

"The Nuruls": A Sociolinguistic Study of Name Enregisterment in Indonesian Online Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The emerging trend of using first name as a register to address a specific kind of social and linguistic behaviour has been getting more common. This phenomenon is related to a linguistics process that is known as enregisterment (Agha, 2003). The current study examines the enregisterment process of the name "Nurul" into a characterological figure and how it intersects with the language and social ideologies among the Indonesian youth on the social media platform X. The study employed a qualitative content analysis, with the data taken from posts that contain the word "Nurul" from the platform X. Furthermore, the data was analysed with critical discourse analysis (CDA) and feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA). The result of the study finds that "Nurul" is said to be a religious girl but has a hypocritical nature to the name which does not reflect the Islamic values. "Nurul" functions as a critique of sexism and patriarchal conventions. However, it also underlined the possibility of gender stereotypes and marginalising women.

KEYWORDS enregisterment; first name; Nurul; social media; sociolinguistics.

ABSTRAK

Tren yang muncul dalam menggunakan nama depan sebagai register untuk menyebut jenis perilaku sosial dan linguistik tertentu telah menjadi semakin umum. Fenomena ini terkait dengan proses linguistik yang dikenal sebagai enregisterment (Agha, 2003). Penelitian ini mengkaji proses enregisterment nama "Nurul" menjadi tokoh karakter dan bagaimana hal tersebut bersinggungan dengan bahasa dan ideologi sosial di kalangan anak muda Indonesia di platform media sosial X. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis konten kualitatif, dengan data yang diambil dari postingan yang mengandung kata "Nurul" di platform X. Selanjutnya, data tersebut dianalisis dengan analisis wacana kritis (CDA) dan analisis wacana kritis feminis (FCDA). Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa "Nurul" dikatakan sebagai perempuan yang religius namun memiliki sifat hipokrit pada namanya yang tidak mencerminkan nilai-nilai Islam. "Nurul" berfungsi sebagai kritik terhadap seksisme dan konvensi patriarki. Namun, hal ini juga menggarisbawahi kemungkinan adanya stereotip gender dan memarjinalkan perempuan.

KATA KUNCI enregisterment; nama depan; Nurul; media social; sosiolinguistik.

Introduction

The phenomenon of using a first name as a stereotypical figure in order to address a specific kind of social and linguistic behaviour has been increasing

in the digital world. Names, as linguistic objects, are attached to social categories and their construction of linguistic ideology, namely regarding race, ethnicity, social class, gender and religion (Heyd 2022). For instance, the name "Karen" is associated with a middle-class white woman who is ignorant, entitled and demanding (Blitvich 2022). In Indonesian online discourse, the use of the name "Nurul" (often labelled as "the nuruls") has been recently widespread, particularly in social media platform X, among the youth. Nurul is characterised as self-righteous religious women who wear headscarves but engage in immoral behaviour, often exhibiting double standards (Aziza 2023).

This phenomenon is related in sociolinguistic as the process of *enregisterment*, which is defined as "processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognised register of forms" (Agha 2003, 242). With this, social signs become culturally stereotypic characteristics of 'enregistered' as person types or "characterological figures" (Agha 2003; Ilbury 2020). As a result, when a speaker employs a specific linguistic form, they conjure up both the social connotations connected to that form and the imagined figures who are stereotypically associated with that form of language (Ilbury 2022). Furthermore, Heyd (2022) proposed that first names can contribute to the enregisterment process, thereby connecting linguistic practices with acts of valorisation and devaluation through language-ideological moves.

To date, several studies have investigated enregisterment and characterological figures (e.g., Hutanu, 2021; Ilbury, 2022, 2023; Németh, 2021; Ruano-García, 2021). More recent attention has focused on the characterological figure of an online persona. Illbury (2020) investigated the enregisterment of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in a corpus of tweets by ten gay British men and how it built a characterological figure of a "Sassy Queen". This persona is used only in specific social contexts where being "sassy" is appreciated and respected. By doing this, the likelihood of conflict is reduced, and peer social cohesiveness is increased. In the same vein, Heyd (2022) examines the enregisterment of "Lisa" in German student discourse. The study noted Lisa as a "young, shallow female persona perceived as entitled and annoying" (Heyd 2022, 271) and touches on the discourse of cosmopolitanism, elitism, and gender.

