

EXPLORING SLANG IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH (AAE) IN TIKTOK COMMENTS: SOCIOLINGUISTICS STUDY

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Abstract

This study examines slang that arise in social media such as TikTok. The phenomena of African American English slang terms appearing in TikTok's comments have relevance to this study. The objective of this study was to understand the sorts of slang and what their functions are. Additionally, this study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach. The theory of the functions of slang is from Zhou and Fan (2013), and the framework for the types of slang is based on the theory of Allan & Burridge (2006). The analysis's findings indicate that there are four categories of slang utilized by TikTok users: Clipping, Acronyms, Fresh and Creative, and Flippant. The highest percentage of types of the used slang words was Fresh and Creative (40%), Clipping (33.3%), Acronym (16.7%), Flippant (10.0%), and Imitative (0.0%). Slang among TikTok users serves purposes related to pursuing self-identity and emotive feelings. The highest percentage of functions of the used slang words was Pursuit self-identity (53.3%), Emotive Feeling (46.7%) and Achieving Politeness (0.0%). The sociolinguistic approach is utilized to better comprehend the slang expressions found in TikTok comments and to address the two issues that have resulted from them. Slang language usage is growing in popularity as a way to enhance language studies as language changes. Instead of being perceived as negative or disrespectful, slang language encourages people to be more innovative in order to communicate more simply and expressively.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, slang, types and functions of slang

1. Introduction

Language is a method of communication between individuals or groups of people that conveys meaning through words, symbols, and gestures. The term 'language' here is used not as a constructed language with its own grammar, syntax, morphology, and phonology, but in the same way linguists would discuss women's language, (Cage, 1999) as a method of speaking, a form of sociolect. The phenomenon of language in society is a rich and complex field of study that encompasses sociolinguistics, anthropology, psychology, and other disciplines. It highlights the central role of language in shaping human interactions, social structures, and cultural practices. Language views vary depending depending on the person's status as a social user, gender, age, ethnicity, and the type of social networking in which they participate (Hall & Bucholtz, 1995).

Sociolinguistics is the study of the connection between language and society. It entails investigating how language is used in various social contexts, how it differs among different groups of people, and how social factors such as culture, ethnicity, gender, class, and power dynamic s influence it (Trudgill, 1995). (Holmes, 2013) points out that slang may contain a variety of linguistic elements, including novel words or phrases, metaphorical language, and inventive grammatical constructions.

AAE slang is a significant component of the language and culture of African Americans, according to (Green, 2002) research. The researcher has maintained that AAE slang is a real and useful aspect of the English language, rather than a sort of "incorrect" or "uneducated" speech. The researcher has also investigated the influence of AAE on education and employment, stating that mainstream society's stigmatization of AAE might have detrimental implications for Black Americans. According to (Green, 2002) African American English is derived from the West African languages spoken by enslaved Africans imported to the United States as part of the transatlantic slave trade. These languages influenced the development of African American English and contributed to its unique grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation. AAVE evolved over time through contact with other dialects of English spoken in the United States, including Southern White English and Northern Urban Black English (Green, 2002).

Black people's vocabulary is becoming commodified alongside their internet characterizations. Phrases like "lit, bussin', bae, thirsty, salty, aight, hella, period, and lowkey" all originated in Black culture and gained popularity on social media sites like TikTok, resulting in their current status as internet slang (Laing, 2021). Individuals who were not Black began using AAVE after being exposed to it through encounters with Black users on social media, similar to Black people's memes that went viral, AAVE terms became the "trend" of social behavior (Benitez, 2022). People on social media, especially on TikTok, saw using these terms as a means of gaining acceptance from the platform's users and becoming well-known online.

Zuraida's 2020 paper "Investigating Indonesian Slangy Words on Tiktok's Comments" describes recent research on the use of slang in social media. The purpose of this research is to acquire knowledge of slang terms (in this example, "Ngab" means "Bang/Brother"), which is complicated by the Indonesian language standard. The research used a qualitative approach, and the author analyzed the data using descriptive approaches. The information was acquired via TikTok. The writer collected data through observation. She discovered that "Ngab" is a slang phrase used in teen talks to be informal and to join the comment thread's group (Zuraida, 2020).

