LINGUASPHERE, Volume 2, Number 2, November 2026, pp. 20 - 28 (Research Article)
doi:

Political Language Humorization on TikTok: A Pragmatic Study of the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

The rapid spread of humor-based viral phenomena on social media platforms such as TikTok has given rise to complex forms of linguistic creativity that remain underexplored from a pragmatic perspective, particularly in the Indonesian digital context. This study aims to describe the forms of language humorization, analyze meaning transformation, and explain the social functions of netizen digital culture regarding the viral song "MBG" on TikTok. Using a qualitative descriptive method with a pragmatic approach, this study analyzed 50 linguistic units selected via purposive sampling from TikTok comments in May 2026. Data were collected through non-participatory observation and note- taking, validated by theoretical triangulation. The results reveal four main patterns: (1) hyperbolic praise based on identity contrast between local figures and global pop idols; (2) irony and sarcasm as covert sociopolitical criticism by flouting the maxims of quality and relevance; (3) linguistic creativity and meme culture through creative acronyms; and (4) netizen interpretation dominated by strong cognitive internalization into daily activities (42%). This study concludes that TikTok's comment section has transformed into a complex, participatory arena for meaning negotiation, where humor serves as a pragmatic strategy to indirectly express criticism, opinions, and group solidarity. These findings contribute to the development of pragmatic theory by demonstrating how flouting maxims and creative language function as tools of digital resistance and social bonding within Indonesian netizen culture.

Keywords: Language Humorization, Digital Culture, TikTok, Pragmatics, "MBG" Song.

INTRODUCTION

The development of social media has brought significant changes to language practices in digital spaces. TikTok, as one of the short-video-based platforms, is not merely a space for entertainment but also a space for the dynamic production and reproduction of linguistic meaning. Language on social media no longer functions solely as a literal communication tool; it also serves as a medium of expression, entertainment, and complex digital cultural representation (Crystal, 2011). Within this context, various intriguing linguistic phenomena have emerged, one of which is language humorization in netizens' interactions with viral content. This phenomenon demonstrates that the development of digital technology has not only transformed the way society communicates, but has also altered how language is produced, interpreted, and disseminated in everyday life (Jenkins, 2006).

One phenomenon that has attracted public attention is the viral spread of the song "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" on TikTok. The song's popularity is evident not only from the high frequency of

sound usage and the spread of related content, but also from the diverse netizen comments appearing on associated uploads. These comments do not merely constitute direct responses to the song; they also contain various forms of humor, wordplay, sarcasm, irony, and multiple-meaning utterances that reflect the

linguistic creativity of social media users. In practice, language related to public figures undergoes meaning transformation upon entering the digital space and subsequently being reproduced by netizens in the form of collective humor. In the case of the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song phenomenon, a public figure originally known through his role in the political sphere experienced a shift in representation upon entering digital culture. Through netizen comments, this figure is no longer interpreted formally but is instead reconstructed as part of collective humor, wordplay, and the creative expression of social media users. This condition indicates that netizens act not only as consumers of information but also as active producers of meaning who construct and disseminate digital discourse through participatory culture and the evolving meme culture on social media (Shifman, 2013).

This phenomenon can be understood through a pragmatic perspective that focuses on the meaning of utterances based on the context of their use. In pragmatic studies, the meaning of an utterance is not always identical to its surface literal meaning. Through the concept of conversational implicature, the implied meaning contained in netizen comments can be uncovered to understand the actual intent behind an utterance (Grice, 1975). Furthermore, speech act theory explains that language is not only used to convey information but also to perform specific actions, such as praising, mocking, criticizing, ridiculing, or creating a humorous effect (Searle, 1969). Within the context of digital culture, these linguistic practices have developed into part of a participatory culture that enables social media users to actively shape and reconstruct meaning through online interaction (Jenkins, 2006).

Studies on language in social media have indeed been widely conducted. Wahyuni et al. (2025) showed that forms of digital sarcasm in social media comment sections are often used to convey criticism and emotional expression indirectly. Furthermore, Tampubolon et al. (2025) found that social media users utilize various forms of language play, abbreviations, and contextual expressions as digital communication strategies. Malikha (2025) demonstrated the dominance of sarcastic utterances and shifting politeness patterns in online interactions within TikTok comments. Meanwhile, Munthe et al. (2025) found that TikTok comments largely contain expressive speech acts in the form of criticism, sarcasm, mockery, and cynical humor that represent netizens' digital communication culture. Adiputra et al.'s (2025) research also showed that the use of connotative utterances in TikTok comments often conceals certain social meanings through digital communication practices. Other studies have also examined digital humor and meme culture as part of digital society's communication practices (Zappavigna, 2012). These various studies indicate that social media is a space rich in linguistic creativity, meaning negotiation, and complex digital communication practices. Nevertheless, research specifically highlighting the process of language transformation related to public figures into netizens' collective humor within the phenomenon of viral songs on TikTok remains relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused separately on sarcasm, linguistic politeness, speech acts, or linguistic creativity. Therefore,

the relationship between pragmatic meaning, digital humor, and participatory culture in the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song phenomenon still requires further in-depth study (Shifman, 2013).

