



# Verbal Abuse in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang Live Streaming: A Sociolinguistic Study

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the types and motives of verbal abuse used by players in recorded Mobile Legends: Bang Bang live-streaming sessions on YouTube from a sociolinguistic perspective. The research addresses two main problems: identifying the forms of verbal abuse and examining the motives underlying their use during gameplay interactions. A qualitative research design was employed using qualitative content analysis. The data were collected from a recorded YouTube live stream by an Indonesian amateur streamer. Observation sheets were used as research instruments to document abusive utterances and explore viewers' perceptions. The findings revealed four dominant types of verbal abuse: insults and name-calling, blaming and reporting threats, obscene and aggressive language, and threats of in-game sabotage. A total of 54 verbal abuse expressions were identified, with insults and name-calling appearing most frequently. The motives behind verbal abuse included frustration from poor performance, behavioral shifts, emotional disengagement from the team, and the online disinhibition effect.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a crucial part of human interaction because it reflects emotions, attitudes, and social relationships. In sociolinguistics, language use is closely linked to social context, including communication in digital environments. One common phenomenon in online interactions is verbal abuse, which refers to the use of offensive, aggressive, or insulting language toward others. Verbal abuse frequently occurs in online gaming communities, especially in competitive games such as *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. Through voice chat, text chat, and live broadcast communication, players often express frustration, anger, and disappointment using abusive language.

Several previous studies have discussed verbal abuse and toxic communication in online gaming environments. According to (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) examined toxic behavior in competitive online games and identified several forms of verbal abuse, including insults, blaming expressions, obscene language, and threats of sabotage. Their study revealed that competitive pressure and anonymity encourage players to express aggression more openly in online interactions. This research provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding verbal abuse in gaming communication. (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) also explained the motives behind verbal abuse, such as frustration over losing, behavioral changes, emotional release, and the online disinhibition effect.

Studies conducted by scholars from Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha (Undiksha) have also discussed sociolinguistic behavior, swear words, digital communication, and interaction patterns in online environments. Swandana et al. (2017) analyzed swear words

used by Bali Aga people in Sidetapa Village and found that swear words are frequently used to express anger, disappointment, emotional catharsis, and interpersonal identity. Their findings indicate that offensive language may function as an emotional expression in social interaction. (Padmadewi & Swandana, 2025) Further explained that swear words are commonly used to convey frustration, emotional pressure, and disappointment in communication contexts.

Similarly, (Budasi & Swandana, 2025) found that language use in YouTube comment interactions frequently contains slang, emotionally expressive language, and informal communication patterns influenced by digital interaction environments. Research related to sociolinguistic interaction and communication behavior was also discussed (Nitiasih & Riastini, 2023), who emphasized that interaction patterns are closely related to communicative intentions and emotional responses during social interaction. In addition, (Padmadewi & Swandana, 2025) explained that language behavior in multilingual communication environments is strongly influenced by social context and communication dynamics. Another relevant study by (Budasi & Swandana, 2025) stated that communication and linguistic expression are closely connected to social meaning and community behavior. Furthermore, Adi et al. (2026) explained that language choice and code-switching behavior are influenced by communication purposes, social interaction, and emotional expression. Another study conducted by Swandana et al. (2020) revealed that language production and linguistic behavior are influenced by communication context and interaction patterns. These findings support the idea that digital communication environments encourage emotionally expressive and reactive language behavior among users.

A previous study by (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) identified several types of verbal abuse in online games, including insults, blaming, obscene language, and threats of sabotage. Their study also explained the motives behind verbal abuse, such as frustration over losing, behavioral changes, emotional release, and the online disinhibition effect. However, research examining verbal abuse in recorded live YouTube *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* sessions from a sociolinguistic perspective is still limited. Based on previous studies, verbal abuse and toxic communication have been widely discussed from sociolinguistic and communication perspectives. However, research specifically analyzing verbal abuse in recorded YouTube livestreams of *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* using a sociolinguistic approach is still limited. Therefore, this study contributes to previous research by focusing on the types of verbal abuse and the motives underlying their use in livestream communication.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of verbal abuse and analyze the motives behind their use in recorded YouTube live-streaming sessions of *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. This study uses a qualitative research design with qualitative content analysis. The data are collected from recorded live streams. Based on these discussions, this article focuses on the forms of verbal abuse and the motives underlying their use in online gaming communication.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to analyze verbal abuse in recorded *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* live-streaming sessions on YouTube. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of language use, emotions, and social interactions within natural digital communication contexts. The study

focused on identifying the types of verbal abuse and analyzing the motives underlying their use during gameplay interactions.