The objectives of this study are to advance knowledge of slang as a dynamic linguistic phenomenon on social media. The study aims to offer important insights into the changing nature of language in modern digital communication by examining the types and functions of slang in TikTok comments. In the end, this examination of slang will improve our understanding of how, in a linguistic environment that is evolving quickly, language both reflects and shapes social identities and cultural expressions. This phenomenon creates a new obstacle for English learners in that they periodically come across new slang terms that other people now use in everyday speech. As a result, the researcher anticipates that this research will contribute to sociolinguistics. Furthermore, this study is likely to help the English department increase student sociolinguistic expertise. (Allan & Burridge, 2006) provided insights into how slang evolves and can create barriers to understanding for those not familiar with it.

Sociolinguistics

The field of study known as sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society. According to Wardhaugh (2006), sociolinguistics is the study of the relationships between language and society in order to gain a better knowledge of how languages work and the structure of language in communication.

According to Holmes cited in (Wihadi et al 2020) there is a relationship between slang and sociolinguistics when it comes to the usage of informal terms that are not considered part of the language but may be more acceptable when used in social contexts. Sociolinguistics embraced a more nuanced view of the link between language and what (Hall & Bucholtz, 1995) referred to as "the socially constructed self."

In brief, sociolinguistics is concerned with culture and its relationship to language. Linguistics is intrinsically linked to society because the way people use language in society is an extension of society. Internet slang is linked to society, and this connection improves the platform's success. According to Sherzer (2010), speaking is a form of communication method that involves

speaking. The context in this example is obviously the internet, specifically the TikTok app. Furthermore, the scene provides a detailed description of cultural importance. In this case, the scene refers to the various types of postings in which comedy and unusual human behavior occur.

Language Variety

Complexity theory views language as a dynamic complex system that is constantly evolving to satisfy the communication needs of its speakers. Phonemes, morphemes, grammatical structures, and meanings vary throughout all aspects of language. Variation in language use among speakers or groups of speakers can explain changes in pronunciation (accent), word choice (lexicon), and even preferences for specific grammatical patterns (Rosa, 2017). One of the main issues in sociolinguistics is variation. It has been found that linguistic change usually occurs through variation.

Linguists use the term "language variety" to refer to all of a language's overlapping subcategories. Since languages differ greatly from one another, linguistic variety also affects how languages are utilized in different societies (Nabila & Hendar, 2022). Lexical variation, including slang, argot, jargon, register, and idiom, is commonly examined in connection to specific formality levels or styles (also known as registers); nevertheless, these uses are also occasionally examined as varieties (Heidary & Barzan, 2019).

Slang

Slang is a nonstandard language that can be used informally or directly. Slang is typically used by young people or certain groups. Currently, slang is a trendy language that is more user-friendly. (Yule, 2006) defined slang as "words or phrases used instead of more everyday terms by other groups with special interests and among younger speakers." It can be utilized by members within a group who share attitudes and views to differentiate themselves from others. Yule's study (as cited in Putri & Fauzia, 2017), slang is a result of word formation. Slang is a type of jargon marked by its defiance of formal conventions, comparative freshness and common fragility, and its prominent use to claim unity in group membership; it is a powerful social force with a substantial impact on language (Saputra, 2016).

Slang is commonly utilized by the younger generation/adolescents in their regular group conversation (Zuraida, 2021). According to the ideas discussed above, slang is closely associated with the lives of adolescents because it is they who are eager to define their identity, seek out trendy things, and lead active lives. Slang is even a non-standard language that is used informally by some segments of society, especially adolescents, to define their time period and create their identity as youths.

According to Spolsky as stated in Rahmawaty (2012), listed below are some features of slang:

1. Slang is a type of jargon distinguished by its lack of formal rules. To assert solidarity, one must consider comparable freshness, common ephemerality, and noticeable use.
2. Slang frequently violates other social rules, making liberal use of prohibited expression.
3. Slang is jargon that is employed by a specific social group for a specific purpose, such as to familiarize a discourse.
4. Slang can take the form of new or old terms with new meanings.