Based on these conditions, this study offers novelty in its effort to integrate pragmatic and digital cultural perspectives in analyzing the phenomenon of language humorization in TikTok comments. The novelty of this research lies in its analysis of the meaning transformation process of language related to public figures into digital humor through netizens' comment interactions in the phenomenon of the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song. Unlike previous studies that focused more separately on sarcasm, sentiment, political communication, linguistic politeness, or linguistic creativity, this study examines how implied meaning, speech function, and digital cultural practices interact with one another in shaping collective humor within social media spaces (Grice, 1975).

Based on the background described above, this study focuses on examining how forms of language humorization emerge in TikTok comments on the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song phenomenon. Furthermore, this study also examines how the process of language meaning transformation occurs in netizens' comment interactions, particularly regarding the shift from literal utterances to humorous, sarcastic, or ambiguous meanings. Moreover, this study seeks to identify the social function of language humorization within digital culture, particularly in the context of netizen participation in constructing shared meaning in social media spaces.

In line with this focus, this study aims to describe the forms of language humorization that emerge in TikTok comments on the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song phenomenon, to analyze the process of language meaning transformation in these comment interactions, and to explain the social function of language humorization within netizens' digital culture.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a pragmatic approach. The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because this study aims to understand, describe, and interpret the meanings contained in netizen comments on the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song phenomenon on TikTok without manipulating the research data.

The pragmatic approach was used to examine the meaning of utterances based on the context of their use, particularly in identifying implicatures, speech acts, and forms of language humorization emerging in netizens' digital interactions (Yule, 2022).

The research data consisted of netizen comments found on TikTok uploads that used the song "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" as background sound. The data sources were obtained from several TikTok uploads that used the song and had high levels of interaction during the period of May 2026. A total of 50 comments were analyzed, selected using a purposive sampling technique. This technique was applied by considering data characteristics relevant to the research objectives, namely comments containing elements of humor, mockery, irony, wordplay, sarcasm, or indirect meaning related to the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data collection was conducted through the observation method using the non-participant observation technique (simak bebas libat cakap/SBLC) combined with the note-taking technique (Sudaryanto, 1993). The researcher acted as a non-participant observer who monitored the comments appearing on TikTok uploads without engaging in interaction with social media users. Comments meeting the research criteria were subsequently documented through screenshots and recorded into a data corpus to facilitate the analysis process. During data collection, user account identities were not included in order to maintain privacy and uphold digital research ethics (Kozinets, 2020).

Data analysis was carried out through several stages. The first stage was data reduction, namely selecting comments relevant to the research focus. The second stage was data classification based on the forms of language humorization identified. The third stage was pragmatic analysis, which involved identifying conversational implicatures based on Grice's theory (1975) and examining speech act functions based on the theories of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). This pragmatic analysis was conducted by synchronically relating the text of netizen comments to the context of the TikTok video content that triggered them. In addition, the analysis also took digital cultural context into account to understand how collective humor is constructed through netizen participation in social media spaces (Jenkins, 2006; Shifman, 2014). The final

stage was drawing conclusions based on the patterns of findings that emerged from the overall research data.

To ensure data validity, this study employed theoretical triangulation. The data obtained were analyzed using several theoretical perspectives, namely implicature theory, speech act theory, and digital culture theory. The use of these multiple perspectives aimed to improve interpretive accuracy and strengthen the validity of the research findings in explaining the phenomenon of language humorization in TikTok comments related to the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song. The application of theoretical triangulation allows a phenomenon to be examined from various points of view, thereby producing a more comprehensive and in-depth interpretation (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the stages of data reduction, classification, and interpretation, this study identified various forms of language humorization emerging in netizen comments on the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" song phenomenon on TikTok. The comments obtained were reduced and grouped according to shared linguistic characteristics and recurring meaning tendencies. This categorization process was carried out to facilitate the identification of language humorization patterns as well as netizens' interpretation of the phenomenon under study. In qualitative research, the data-grouping process is an essential part of identifying recurring themes, allowing for a more systematic interpretation (Miles et al., 2014).