Primary data were obtained from one YouTube livestream session recorded by an Indonesian amateur Mobile Legends: Bang Bang streamer, referred to as "Streamer A" to maintain anonymity. The livestream recording was selected through purposive sampling based on several criteria: (1) the livestream contained active verbal communication between the streamer and other players; (2) the gameplay involved competitive ranked matches that could potentially trigger emotional reactions; (3) the recording contained remarks suspected of being verbally abusive; and (4) the audio quality was clear enough to allow for accurate transcription and analysis. These criteria were used to ensure that the selected data were relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation techniques. An observation sheet was employed to record relevant information from the livestream, including the timestamp of each utterance, the verbal expression used, the situational context in which the utterance occurred, the target of the utterance, preliminary categorization of verbal abuse types, and notes regarding possible motives underlying the expression. The recorded livestream was repeatedly observed to ensure comprehensive data identification and accurate transcription.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. First, the livestream recording was transcribed verbatim. Second, utterances containing verbal abuse were identified and extracted from the transcript. Third, the identified utterances were coded and categorized according to the verbal abuse classification proposed by (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015), namely insults and name-calling, blaming and reporting threats, obscene and aggressive language, and threats of in-game sabotage. After the classification process, each utterance was further analyzed to identify its underlying motive based on (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) framework, including frustration from losing, emotional disengagement, behavioral shifts, and the online disinhibition effect. Finally, the categorized data were interpreted within a sociolinguistic perspective to explain how verbal abuse functioned in the gaming interaction context.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, investigator triangulation and theoretical triangulation were employed. The coding results were reviewed and discussed with an experienced researcher in sociolinguistics to minimize subjective interpretation and improve coding consistency. In addition, the classifications and interpretations were continuously compared with the theoretical framework proposed by (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) and relevant sociolinguistic studies on verbal abuse and digital communication. Repeated observation of the livestream recording was also conducted to verify the accuracy of the transcription and coding process.

Although the qualitative approach provides a detailed and contextual understanding of language behavior, this study has several limitations. The findings are derived from a single livestream recording and a limited number of participants; therefore, they cannot be generalized to all online gaming communities. Furthermore, the interpretation of verbal abuse remains context-dependent and may be influenced by the researcher's analytical perspective.

### 3. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of verbal abuse identified in the recorded YouTube live-streaming session of an Indonesian Mobile Legends: Bang Bang streamer. The analysis focuses on the types of verbal abuse and the motives underlying their use during gameplay interactions. Based on the data analysis, several forms of verbal abuse were identified, including insults and name-calling, obscene and aggressive language, blaming expressions, and threats of in-game sabotage. These findings support (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) The theory is that toxic communication commonly appears in competitive online gaming environments. Out of the 54 verbal abuse expressions, the most frequent types were insult and name-calling, each occurring 27 times. This suggests the streamer primarily uses verbal abuse as a means to express anger, frustration, or insult people. The next common type was obscene and aggressive language, with 18 occurrences. Threats of in-game sabotage appeared 5 times, and blaming and reporting threats occurred 4 times.

#### 3.1. Types of Verbal Abuse

##### 3.1.1. Insult and Name-Calling

These types of verbal abuse involve using direct insults or derogatory labels aimed at other players.

Streamer A: *Goblok dia wei* (He is so stupid).

This utterance contains a direct derogatory expression directed toward another player. The lexical item "*goblok*" functions as an insult intended to negatively evaluate the target's competence and performance during gameplay negatively. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this utterance serves as a mechanism of social evaluation. According to Holmes et al., (2022) speakers frequently use language to evaluate the abilities and behaviors of others within social interactions. In the gaming environment, competence is highly valued because team success depends on coordinated performance. As a result, players who are perceived as underperforming may become targets of negative linguistic evaluations. The use of "*goblok*" demonstrates how language is used to establish symbolic hierarchies between competent and incompetent players. Rather than functioning solely as an emotional outburst, the insult reflects broader social expectations regarding performance within the gaming community.

##### 3.1.2. Blaming and Reporting Threats

Blaming and reporting threats is a type of verbal abuse in which a speaker blames another person for mistakes, poor performance, or failure during a game, while sometimes also threatening to report or punish them.

Streamer A: *Tigreal bujang nginam, jangan kabur kayak gitu* (Tigreal, you idiot, don't run like that).

This utterance reflects the speaker's dissatisfaction with a teammate's decision during gameplay. The statement assigns responsibility for a perceived failure to another player. From a sociolinguistic perspective, blaming expressions function as tools for regulating group behavior. Stapleton et al., (2022) argues that linguistic choices are shaped by interactional goals and social expectations. In this context, the utterance reflects the gaming community's expectation that tank players should remain in combat and support teammates. The criticism, therefore, functions not only as personal dissatisfaction but also

as an attempt to reinforce community norms regarding teamwork and strategic responsibility.

### 3.1.3. Obscene and Aggressive Language

Streamer A: *Jangan kabur anjing* (Don't run, damn it).

The utterance contains profanity used to intensify criticism toward another player. The word "*anjing*" functions as an emotionally charged expression conveying anger and frustration. Sociolinguistically, profanity serves as an expressive linguistic resource that intensifies social evaluation and emotional meaning. As noted by Swandana et al., (2017), swear words often function as markers of emotional release and interpersonal positioning. Within competitive gaming environments, obscene language enables speakers to communicate dissatisfaction more forcefully while simultaneously signalling emotional involvement in the interaction. The use of profanity, therefore, reflects both emotional expression and social evaluation.

### 3.1.4. Threats of In-Game Sabotage

Streamer A: *Kalau Fanny masih main kayak gitu, gua ngefeed aja* (Fanny, if you keep playing like that, I'll intentionally feed).