There is still a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with research into how names operate as shorthand for specific social and linguistic behaviours (Blitvich 2022; Heyd 2022; Kosse 2021; Menzie 2022). Existing research has focused on different languages and countries; however, there is still a lack of specific focus on the Indonesian context. Furthermore, this growing trend of using first names as characterological figures in online discourse highlights the need for further exploration in sociolinguistics. Thus,

this research examines the enregisterment process of the name "Nurul" and how this process gives insight into how language ideologies and social stereotypes intersect in digital communication among Indonesian youth on the social media platform X. By analysing how "Nurul" acts as a characterological figure, we can gain a deeper understanding of a broader discourse of gender, social class and religion that this phenomenon reflects.

Accordingly, the research questions of this study are as follows:

- 1. How does the name "Nurul" function as a characterological figure through the process of enregisterment in contemporary Indonesian online discourse on social media platform X?
- 2. What are the specific social and linguistic behaviours associated with "Nurul" in the social media platform X, and how do these behaviours reflect broader social language ideologies?

Theoretical Framework

Names as Enregisterment and Characterological Figure

Enregisterment is a salient process that helps to develop both language use and social identities. One of the ways enregisterment works is through the construction of characterological figures, which, in the most basic manner, are defined as stereotype personas associated with specific registers (Johnstone 2017). Characterological figures are developed through linguistic choices and attached to specific speaker types (Agha 2003). For instance, social media communication frequently occurs through specific address forms, and its structure contributes to the formation of these online personas (Truan 2023). Moreover, stylistic variations in spelling and writing on social media platforms are also part of the enregisterment of characterological figures (Ilbury 2020). This notion can be illustrated in real-life examples. The exemplification of a working-class persona is developed linguistically in the figures of Haagse Harry in the Hague and Chavs in England (Cole and Tieken-Boon Van Ostade 2022). In other words, enregisterment and characterological figures are concepts that are intertwined in a way that not only develops language practices but also social identities. To put it succinctly, associating linguistic forms with specific cultural patterns of action shapes these figures, which in turn shapes ideas and beliefs about how language is used (Agha 2005).

Accordingly, previous studies show that names can also be implemented in the process of enregisterment and the making of characterological figures (Heyd 2022). The process of enregisterment is observable via these characterological figures through their names, even if the social cues on digital platforms are more often somewhat constrained. The use of names as a form of enregisterment and characterological figure is increasingly prevalent in online discourse. Name practices, in the context of text-based digital environments, are critical to separating between contexts and regulating the absence of situated social cues (Jacobson 1996). The names chosen as characterological figures can predominately influence interpretations and social value judgments. For example, research conducted by Beaton et al. (2024) found that Natalia Lugo's parody of "Francheska"—a stereotype of a Puerto Rican welfare queen—propagated racial stereotypes and further entrenched dominant ideologies of class, race, and honour. Incel (involuntary celibate) communities have done the same, using names such as "Stacy," "Becky," and "Chad" to construct characterological figures and then categorise them with gender roles that follow the male gaze (Menzie 2022).

Gender, Social Class, and Religion

The relationship between language, gender, and social class has been extensively investigated in the field of sociolinguistics. Typically, these investigations are conducted separately, with an emphasis on social class or gender. Nevertheless, previous studies have been conducted that integrate these two factors. For example, in studies on language variation, the traditional viewpoint holds that social class influences gender-related linguistic variation (Labov 1990). However, this perspective is questionable due to the intricate nature of the interaction between social class and gender, and gender is typically more influential in language variation (Milroy and Gordon 2003). Despite this, the scope of research on gender and social class is not restricted to linguistic variations. Queen (2012) demonstrates how linguistic tropes index gender and social class, thereby reinforcing conventional ideals of wealth and social privilege. Furthermore, Guy (2013) investigates the correlation between sociolinguistic factors among Portuguese speakers in Brazil, highlighting the potential of variation to serve as a marker of identity and social attributes.

