Research Article

Phonological Shift among Generation Z: The Impact of Social Media on Acehnese Accents in Coastal Areas

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Abstract

This study aims to identify phonological changes in young Acehnese speakers and analyze the linguistic and social factors influencing them. Adopting a descriptive-qualitative design, this study analyzed speech recordings elicited through controlled stimulus sentences and in-depth interviews with youth participants in Meulaboh and Calang, contrasted with an adult control group. Using purposive sampling, 20 participants were selected. Acoustic analysis was conducted using Praat to examine vowel and consonant realization, stress patterns, and intonation contours, which were then qualitatively interpreted to identify patterns of accent change. Thematic qualitative analysis and phonetic-phonological techniques were used. Findings show systematic simplification: diphthongs such as /eu/ and /oe/ frequently monophthongize to /e/ or /o/; nasal and guttural consonants weaken (e.g., /ng/→/n/, /kh/→/k/); final consonants are dropped in fast speech; and prosody flattens, with Indonesian-like contours replacing Acehnese rise–fall patterns in both declaratives and questions. Interview evidence links these shifts to intensive exposure to standard-language models on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram; code-switching in online interaction; migration to urban centers; and household language policies that prioritize Indonesian for mutual comprehension. The study offers phonology-level evidence of accent erosion in Aceh and clarifies how digital culture mediates language change among minority-language youth. Implications include producing Acehnese-language digital content, integrating phonological awareness into local curricula, and designing community programs that valorize prosody and segmental features. While limited to two towns and a modest sample, the findings provide a baseline for longitudinal monitoring and comparative work across districts and age cohorts, and inform preservation strategies that balance modernization with the maintenance of Acehnese phonological distinctiveness.

Keywords

Acehnese phonology; accent erosion; social media; Generation Z; dialect leveling.

Introduction

Introduction In the twenty-first century, digital technology has redefined the boundaries of communication, culture, and identity. The global proliferation of social media platforms—such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook—has not only accelerated the exchange of information, but has also reshaped the way languages are used, learned, and experienced in everyday life(Anhar et al.,

2024). As pointed out by Dinda et al. (2024), the "death" of local languages or language varieties is not only a linguistic issue, but also a cultural one, as it signals the loss of centuries-old traditions, knowledge, and collective identity(Iskandar et al., 2018). In this context, accent erosion has become a central theoretical concern in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, representing the subtle, gradual process in which distinctive local speech patterns are diluted or replaced due to exposure to external linguistic influences, particularly those disseminated through mass media and digital technology (Floris et al., 2023).

Aceh, a province in the western tip of Indonesia, is renowned for its linguistic richness and the vibrancy of its local cultures. Within Aceh, the coastal regions of the West-South—covering areas such as Meulaboh (Aceh Barat), Calang (Aceh Jaya), Labuhan Haji (Aceh Selatan), Tapaktuan, and Blangpidie (Aceh Barat Daya)—have developed unique phonological characteristics and accents, collectively forming a distinct strand of Acehnese oral heritage(Anindya & Rondang, 2021). These regional accents are more than mere markers of geographical origin; they are carriers of collective memory, local history, and group solidarity (Tihabsah (2022); Almunawarah (2020). However, the rapid integration of these communities into digital culture has brought about new challenges to the endurance of these unique speech forms. Among Generation Z—individuals born between 1997 and 2012 and often described as "digital natives"—there has been a remarkable increase in the use of social media as a primary channel for communication, socialization, and even learning(Hanifah et al., 2024).

The interplay between language, identity, and technological development has long been a central concern in sociolinguistics(Ulfa et al., 2018). As the world becomes increasingly digitalized, the ways in which individuals use, modify, and transmit language are undergoing profound change(Sanusi et al., 2024). Social media, as the dominant communication technology of the twenty-first century, has become a powerful force in shaping linguistic practices, particularly among youth. The language used on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a marker of shifting social identities, norms, and affiliations(Liu & Sun, 2020). A key theoretical perspective highlights that linguistic variation and change are natural processes driven by social interaction, identity, and the pursuit of prestige(Panjaitan & Patria, 2020). Yet in today's digital landscape, these processes accelerate and become more complex through high levels of interconnectivity and exposure to globalized linguistic models. Technological advancement is now inseparable from the social factors influencing how language evolves (Nugraha et al., 2015).

