SEMANTIC CHANGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A STUDY OF SLANG TERMS ON TIKTOK

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Abstract
This study explores the semantic change of slang terms on TikTok, a rapidly evolving social media platform that significantly influences language usage among its diverse user base. By analyzing a range of popular slang expressions, this research investigates how these terms are adapted, redefined, and disseminated within the TikTok community, reflecting the platform's unique cultural landscape. Employing qualitative content analysis alongside user engagement metrics, the study examines the factors driving these linguistic shifts, including cultural trends, peer influence, and the platform's interactive features. Through case studies of specific slang terms, the research highlights how context, humor, and visual elements contribute to the evolving meanings of these expressions. Findings reveal that TikTok not only serves as a breeding ground for new slang but also accelerates the process of semantic change, demonstrating the fluidity of language in digital spaces. The study further discusses the implications of these changes for communication, identity formation, and community building among users.
Keywords : Semantic Change, Social Media, Slang TikTok, Language Evolution, Digital Communication, Linguistic Innovation

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INTRODUCTION
A. Background

Language is a dynamic and ever-evolving system that reflects changes in society, culture, and technology. In the digital age, social media plays a significant role in shaping the way people communicate. One of the most influential platforms in the development of language—particularly in the use of slang—is TikTok. This platform is not only a source of entertainment but also a space where new language trends emerge and spread rapidly.

TikTok allows users to create, share, and respond to content instantly, accelerating the spread of slang terms. Many words or phrases that were initially used only within small user communities have become widely popular and are even used outside the platform, both in everyday conversations and on other social media platforms. This phenomenon shows that language no longer evolves solely through direct interaction but also through vast and interactive digital spaces.

Semantic change is a natural process in which the meaning of a word or expression shifts over time. In the context of TikTok, these shifts often occur rapidly due to the influence of virality, user creativity, and the diverse interpretations of a broad audience. Terms that originally carried specific meanings may undergo broadening, narrowing, semantic shift, or even develop entirely new meanings.

This mini research aims to identify and analyze examples of semantic change in popular TikTok slang terms. It will also explore the factors that drive these meaning changes and their impact on language use in daily life. Through this study, it is expected to gain deeper insights into how social media influences the evolution of language in the digital era.

B. Research problem

This problem discusses the relationship between Semantic Changes in Social Media, especially Slang Terms on TikTok. The problems that will be discussed in this study are attached in the form of the following questions:

➢ How does semantic change occur in slang terms used on TikTok, and what social and linguistic factors influence these changes?

C. Research objective

This study aims to investigate semantic changes in social media, especially on TikTok. The specific objectives are:

1. To Identify Slang Terms:
   Catalog and analyze the most frequently used slang terms on TikTok, highlighting their definitions and contexts of use.
2. To Examine Semantic Evolution:
   Investigate the processes through which these slang terms change in meaning over time, identifying key factors that influence this evolution.
3. To Reflect Cultural Trends:
   Analyze how the evolution of slang on TikTok reflects broader societal and cultural shifts, providing insights into contemporary youth culture

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the researcher tries to explain the study of semantic changes in social media which are divided into several variables. These variables are written in this form:

1. **Semantic Change in Linguistics**

   Semantic change is a core area of linguistic study, encompassing processes such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, and pejoration. According to Campbell (2005), semantic shifts often occur as a response to cultural and social changes, influenced by factors such as technology, media, and generational differences. This foundation provides a framework for understanding how new platforms like TikTok affect language.

2. **Slang and Identity**

   Slang serves as a vital linguistic tool for identity construction and social belonging. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) argue that slang can signify group membership and differentiate social identities. On TikTok, users employ slang to connect with peers and express individuality, making it a rich site for studying the interplay between language and identity.

3. **TikTok as a Linguistic Landscape**

   TikTok's unique format—short videos combined with music and visual effects—creates a dynamic environment for language innovation. Research by Hu (2021) highlights how TikTok facilitates rapid dissemination of slang, allowing terms to gain traction quickly and evolve in meaning. The platform's algorithm also amplifies certain expressions, making them viral and further influencing their semantic trajectories.