Recent research has demonstrated that language choices are indicative of societal perspectives on gender and class. For instance, the study conducted by Martin-Anatias (2019) used critical discourse studies (CDS) and feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA). This study found that the word 'pelakor' is based on gender bias and sexist thought patterns that are embedded in Indonesian society. In the same vein, Beaton et al. (2024) research serves as an illustration of the manner in which sociolinguistic behaviour both symbolises and perpetuates gender and social class. This demonstrates how social hierarchies and stereotypes can be reinforced by linguistic and cultural markers, particularly those that pertain to excluded groups.

Given that Nurul's characterological figure is built around the intersections of gender and social class, these factors must be considered in this study. In Indonesia, cultural and religious factors greatly influence the construction and views of gender and quality. Women who do not conform to societal norms will face stigma (Martin-Anatias 2019). Social class also has an impact on Indonesia, as the development of progressive thought is primarily concentrated in urban areas despite the country's numerous regions. As a result, this study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between gender discourse, social class, and the enregistrement of the name "nurul".

Meanwhile, religious identity refers to the identity of beliefs held by a group of adherents of the religion. Among the various types of social identity, the main point of religion as a social identity is that, from the point of view of its adherents, religion has a dual function as a social identity as well as a belief system that is "unfalsifiable" (Aisyah and Yulianto 2018); thus social identity is closely influenced by religious identity. This shows that religious belief is one of the foundations in the formation of social identity and the way a person views things in the context of society. Especially the name "nurul", which is related to religion and good meaning in Islam.

Method

Research Design

In order to identify themes and patterns associated with the construction of "Nurul" as a characterological figure, the research employed qualitative content analysis. Krippendorff (2019) defines content analysis as a research method that utilises the context of texts or other significant materials to draw reliable conclusions. It aims to provide new perspectives and enhance our understanding of specific cases. Data can take the form of writing, images, web pages, videos, and more. The requirements of what constitutes text are "in the sense that they are meant to be read, interpreted, and understood by people other than the analysts" (Krippendorff 2019, 38).

Content analysis is particularly suited for this research. Content analysis allows for the identification of patterns and themes that shed light on the use and interpretation of the name 'Nurul' within broader social, cultural, and ideological contexts through a systematic examination of online content, including tweets, comments, images, videos, and memes. This design allows for a comprehensive examination of the particular social and linguistic behaviors associated with 'Nurul', and links these behaviors to broader social categories and ideologies in Indonesia.

Data Collection

The data for this study was gathered utilising a content analysis technique. The data was systematically collected from the social media platform X in light of the fact that the use of "the nuruls" became widespread on this platform. Utilising the advanced search function, the data from X were acquired by conducting a search for the keywords "nurul" and "the nuruls" within the time frame of April 2023 to May 2024. The timeframe was selected based on the period during which the term "nurul" is most likely to be discussed in relation to the viral post that discussed "the nuruls" (Aziza 2023).

One hundred posts were manually selected for analysis. Manual selection was deemed necessary to maintain the relevance and accuracy of the data due to the abundance of posts that contain the searched keyword, resulting in data that is not relevant to the subject matter. The posts then were sorted according to relevance in relation to the research question, i.e., the characterological figure that relates to "nurul". The chosen posts were collected through screenshots and then converted into text format. Ethical considerations are pertinent. Since X is a public platform, the users' direct permission is not taken; however, all user identities and their respective pictures are blurred. The usernames or any other information that has the potential to identify users were erased.

Data Analysis

Coding and categorisation of the data and discourse analysis will be conducted to analyse the data for this research. The steps for the analytic process are in accordance with Creswell & Creswell's (2023) qualitative analysis process. To begin this process, textual data collected from posts will be converted into text format, while visual data will be catalogued. Then, the researcher will read through all the data to gain an overall sense of the information and its meaning. The next step is to code the data, which is the act of categorising the data into separate parts according to the represented category (Rossman and Rallis 2012). The data will be organised according to the categories identified by the researcher. Heyd (2022) identifies three dimensions to categorise the data into relevant discourse, which are linguistic features, social categories, and semiotic codes. By means of coding, the data is then separated into three components: the language features, social categories, and visual semiotics associated with "Nurul." The coded data will be examined for recurrent themes and patterns, as well as how they interact to create the characterological figure of "Nurul".

