbreviated form *pls* seemed to be the most frequent example of vowel omission used by Malaysian netizens on Facebook, with 44 occurrences, accounting for 15% of the total us of

abbreviations. With the emphasis on speed in giving synchronous responses in online communication (Madaminova, 2021), the user employed the reduced form of *please*, *pls*, to align with the need for rapid and precise text-based communication. Thus, vowel omission aids in expressing ideas quickly and enhances the speed of communication (Crystal, 2006), which creates a palpable sense of urgency for protection.

4.1.3 *Clippings*

Example 3: *We will get **thro** it*

Clipping refers to the omission or deletion of parts of a word or phrase. It includes both front clipping and back clipping. In Example 3, the Facebook user employed *thro* as a clipping of the word *through*, omitting the latter parts of the word and using only the first few letters to convey the meaning of the complete word. This type of usage typically signals an informal setting, and thus, fosters a more relaxed interaction. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory illustrates how this clipping reduces social distance and social power between the user and other communicators, increasing informality and casualness. Although this user did not adhere to standard English spelling rules, the communication remained effective as other users could easily grasp the intended meaning of the clipping based on the context and their lexical knowledge. Additionally, Facebook users engaged in synchronous communication during live press conferences, necessitating quick-paced interaction. 43 comments contained clippings, such as *bro* for brother, *doc* for doctor, and *pub* for public. The use of clippings simplifies and accelerates typing, enabling users to type more words within a specific time frame during their online interactions.

4.1.4 *Homophones*

Example 4: *its ok dg...no need to say sorry...we understand...**u** also a human...*
*its ok dg...**u** did **n** give ure best to us already...tqsm...*

Homophones refer to words that are similar or identical in pronunciation but differ in spelling and meaning. In CMC, homophones include both letter and number homophones. Letter homophones replace a word with a letter that has the same pronunciation, while number homophones replace a word or part of a word with a number having the same pronunciation. For example, in the current study, Facebook users conveyed the words *before* and *be* using *b4* and *b*. In Example 4, a Facebook user demonstrated the process of using homophones in their comment. Instead of writing out the full words *you* and *and*, the user employed *u* and *n*. Since the letter *u* and the word *you* share the same sound in English, they are considered letter homophones, as are the letter *n* and the word *and*. By using just one letter or number to replace a complete word, the user could type more quickly, and readers could easily recognize and understand the text. This usage also reflects the flexible and playful nature of language in online communication (Crystal, 2008). Utilizing homophones has certain pragmatic functions that are more implicit in terms of expressive effect (Bing, 2013) as it can achieve the impact of conveying one meaning while stating another. In the example, the use of *u* and *n* occurred more than once in the user's soothing and comforting words to the spokesman, suggesting that there was no need for the Director-General (DG) to apologize and that he had done well. The acronym DG refers to the Director General of the Ministry of Health in Malaysia, who represents the Ministry in updating Malaysians on the latest updates about COVID-19, and instilling confidence to eventually conquer the "war." It is interesting to note that the use of *n* appeared 31 times (2.3%) in the collected data, indicating that *n* for *and* has become a common feature of netspeak. Other linguistic features of netspeak observable in this comment include the use of ellipsis (...), initialisms (e.g. tqsm), and apostrophe omission (e.g., its). The use of the ellipsis could indicate the speaker's difficulty in expressing gratitude to the DG (Peterson, 2011), while the use of initialisms and apostrophe omission saves time in typing without affecting the meaning.

In other words, synchronous online communication which happens during livestreams display a high frequency of linguistic features which allow users to save time. One of the most often used netspeak features is abbreviations and it includes initialisms and acronyms, vowels omission, clippings, homophones. With the use of these features, feedback and engagement become rapid and this also reflects the urgency and immediacy of the latest updates provided in livestreams setting. The other linguistic features which allow users to save time in expressing their ideas are emoticons, emojis and stickers.

