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## **THE IMPACT OF TIKTOK ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE: SLANG AND TRENDS**

**Abstract.** The article explores the linguistic influence of TikTok on the English language, focusing on the emergence of slang and language trends within the platform's ecosystem. As a global social media phenomenon, TikTok fosters rapid and widespread linguistic innovation through its unique format of short, viral video content. Understanding these language trends is essential for grasping how digital communication reshapes English in the 21st century.

The study examines popular TikTok content, including viral phrases, identifying key lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features that characterize this platform-specific language evolution. Special attention is given to the role of social and cultural factors in driving the creation and adoption of new slang terms. Furthermore, the research investigates how these linguistic innovations spread beyond TikTok, influencing mainstream English usage and online discourse.

A comparative analysis highlights demographic factors, such as age and regional diversity, affecting slang adoption. Stylistic elements, including humor, hyperbole, and informal tone, are analyzed for their contribution to engagement and retention. The findings demonstrate TikTok's capacity to democratize language creation, making it an influential force in shaping modern English communication. These insights offer valuable perspectives on the intersection of social media, culture, and language dynamics.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized to explore the structural, lexical, and stylistic dimensions of TikTok-induced language trends. The study provides a framework for understanding the transformative impact of digital platforms on linguistic practices.



**Keywords:** TikTok, English language, slang, digital communication, language trends.

**Problem Statement.** In the era of global digitalization, social media platforms have become not only tools for communication but also spaces for cultural and linguistic evolution. TikTok, with its rapid content dissemination and creative format, plays a critical role in shaping contemporary language trends, particularly in the English language. As TikTok slang transcends the platform, influencing mainstream communication and youth culture, it is essential to understand the linguistic mechanisms driving these changes. This study aims to identify and analyze the structural, lexical, and stylistic features of TikTok's linguistic trends, focusing on how they emerge, spread, and impact broader language use.

**Review of recent publications.** The intersection of language and social media has become a burgeoning area of research. Recent studies emphasize the role of platforms like Twitter and Instagram in language change, but TikTok remains underexplored. This article builds on the works of linguists such as Gretchen McCulloch (*Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language*), Naomi Baron (*Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World*), and discourse studies by Crispin Thurlow on digital communication, applying their insights to the unique linguistic ecosystem of TikTok.

**The purpose of the study is to** examine the linguistic peculiarities of TikTok's content to understand how slang and trends emerge and evolve. The research focuses on popular TikTok videos and hashtags during 2023–2024, analyzing their impact on English vocabulary, grammar, and stylistic norms. By exploring this dynamic interplay between digital communication and language innovation, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding TikTok's influence on modern English.

**Results and Discussions.** TikTok, launched in 2016, has grown into one of the most influential social media platforms, boasting over 1 billion active users worldwide. Its primary appeal lies in its short video format, fostering creativity and immediacy in communication. TikTok's algorithm promotes viral trends, enabling rapid dissemination of language innovations. Users engage with content through comments, captions, and video responses, creating a collaborative linguistic environment where slang and new expressions thrive.

The platform's structure encourages multimodality (combining text, audio, and visuals), and creativity. TikTok is currently one of the most popular apps, especially among Generation Z, where it plays a significant role in their cultural identity. Although new content is uploaded every minute, much of it enjoying only short-lived fame, a variety of TikTok slang phrases have become staples on the platform and have seamlessly integrated into everyday language.

Slang refers to informal, non-standard language that emerges within specific social groups and evolves rapidly over time. According to Eble (1996), slang is “an

ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group.”[1] Partridge (2006) adds that slang often reflects creativity and rebellion, departing from formal linguistic norms to establish distinct cultural or generational identities [2].

In the realm of digital communication, slang has taken on new forms and significance. Digital communication, defined as the electronic exchange of information through devices or technologies (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005), fosters the rapid spread and transformation of slang [3]. TikTok, with its dynamic content and highly interactive user base, acts as a breeding ground for innovative language use. Users invent, popularize, and propagate slang through videos, hashtags, and comment threads, embedding these terms into global online culture.