Types of Slang

People use slang because they want to stand apart. They believe that by adopting slang language to express the identity of a specific sub-social society, it will be widely utilized since it is cool or looks to be fashionable when everyone loves it. If a term has slang features, it may be classified as such. (Allan & Burridge, 2006) classified slang into five categories: fresh and creative, flippant, imitative, acronym, and clipping.

1. Fresh and Creative

This type includes fresh and inventive terms that grow out of social movements, cultural trends, or imaginative wordplay. Fresh and creative slang frequently embodies the essence of a particular time or place, reflecting current challenges, attitudes, and experiences. It indicates that slang words have evolved into new vocabularies to explain topics in an informal atmosphere. For example, the

term "buddy" is frequently used to describe a close friend. The term "buddy" communicates a sense of familiarity, which is typically associated with trust and support.

2. Flippant

Flippant slang refers to informal, frequently funny language that may minimize serious subjects or circumstances. In slang, it means that a word is composed of two or more words that are unrelated to its denotative meaning. For example, "holy cow" means to be shocked by something.

3. Imitative

The slang word is imitated or developed from the Standard English word in this case. It's also like utilizing Standard English terms in a new context, or mixing two separate words. "skrrt skrrt." Is an example of imitative AAE slang. This word, which sounds like a car screeching to a halt or making a sharp turn, is frequently used in rap music or in talks to describe the notion of rapidly changing directions or halting.

4. Acronym

It indicates that the term's outcome is taken from the first letter of each word in a phrase. Initials are typically uttered as a new word and are derived from a group of words or syllables. The acronym "OMG" stands for "Oh my God."

5. Clipping

It signifies that a slang phrase is created by deleting a piece of a lengthier word, yielding a shorter variant with the same meaning. For example, "comfy" means comfortable.

Functions of Slang

The interpersonal function of language is the most fundamental in terms of sociolinguistics. The most important component of slang's social functions is that language is used to communicate amongst persons. According to Zhou & Fan (2013), slang has numerous functions. In terms of the functions, Zhou & Fan (2013) categorize slang into three;

1. Pursuit of self-identity

While slang can be an expression of self-identity, it's important to strike a balance and adapt language to different situations and audiences. Being versatile in communication style allows you to effectively connect with a broader range of people. For example, a teenage group at school may have its own collection of slang terms or phrases that they use.

2. Emotive feeling

In certain contexts, the use of slang can create a sense of intimacy and authenticity. When individuals share and understand specific slang terms, it can signal a close relationship or a deep understanding of a particular subculture. This can foster positive emotive responses such as trust, camaraderie, and genuine connection. The emotional feeling is another function. This is critical in determining both the speaker's and the hearer's attitude toward a given subject. Depending on the emotive mood imparted, acceptance in the dialogue might be good or negative. This emotional feeling has a significant impact on the psychological situation.

3. Achieving politeness

Achieving politeness refers to a particular method of speaking or writing that is unique to a particular setting of communication. There are three aspects to achieving politeness: the occasion (formal or informal), the addressee (age, gender, occupation, degree of acquaintance), and the topic of the speech. Because of this, slang is often used in casual contexts and plays a crucial role in fulfilling the phatic function.

2. Method

This study employs a naturalistic qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach that investigates phenomena in context-specific settings such as 'real world settings,' with the scholar not attempting to change the phenomenon of interest. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) propose that a descriptive inductive analytical technique is an instantaneous act of the wide-ranging patterns of data analysis at the data collecting stage. According to (Sudaryanto, 2015), the qualitative method is a sort of study in which findings are developed or reported utilizing current data and are solely based on facts or happenings observed by the speakers.

Examining slang in TikTok comments is the main focus of the study object. There are multiple steps in the process. The first step was to decide on the research topic. A thorough literature review of

slang is conducted using resources from online books and journals. The study technique is based on content analysis since the researcher evaluates recorded information within its own context, and the material in question is found on TikTok's comments. A pair of research objectives were then developed, focusing on various types of slang and its functions. Textual or narrative descriptions of the events being studied are generated in qualitative research, according (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Any written information, including papers, interview transcripts, media, and even personal interviews, can be used for content analysis (Cohen et al., 2007).