From 42 netizen comments constituting the research corpus, 50 relevant linguistic units in the form of words, phrases, and utterances were obtained. These units were then grouped into four

main categories: humorization through hyperbolic praise, humorization through irony and sarcasm, humorization through linguistic creativity and meme culture, and netizen interpretation of the "MBG" song's humor. These four categories reflect how digital linguistic text is deconstructed into a discourse of collective humor. Representative examples from each category are presented in Table 1, while the complete recapitulation of data distribution is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Examples of Data Classification

No.	Code	Data	Category
1	PH1	"OMG, Bahlil looks like Zayn Malik"	Hyperbolic Praise
2	PH9	"Bolu ketan = BOtak LUcu KEren TAmpan (Bald, Funny, Cool, Handsome)"	Hyperbolic Praise
3	IS1	"Handsome, as long as fuel prices are stable"	Irony and Sarcasm
4	IS6	"The song's tone doesn't insult directly, but it's sarcastic because it doesn't match the facts"	Irony and Sarcasm
5	KB1	"Buahlil" (blend of "buah" [fruit] and "Bahlil")	Linguistic Creativity and Meme Culture
6	KB9	"MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng"	Linguistic Creativity and Meme Culture
7	PM5	"It echoes in my head while showering, sweeping, cooking, washing"	Netizen Interpretation
8	PM15	"The MBG program lost the branding battle to Bahlil"	Netizen Interpretation

Note: The complete dataset consisting of 50 linguistic units is available from the corresponding author upon request.

Table 2. Recapitulation of Data

No.	Category	Number of Data	Percentage
1	Humorization through Hyperbolic Praise	10	20%
2	Humorization through Irony and Sarcasm	9	18%
3	Humorization through Linguistic Creativity and Meme Culture	10	20%
4	Netizen Interpretation of "MBG" Humor	21	42%
	Total Linguistic Data Units	**50**	**100%**

As shown in Table 2, the category of Netizen Interpretation of "MBG" Humor is the most dominant, comprising 21 data (42%). This finding indicates that the "MBG" song phenomenon generates diverse

responses, interpretations, and meaning negotiations among netizens. In digital culture, social media users act as participants who shape, modify, and disseminate content meaning through online interaction (Jenkins, 2006).

Meanwhile, the categories of Humorization through Hyperbolic Praise and Humorization through Linguistic Creativity and Meme Culture each account for 10 data (20%), while Humorization through Irony and Sarcasm accounts for 9 data (18%). These findings indicate that humor within the "MBG" phenomenon is constructed through several interrelated linguistic strategies, ranging from exaggerated praise and indirect mockery to the creation of new linguistic forms that develop as part of digital meme culture. This phenomenon aligns with Shifman's (2014) view that meme culture in digital media enables users to creatively produce and reproduce meaning through the modification of language, symbols, and popular cultural references.

Overall, these four categories demonstrate that language humorization in the "MBG" phenomenon functions not only as a means of entertainment but also as a space for netizens to express opinions, construct group identity, and negotiate meaning regarding the public figure who is the subject of discussion. Therefore, further analysis was conducted on each category to understand the forms of language humorization and the pragmatic functions embedded within them. Humorization through Hyperbolic Praise

One form of language humorization found in netizen comments on the "MBG" song phenomenon on TikTok is hyperbolic praise, an utterance form containing exaggerated reinforcement of meaning to create a humorous effect. PH1: "OMG, Bahlil looks like Zayn Malik"

Data PH1 shows that netizens use comparisons with global public figures as an expressive strategy that is not literal but hyperbolic and humorous in nature. Pragmatically, this utterance functions not only as praise but also as an emotional expression constructed through a play on meaning within the context of digital interaction (Grice, 1975). Analyzed through Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature, this utterance flouts the maxim of quality, as the claim of resemblance to a public figure is not based on factual truth but on the speaker's subjective perception and creativity. This flouting generates a humorous implicature — the utterance is not

intended as literal truth but as a form of entertainment and social solidarity within the TikTok comment space.

From a speech act perspective, this utterance constitutes an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969), reflecting the speaker's psychological attitude of admiration wrapped in humor. Austin (1962) explains that a speech act comprises not only a locutionary act but also illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions. In this context, the illocutionary act is the expression of hyperbolic admiration, while the resulting perlocutionary effect is entertainment and the audience's emotional engagement within digital comment culture. Exploring the use of the name "Zayn Malik" reveals a humor mechanism based on identity contrast. Humor emerges from the sharp discrepancy between the sociopolitical identity of a local public figure (Bahlil) and the persona of Zayn Malik as a global pop idol associated with aesthetic standards, popularity, and international entertainment culture. This incongruity is precisely what produces the humorous effect, as netizens consciously juxtapose two entities from vastly different social and cultural domains.