Following the coding and categorisation of the data, discourse analysis will be conducted. The research will utilise Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 2013; 2015) and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar 2007; 2014; 2020) to analyse the data in order to identify the power and ideological dynamics underlying the characterological figure of "Nurul". In the perspective of CDA, discourse is seen as the use of language in writing and speech as a social practice that may show how ideology produces and reproduces unequal power relations between social classes, genders, and majority and minority groups (Fairclough 2013). Furthermore, feminist critical discourse analysis aims to highlight the ways in which implicit or explicit discourse is used across cultures and places to construct, enforce, negotiate, and challenge gender assumptions and existing systems of power (Lazar 2007). Therefore, feminist critical discourse analysis research investigates the ways in which textual representations of gender social practices and conversational methods are used to discursively construct, resist, or reject power and dominance (Lazar 2007). Thus, the analysis process in this research will entail placing texts and visual data in larger social and cultural settings, evaluating how texts and images are generated and consumed, and doing a thorough functional linguistic analysis of textual and visual data.

Results

Enregisterment of Nurul

In this section, the data that has been collected from X's post about "Nurul" will be described and analysed. The data analysis focused on linguistic attribution, non-linguistic attribution, and visual semiotics. The analysis section will discuss how Nurul's enregistrement is related to broader discourses, namely social class and gender.

The name "Nurul" is used to describe a specific female stereotype on the Indonesian website. According to the data, Nurul is said to be a religious girl but has a hypocritical nature. Numerous linguistic traits and behaviours have been identified. First, people tend to associate "Nurul" with a woman who sexualises attractive men, including gay men, but displays homophobia, as evidenced by one of the posts:

@X1 *lah indonetz mah kan kebanyakan demen gay fetishising aje aslinya mah the nuruls homophobic* (indonetz mostly like to fetishised gay, in truth the nuruls are homophobic)

@X2 Woy lah nurul itu bukan sekedar ledekan klasis buat mbamba muslim middle-low economy makan gacoan, bukan!! Nurul itu cewe2 yang suka baca BL tapi homofobik, yang tiktokan pake lagu Christmas tapi disensor christmasnya, yang sengebet itu pura2 mabok sampe bikin 'soju halal' (hey nurul it's not just a classist joke for middle-low economy Muslim women eating gacoan, no!!! Nurul is a woman who likes to read BL but is homophobic, who posts TikTok using Christmas songs but censors the Christmas word, and who really wants to pretend to be drunk to the point of making halal soju)

This indicates a conflict between Nurul's appearance as a religious woman and her often sexually explicit private thoughts, which she expresses in the digital public sphere through her posts. The most frequently found phrase that Nurul uses to express this is the sentence 'rahimku anget' (my womb is warm), which reflects their sexual desire. In example 2, it is also stated that Nurul's hypocritical nature was shown when they uploaded a Christmas song on TikTok but censored the word Christmas and drank halal soju because it is prohibited in their religion. Nevertheless, in the eyes of people, this treatment seems forced and contradictory.

Apart from that, "Nurul" is also characterised by their sexist and misogynist views. This characterisation occurs when an account labelled as "Nurul" blames other women for being sexualised because of their attire. As explained in the following post:

@X3 can't believe these trolls still going on normalising XXX being sexualised. it's lowkey triggering especially when it's the nuruls who does it. it hurts more when it's coming from fellow women.

The examples and explanations above have revealed a complex interaction in Nurul's characterisation, especially the markers of religion, perceived hypocrisy, and sexual objectification. Then, apart from reproducing stereotypes from linguistic attributions, Nurul's characterisation is also carried out using non-linguistic attributions and visual semiotics, namely from regional origin, lifestyle, fashion, and consumption habits. Through this attribution, Nurul's meaning expands, as in the following example:

@X4 if nuruls associated with cewe cewe kabupaten kerudungan yg hobi makan gacoan dan jajanan di pinggir jalan/di alun-alun, GW LAH NURUL TSB (jokes aside but i think we rlly should stop using that term imo it's somehow misogynistic and classist)

@X5 ironic how people judge "the nuruls" solely based on their appearance. meanwhile the og stereotype "karen" is always based on their behavior. imo calling girls "the nuruls" based on their appearance only is inappropriate, rude, and immoral.