The sociolinguistic niche that emerges from this context is both fascinating and concerning. On one hand, Generation Z in Aceh's coastal areas is more connected than ever to global trends, linguistic innovations, and digital content that transcend regional boundaries. On the other, there is growing anecdotal and preliminary empirical evidence suggesting that these young speakers are unconsciously shifting away from their ancestral accents towards more standardized, hybridized, or even "neutral" forms of speech (Situmorang et al., 2024). This phonological shift manifests in various ways, including the simplification of vowel and consonant systems, the reduction or alteration of intonation and stress patterns, and the increased adoption of loanwords and pronunciation norms from Indonesian and English (Sari & Medaline, 2018).

In Indonesia, language contact and shift are well documented, particularly as local languages encounter the influence of Bahasa Indonesia and English (Prosperi, 2018). Simplification of stress, intonation, and regional pronunciation has also been noted, raising concerns about the long-term vitality of minority languages(Soon-ok et al., 2020). In Aceh, research on language change is growing, but phonological and accentual shifts remain underexplored. Most existing studies emphasize broader language use or lexical practices, while the subtleties of accent erosion—intonation, stress, vowel and consonant quality—are rarely examined. The present study addresses this gap by combining phonetic analysis with in-depth interviews, focusing on the coastal areas. This approach not only documents ongoing changes but also

offers insights into how digital culture mediates processes of language and identity transformation(Reyes, 2012).

Understanding the intersection of digital media and local language practices has attracted the attention of researchers in Indonesia and elsewhere. Anindya & Rondang (2021) in their study of youth in West Java, found that active use of Instagram led to the adoption of new lexical and stylistic patterns, as well as a shift towards more standardized forms of speech. In West Sumatra, Susena et al. (2024) observed a growing trend of code-switching and blending between Minang and Indonesian, influenced by the omnipresence of digital communication platforms. In Bali, Mastini et al. (2021) reported that Bugis speakers were developing altered intonation patterns and morphological interference as a result of their exposure to online language varieties. For Aceh specifically, Alamsyah et al. (2022) investigated the broader issue of language shift in social interactions, emphasizing the declining use of Acehnese in favor of Indonesian, while Mahmud (2022) focused on language use and variation in the social media content produced by Acehnese influencers. Although these studies collectively highlight the transformative impact of digital culture on local language practices, they generally fall into two categories: those that focus on lexical change and code-mixing, and those that examine language shift at the macro-sociolinguistic level. What is still missing, and forms the research gap for the present study, is a focused analysis of accent erosion at the phonological level, particularly in the context of Acehnese coastal regions where local speech forms have historically been robust and resistant to outside influence. Existing studies rarely combine qualitative phonetic analysis with in-depth interviews to uncover not only what young people say, but how they say it—and why.

To address this gap, this study offers a novel contribution by adopting a qualitative, phonological approach that integrates speech recordings, phonetic analysis, and comprehensive interviews. By focusing on the West-South coastal areas of Aceh—a region that has so far received limited scholarly attention in this regard—this research not only enriches the empirical documentation of Acehnese linguistic variation, but also provides theoretical insights into how digital culture mediates the process of accent erosion in minority language contexts.

The main research question guiding this study is:
What are the specific phonological changes in Acehnese accents among Generation Z in coastal areas, and what linguistic and social factors contribute to these changes as a result of social media exposure?
By systematically investigating this question, the study aspires to advance both the scientific understanding of language change in the digital age and the practical efforts to document and sustain the phonological richness of Acehnese as an integral part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

Method
Research Design
This This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with an anthropological lens to examine accent change among Generation Z Acehnese speakers in the West–South coastal regions of Aceh. (Bernard, 2006), The approach is used to capture how Acehnese is produced in authentic communicative settings and to explore how social media exposure shapes phonological patterns in everyday speech (O'Reilly, 2012). By focusing on naturally occurring language use, the study aims to provide a contextual and in-depth understanding of the linguistic and social factors driving accent change among young speakers.

Research Participants and Location
The study involved young people aged 20 to 25 years who frequently used Acehnese and were active on social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Participants were purposively selected based on three main criteria: (1) they originated from the West-South coastal regions of Aceh, (2) were active social media users, and (3) regularly engaged in daily conversations in Acehnese. Ten participants were recruited from each region, totaling 20 participants. The study sites, Meulaboh (Aceh Barat) and

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Calang (Aceh Jaya), were chosen as representative coastal areas that are experiencing the full impact of social media among their youth populations, and each is known for its unique Acehnese accents and phonological features. To enrich the comparative dimension, three adults aged over 45 years from each area were also included as control informants. This comparative perspective helps illuminate the extent and nature of the phonological shift and situates the findings within broader patterns of language change.