4. **The Role of Context in Semantic Change**

   Context plays a crucial role in how slang terms are interpreted and redefined. According to Gee (2014), meaning is shaped by situational factors, including the audience and the medium. TikTok's interactive features, such as comments and duet functions, provide a context where slang can be both challenged and reinforced, leading to continuous semantic shifts.

5. **Cultural Influences on Slang**

   Cultural trends significantly impact the evolution of slang on social media. Research by Thurlow (2003) emphasizes that slang reflects cultural attitudes, trends, and values.

TikTok, with its diverse user base, serves as a melting pot of cultural influences, resulting in a rich tapestry of slang that reflects broader societal dynamics.

RESEARCH METHOD
A. Research Design
This research uses a qualitative descriptive research design. It aims to describe and analyze semantic changes in slang terms commonly used on TikTok. Data is collected through observation of video captions, comments, and hashtags, and then analyzed linguistically to identify shifts in meaning over time or in different contexts. This research does not aim to test hypotheses but to understand linguistic phenomena in depth. With this approach, the researcher can explore how language evolves in digital spaces, particularly among social media users such as those on TikTok.

B. Research Subject
The subjects of this study are TikTok users who frequently use slang terms in their videos, captions, and comments. These users come from various age groups but are predominantly from Generation Z and Millennials.

C. Reseacrh Object
The object of this research is the slang terms used on TikTok, with a focus on how the meanings of these terms undergo changes (semantic shifts) in the context of their usage on the platform.

DATA ANALYSIS
A. Definition of semantic change
Semantic change in linguistics refers to the development of word meanings over time. It involves shifts in how words are used and understood, often leading to significant differences between their original and modern meanings. This change is part of the phenomenon of language shift, where words gradually acquire new or modified meanings.

Types of Semantic Change:

1. **Broadening (Widening)**
   Occurs when a word's meaning becomes more general or covers a wider range than before.
   Examples:
   - *"Holiday"* originally referred only to a religious holy day, but now includes any day off, religious or not.
   - *"Dog"* once referred to a specific breed, but now applies to all domestic canines.

2. **Narrowing (Specialization)**
   Happens when a word's meaning becomes more specific or limited.
   Examples:
   - *"Meat"* used to mean "food" in general, but now refers specifically to animal flesh.
   - *"Girl"* once meant a young person of any gender, but now only refers to a female child.

3. **Semantic Shift (Change in Denotation)**
   The word undergoes a complete shift to a meaning unrelated to its original sense.
   Examples:
   - *"Awful"* used to mean "inspiring awe," now means "very bad" or "terrible."
   - *"Nice"* once meant "foolish" or "naive," now means "pleasant" or "kind."

4. **Melioration (Improvement)**
   A word with a previously negative or low status acquires a more positive or elevated meaning.

Examples:
➢ *"Knight"* originally meant a young male servant, now is a noble title in Western culture.
➢ *"Minister"* once meant "servant," now refers to a government official or religious leader.

5. **Pejoration (Deterioration)**
A word that originally had a neutral or positive meaning becomes negative.
Examples:
➢ *"Silly"* used to mean "happy" or "blessed," but now means "foolish."
➢ *"Cunning"* used to mean "clever," but now often implies "deceptive" or "sly."

6. **Metaphor and Metonymy**
- **Metaphor**: A change in meaning based on similarity between concepts.
  ➢ Example: *"Head"* (part of the body) → *"head of the company"* (leader).
- **Metonymy**: A change in meaning based on association or closeness.
  ➢ Example: *"The White House announced..."* (refers to the U.S. government, not the building).

