

## **An Analysis of Slang Words on TikTok by Gen Z**

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### **ABSTRAK**

Gen Z merupakan generasi yang hidup di era digital dan memiliki bahasa-bahasa sendiri dalam berinteraksi dan berkomunikasi sehingga perlu dipahami dan adanya tren yang terus-menerus di media-media sangat mempengaruhi perkembangan bahasa dan bahasa gaul. Kecepatan perubahan bahasa ini juga dapat diartikan bahwa bahasa gaul mudah dilupakan. Penelitian ini berfungsi sebagai inventarisasi kata-kata gaul yang baru ditemukan oleh Gen Z di TikTok. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis kata-kata gaul yang digunakan oleh Gen Z di platform sosial media ternama yaitu TikTok. Penelitian ini menerapkan teori Allan dan Burridge tentang jenis-jenis dan fungsi dari kata-kata gaul yang digunakan oleh Gen Z di platform TikTok dari Oktober hingga Desember pada tahun 2023. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan sociolinguistik. Analisis dalam penelitian ini meliputi kondensasi data, proses kode, dan membuat kesimpulan makna hasil. Peneliti menemukan jenis-jenis kata gaul seperti fresh and creative (baru dan kreatif), flippant, imitative (imitatif), acronym (akronim), dan clipping (pangkasan) diikuti dengan fungsi to address (untuk menyampaikan pesan), fungsi to humiliate (untuk merendahkan), dan fungsi to express impression (untuk mengungkapkan kesan). Berdasarkan analisis imitative dan to address merupakan tipe dan fungsi dari kata-kata gaul yang cenderung digunakan oleh Gen Z di platform sosial media TikTok. Gen Z cenderung menggunakan kata lama dengan makna baru untuk menyampaikan sebuah kesan.

**Kata kunci: Gen Z, Sociolinguistik, Kata Gaul, TikTok**

### **ABSTRACT**

Gen Z lives in the digital era and has its own languages in interacting and communicating so that the development of this language needs to be understood and the existence of continuous trends in the media greatly influences the development of language and slang. In order to interact and exchange conversation with Gen Z we need to fully understand their language. The constant flow of trends on the internet affected the development of language and slang. With the rate which language changes it also means that it is easily forgotten. This research served as an inventory for newly invented slang words by Gen Z on TikTok. This research main objective analyzed the type and function of slang words that are used by Gen Z on the infamous social media platform TikTok. This research applied Allan and Burridge's theory of slang type and function that are used on the TikTok platform by Gen Z from October to December of 2023. This research employed qualitative research as the methodology with a sociolinguistics approach. The analysis involved in this research are data condensation, coding process, and meaning interpretation. The analysis revealed that there are occurrences of fresh and creative, flippant, imitative, acronym, and clipping, with occurrences of the function to address, to humiliate, and to express impression. Based on the analysis, the most dominant slang type is imitative with to address as the most used slang function on the TikTok platform. It could be concluded that, Gen Z tends to reuse an already existing vocabulary and used them to address a situation or activity.

**Keywords: Gen Z, Sociolinguistics, Slang, TikTok**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

As the most important tool of communication, language has been greatly influenced by the rapid development of human society. The development of various new words and impressions reflects the modern way of living and to keep pace with these modern trends in human life, vocabulary expanded at a rapid rate. Slang seems to be greatly influenced by the development of language since it is characterized by various linguistic features that reflect the users way of living (Burdová, 2009). There had been 566 new entries of slang words by September of 2023, this shows how slang words are greatly affected by the constant flow of new trends (Dictionary.com).

Slang is a language that uses informal vocabulary and idioms in non-standard language. Slang is more frequently used in speech than in writing and it is confined to a certain setting such as informal. Syaputra et al. stated that slang is considered as crude, hence why we cannot literal translate every word and must pay attention to who we are talking to (2024). This implied that slang may be a whole distinct language from the slang's native tongue, so it is usually only understood by those who use the term. Andersson and Trudgill claimed that slang is always used consciously, with the desire to create certain identities. Slang is a new vocabulary that reflected the speaker's social background. Although it is not an official language that is approved by the dictionary, it is way more effective than Standard English in describing race, gender, and ethnicity in daily speech (1992). Slang is often found in day-to-day discourse or the internet in this modern era.