4.2 Emoticons, Emojis, and Stickers

Example 5: *556 kes in Sabah* 

Example 6: 

In computer-mediated communication (CMC), the use of emoticons, emojis, and stickers has become a popular way to express emotions and feelings. When communicating online, people cannot see each other's facial expressions, so employing emoticons, emojis, and stickers provides a convenient and effective means of conveying emotions. During the 1990s, emoticons like the smiley :-) were widely used in online communication (Crystal, 2006). Today, emojis and stickers, offering greater emotional expressiveness in the absence of context, have been developed to allow users to express emotions more vividly (Aldunate & González-Ibáñez, 2017). In the current study, emojis and stickers were preferred, as evidenced by their use in 251 comments (18.7%). While most previous research has noted the use of emoticons to convey emotions (Boutet et al., 2021; Hasyim, 2019; Li & Yang, 2018), no emoticons were found in this study. This absence may be due to the emoji suggestions which are automatically offered to users, as well as the lack of precision and liveliness in expressing emotions compared to emojis and stickers (Wang, 2020). Emojis and stickers in this study were more dynamic, engaging, and expressive in conveying emotions (Chen & Siu, 2017), portraying unique Malaysian characteristics, such as a woman wearing a hijab () or a bindi on the forehead (). These are novel features enabled by social media platforms.

Example 5 illustrates a comment from a Malaysian about the number of infected cases in Sabah, ending with the “crying face” emoji. This emoji  conveyed sadness and sorrow, reflecting the user's distress over the high number of cases in the second outbreak of COVID-19 due to the election in Sabah. Emojis can strengthen the emotions conveyed in communication (Tang & Hew, 2018) by helping readers visualize the user's face and mood and compensating for the shortage of nonverbal cues in text-based communication. Interestingly, the crying face emoji

 was used by 54 times out of 177 occurrences (30.5%), perhaps reflecting widespread worry and sorrow about the ongoing risks of COVID-19.

In Example 6, a Facebook user posted only a sticker of a woman wearing a mask, clearly communicating the importance of wearing masks to protect against the highly contagious COVID-19. This sticker helped avoid ambiguity that might arise from words alone (Arwani, 2021). Interestingly, the same sticker  appeared 61 times out of 177 occurrences (34.5%) and was mainly used by Malay women (as inferred from the names) to showcase their identity as Muslims wearing headscarves.

Hence, the use of emoticons, emojis, and stickers in online communication is an effective way to convey the identity, facial expressions, and emotional states of communicators. These tools are more frequently used in synchronous interactions, where instant emotional feedback is possible (Nexø & Strandell, 2020).

With the advancement of the internet and technology, emojis and stickers have been created and widely adopted. Social networks often respond to social events and changes (Harper, 2010), leading to new expressions that accompany breaking news. For instance, the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 sparked new expressions related to the pandemic in the Malaysian context, including the emoji of prayer (), the sticker of wearing a mask (), the sticker of sanitizer with the words *STAY SAFE* ()and other new netspeak like *Covid-19* and *CMCO.*

4.3 Capitalisation

Example 7: ***PLEASE STAY HOME STAY***

Capitalisation is a form of graphology and an important feature of netspeak. It involves using capital letters to add extra emphasis to words or phrases (Crystal, 2006). More visually conspicuous than lowercase, capitalisation is often preferred by users as it grabs attention and conveys strong emotion or urgency (Al-Ahdal & Algouzi, 2021). For instance, in Example 7, a Facebook user capitalised his utterance to easily capture people's attention. By using capitalisation, the importance of staying home to fight against challenging conditions was underscored.

Specifically, the capitalised verb *STAY* was used twice, emphasising the action that people should follow. Without having to add explanatory text, capital letters are commonly used by online users to highlight critical information quickly, ensuring that key messages stand out immediately and are easily noticed (Yeo & Ting, 2017). Capitalisation appeared only 24 times (1.8%), making it the second least used linguistic feature in the current study.

4.4 Repetition of Letters

Example 8: *Stay **stronggg**!!!*

Repetition is a useful tool in both face-to-face communication and online communication as it can help emphasize a point or strengthen the power of persuasion. However, this feature is the least used in this study. In this context, repetition occurs when letters are used two or more times in immediate succession to express a range of functions, "such as an expression of pleasure or pain, as a sarcastic or exasperated reaction, or simply as a turn-taking marker, showing that an utterance is ended." (Crystal, 2006, p. 103). Repetition of letters is a form of spelling adaptation, and it is also used for emphasis (Gustilo et al., 2020).