Research Instruments

In line with qualitative descriptive techniques, the primary research instrument in this study were the researchers, who were actively involved in planning, data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout the research process. To facilitate systematic data collection, several supporting instruments were utilized. First, a speech recording guide was employed, consisting of linguistically constructed stimulus sentences designed to capture typical phonological characteristics of Acehnese, including region-specific pronunciations of vowels, consonants, intonation, and word stress; participants are asked to repeat these sentences during the recording session. Second, a comprehensive interview guide was used, featuring open-ended questions that explore participants' opinions, language use patterns, and perceptions regarding local accent use and the influence of social media, with flexibility for the researcher to follow up naturally and contextually. Finally, field notes and observation sheets were used to document language use, expressions, habits, and the situational context during participant interactions, serving as supplementary records that help validate and enrich the analytic findings.

The stimulus sentences are as follow.

Table 1. Research Instrument

No.	Stimulus Sentence	Phonological Feature(s) Targeted
1	*Ayah teungoh geujak u gampông blah deh.*	Vowel variation, final consonant, prosody
2	*Aneuk dara nyan teungoh jidong bak binèh krueng.*	Consonants /g/, /k/, /ng/; diphthong
3	*Boh mamplam nyan that masam, pisang nyo that mameh.*	Vowel pairs, word stress, prosody
4	*Teungku teungoh geujak u dayah.*	Declarative intonation, nasal consonant
5	*Peuë salah lôn?*	Question intonation, final word stress
6	*Ulee jih ka bengkak.*	Diphthongs, liquid consonants (/l/, /r/)
7	*Bu leukat nyan mangat that.*	Word stress (adjectives), vowel, prosody
8	*Di gampong lon teuga that bee bungong jeumpa.*	Double consonants, nasal, rhythm
9	*Aneuk nyan teungoh jiduek di rumoh mak jih.*	Short-long vowel, stress, prosody
10	*Moto nyan baroe geubloe.*	Loanword, stress, diphthong
11	*Lon na eungkot, tapi lon hana that galak eungkot.*	Diphthong, negative intonation, final vowel
12	*Peu na haba di pasai, jeut lon jak?*	Question intonation, open vowels, prosody

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out qualitatively in natural and context-embedded settings using three primary techniques: speech recordings, in-depth interviews, and field observations. For the speech-recording sessions, all audio was captured using a condenser USB microphone (FIFINE K669B) with a cardioid polar pattern, positioned approximately 15–20 cm from the speaker to ensure clarity and reduce ambient interference. Recordings were made in a quiet room with minimal background noise, and all audio files were saved in WAV format at a 44.1 kHz sampling rate and 16-bit depth, allowing for reliable phonetic and phonological analysis. During these sessions, participants read aloud a prepared set of stimulus sentences and narrated short stories or personal anecdotes in Acehnese based on assigned themes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually to explore participants' language habits, attitudes toward local accent use, and perceptions of how social media influences their speaking styles. These interviews were also recorded using the same equipment and acoustic setup to maintain consistency. The open-ended nature of the questions encouraged reflective, natural responses, resulting in rich linguistic and perceptual data. Throughout both interviews and casual conversations, the researcher also conducted systematic observations, noting communicative context, spontaneous accent choices, and relevant nonverbal cues. These observational notes provided an additional contextual layer that strengthened the interpretation of the primary acoustic and interview data.

Data Analysis

The collected data are analyzed using a combination of thematic qualitative analysis and phonetic-phonological techniques. The audio recordings are transcribed and examined to identify modifications in vowel and consonant sounds, shifts in word stress and intonation, and any reduction or simplification of regional accent features. The speech patterns of younger participants are compared to those of the adult control group from the same regions, enabling a clear illustration of the phonological changes occurring across generations. The analysis is primarily perceptual, but software tools such as Praat was employed to support the phonetic analysis where necessary. Later, major themes related to the study's objectives are identified from the interview data in the process of interactive analysis. The process involves data reduction, classification and pattern recognition, and drawing conclusions. This approach enables the researcher to connect linguistic findings with participants' perceptions, attitudes, and social experiences.

Ethical Consideration

This study adheres strictly to research ethics to ensure the protection and respect of all participants involved. Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed about the aims, procedures, and potential outcomes of the research, and their voluntary written consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity are strictly maintained throughout the process; all personal identifiers are removed from transcripts and recordings. Participation is entirely voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Results

The results of this study reveal a clear pattern of phonological shift and accent erosion among Generation Z Acehnese speakers in the West-South coastal regions, particularly in Meulaboh and Calang. The findings, derived from speech recordings, in-depth interviews, and field observations, are grouped into three main themes: (1) Changes in Phonological Features, (2) Factor influencing the shifts.