@X6 why y'all so easy to give stereotypes like this to others like do y'all know what the nuruls is, ain't just simply girls with hijab who eat gacoan
① stop the labelling lah atp you just hate womens, *ngevideoin orang diem-diem trus diketawain bareng-bareng dasar misoginis* (recording people silently and then laughing about it, how misogynistic)

Example 4 encapsulated the non-linguistics enregisterment of Nurul. The example mentions the geographical origin of Nurul, which was depicted as coming from 'Kabupaten' (district) rather than an urban are. This denotes a particular rural or semi-urban origin, therein indicating the influence of their perceived social behaviours and tastes. Alongside that, the example stereotyped Nuruls with using a motorcycle, specifically a "Scoopy," which is a popular mode of transportation in Indonesia.

The fashion choice is also an indicator as mentioned in example 5, for

instance with wearing pastel cardigans and hijabs. Moreover, the fashion choices linked to Nurul's enregisterment can be outfits that attempt to follow trends but are considered tacky or inappropriate to people. Therefore, reflects their effort to fit in with fashion trends despite the limited access to high-fashion items. At the same time, consumption habits are also highlighted as indicated in example 6, drinking Americano and eating Indonesian food such as "seblak" and "mie gacoan" are the main stereotyped of Nurul. Both of these distinctions can also be seen in the figure below.









Figure 1. Posts about Nurul's appearance and consumption habits

Discussion

The Nurul phenomenon in The View of Islam

The name "Nurul" comes from the Arabic word "light", the origin of the word nurul is "NUR", this terminology appears to have a different meaning than what is spread on Indonesian social media. The term Nurul is used for a woman wearing a hijab who has a behavior that does not reflect a good Muslim women, for instance "Nurul" likes to dance in places such as cafes with live music resembling clubbing behavior. Furthermore, Indonesian netizens also describe the nurul as a woman who wears a hijab but has tight and revealing clothes. The meaning of the term the nurul that has developed on social media is considered contrary to Islamic values.

The term the nuruls, describes the lifestyle of a muslim woman today. Where a Muslim woman is associated with the life style of today's young people who like music, food, fashion, and others which are currently interpreted as negative. However, in Islamic views Nurul should be defined as a good Muslimah like the origin of the name "NUR".

Ustaz Adi Hidaya explained in his talk that "all things that do not produce benefits, lack of positive things, are considered makruh by sharia. Not favored. Moreover, if the things that are done are more inclined to the value of sin." Furthermore, Ustaz Ahmad Khan also said quoting from the second volume of Fiqh Mazahibul Arba'ah page 43, "The law of women dancing or dancing in front of men who are not their mahrams is haram, according to ijma, in the agreement of the scholars," said Ustadz Ahmad Khan. The explanation from the scholars above can conclude that the nuruls' actions are considered negative and do not reflect good Muslim behavior. Especially the behavior of the nuruls who like to dance to the music in cafes or hangouts.

In surah An-Nur verse 31 which refers to the meaning of the origin of the name Nurul is mentioned stated

"And say to the believing women, that they should keep their eyes, and keep their private parts, and should not reveal their adornment (aurat), except what is (usually) seen."

This verse explains that as a Muslim woman, she should keep her aurat, dress covered and be able to maintain her nature and dignity. Additionally, The nurul identity that is formed on social media, shows that the social identity formed from the prototype of a hijab-wearing Muslim woman is formed in contrast to the current social identity of the nurul. The name Nurul, which means light in Arabic, is often associated with an Islamic religious context. Like the name of a devout Muslim woman. The strong religious identity in Indonesia, makes the nurul phenomenon contrast with the social identity formed on social media X. Viral posts that talk about the nurul phenomenon on social media X. form a social identity based on the selfpresentation displayed on social media. Based on erving goffman's selfpresentation theory, it states that the chosen identity is a certain identity that individuals display in the public sphere. so that the nurul's social identity is not a good and radiant Muslim woman as the name suggests but shifts to a Muslim woman who dresses modestly and according to the teachings of Islam.