As shown in Example 8, the repeated letter *g* in the word *strong* emphasized the need for Malaysians to stay strong and be courageous in fighting the virus. Another linguistic feature observed in this example is the repeated exclamation mark following *stronggg*, which further amplified the emphasis and intensity of the word *strong*. In other cases, words are spelled using what is known as pronunciation spelling (Koeppel, 2018), where the spelling reflects the way a word is pronounced. These written features are used to convey emotions and expressiveness in netspeak that cannot be shown in traditional written communication. Examples from this study included *relaxxx* and *omggg*. Since Facebook communication takes place through digital media, the absence of face-to-face interaction makes it difficult for participants to express their emotions through facial expressions and gestures. Thus, the repetition of letters helps to enhance message comprehension and promote emotional expression. In the current study, 21 instances (1.6%) of comments were found to use the repetition of letters to convey emotions and emphasis.

4.5 Punctuation Marks

Example 9: *Scary**!!!** 1228*!!!!!

Using repeated punctuation marks is another feature of netspeak. They can achieve some of the effects of paralinguistic cues in spoken conversation, such as indicating emphasis (Kalman & Gergle, 2009). Peterson (2011) also noted that the unusual use of punctuation marks in online communication serves to express emotions. According to Crystal (2006), punctuation repeats are usually used minimally in most formal situations, as they are not a formal mark in communication, while their unconventional usage in netspeak aims to express attitudes and emotions or add extra emphasis.

In the comments collected, 32 users used the repetition of punctuation marks, such as ellipsis dots and question marks, at the end of sentences to replace full stops. The repetition of punctuation marks aims to accentuate emotions like excitement, shock and anger (Yeo & Ting, 2017). Ellipsis dots were mainly used to signify hesitation and silence in conventional usage (Magworo et al., 2018), but in the analysed comments of this study, like *48 hours…1000++kes*, the repetitive use of ellipsis dots served to show the Facebook user's shock at the increased number of cases in a short time and put stress on the case number *1000++*.

The repetition of question marks was also used by Facebook users in this study, appearing 21 times out of the 48 occurrences (43.8%). Although the question mark is typically used to indicate a question, the repetitive use of question marks in this study conveys different meanings. For instance, in the collected comment *1228 today????* the repeated question mark highlighted the user's shock at the number of infected cases.

In Example 9, the exclamation mark was repeated three times after *scary*, which could indicate astonishment. The Facebook user repeated the exclamation mark five times after the case number, emphasizing the great number of affected cases and the extreme emotion of the user. Therefore, from the data analysed, it could be seen that in digitally mediated social communication, repeated punctuation marks function similarly to emotions expressed in the voice during spoken communication. In the data collected, 48 (3.6%) comments were found to use repeated punctuation at the end of a sentence in a duplicated form.

4.6 Discourse Particles

Example 10: *Stay home **la***

Example 11: *Penang famous **lo**, suddenly so many cases*

According to Kroeger (2018), a discourse particle is defined as a linguistic unit that helps one to understand the intended meanings of speakers. The use of particles by Malaysians is related to the geographic population and historical background in Malaysia, which can be traced to the Malay language and Chinese languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hokkien. Many particles from local languages are used by Malaysians when using English in daily communication. For example, Malaysians use particles after sentences like *la, lah* and *ya* and in Chinese, particles like *liao* and *lo*. Considered one of the characteristics of Malaysian English with localised features that differ from the standardised form of English, the unique discourse particles such as *lah, lo* and *leh* used by Malaysians contribute additional meanings to the utterances. The functions of these particles are varied and context specific (Badan & Romagnoli, 2018).

The use of particles in Malaysian netizens' comments, which is not included in Crystal's (2006) list, is a unique feature found in this study, as the particles used affect the interpretation of utterances. In Examples 10 and 11, two different particles were used. *La*, originating from the Malay language (Jaafar, 1999), is used mostly by Malaysians, and *lo*, originating from Mandarin, is often used by Chinese people. Particles are interpreted differently based on the context. The use of *la* convey a range of meanings which can imply emphasis, sarcasm, annoyance, mildness or indifference when used within the context of their utterances (Hei, 2002; Tay, 2014). In Example 10, the Facebook user was advising people to stay home to stay safe with *la* at the end of the utterance. The use of this particle softened his advice so that it did not sound too imposing and direct (Kuang, 2002). Without the particle, this utterance would change into an impolite request and might make hearers uncomfortable. Furthermore, using *la* at the end of this sentence made it sound like a kind reminder that it was good to stay home, so the gentle tone comforted communicators and thus reduced the social distance between them.