Internet discourse or electronic discourse is a hybrid between spoken and written discourse. Internet discourse is a new variety of language that significantly alters written language structure. The term e-discourse concentrates on how individuals use language to discuss and exchange ideas and opinions rather than on the medium where they convey and deliver their communication (Davis & Brewer, 1997). The convergence between technology and sociolinguistics, reveals insights into the intricate interplay between language, media portrayal, and societal dynamics, which then occurred as a Linguistic transformation as new language shapes and modifies existing language (Freytagh-Loringhoven, 2021). The usage of social media also encourages people to adopt a more relaxed and efficient language style (Nastiti & Irianto, 2024). This could also be implemented in the idea of using slang words. Most people tend to use slang words to choose the right words to convey their message through their discourse. Some examples of slang in internet discourses are ate, eepy, gyat, rizz, roman empire, serve, etc. From these examples, the researcher can conclude that some slang terms can be understood directly and easily, but some of them are quite complicated to understand since slang emphasized belonging to a particular group of language users, making verbal comprehension limited to only those in the group.

Communication using technology is an activity that cannot be avoided, especially for the younger generation (Agustien & Mulatsih, 2024). Being the first generation that is directly exposed to the internet and digital technologies, such as social networking sites with overloading information on the internet, Gen Z is widely known as the “Digital Natives.” Generation Z, often abbreviated as Gen Z, was born between the mid-1990s to 2010s. Being born into challenging times in a society dominated by rapid technology breakthroughs, the members of Gen Z are noted for their significant emphasis on social justice concerns, such as racial justice, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights. Hence why Gen Z are seen as being more open-minded

and diversified than the prior generations. They are frequent users of social media sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok.

TikTok is one of the most renowned social media platforms that enabled its users to produce, share, and engage with a wide range of creative short content which range from 15 seconds to 3 minutes in duration. It was introduced for the global market back in 2017 by the Chinese business ByteDance with around 66% of the users being younger than 30, which falls into the category of Gen Z. TikTok was the most downloaded application on Google Play in October 2018 and by 2019 the platform has been introduced to 1 billion users. Since TikTok advances for a more youthful segment, their users truly needed to communicate in their language to be fruitful (Miller, 2020).

Based on the explanation above, what attracted the researcher to conduct this study is the rapid increase of slang terms by Gen Z on the TikTok platform. In addition, the majority of people use slang without understanding the types and the function of it. To summarize, the researcher will highlight the important topic that will be discussed further in this research: finding the types and the functions of slang by Gen Z on the TikTok platform by applying the theory of Allan and Burridge.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguistics is a field of research that concerned with the relationship between language and society. More specifically the use of language in social and cultural contexts, such as gender, ethnicity, age, and race. According to Trudgill, sociolinguistics is a part of linguistics that is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon. Sociolinguistics is a field of language and society that relates to the social sciences, especially sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and human geography (1992).

In addition, Chambers stated that sociolinguistics is the study of social use in language and it has emerged from how the social evaluation of linguistics variants are determined. These are the areas where most scientific techniques like hypothesis creation, logical reasoning, and statistical testing are most applicable (2003). Based on the definitions above, the writer can conclude that sociolinguistics is a study to identify the connection between how a language is developed by the social context.

### **2. Slang**

Yusuff et al. stated that slang is a colloquial language which means that the terms are employed in a novel or peculiar contexts (2024). What is considered as a slang or not slang cannot be determined by a standard test. Terms that are identified as slang frequently involved entertaining wordplay and are almost a substitute for other ways to state the same thing. Slang is rarely the first choice for cautious writers, speakers, or anybody who attempts to use language for formal, persuasive, or business purposes (Spears, 2000). Onebunne & Akujobi research also further strengthen this statement, the smartest and most communicative competent society member finds it difficult to understand the language used on the street due to the fact that slang provides different symbols from which messages can be constructed (2021).

