

**TREND OR TEASE?: STUDENTS' INTERPRETATION OF PSEUDO-
BULLYING IN TIKTOK'S "AT LEAST" PHENOMENON**



A THESIS

“Submitted to the Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational in Partial
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Written By :

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2022.71.0035

**ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM
FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
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APPROVAL PAGE

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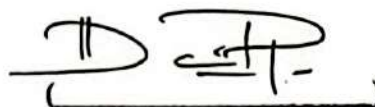
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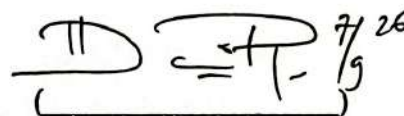
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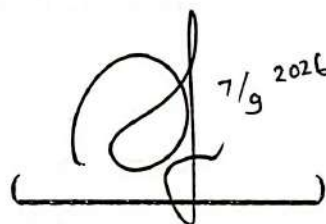
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State that :

1. All the data, information, interpretation, and conclusion presented in this thesis, except for those indicated by the sources are the results of my observation, process, and thought with the guidance of my advisors.
2. The thesis that the writer wrote is original and has never been handed in another academic degree, neither at Indo Global Mandiri University nor other Universities.

This statement is made truthfully, and if one day there is evidence of forgery in the above statement, the writer is willing to accept the academic sanction of the cancellation of my Sarjana degree that the writer has received through this thesis.

Palembang, August, 24th 2026
The Writer



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DEDICATION

With my deepest gratitude, I dedicate this thesis to the people who have been the greatest source of love, strength, and support throughout my life.

1. To my beloved parents, Sultan Elni Johan and Leni Marlina, thank you for your endless love, sincere prayers, unwavering support, and countless sacrifices. Every step I have taken and every achievement I have reached would not have been possible without your patience, encouragement, and belief in me. You have always been my greatest source of strength, especially during the most difficult moments of my life. This thesis is a small reflection of my gratitude for everything you have done for me. I hope it brings you pride and happiness, just as your love has always brought meaning to my life.
2. To my beloved late sister, Virnie, although you are no longer by my side, you will always remain in my heart. Losing you has been the greatest sorrow I have ever experienced, yet your memory continues to give me strength and remind me to keep moving forward. There were countless moments when I wished you were still here to witness this milestone with me. I believe that, wherever you are, you are watching over me with love. This thesis is dedicated to your beautiful memory, with all my love, respect, and endless longing.
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7. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to myself. Thank you for choosing to keep going despite the pain, uncertainty, disappointment, and countless challenges along the way. Thank you for believing that every hardship would eventually lead to a better tomorrow. Completing this thesis is not only an academic accomplishment but also a personal victory that reflects resilience, perseverance, and faith. May this achievement remind me that no matter how difficult life becomes, there is always hope for those who continue to move forward with courage and determination.

This thesis is more than the completion of an academic journey; it is a testament to the love, prayers, sacrifices, and kindness of everyone who has walked beside me. For that, I will always be sincerely grateful.

MOTTO

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

"Indeed, with hardship comes ease."

(Qur'an, Surah Al-Insyirah: 6)

“You do not have to be the smartest; you just have to keep going and finish on time.”

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The researcher would also like to express her appreciation to herself for remaining resilient, believing in every step of the journey, and never giving up despite the challenges encountered throughout the completion of this thesis. Every obstacle has provided valuable lessons, while every achievement has become a reminder that perseverance, patience, and determination always lead to meaningful growth. Completing this thesis marks not only the fulfillment of an academic requirement but also an important milestone in the researcher's personal and academic development.

Finally, the researcher realizes that this thesis is not without limitations. Therefore, constructive criticism and suggestions are sincerely welcomed for the improvement of future research. It is hoped that this study will provide useful insights for readers and contribute to the development of pragmatic studies, particularly those related to implicature, pragmatic functions, Face-Threatening Acts (FTA), and the use of the expression "at least" in digital communication. Furthermore, this study is expected to contribute to English language teaching by promoting students' pragmatic awareness and digital literacy.

Palembang, August, 24th 2026



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ABSTRACT

The development of digital communication through social media has created various language trends containing implied meanings, one of which is the use of the expression “at least” on TikTok. Although the expression appears to be positive, it often implies comparison and evaluation of others, which may lead to pseudo-bullying. This study aims to analyze how pseudo-bullying is pragmatically constructed through the “at least” trend on TikTok and to examine students' interpretations of its implied meanings. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design with a pragmatic approach. The participants were 32 sixth-semester students from the English Education Study Program who participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The data were collected through Student Tasks based on fifteen TikTok videos and analyzed using Grice's theory of implicature, pragmatic functions, and Brown and Levinson's Face-Threatening Act (FTA). The findings showed that most students were able to interpret the implied meanings by considering the context of the utterances. Indirect criticism was identified as the most dominant pragmatic function, while threats to positive face occurred more frequently than threats to negative face. Overall, the findings indicate that the interpretation of the at least trend depends on the context of the utterance. Therefore, the expression does not always represent pseudo-bullying, but it may be interpreted as pseudo-bullying when it conveys implicit comparison and negative evaluation.

Keywords: *Pseudo-bullying, Implied meaning, Students' interpretation, Pragmatic competence, TikTok.*

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