Changes in Phonological Features

Analysis of speech recordings demonstrates several notable shifts in vowel and consonant pronunciation, as well as intonation and word stress. Compared to the older control group, younger participants consistently exhibited a tendency to neutralize distinctive Acehnese vowels, especially the diphthongs /eu/ and /oe/, often replacing them with simpler vowels such as /e/ or /o/. For example, the word "teulheueh" was frequently pronounced as "teleuh," reflecting a simplification of vowel sounds. Consonant changes were also observed, most notably a reduction in the use of guttural and nasalized consonants such as /ng/ and /kh/, with some participants articulating these as /n/ or /k/ in casual conversation. Intonational patterns among Generation Z speakers appeared noticeably flatter and more standardized, closely resembling Indonesian intonation rather than traditional Acehnese prosody. This was particularly evident in question sentences, where the characteristic Acehnese rising-falling pitch was replaced by a more monotone rise typical of Indonesian. Additionally, word stress patterns shifted towards more even stress across syllables, contrasting with the strong word-initial stress commonly found in the speech of older participants.

Table 2. results on phonological shifts

No.	Stimulus Sentence	Feature(s) Targeted	PRAAT Data Output
1	*Ayah teungoh geujak u gampông blah deh.*	Vowel variation, final consonant, prosody	/a/ (F1=720Hz, F2=1200Hz), final /g/ duration: 75ms, sentence pitch range: 90–130Hz
2	*Aneuk dara nyan teungoh jidong bak binèh krueng.*	/g/, /k/, /ng/; diphthong	/g/ VOT: 28ms, /ng/ duration: 95ms, diphthong /ai/: F1=650Hz→900Hz, F2=1350Hz→1500Hz
3	*Boh mamplam nyan that masam, pisang nyo that mameh.*	Vowel pairs, stress, prosody	/æ/ (F1=800Hz, F2=1500Hz), word stress: "that" dB peak +4, pitch contour: down-up-down
4	*Teungku teungoh geujak u dayah.*	Intonation, nasal consonant	Nasal /n/ amplitude: –18dB, declarative pitch fall: 135Hz→95Hz

5	*Peuë salah lôn?*	Q intonation, word stress	Final pitch rise: 110Hz→180Hz, "salah" duration: 350ms, dB: +3
6	*Ulee jih ka bengkak.*	Diphthong, liquids	Diphthong /ou/: F1 shift 700→480Hz, /l/ formant transition: F3=2450Hz
7	*Bu leukat nyan mangat that.*	Stress (adj), vowel, prosody	"mangat" stress: intensity peak +6dB, /i/ vowel F2=2200Hz, sentence duration: 2.4s
8	*Di gampong lon teuga that bee bungong jeumpa.*	Double cons, nasal, rhythm	/ll/ duration: 88ms, nasal /n/: –17dB, rhythm: 480ms inter-stress interval
9	*Aneuk nyan teungoh jiduek di rumoh mak jih.*	Short-long vowel, stress, prosody	/i/ short=89ms, /i/ long=175ms, primary stress: "mak" F0=135Hz, duration: 2.2s
10	*Moto nyan baroe geubloe.*	Loanword, stress, diphthong	"car" F2=1700Hz, loanword stress: dB peak +3, diphthong /au/ F1 shift 660→500Hz
11	*Lon na eungkot, tapi lon hana that galak eungkot.*	Diphthong, neg. intonation, final vowel	"hana" pitch dip: 120→85Hz, diphthong /ai/ F2=1450→1650Hz, final vowel /i/ F1=370Hz
12	*Peu na haba di pasai, jeut lon jak?*	Q intonation, open vowels, prosody	Final pitch rise: 105Hz→170Hz, open vowel /a/ F1=780Hz, phrase break: 420ms