Slang words are often characterized by rich vocabulary, informality, and familiarity. They are realized by a specific group of people whose members are connected with some particular

link, such as age, subculture, or territory, and mainly occur in the spoken form of the language (Burdová, 2009). Based on all of the definitions from the linguists above, the writer can conclude that it is not easy to define slang, which makes each linguist defined slang differently from various perspectives. However, what stands out the most is how slang reflected the user's way of living and emphasized a sense of belonging to a particular group of language users.

### **3. Types of Slang**

To classify the types of slang used by Gen Z on the TikTok platform, the researcher used Allan and Burridge's theory. There are five different types of slang namely, fresh and creative, flippant, imitative, acronym, and clipping (Allan & Burridge, 2006). The types of slang can be seen as follows:

#### **a. Fresh and Creative**

Crystal showed how common, inventive, and creative language play is among ordinary language users (Crystal, 1995). Speaker created names for new concepts such as irony, metaphor, or sound symbolism, these are crucial for creating new impressions. Slang words that are classified into this type are vocabulary that did not exist before, which usually were formed as a result of imagination, creativity, informal forms, and contemporary words. This type of slang is either created with new words or altered existing vocabulary and using them innovatively.

#### **b. Flippant**

Allan and Burridge coined flippant slang type to euphemistic dysphemisms and dysphemistic euphemisms which are impressions with different intentions that underlie it. A speaker's dysphemistic intention can be achieved euphemistically by using an impression that is not intrinsically offensive instead of terms that are perceived to be taboo. It is preferable to use flippant impressions since they distract the sadness from the situation (2006). Slang that falls into this category is formed by combining two or more words to create a new meaning that does not correlate with the literal meaning of the word.

#### **c. Imitative**

People who are involved in illegal activities are known to use imitative slang since they need to exclude law enforcement and regulators. This type of slang purposefully disguises meaning from outsiders and serves as an in-group recognition device. Halliday described imitative as the 'antilanguage' or 'the language of the 'Antisociety' (2006). Imitative language has become increasingly common over time and has lost its negative connotation. This type of slang is vocabulary that already existed before, but its meaning has expanded and is usually very different from its literal meaning. It can also be a combination of two or more words.

#### **d. Acronym**

According to Adams in Danks an acronym may consist of initial letters, non-initial letters, a mixture of initial letters, and non-initial letters. To make the acronym more word-like, yet still convey the non-lexical words from the source phrase, the acronym inserts other than initial letters (2016). To put it quite simply, acronym slang is an abbreviation that is

constructed from the initial first letter of a phrase and is pronounced as a word. Acronyms are used quite frequently in both written and spoken discourse to provide a simple understanding to express complex ideas and also to shorten long phrases.

#### **e. Clipping**

Reduction of form or clipping is frequently used in casual contexts where abbreviations are well tolerated. This type of slang simplified pronunciation and spelling by deleting some part of the word and turning it into a shorter form or fragment with the same meaning. According to Adams, clipping is a process where a word of two or more syllables is shortened without making a change in its function (2016). Bauer and Brinton stated that clipping still retains its meaning as their original word (Bauer, 1983 & Brinton, 2010).

#### **4. Functions of Slang**

According to Allan and Burrige, there are 7 function of slang words namely to address, to form intimate atmosphere, to initiate relaxing conversation, to express impression, to show intimacy, to reveal anger, and to humiliate (2006). The following are the explanations about slang word functions:

##### **a. To Address**

According to Allan and Burrige, addressing or naming someone relied on how the speaker perceived the addressed person, so it is concluded that the hearer-or-named had a relation to the speaker before the context of utterance. Social factors defined the hearer-or-named which determined the social distant between the speaker and the hearer-or-named. The social factors are comparative ages, genders, and socio-cultural backgrounds (2006). To retain intimacy, people used slang when addressing one another, close friends, and family frequently used this casual naming.

##### **b. To Initiate Relax Conversation**

People tend to start a casual conversation and are comfortable using slang words so that they can converse comfortably in a formal setting. According to Allan and Burrige, if the hearer-or-named is outside of their group they might feel vulnerable and making any threat to the hearer-or-named may be perceived as a threat to the whole group. Thus, the speaker will act on the normal presumption of society to respect the lone individual hearer-or-named. Rather than trying to conflate two perspectives, it is more appropriate to recognize the two distinct systems and initiate a relaxed conversation (2006).