B. **Social Media**

Social media is an online platform that allows users to interact, share information, and build virtual communities. As time has progressed, a platform called TikTok emerged, launched in 2016, and has grown into one of the most influential social media platforms, with over one billion active users worldwide. TikTok's main strength lies in its short video format, which encourages creativity and fast-paced communication. Its algorithm effectively spreads viral trends, accelerating the emergence of language innovations. Users engage with content through comments, captions, and video responses, creating a collaborative linguistic space where slang and new expressions flourish.

TikTok's design promotes the use of multiple modes of communication—such as text, sound, and visuals—while also fostering user creativity. At present, it ranks among the most widely used applications, particularly by Generation Z, for whom it holds strong cultural significance. Despite the constant stream of new content—most of which gains popularity only briefly—many slang terms originating from TikTok have become common on the platform and have naturally blended into daily conversations. As technology and digital platform usage continue to advance, new terms—commonly known as slang—have emerged. Slang is a form of informal language that develops within specific social groups and changes rapidly. According to Eble (1996), slang consists of casual words and expressions used to express or strengthen group identity. Partridge (2006) adds that slang reflects creativity and a departure from formal language norms.

In the digital communication era, slang has become more widespread and taken on new meanings. Digital communication—the exchange of information through electronic devices—accelerates the spread of slang (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). TikTok, with its fast-paced and interactive content, serves as a space for the emergence of new language terms. Through videos, hashtags, and comment sections, users create and spread slang that eventually becomes part of global digital culture.

David Crystal (2013) noted that digital communication has greatly enriched the English lexicon with terms like "selfie," "hashtag," and "vlog," all of which originated from social media. TikTok has continued this trend by introducing unique syntax and grammar, such as fragmented sentences, nonstandard spellings, and abbreviations. For example, phrases like "fit check" (outfit check) and "POV" (point of view) illustrate how the platform reshapes language norms to suit fast and visually-driven communication.

Additionally, TikTok has contributed to the widespread adoption of slang expressions like "no cap" (meaning "no lie") and "slay" (used to compliment someone's excellence). While

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these expressions originally stemmed from specific subcultures, they gain massive exposure through TikTok's algorithms and global reach. The platform's fast-paced nature ensures that slang not only spreads widely but also evolves quickly, reflecting the fleeting yet impactful nature of digital communication.

C. Slang TikTok

Slang terms originating from TikTok often transcend the platform, influencing mainstream English, including spoken language, social media, and even marketing. This phenomenon illustrates how TikTok serves as a linguistic incubator, fostering creativity and shaping modern communication.

Below are several examples presented in a table that include TikTok slang terms, their original meanings, their usage on TikTok, and the type of semantic change that has occurred:

Slang Term	Original Meaning	Tik Tok Usage	Type of Semantic Change
RIZZ	Abbreviation of "charisma", which traditionally means a special magnetic quality or charm.	Refers to someone's flirting or charm skills, especially in attracting or impressing others romantically.	**Broadening:** Expanding from a general meaning of charm to a specific context of romantic interactions.
CAP	Derived from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), meaning "to lie" or "falsehood".	Commonly used in Tik Tok to indicate something is a lie or not true. Often used in phrases like "no cap" to emphasize truth.	**Narrowing:** Originally a general term for falsehoods, now used mainly to call out exaggerated or untrue statements in digital communication.
BET	A traditional term used for an agreement or wager	On TikTok, "bet" is used to express agreement or enthusiastic affirmation, equivalent to "okay" or "sure".	**Broadening:** Expanding from a betting or wager context to general expressions of agreement or assurance.
SUS	Short for "suspicious", often used to imply that something is not quite right or trustworthy.	Used to describe a person or situation that seems shady, untrustworthy, or out of place. Most notably used in gaming contexts but has spread in TikTok's viral trends.	**Pejoration:** Originally had a neutral meaning of suspicion but now implies negative judgment or distrust.
NO CAP	"Cap" means a lie;the phrase "no cap" emphasizes truthfulness	"No cap" is used to stress that what is being said is the truth, or to clarify that someone is not lying.	**Amelioration:** Originally used in a negative context (as a lie), now used to emphasize honesty, with a shift to a positive connotation.
FLEX	To show or exhibit something, originally meaning to physically	On TikTok, "flex" is used to refer to showing off material possessions,	**Broadening:** The term has expanded beyond its physical meaning to