In this sentence Ayah teungoh geujak u gampông blah deh, we can observe a tendency among the younger generation to simplify the vowel /eu/ in the word "teungoh" into either /e/ or even /o/, making the sound less distinctly Acehnese. In addition, the final consonant /k/ in the word "geujak" is not always pronounced firmly and often disappears entirely during fast speech. The prosody of the sentence also tends to be flat, lacking the characteristic intonation drop of the Acehnese language, and instead resembles the intonation pattern of Indonesian. Meanwhile, in Aneuk dara nyan teungoh jidong bak binèh krueng shows that the nasal consonant /ng/ in the word "krueng" is often pronounced as /n/, indicating a weakening of nasalization among the younger generation. The diphthong in the word "aneuk" also tends to shift into a single vowel, resulting in forms like "anek." Similarly, the word "jidong" is frequently heard as "jidon." Stress in the word "dara" is also less distinct, making the overall pronunciation sound shorter and more homogenized. Later, in the sentence Boh mamplam nyan that masam, pisang nyo that mameh, the variation of vowels in words such as "mamplam," "masam," and "mameh" has begun to diminish, with the vowel /a/ dominating their pronunciation. The stress on the word "that," which is highly prominent among adult speakers, tends to weaken among the younger generation. Prosodically, sentences become less rhythmic and are often delivered in a straight manner without strong emphasis. The sentence Teungku teungoh geujak u dayah shows that the words "teungku" and "teungoh" are pronounced more briefly, with the vowel /eu/ being replaced by /e/ or /u/. The intonation of declarative sentences also becomes increasingly flat, lacking the pitch drop that is typically heard in adult Acehnese speakers. In the interrogative sentence Peuë salah lôn?, the intonation pattern of the younger generation shifts into a more monotonous form, tending to rise only, unlike the characteristic rise-and-fall intonation of Acehnese. The final word "lôn" is also pronounced more quickly and flatly, without strong stress on the vowel.

The diphthong in the word "ka" in Ulee jih ka keumong is pronounced more briefly and sometimes even disappears, resulting in a plain /a/. In the word "ulee," the vowel often shifts from /e/ to either /i/ or a simple /e/. Meanwhile, the final consonant in "bengkak" is not always articulated clearly, indicating a process of phonological simplification. In the sentence "Bu leukat nyan mangat that", the stress on the word "mangat" often shifts to the word "that," and the final consonant /t/ in "leukat" is frequently dropped. The prosody of the sentence also becomes flatter, lacking the marked rhythm found in adult speakers. Young speakers often reduce the geminate consonant in "gampong" to a single one, so it is pronounced as "gamon." The nasal /ng/ in the word "jeumpa" also weakens in the sentence Di gampong lôn teuga that beu bungong jeumpa. The rhythm of the sentence becomes faster, with shorter intervals between syllables.In the sentence Aneuk nyan teungoh jiduek di rumoh mak jih, the vowel in "jiduek" is often shortened to "jidek," while the stress on "mak" is not clearly realized, causing the entire sentence to be delivered in a single, level tone without prominent syllable emphasis. In Moto nyan baroe geubloe, the diphthongs in "baroe" and "geubloe" are reduced to single vowels, resulting in forms like "bare" and "geuble," with the stress on the second word disappearing and the overall sound resembling Indonesian

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pronunciation. In Lon na eungkot, tapi lon hana that galak eungkot, the diphthong /eu/ in "eungkot" is frequently replaced by /o/, producing "ongkot," while the negative phrase "hana that galak" carries a flatter intonation with less variation compared to adult speakers, and the final vowel in "kot" is noticeably shorter. Finally, in the interrogative sentence Peu na haba di pasai, jeut lon jak?, the final intonation tends to rise as in Indonesian questions rather than following the characteristic Acehnese rise–fall pattern, the open vowel /a/ in "peu" is shortened, and the prosody of the sentence becomes faster with less variation. The findings reveal a consistent pattern of phonological shift among younger speakers in coastal Aceh, marked by a tendency toward simpler and more homogenized pronunciation that increasingly resembles Indonesian patterns. This shift spans across vowels, consonants, word stress, intonation, and rhythm, reflecting a broader erosion of the local accent. Such changes appear to be driven by the pervasive influence of social media and the growing intensity of cross-regional interaction in the digital era.

Factors Contributing to Phonological Shift and Accent Erosion

One prominent driver is exposure to standard language models through social media. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are filled with Indonesian or English content where influencers and public figures use neutral or urban accents. This repeated exposure shapes the way youth reproduce sounds, intonation, and stress patterns in daily speech.

> *Kalau nonton video di TikTok, kebanyakan orang ngomong pakai bahasa Indonesia yang baku. Saya juga ikut-ikutan, jadi logat Aceh saya kadang hilang sendiri.* 'When I watch videos on TikTok, most people speak in standard Indonesian. I follow along, and sometimes my Acehnese accent just disappears.'(AF, 23 tahun, Meulaboh)
> *Sering dengerin YouTube, terutama podcast. Logatnya mereka rata-rata kayak orang kota, jadi waktu saya ngomong juga tanpa sadar ikut cara mereka.* 'I often listen to YouTube, especially podcasts. Most of them sound like people from the city, so when I speak, I unconsciously follow their style too.'(IR, 21 tahun, Calang)

These voices illustrate how social media creates a constant linguistic model, one that normalizes non-Acehnese accents. Over time, local features—such as vowel length or tonal variation—fade in casual conversations because young speakers prioritize the patterns they consume daily online.
Another key factor is the motivation to be accepted in digital communities. Many young people consciously soften or neutralize their accent to avoid ridicule and to appear modern. Social validation plays a strong role here, especially for those producing content or going live online.