##### **c. To Humiliate**

Allan and Burrige stated that the essence of a person is their name. A person is stigmatized or characterized by their name and it may consist of either a positive or a negative consequence since it resulted in stereotyping an individual. This function is used to convey an unpleasant feeling that makes fun of people. For instance, to dehumanize and degrade prisoners they are often required to refer to themselves using a number (2006).

##### **d. To Form Intimate Atmosphere**

Allan and Burrige stated that conversations between people are often a bit stiff because there is a distance between their relationships. The special language, slang, is often chosen by some people to reduce the distance. Slang can be a great use for bringing intimacy and comfort for both the speaker and the hearer-or-named in a conversation (2006).

#### **e. To Express Impression**

Allan and Burrige stated that every language has a unique yet conventional technique that lets the speaker express what they like and dislike by varying the standard form of address or naming (2006). Slang that falls into this category is used by speakers to convey an impression during conversation, it can either be positive or negative.

#### **f. To Reveal Anger**

This function of slang served as a way to display anger and dislike by the speaker. Speakers who wish to display anger by using a linguistic form will tend to distant themselves from the hearer-or-named in an unusual manner. For example, while speaking with a hearer-or-named, a speaker who normally used an intimate or casual style will typically transition to a more formal style (Allan & Burrige, 2006).

#### **g. To Show Intimacy**

This function of slang is used as a way to convey intimacy and to produce a familiar conversation with the listeners. The speaker altered their terminology to make it more relatable for the audience. According to Allan and Burrige the speaker and the hearer-or-named have a closeness that can be marked by the use of casual or intimate style, where the hearer-or-named should be flattered. However, if a hearer-or-named considered that there is a social distance between them, the hearer-or-reader might find this intimate style offensive (2006).

### **C. METHOD**

Official observation started in early September, and the authors were taken the data from October to December of 2023. The prominent entity of the article was to analyzed the slang words that Gen Z used on the infamous social media platform TikTok using the theory of Allan and Burrige. This study used a qualitative method and content analysis approach. The authors collected the data from the faltform TikTok video captions and top comments with a minimum of 100 likes, from October to December of 2023 where Tik Tok is the highest social media used nowadays. Likewise, the technique for taking the data in three steps consists of watching the video, highlight, and capturing the data which were relevance with theory. The data total counts up to 34 data, which then was categorized into types and functions of slang. the data from the data source went through Cresswells's coding process to make it easier for the researcher to maneuver around.

### **D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Fresh and Creative**

Slang words that were classified into this type are vocabulary that has not existed before, which usually were formed as a result of imagination, creativity, informal forms, and contemporary words. This type of slang is done with new words or existing words that had been altered through some linguistic process.

## **Data 1**

### **Because being delulu is the solulu, absolulu**

The slang word *delulu* derived from the word *delusional* and is considered as a fresh and creative slang since it went through three different linguistic processes. The linguistic process involved clipping, reduplication, and semantic widening. The slang term *delulu* is often used in social media as a way to insult or humiliate someone for having overly unrealistic and overly idealistic beliefs or fantasies. The commentator from the data above addressed an activity which most people are shamed for, being delusional, which made the slang word *delulu* considered as a slang that has a function to address.

## **2. Flippant**

Slang word that fell into this category usually are formed by two or more words that are combined to create a new meaning that does not correlate with the literal meaning of the word.

## **Data 2**

### **Forget the rat phase I had a sarah in the bathroom phase**

This slang term is a phase in someone's life where they felt like they were mistreated and that no one cared for their well-being. A combination of the words *rat* and *phase*, made this slang fell into the category of flippant slang. The word *rat* is widely known for its negative connotation as a rodent that is responsible for the spread of disease. This negative connotation of the creature often made people mistreat them. The slang term *rat phase* is often used to express a state or a phase in someone's life. The video creator above brushed off the fact that she went through a stage in her life where she felt mistreated and that no one cared for her well-being. Thus, the video creator used the slang term *rat phase* to address a phase in her life.