The utterance represents an explicit threat to intentionally reduce the team's chance of winning by deliberately allowing the opponent to gain kills. Unlike ordinary criticism, the speaker threatens future destructive behavior unless teammates improve their performance. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the expression reflects the use of language as a form of social pressure, in which the speaker attempts to regulate teammates' behavior through intimidation rather than cooperation.

## 3.2. Motives of Verbal Abuse

### 3.2.1. Frustration from Poor Performance or Losing the Games

From a sociolinguistic perspective, frustration reflects the relationship between language and social expectations. Players evaluate teammates according to shared norms of competence and cooperation. When those expectations are violated, verbal abuse becomes a linguistic strategy for expressing dissatisfaction and assigning responsibility. Many abusive utterances were directed at teammates who failed to perform expected tasks during critical gameplay situations.

Streamer A: *Goblok dia wei!* (He's so stupid!)

The streamer says this after a teammate makes a mistake during gameplay. This utterance reflects frustration caused by the teammate's poor performance. Rather than calmly criticizing the mistake, the streamer immediately expresses disappointment through an insulting expression. (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) explain that frustration from losing or poor performance frequently leads to toxic language, as players perceive their teammates' mistakes as obstacles to victory. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the insult also functions as a negative social evaluation of another player's competence within the gaming community.

### 3.2.2. Behavioral Shift

Behavioral shift refers to changes in communication style caused by emotional pressure during gameplay.

Streamer A: *Tigreal, jangan kabur anjing!* (Don't run away, Tigreal, damn it!)

The teammate retreats during a team fight. The streamer demonstrates a behavioral shift by abandoning neutral communication and using profanity to express dissatisfaction. The competitive nature of the match alters the speaker's linguistic behavior, making communication more aggressive than would typically occur in everyday interaction. This finding supports (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015) explanation that stressful gaming situations can produce temporary changes in communication style.

### 3.2.3. Emotional Disengagement from the Team

Emotional disengagement from the team is a motive in which players lose their willingness to cooperate, causing them to withdraw socially and verbally from their teammates during the game.

Streamer A: *Percuma gua bantuin, kalian nggak bisa main* (It's useless for me to help, you guys can't play)

The streamer says this after teammates repeatedly make poor decisions during team fights. This utterance reflects emotional disengagement from the team because the speaker no longer believes that cooperating with teammates will produce positive outcomes. Rather than encouraging or directing teammates, the streamer expresses hopelessness and distances themselves emotionally from the group's objective. According to (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015), emotional disengagement occurs when players become psychologically detached from their teammates due to repeated frustration. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the utterance also signals a weakening of group solidarity and shared identity, as the speaker separates themselves from the rest of the team through negative evaluation.

### 3.2.4. Online Disinhibition Effect

The Online Disinhibition Effect is a psychological phenomenon in which individuals behave more openly, aggressively, or irresponsibly in online environments than they would in face-to-face interactions. In online gaming contexts, this effect occurs because players feel anonymous, emotionally detached, and less constrained by social norms, which encourages them to express anger, frustration, and verbal abuse more freely toward other players.

Streamer A: *Kontol, kalian semua nggak ada yang bisa main!* (Fuck, none of you know how to play!)

This utterance reflects the Online Disinhibition Effect because the speaker uses explicit profanity and openly insults all teammates without hesitation. Rather than expressing frustration in a socially acceptable manner, the speaker employs highly offensive language that is more likely to occur in an anonymous online environment than in face-to-face interaction. According to (Blackburn & Kwak, 2015), anonymity and reduced social accountability encourage players to communicate more aggressively during online gameplay. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the utterance demonstrates how digital communication environments reshape linguistic behavior by lowering social restraints and increasing the acceptability of emotionally charged expressions.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study examined verbal abuse in recorded Mobile Legends: Bang Bang livestream sessions on YouTube from a sociolinguistic perspective. The findings revealed that verbal abuse primarily appeared in the forms of insults and name-calling, blaming expressions, and obscene or aggressive language. These expressions were motivated by

frustration resulting from poor performance, behavioral shifts caused by competitive pressure, emotional disengagement from teammates, and the online disinhibition effect.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, verbal abuse serves functions beyond emotional expression. It operates as a mechanism for evaluating competence, enforcing community norms, constructing social identities, and negotiating interpersonal relationships within gaming communities. The findings demonstrate that language use in online gaming is strongly influenced by social expectations, interactional goals, and the competitive nature of the digital environment.

This study contributes to sociolinguistic research by highlighting the relationship between language, social behavior, and digital communication. However, the study is limited by its reliance on a single livestream recording and a relatively small dataset. Future research is recommended to examine larger datasets, different gaming platforms, and cross-cultural contexts to obtain a broader understanding of verbal abuse in online gaming communities.

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#### **Authors' Contribution**

*Ni Putu Desi Tresnayanti* worked on the project and developed the main conceptual ideas, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript. *I Wayan Swandana* and *Putu Adi Krisna Juniarta* assisted with the analysis, provided error revisions, and supervised the overall research process.

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