Furthermore, the use of hyperbolic praise also relates to Leech's politeness principle, in which excessive praise in a digital context does not solely aim to maintain politeness but also functions as a humor strategy to build social closeness among social media users. Thus, politeness in digital spaces can shift into a creative means of humor formation. This finding aligns with Munthe et al. (2025), who showed that expressive speech acts in TikTok comments are often used to build humorous social interaction through praise, mockery, and exaggerated emotional expression. Additionally, Tampubolon et al. (2025) found that TikTok

users tend to employ hyperbolic expressions as a linguistic creativity strategy in digital communication. Nevertheless, this study reveals an important distinction: in the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" phenomenon, hyperbolic praise functions not merely as individual expression but also as part of a collective humorization that reconstructs the public figure within digital meme culture.

Thus, hyperbolic praise in this data functions not only as a form of positive evaluation but also as a pragmatic strategy for creating humor, building digital solidarity, and reproducing the meaning of a public figure within the social media communication space.

HUMORIZATION THROUGH IRONY AND SARCASM

The next form of language humorization found in netizen comments on the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" phenomenon on TikTok is irony and sarcasm.

IS1: "Handsome, as long as fuel prices are stable"

Data IS1 shows that an utterance structurally resembling praise in fact contains implicit meaning that cannot be understood literally. This utterance works through a mismatch between linguistic form and social context, requiring shared understanding among social media users to grasp its actual intent. In digital communication practice, this form has become one of netizens' primary strategies for conveying humor that simultaneously carries subtle mockery.

Pragmatically, this phenomenon can be explained through Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature. The utterance flouts the maxim of relevance, as there is no logical connection between "handsomeness" and "stable fuel prices," and flouts the maxim of quality, as the conveyed meaning cannot be taken as literally true. This flouting generates a sarcastic Implicature the utterance is not intended as genuine praise but as a form of veiled criticism wrapped in humor. Thus, the meaning does not lie on the surface of the utterance but in the contextual interpretation collectively constructed by netizens.

From a speech act perspective, this utterance can be categorized as an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969) that not only states the speaker's psychological attitude but also contains a layer of irony. Austin (1962) explains that speech acts have locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions. In this case, the locutionary act appears structurally as positive praise, while the illocutionary act is veiled mockery or criticism not expressed directly. Meanwhile, the resulting perlocutionary effect is a combination of humor and social criticism captured by the audience within the digital comment space. This demonstrates that meaning in TikTok comments strongly depends on cultural context and shared understanding among users within the digital community. This phenomenon of irony and sarcasm also reflects that TikTok's comment space serves as a venue for social opinion expression that is not always conveyed directly. Netizens tend to use indirect language strategies to avoid open confrontation while simultaneously creating a space for collective humor. This finding aligns with Wahyuni et al. (2025), who showed that sarcasm in social media is used as an indirect communication strategy to convey criticism and emotional expression. Additionally, Malikha (2025) found that TikTok interactions reflect a shift in linguistic ethics, where politeness is not always explicitly maintained but is instead negotiated through humor and mockery.

Furthermore, Munthe et al. (2025) also confirmed that expressive speech acts in TikTok comments largely contain criticism, mockery, and cynical humor that represent digital communication culture. However, within the context of the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" phenomenon, irony and sarcasm function not merely as individual criticism but also as part of a collective humorization formed through netizens' participatory interaction in digital culture. Thus, irony and sarcasm in this data indicate that humor on

TikTok is not merely entertainment but also a medium for negotiating social meaning through complex language play. HUMORIZATION THROUGH LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY AND MEME CULTURE

The next form of language humorization found in netizen comments on the "MBG Mas Bahlil Ganteng" phenomenon on TikTok is linguistic creativity developing within meme culture.

KB9: "Bolu ketan = BOtak LUcu KEren TAmpan" (Bald, Funny, Cool, Handsome)

Data KB9 shows that netizens do not merely respond to content literally but also reproduce language through wordplay, abbreviation, acronymization, and creative repetition that does not follow formal linguistic structure. This process demonstrates that language in digital spaces is dynamic and open to meaning modification by social media users. Pragmatically, this phenomenon can be understood as a deliberate deviation from linguistic form intended to create a collective humorous effect. The expression "BOtak LUcu KEren TAmpan" reflects a creative acronymization process that does not follow standard morphological rules, yet produces new meaning understandable only through shared knowledge among users. In digital communication, the ability to comprehend such forms depends on the pragmatic competence and digital cultural understanding shared within the speech community (Crystal, 2011).