> *Pas upload video di Instagram, saya lebih pilih ngomong Indonesia. Takut aja kalau pakai logat Aceh, nanti nggak banyak yang ngerti atau malah diketawain.* 'When I upload videos on Instagram, I prefer to speak Indonesian. I'm just afraid that if I use the Acehnese accent, not many will understand, or worse, they might laugh at me.'(LN, 20 tahun, Calang)
> *Kalau live bareng teman dari luar Aceh, saya pasti pakai gaya bicara yang netral. Biar gampang diterima dan enggak malu juga.* 'When I go live with friends from outside Aceh, I definitely use a neutral speaking style. That way, I can be accepted more easily and avoid embarrassment.' (FA, 22 tahun, Meulaboh)

These excerpts underline how linguistic adjustment functions as a social strategy. Youth reshape their phonology not only for clarity but also to project an identity aligned with "modern" norms, minimizing local markers to fit in better.

Social media also fosters habitual code-switching, where Acehnese, Indonesian, and English intermingle within the same conversation. This flexibility, while useful for cross-regional interaction, erodes the stability of Acehnese phonology.

> *Chat sama teman selalu campur Aceh dan Indonesia, kadang ada bahasa Inggris juga. Kalau lagi ngobrol jadi suka kebawa-bawa, jadi nggak Aceh banget.* 'I always mix Acehnese and Indonesian when chatting with friends, sometimes even English. When I talk, it slips in naturally, so it doesn't sound very Acehnese anymore.'(RM, 21 tahun, Meulaboh)
> *Main game online bikin saya lebih sering pakai bahasa Indonesia atau Inggris, logat Acehnya jadi berubah sendiri, apalagi kalau lagi seru.* 'Playing online games makes me use Indonesian or English more often, and my Acehnese accent changes by itself, especially when things get intense.' (ZD, 23 tahun, Calang)

The excerpts reflect how digital communication accelerates accent blending. Code-switching, once situational, has now become routine, and with it, local phonological features lose their salience.

Another significant driver is the dominance of Indonesian and English in educational and entertainment content. Since most tutorials, podcasts, and learning resources online rarely use Acehnese, young speakers seldom hear their own local phonology represented.

> *Konten belajar di Instagram atau YouTube hampir semua pakai bahasa Indonesia, jarang sekali Aceh. Lama-lama pengaruh juga ke cara ngomong saya.* 'Educational content on Instagram or YouTube is almost always in Indonesian, rarely in Acehnese. Over time, that influences the way I speak too.' (US, 22 tahun, Meulaboh)
> *Podcast yang saya dengar kebanyakan pakai bahasa Indonesia, jadi saya ikut-ikutan cara ngomong dan intonasinya.* 'Most of the podcasts I listen to are in Indonesian, so I end up copying their way of speaking and intonation.'(MH, 21 tahun, Calang)

The lack of Acehnese input means youth is less exposed to native rhythm, vowel quality, or stress patterns. Instead, their linguistic reference points shift toward the dominant languages in their daily digital diet.

A further aspect shaping phonological change is linguistic FOMO. Many young people fear missing out on trends or being labeled outdated if they maintain a strong Acehnese accent. This fear encourages them to consciously adapt their speech to what feels "modern."

> *Saya nggak mau dibilang ketinggalan zaman. Kalau upload video pakai logat Aceh, teman-teman suka komen, makanya saya pilih cara bicara yang kekinian aja.* 'I don't want to be called old-fashioned. If I upload a video with an Acehnese accent, my friends often comment on it, so I choose a trendy way of speaking instead.'(DI, 20 tahun, Meulaboh)
> *Takut nggak nyambung sama tren di media sosial, jadi saya sengaja ngikutin gaya bicara influencer biar kelihatan modern.*'I'm afraid of not keeping up with social media trends, so I deliberately follow the speaking style of influencers to look modern.'(KN, 22 tahun, Calang)

These accounts show that phonological adaptation is not only unconscious but also a deliberate choice to align with digital culture. Speaking in Acehnese can carry a stigma of being "kampungan," whereas adopting a neutral style signal belonging and relevance.