3. Result and Discussion

This After gathering data, the following phase in this research is to examine the information gathered. This chapter describes several data analysis examples used as study samples. In addition to the results, discussions based on the findings are provided. The researcher will go into great detail on the two primary topics that will occur during this study. This point was investigated by selecting utterances from TikTok comments that included the categories of slang phrases and their purposes. The following sections will cover the many types and functions of slang words.

Table 1: The Types of the Used Slang Words

No.	Types of Slang	Frequency of Slang Used	Percentage
1.	Fresh and Creative	12	40.0%
2.	Flippant	3	10.0%
3.	Imitative	0	0.0%
4.	Acronym	5	16.7%
5.	Clipping	10	33.3%
Total		30	100%

The table above displayed facts discovered by the researcher in order to provide some examples to the readers. According to Allan and Burrige's (2006) approach, only four of the five existing varieties of slang are employed in Table 1. These include Fresh and Creative, Flippant, Acronym, and Clipping. Table 1 shows up to 30 different categories of slang data. The most common sorts of slang words were Fresh and Creative 40.0%, Clipping 33.3%, Acronym 16.7%, Flippant 10.0%, and Imitative 0.0%.

Table 2: The Functions of the Used Slang Words

No.	Functions of Slang	Frequency of Slang Used	Percentage
1.	Pursuit of self-identity	16	53.3%
2.	Emotive feeling	14	46.7%

3.	Achieving politeness	0	0.0%
Total		30	100%

According to Zhou & Fan’s (2013) theory the functions of slang used on table 2, there are only two functions used out of three existing functions. Those are Pursuit of self-identity and Emotive feeling. Based on table 2, as many as 30 functions of slang finding data. The highest percentage of functions of the used slang words was Pursuit self-identity 53.3%, Emotive Feeling 46.7% and Achieving Politeness 0.0%.

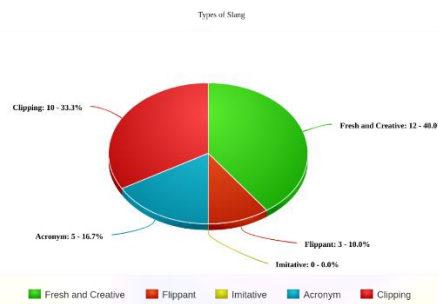


Figure. 1 Percentage of types of slang

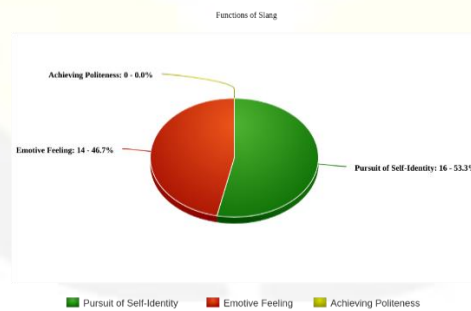


Figure. 2 Percentage of functions of slang

The figure above showed data found by the researcher in order to give some illustrations to the readers.

Data 1

Fresh and Creative

“They finna bring this up at the Congress.”



Source: TikTok

Figure. 3 Example of Fresh and Creative

The slang word "finna" is fresh and creative. This slang word is a fresh way to express something in an informal setting. Because "Finna" has a completely unique vocabulary that was not created by imitating, clipping, or otherwise, it is original and unusual. "Finna" is a slang term that is a contraction of "planning to" or "about to." It is commonly used in African American English and in other informal contexts. "Finna" is used to express the idea of being about to do something or being on the verge of doing something. The term "finna" is often used in casual conversations, particularly among younger speakers, and has become more widely used in recent years in popular culture, particularly in hip-hop and rap music.

The function of utilizing slang phrases in data 1 is to establish self-identity. In response to the behaviours revealed in the video upload, a commentator wishes to note, "They are planning to bring this up at Congress." What distinguishes these expressions is that they imply an informal relationship between friends, which brings the conversation closer and makes the other person feel more relaxed and like a member of the group.

Data 2

Flippant

“Why he lowkey good at that...”