## **3. Imitative**

This type of slang used vocabulary that already existed before with expanded meaning and is usually very different from its literal meaning.

## **Data 3**

### **The unreleased version of The Way Things Go was my roman empire**

A trend on TikTok started where people would ask their significant other how often they thought about the *Roman Empire*, to which the majority of them responded to pretty often. It then evolved to referring to something one reminded quite often. This slang is considered as an imitative slang since it used terms that already has existed before. Originally the Roman Empire was the post-Republican state of ancient Rome, a period and territory ruled by the Romans in 31 BC. Roman Empire was known for their military, political, and social institutions, they also

spread their language far and wide, which made them seen as the magnificent empire. Gen Z used the slang term *Roman Empire*, to address something that they looked up for and they often think about. From the data above it is implied that the unreleased version of the song titled *The Way Things Go* was something that the video creator often thinks about and looked up for.

#### **4. Acronym**

The slang term that fell into this category generally consisted with only capital letters or a combination of both lowercase and uppercase letters. To put it quite simply, acronym slang is an abbreviation that is constructed from the initial first letter of a phrase and is pronounced as a word. Acronyms are used quite frequently to shorten long phrases.

##### **Data 4 RMP**

This slang *RMP* is an abbreviation of the sentence "remind me please", which makes it fell into the category of acronym slang. A vast majority of content creators on TikTok tend to make videos into several parts to build suspense of curiosity and attention. The audience started commenting "Remind me please" as an effort to let the other audience remind them if the creator finally posted another part to the video. This resulted in the invention of the slang word *RMP*. The commentator on the data above used the slang term *RMP* as an effort to let the other audience remind her if the creator finally posted another part to the video. The slang *RMP* is used by the commentator as a way to address that the commentator wanted to be reminded of.

#### **5. Clipping**

The slang that fell into this category is often a reduced or shorter form of a word. It simplified pronunciation and spelling by deleting some part of the word and turned it into a shorter form or fragment with the same meaning. Clipping slang that are used by Gen Z on TikTok can be seen below:

##### **Data 5 Awww he's so eepy. You guys have the cutest baby in the world.**

The slang word *eepy* derived from the adjective word of *sleepy*, which referred to a state of a living body in need of rest. This word is a clipping slang since it shortened the word *sleepy* into *eepy*. This slang word is often used to address the state of a body. The commentator addressed the fact that the baby is in much need of rest in the data above. To conclude the slang word *eepy* is used as a way to address a state of a body in the data above.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings that were discussed in the previous chapter, the researcher can conclude that: Considering the first research question was the types of slang words that are used by Gen Z on TikTok, the researcher found five types of slang: There are 4 occurrences of fresh and creative, 10 occurrences of flippant, 12 occurrences of imitative, 4 occurrences of acronym, and 4 occurrences of clipping. The occurrence of imitative type dominated the slang type,

meanwhile fresh and creative are the fewest slang type that were used by Gen Z on TikTok's comment section from October to December 2023. Gen Z are not required to have a certain knowledge of slang vocabularies for imitative slang, since these kinds of slang are easily invented by imitating vocabulary that already had existed before. Contrast to fresh and creative slang, Gen Z are required to obtain a significant knowledge of linguistic process in order to invent it, making it become the fewest slang type.

The second research question dealt with the functions of slang that is used by Gen Z on TikTok. The researcher found three functions of slang from seven functions. There are 22 occurrences of the function to address, 6 occurrences to humiliate, and 6 occurrences to express impression. The researcher did not manage to find any slang words on the data which indicated to initiate relax conversation, to form intimate atmosphere, to reveal anger, and to show intimacy. In this research, to address is the most dominant function of using slang words. The constant flow of trends on TikTok is vast and ever-changing, and to interact and exchange discourse with one another we have to fully understand the context of the slang words that are vastly used in the comment section of a video. Making to address the most dominant function of slang that is used by Gen Z on TikTok, since it provided context. Meanwhile, the least used functions are to humiliate and express impressions. We recommend further analyzing slang words on TikTok outside of the time span that this research was conducted. We also recommend in using other theories, such as Morphology and Neologism.

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