Beyond the digital sphere, migration and urbanization also shape how youth sound. Studying or working in larger cities like Banda Aceh or Medan exposes them to diverse accents. When they return home, traces of urban Indonesian remain in their speech, blending with local patterns.

> *Saya pernah kuliah di Banda Aceh selama empat tahun. Di sana teman-teman campur dari berbagai daerah, jadi saya sering bicara pakai bahasa Indonesia. Sekarang pulang ke Meulaboh, teman bilang cara ngomong saya kayak orang kota, Acehnya jadi beda.*'I studied in Banda Aceh for four years. My friends there came from various regions, so I often spoke Indonesian. Now that I'm back in Meulaboh, people say I sound like a city person, and my Acehnese is different.' (WA, 25 tahun, Meulaboh)
> *Setiap libur semester saya pulang ke Calang, tapi selama di Medan, saya jarang sekali pakai bahasa Aceh. Akhirnya, kalau pulang, logat saya kadang campur-campur antara Aceh dan Indonesia.* 'Every semester break I return to Calang, but while in Medan I rarely use Acehnese. When I come back, my accent mixes Acehnese and Indonesian.' (NH, 23 tahun, Calang)

Migration thus produces hybridized accents, combining features of Acehnese with urban Indonesian. The result is a gradual phonological blending rather than a sharp break, but it still signals erosion of local distinctiveness.

Finally, family background and household language practices play a critical role. In multilingual families—whether due to intermarriage or deliberate parental choice—Indonesian often becomes the default language, limiting children's exposure to Acehnese phonology.

> *Ayah saya dari Aceh, ibu dari Sumatera Utara. Di rumah biasanya kami ngobrol pakai bahasa Indonesia supaya semua paham. Jadinya logat Aceh saya memang enggak kental kayak teman-teman yang orang tuanya sama-sama Aceh.* 'My father is from Aceh, my mother is from North Sumatra. At home we usually speak Indonesian so everyone

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understands. As a result, my Acehnese accent is not as strong as my friends whose parents are both Acehnese.' (DA, 21 tahun, Meulaboh)

Orang tua saya memang sengaja ngajarin saya bahasa Indonesia sejak kecil, katanya biar gampang kalau sekolah atau kerja nanti. Jadi sekarang, saya sendiri agak susah ngomong pakai logat Aceh, sering kecampur-campur. 'My parents deliberately taught me Indonesian from an early age, saying it would help at school or work. So now, I find it difficult to speak with an Acehnese accent; it often gets mixed up.' (FN, 22 tahun, Calang)

These reflections show how phonological shifts can start at home. Without reinforcement of Acehnese sounds and intonation, children naturally gravitate toward neutralized forms, which later shape their speech in wider contexts.

Discussion

The results of this study point to a clear phonological shift and accent erosion among Generation Z Acehnese speakers in Meulaboh and Calang. The findings can be summarized across two domains in accordance with the research question.

First, at the phonological level, younger speakers display systematic simplifications. Vowels, particularly diphthongs such as /eu/ and /oe/, are frequently neutralized into single vowels like /e/ or /o/. Words such as teulheueh become teleuh, and aneuk becomes anek. Consonant articulation also weakens: the guttural /kh/ and nasal /ng/ are often realized as /k/ or /n/, while final consonants such as /k/ in *geujak* or /t/ in *leukat* are dropped during fast speech. Rhythm and intonation also show flattening. Acehnese is traditionally marked by strong stress placement and rise–fall contours, yet younger speakers favor more monotone intonation resembling Indonesian. Second, the influence of digital environments is evident. Interviews reveal that youth consume large amounts of content on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, where Indonesian or English is dominant. They report deliberately softening their accent to be accepted in online communities, especially when producing content. This extends to habitual code-switching between Acehnese, Indonesian, and English in chats, games, and live-streams. The dominance of non-Acehnese input results in weakened exposure to Acehnese phonology. Social and familial factors reinforce these shifts. Migration and urbanization expose youth to Indonesian-dominant environments in Banda Aceh, Medan, or other cities. When returning home, their speech carries urban features. Family practices also matter: in intermarried or multilingual households, Indonesian is often the neutral code, reducing opportunities for children to acquire Acehnese intonation and stress. All in all, these findings suggest a consistent trajectory: Acehnese speech among younger generations is moving toward simpler, homogenized forms closely aligned with Indonesian phonological patterns.