From a meme culture perspective, this phenomenon aligns with Shifman's (2014) concept of memes as cultural units that are replicated, modified, and disseminated participatively through digital media. In this case, the phrase "my little bolu ketan" becomes a recontextualization of everyday language expression, subsequently transformed into a symbol of collective humor on TikTok. Meanwhile, Jenkins (2006) explains that participatory culture allows media users to become not only consumers but also active producers of meaning in the process of digital culture dissemination. Furthermore, this linguistic creativity also reflects the expressive function of speech

acts, in which users not only convey information but also construct social identity and community solidarity through humor. The use of non-standard, repetitive, and absurd linguistic forms indicates that the primary communicative goal in this context is not clarity of meaning, but rather emotional engagement and togetherness within the digital space.

This finding aligns with Tampubolon et al. (2025), who showed that Generation Z tends to use linguistic creativity such as abbreviations, wordplay, and contextual expressions as a humorous digital communication strategy. Nevertheless, within the context of the "MBG" phenomenon, linguistic creativity functions not merely as individual expression but also develops into a collective meme pattern that reinforces content virality through repetition and language modification by netizens. Thus, linguistic creativity in this data shows that humorization on TikTok occurs not only at the level of meaning but also at the level of linguistic form, where netizens actively reproduce language into new forms that are flexible, creative, and rich in digital cultural meaning. NETIZEN INTERPRETATION OF "MBG" HUMOR IN DIGITAL SPACE

The phenomenon of netizen interpretation of "MBG" humor on TikTok can be observed in the following data.

PM5: "It echoes in my head while showering, sweeping, cooking, washing"

Data PM5 shows that the "MBG" song possesses strong memorability among listeners, emerging not only when users consciously access social media but also spontaneously during everyday activities. This indicates that viral content on TikTok can transcend digital space and enter users' lived experience. Pragmatically, this phenomenon can be understood as an expressive speech act representing the user's experience of exposure to viral content. The utterance "it echoes" reflects the unintentional recurrence of song fragments during daily activities such as showering, sweeping, cooking, and washing. While conceptually related to involuntary recall within psycholinguistics, from a pragmatic perspective this

phenomenon can be interpreted as a form of confession by the speaker regarding the perlocutionary effect produced by exposure to digital content. Thus, this utterance reflects not only a cognitive effect but also becomes a form of linguistic expression of users' subjective experience in responding to a viral phenomenon.

This phenomenon aligns with Wahyuni et al. (2025), who showed that viral content on social media elicits not only humorous responses or criticism but also emotional attachment and intense user experience. Additionally, Malikha (2025) explained that TikTok interactions reflect a shift in linguistic patterns, in which non-standard expressions are used to spontaneously represent psychological experience within digital space. Furthermore, Munthe et al. (2025) confirmed that TikTok comments constitute a form of expressive speech act reflecting both social reaction and subjective experience toward a digital phenomenon. In this context, Data PM5 demonstrates that "MBG" humor functions not only as entertainment but also generates an experiential impact embedded in users' daily activities.

Thus, this phenomenon shows that in digital space, meaning is produced not only through social interaction but also through the internalization of users' experience with viral content. In line with Jenkins (2006), audiences within participatory culture do not merely consume content but actively construct and experience the effects of meaning through their engagement in the digital media ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of netizen comments on the "MBG" song phenomenon on TikTok, it can be concluded that language humorization and users' interpretation of the content are shaped through diverse linguistic strategies and cognitive responses. This phenomenon indicates that netizen comments function not only as a means of entertainment but also as a space for articulating social criticism, linguistic creativity, and the internalization of digital content into everyday experience. The findings show that humorization is constructed through hyperbolic praise that exploits the discrepancy between the sociopolitical identity of a public figure and the persona of a global pop idol to create a comedic effect, while netizens also employ irony and sarcasm as expressive speech acts that conceal grievances and criticism of economic policy through the flouting of the maxims of quality and relevance. In addition, linguistic creativity within meme culture emerges through creative acronymization, modification of formal language forms, and collective wordplay, and netizens' interpretation of the song generates a profound subjective experiential impact, in which digital content undergoes cognitive internalization to the point of recurring during everyday physical activities. Accordingly, the "MBG" phenomenon demonstrates that social media comments function not merely as spontaneous reactions but as a space for meaning negotiation involving pragmatic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions within a participatory digital ecosystem, thereby contributing to the development of pragmatic theory by illustrating how the flouting of conversational maxims and creative language use operate as strategies of digital resistance, social critique, and community solidarity within Indonesian netizen culture.

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