Example 11 shows the Facebook user's comment on the high number of cases in Penang. According to Low and Adam (2005), *lo* or *lor* is usually uttered in a high tone, and it is used to agree with someone's action or belief. But in this case, sarcasm was conveyed, implying a criticism

of the responsible party for the high number of infected cases. *Lo* was used by the Facebook user to indicate his sarcasm on the fact that Penang was "famous" for its many affected cases. Particles like *la* and *lo* appeared 32 times out of the 69 occurrences (46.4%) in the current study, and they mainly served to indicate people's attitudes toward their utterances.

4.7 Translanguaging

Example 12: *Yes, pls* ***tutup sekolah*** (Yes, pls close school)

Translanguaging refers to the alternation between two or more languages or language varieties in the same conversation (Park, 2013). Translanguaging occurs not only in physical communication but also in online communication. The use of translanguaging has several functions, such as constructing meaning, mediating understanding, and highlighting emphasis (Portolés & Martí, 2017).

Translanguaging, which is not included in Crystal's (2006) list, was found in this study. This illustrated the fact that language, culture, and communication are intertwined (Bonvillain, 2019). Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. The language used by Malaysians is considered a linguistic hybrid of English, Malay, and Chinese (Wong et al., 2012). In the current study, translanguaging mainly occurred between Malay and English, as Malay is the national language and English is the second language (Ghazali, 2012). In the process of translanguaging between English and Malay, comments made in English are regarded as signalling the importance of what is said while the comments made in Malay are used for emphasis (Hashim et al.,2017). For instance, in Example 12, the Facebook user first used English to respond to other users' advice about closing schools, then alternated to Malay to reiterate the action of "close schools." By translanguaging, it was easier for communicators to notice the words *tutup sekolah*, Liu and Fang (2022) stated that attention can be drawn with translanguaging, by using the Malay phrase *tutup sekolah*, emphasising the urgent action of closing schools to be taken by the Malaysian government to control the COVID-19 outbreak situation. The use of translanguaging in Facebook communication is influenced by spoken communication because Malaysians often alternate between languages when they speak in informal settings (Lau & Ting, 2013; Then & Ting, 2009; Carstens & Ang, 2019). Most importantly, displaying identity, providing further explanations

(such as expressing cause and effect), and fostering active participation are important factors that lead Malaysians to use translanguaging in their conversations (Hadei et al., 2016; Rajendram, 2021). Translanguaging appeared 44 times (3.3%) in the current study to emphasize important points.

5. Conclusion

In this study, many of the features documented by Crystal (2016) were found in the comments posted by Malaysian netizens in synchronous live press conferences on Facebook. These features included abbreviations (21.9%), punctuation marks (3.6%), capitalisation (1.8%) and repetitions of letters (1.6%). Abbreviations were the most used feature, indicating that the main function of netspeak is to save time and increase communicative efficiency. In addition, some unique features not documented by Crystal (2006) were found in this study. They were emojis (13.2%), stickers (5.5%), particles (5.2%) and translanguaging (3.3%). New expressions linked to the pandemic such as *COVID-19,* and the sticker ‘  ’ were also identified. This suggests that language in CMC evolves over time and is influenced by context, language users and the affordances of the medium.

This study enhances our understanding of netspeak used in livestreams. It sheds light on the distinctive characteristics of synchronous online communication, particularly in the context of live comments. Unlike asynchronous communication, synchronous interactions occur in real-time, enabling immediate feedback and engagement. Besides, it also highlights that netspeak in this context is marked by a higher frequency of time-saving features such as abbreviations and emojis, which underscore the urgency and immediacy of the communicative setting. The functions of netspeak include enhancing communication efficiency, emotional expression, and identity portrayal. For instance, abbreviations and acronyms were often used to save time and space, while emoticons and emojis conveyed emotions and sentiments. Capitalisation and the repetition of letters were used for emphasis, while translanguaging reflected the multilingual nature of Malaysian communication. Overall, the findings emphasized the dynamic nature of online language and its evolution in response to real-time events.

However, it should be noted that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all types of online communication. Further research is needed to identify the linguistic features of

netspeak used on other platforms and in different genres, such as online advertisements and newspapers, as comprehensive studies on CMC are helpful in gaining a better understanding of the nature of online communication. Apart from that, other influencing factors like the culture and demographics of the users could be taken into consideration.

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