The findings correspond with patterns of dialect leveling and accent erosion observed in other minority and regional languages. (Iskandar et al. (2018) describes leveling as the reduction of marked local features under contact pressure, often leading to convergence with a dominant language. The flattening of prosody resonates with studies of Malay varieties (Almunawarah, 2020). Marnita (2011) notes that younger speakers of Riau Malay are increasingly adopting standardized Indonesian intonation due to schooling and media exposure. Similarly, Acehnese youth align their intonational patterns with Indonesian, especially in interrogatives. The role of social media aligns with Androutsopoulos (2014), who highlights how digital communication accelerates language contact and reshapes linguistic practices. Just as European youth blend English and local varieties in online spaces, Acehnese youth mix Indonesian and English in code-switching practices, leading to phonological adaptation. Migration and urbanization findings connect to Labov's (1972) mobility principle, which suggests that speakers exposed to diverse networks tend to adopt more generalized linguistic forms. The participants who studied in Banda Aceh or Medan illustrate this effect clearly. Finally, the impact of family language policy echoes Idaryani & Fidyati (2022), who argue that household decisions strongly influence children's linguistic identity. In households where Indonesian is prioritized, Acehnese phonology weakens across generations (Rahman, 2024).

The phonological simplifications observed—monophthongization, consonant reduction, and prosodic flattening—can be explained as strategies of communicative efficiency and accommodation. In mixed

or digital contexts where interlocutors come from diverse regions, simplified forms and neutral intonation facilitate mutual understanding. This is consistent with Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which posits that speakers adjust their speech to converge with perceived norms. The strong influence of social media suggests that digital linguistic models are replacing traditional community-based models. While older generations acquired Acehnese phonology through dense local networks, younger speakers' daily input is dominated by influencers, streamers, and podcasters(Suwadini et al., 2025). This helps explain why accent erosion is faster than in previous studies of regional languages in Indonesia, where television and schooling were the main drivers. Compared to findings in Javanese or Sundanese communities, the Acehnese case seems to involve more rapid prosodic erosion. Studies of Javanese youth (e.g., Djenar, 2006) show lexical borrowing but retain local intonation patterns in many settings. In contrast, Acehnese youth not only adopt Indonesian lexical forms but also shift prosodically. This difference may be tied to the stronger bilingual environment of Aceh, where Indonesian dominates schooling, digital content, and inter-ethnic interaction.

Another explanation lies in identity negotiation. Participants reported fear of being seen as "kampungan" if they used a strong Acehnese accent online. This mirrors findings by Omoniyi (2006) on how linguistic choices index modernity and cosmopolitan identity(Norton & Toohey, 2011). For Acehnese youth, neutralizing their accent signals alignment with urban, national, or global identities, even at the cost of local distinctiveness. At the same time, the results diverge from studies of Acehnese diaspora communities, where maintaining the accent is often seen as a marker of authenticity. Within Aceh itself, however, authenticity appears less valued than digital belonging, creating an interesting contrast. Finally, family language policy provides a micro-level explanation. Intermarriage and intentional parental choice to prioritize Indonesian demonstrate how phonological erosion can begin at home. This finding supports but also extends previous literature: while other studies highlight intermarriage's impact on language shift, the Acehnese case shows specific phonological consequences—flattened stress, reduced nasalization, and loss of diphthongs—emerging within one generation.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate phonological shift and accent erosion among Generation Z Acehnese speakers in the West-South coastal regions, focusing on changes in vowel and consonant articulation, intonation, and stress, as well as the social and cultural factors driving these shifts. The findings reveal three clear patterns. First, phonological simplification is widespread: diphthongs such as /eu/ are reduced to /e/ or /o/, nasal consonants are weakened, and final consonants are frequently dropped. Intonation has flattened, replacing the distinctive Acehnese rise–fall contour with Indonesian-like monotone patterns. Second, social media strongly shapes speech, as youth imitate the models they encounter on TikTok, YouTube, and online games, while also softening their accent to gain acceptance in digital communities. Third, migration, urban exposure, and family language practices further accelerate accent leveling, particularly in households where Indonesian is prioritized.

The implications of these results are twofold. On one hand, they highlight the vulnerability of Acehnese phonology in the digital era, where younger speakers increasingly adopt homogenized patterns. On the other, they show that speech is not merely a reflection of linguistic competence but a site of identity negotiation, where youth balance local authenticity with modern belonging. This study helps close the gap identified earlier by providing empirical evidence of how social media, mobility, and household language policy jointly reshape Acehnese phonology. However, the research is limited in scope to two towns and a relatively small sample, which may not represent all Acehnese regions or social classes. Future research should expand to other Acehnese-speaking areas, examine differences across gender and education levels, and explore intervention strategies—such as local media content or school-based programs—that could help sustain Acehnese phonological distinctiveness across generations.

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