Social Class and Gender Discourse

In this section, the characterological figure of Nurul is analysed in a broader discourse on social class and gender. From the data gathered, it is found that underlying embedded power dynamics and societal norms are at play in the language surrounding Nurul (cf. Fairclough, 2013, 2015). The Nurul discourse is a critique of sexism and patriarchy. Nurul is depicted as a conservative individual who has a tendency to victim-blame women. This representation is a means for individuals to emphasise the widespread misogynistic beliefs that the majority of Indonesians still believe in. They assert their opposition to the perceived misogyny and hypocrisy that Nurul embodies by ridiculing her conduct. This discourse is indicative of more generalised ambivalent perspectives regarding gender and feminism.

However, this critique is a double-edged sword, as using the name "Nurul" to criticise this problem also perpetuates patriarchal values and class disparity. Nurul discourse is connected to social class, as it depicts women from semi-urban or rural areas with specific consumption behaviours. Depicting Nurul with 'kabupaten' (districts) is not only their mark of place but also a target of mockery. In their attempt to fit in and follow trends they observe from social media, which is usually from urban or more developed areas, Nurul is ridiculed. This draws attention to social class differences since Nurul is connected with middle to lower-class social status, therefore indicating their lack of experience and exposure. Comments such as Figure 1 shows this class-based ridicule, marginalising these women and thereby supporting social hierarchies. Food like seblak, mie gacoan, and cilok- which Nurul is connected with- also highlight social class divisions.

From examples 5 and 6, it was seen that enregistering Nurul based on their appearance and lifestyle only perpetuates gender stereotypes. Heyd (2022) in her study, stated that Lisa's discourse in Germany is factored with language policing. Similarly, in this case, labelling certain women as Nurul serves as a form of social policing, which reinforces specific ideological constructs on what is appropriate for female behaviour. Furthermore, Nurul is a gendered characterological figure. The data shows that Nurul has a male counterpart named "Naufal." However, the existence and predominance of this name are not as extensively used as Nurul. Such notion is also seen in Martin-Anatias's (2019) study, which stated that many Indonesians still believe in a gender hierarchy that puts boys and men above girls and women. Nurul is put in the spotlight, and the exclusion of the person with the label is not because of their behaviour but because of their appearance and lifestyle. The discourse of Nurul emphasises how class and gender cooperate to marginalise some groups of women (cf. Lazar, 2007). The criticism of Nurul for her consumption and style choices reflects larger society inclinations to devaluate women

depending on their socioeconomic level. The examples taken from the data above display this junction of class-based and gender criticism.

Conclusion

The enregisterment of Nurul on the social media platform X in Indonesia's online discourse revealed its entanglement with social class and gender dynamics. Mainly through criticism of victim-blaming behaviour, the study implies that the "Nurul" character functions as a critique of sexism and patriarchal conventions. However, this criticism functions as a two-edged blade, possibly marginalising women and feeding gender stereotypes.

The data analysis uncovered the underlying power dynamics in action. The vocabulary used to characterise "Nuruls" reveals society's expectations about women and appropriate behaviour. While the discourse challenged some aspects of patriarchy, it simultaneously reinforces social disparity by targeting women who are perceived to be lacking in style or following outdated gender roles. Additionally, the limited presence of a male counterpart, "Naufal," further highlights the policing of female behaviour.

In a religious point of view, the research finds that the term "Nurul," which translates to "light" in Arabic, has been used in social media to refer to a type of contemporary Muslim woman that is typically perceived negatively. Subsequently, this online persona is populated with actions deemed to be outside of Islamic standards, emphasizing the complexities of social identity that emerge online, where personas are made that are very different from those that exist offline.

Moreover, the research displayed the relationship between social class and gender. Criticising particular lifestyles connected with "Nuruls" and spending habits demonstrate underlying class prejudices. This criticism marginalises women according to their socioeconomic status and consequently emphasises the need to include class in the analysis of gender representations on the internet.

This research has offered insight into the characterological figure Nurul. However, it is noted the gap in the study that could be addressed in future research. More comprehensive research with a larger dataset and interviews might reveal a more comprehensive analysis. It could assist in clarifying the reasons for the usage of this term and the supposed efficiency of this kind of criticism. Future research could also examine other characterological figures in Indonesian culture or conduct comparative research on these figures.

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