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	stretch or display one's muscles.	skills, or qualities in a boastful or bragging way.	include showing off possessions, wealth, and personal qualities.
SLAY	To kill or destroy (violent meaning).	On TikTok, "slay" is used to describe someone excelling in something, especially in terms of appearance or performance (e.g., "slay the day").	**Amelioration:** From a violent or aggressive context to a positive, empowering one associated with excellence or success.
LITTY	Derives from "lit", which originally referred to something being "on fire" or highly exciting	Describes something extremely exciting, fun, or amazing, often used to describe events or experiences.	**Broadening:** Expanded from a literal meaning to represent something more generally exciting or high-energy.
VIBE CHECK	Originally meant checking the mood of an environment or person .	On TikTok, "vibe check" refers to assessing whether something or someone fits a particular mood, energy, or vibe, often in a playful or informal context.	**Metaphorical Extension:** Extends the original meaning of mood checking into a broader, more informal social assessment of environments or people .
FOMO	"Fear of Missing Out" is a psychological term describing anxiety over missing events or experiences	On TikTok, FOMO is often used to express the feeling of anxiety or regret about missing out on trends, events, or experiences that others are participating in or enjoyin g.	**Amelioration:** While it originally had a clinical or negative psychological association, it is now more commonly used in a casual, almost lighthearted context.
TEA	A hot beverage made from leaves.	On TikTok, "tea" refers to gossip or revealing news, especially juicy or scandalous information.	**Broadening:** The term has expanded from its literal meaning to signify news or gossip in a more figurative sense.
GHOSTIN G	The act of disappearing without communication, especially in a romantic or social context.	Describes the act of abruptly ceasing all communication with someone, typically in a dating scenario or after a social interaction.	**Narrowing:** Initially used to describe a disappearing act in a general context, now primarily used in the context of dating or friendships.
SIMPIN	Derived from "simp", a term used to describe someone who excessively admires or is overly attentive to someone else, often to an extreme.	Describes someone who is acting overly affectionate, subservient, or self-deprecating in their romantic interests, often humorously or sarcastically.	**Pejoration:** The term "simp" once had a neutral meaning, but now it carries a negative connotation of excessive and often misguided admiration.

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CLOUT	Refers to influence or power, often in the context of social or political settings.	On TikTok, "clout" refers to social influence or the ability to attract attention and followers, often through social media popularity.	**Broadening:** From its original meaning of general influence to a more specific reference to social media status and influence.
WOKE	Originally referred to being aware of social justice issues and inequalities, particularly related to race and discrimination.	Used ironically to describe someone who is perceived as overly concerned with political correctness or social justice, often in a mocking tone.	**Pejoration:** Originally a positive term for awareness and activism, now often used derisively to describe excessive or performative concern with political correctness.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that slang terms on TikTok undergo various types of semantic change, including broadening, narrowing, amelioration, and pejoration. These changes reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of language influenced by digital communication and youth culture. TikTok, as a highly interactive and trend-driven platform, plays a significant role in reshaping the meanings of existing words and creating new linguistic expressions. The widespread use of these terms demonstrates how social media accelerates language innovation and spreads linguistic change globally.

B. SUGGESTION

Through this mini-research, several suggestions can be given. First, for linguists and lecturers, it is recommended to conduct further research that explores the long-term impact of slang use on social media on the development of formal language, especially among young people. Second, for students or anyone who is learning a language, understanding how the meaning of words can change on platforms such as TikTok can help improve digital literacy and enrich their knowledge of informal and contemporary English. Third, for content creators, it is important to understand the meaning and semantic changes of slang terms to produce more engaging content that is in line with current cultural trends. Finally, for curriculum developers, it would be useful to start integrating social media language topics into lessons so that learning becomes more relevant and connected to students' daily lives.

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