Source: TikTok

Figure. 4 Example of Flippant

The type of slang word “lowkey” is flippant. This slang consists of two words or more that do not correlate with denotative meaning. The slang word “lowkey” can imply that something is not well-known or recognized by most people. "Lowkey" is a slang term that is often used to describe something that is done subtly, discreetly, or with a lower intensity. It suggests that the action or feeling being described is not openly expressed or acknowledged. It can also imply a sense of secrecy, reservation, or downplaying.

The function of using a slang word in data 2 is emotive feeling. The user commented on the posted video to express something as being of low intensity, restrained, or not highly noticeable. It can be used to downplay or minimize the significance of something. Overall, "lowkey" is often used to express a more subdued, subtle, or understated approach or feeling towards something, contrasting with a more overt or exaggerated style. Furthermore, modern language is heavily impacted by popular culture, social media, and personal interpretation.

Data 3

Acronym

“Like bffr.”



Source: TikTok

Figure. 5 Example of Acronym

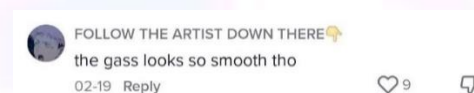
The type of slang word “bffr” is acronym. “bffr” is a slang term for "be fucking for real". This is an expression that can be used to express disbelief, or frustration. “bffr” is a kind of slang word that makes up a new word by taking the initial letter from some words. It's a vulgar way of saying "Are you serious?" or "Is that really true?" This can be used as an addressee or to express excitement, anger, surprise or disappointment. This can be used at the beginning or the last of the utterance.

In data 3, the function of the use of slang words is emotive feeling. Slang is a critical tool for language change and revitalization, and its brightness and color bring vitality to ordinary communication since it is a way to express excitement, passion, and wrath. The user comments on the posted video and expresses his dissatisfaction with the content. This language elicits a wide range of emotions in people. When group members use the slang word "bffr" it conveys skepticism about a scenario or remark.

Data 4

Clipping

“The gas look so smooth tho.”



Source: TikTok

Figure. 6 Example of Clipping

The type of slang word “tho” is clipping. "Tho" is a slang term that is short for "though," and is often used in written or online communication to express a thought or opinion that contrasts with what has been previously stated. In this situation, "though" has been reduced to "tho" by deleting the final "ugh" syllable. The use of clipped slang terms like "tho" can help to streamline communication and make it more efficient, particularly in online or text-based conversations where brevity is often valued.

The function of using slang words in data 4 is to pursue self-identity. The user comments on the posted video and responds to imply that the gas appears to be in good condition, despite any apparent problems or shortcomings. The use of the slang phrase "tho" at the end of a sentence implies that the speaker is providing a personal opinion that may differ from what has previously been expressed or inferred. The phrase "tho" frequently signifies that the speaker is elaborating or qualifying their remark. This slang appears to be a feature of every language spoken by a large group in regular interaction, and it is varied enough to distinguish between subgroups.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, TikTok users frequently use slang terms in their comments on videos that have been published, which reflects the dynamic and changing linguistic landscape of the platform. This research identifies four forms of slang utilized by TikTok users: clipping, acronyms, fresh and creative, and flippant. It is clear from using Allan and Burridge's (2006) framework that four of the five recognized categories of slang are present, with Fresh and Creative (40%), Clipping (33.3%), Acronym (16.7%), and Flippant (10.0%) being the most common categories. Imitative slang was not found in this dataset. Moreover, two of the three possible purposes—the Pursuit of Self-Identity and Emotive Feelings—are more prominent when slang functions are examined using the framework of Zhou & Fan's (2013) theory. According to the research, 53.3% of slang usage is related to self-identity, 46.7% to expressive expression, and Achieving Politeness is not represented in the comments.

TikTok and other platforms promote cultural exchange by allowing users to communicate with people from various language communities. Slang from many places and cultures is frequently combined as a result of this interaction, enhancing the language and encouraging inclusivity. As language progresses, the use of slang language becomes more common as a technique of improving language studies. Slang language is no longer regarded as bad or vulgar; rather, it encourages people to be more creative in order to communicate in a more concise manner while adding a lot of color and expressiveness. Slang is what allows a language to evolve and grow with time. It fosters a sense of belonging among generations, as well as nostalgia later in life. This study highlights the importance of slang in modern communication as well as its function as an evolving aspect that adds to the overall diversity and richness of language.

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