David Crystal (2013) highlighted that digital communication has significantly expanded the English lexicon with terms like "selfie," "hashtag," and "vlog," all of which originated from social media [4]. TikTok has continued this trend, introducing unique syntax and grammar such as fragmented sentences, nonstandard spellings, and abbreviations. For instance, phrases like "fit check" (outfit check) or "POV" (point of view) exemplify how the platform reshapes linguistic norms to suit rapid and visually driven communication.

In addition, TikTok has contributed to the mainstream adoption of slang phrases like "no cap" (meaning "no lie") and "slay" (used to compliment someone's excellence). These expressions, while initially rooted in specific subcultures, 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 rapidly, reflecting the transient yet impactful nature of digital communication.

Through TikTok, slang has transcended its traditional role of fostering in-group identity and has become a global phenomenon, shaping how users communicate and connect in the digital age. Slang is typically linked to youth culture, pop references, and meme culture, resulting in dynamic, ephemeral linguistic expressions.

In *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language* (2019), Gretchen McCulloch emphasized that internet language is not a degradation but a natural evolution of communication, reflecting how language adapts to meet the needs of new platforms. McCulloch described this evolution as a shift towards informality, creativity, and inclusivity, facilitated by digital platform [5]. TikTok exemplifies these principles, amplifying linguistic evolution through its highly visual and interactive format. Its multimodal nature supports the development of "semiotic bundles," where text, sound, video, and imagery converge to convey complex meanings. These bundles foster creative expressions, enabling users to communicate ideas with humor, nuance, and cultural resonance, often bypassing traditional grammatical conventions. For instance, abbreviated phrases, meme-inspired slang, and emojis often combine to produce layered meanings unique to TikTok culture.



McCulloch also explored the role of generational divides in shaping digital communication. Younger generations, immersed in a digital-first world, demonstrate fluency in these new linguistic norms, adopting informal tones, acronyms, and visual markers as integral elements of communication. By contrast, older generations may exhibit slower adoption rates or limited fluency in these norms, reflecting differing levels of comfort with rapid linguistic change. TikTok accelerates this generational shift by normalizing informal, playful, and multimodal communication styles, particularly among Generation Z and younger Millennials. The platform's viral challenges and trends create shared linguistic experiences that shape digital identity, fostering a sense of community among users.

Furthermore, McCulloch highlighted how the internet allows for the creation of "new orthographies" and "paralanguages." On TikTok, orthographic creativity is seen in the use of phonetic spellings (e.g., "u" for "you," "luv" for "love") and stylistic choices like capitalization for emphasis ("SO GOOD"). Paralanguage—the nonverbal aspects of communication—is also prevalent, with emojis, text overlays, and visual effects functioning as critical components of meaning-making. This shift from text-only to multimedia communication represents a significant development in how language evolves in digital contexts.

David Crystal's analysis in *Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide* (2013) documented the internet's transformative effect on the English language, emphasizing how digital communication introduces new vocabulary, syntax, and stylistic conventions. He identified the emergence of neologisms such as "selfie," "hashtag," and "vlog," which originated from the participatory culture of social media. These terms reflect how digital spaces empower users to create language collaboratively, enriching the lexicon while making it more reflective of online behaviors and cultural trends [6].

Crystal also explored how internet language blurs the boundaries between spoken and written forms, creating a hybrid mode of communication characterized by informality and immediacy. Changes in syntax, such as the prevalence of fragmented sentences, ellipses, and unconventional grammar, align with platforms like TikTok, where brevity and visual storytelling are paramount. For example, captions like "When you realize... 🧐" or "Me trying to explain..." utilize incomplete sentences and emojis to evoke humor and relatability, prioritizing context over traditional grammatical rules.

Additionally, Crystal noted how the internet facilitates the spread of nonstandard spelling and punctuation, often driven by creative and playful intent. On TikTok, this is evident in trends like phonetic spellings ("gorl" instead of "girl") or exaggerated capitalization for comedic emphasis (e.g., "I LITERALLY CAN'T"). Such innovations illustrate the evolving nature of English as it adapts to the digital environment.

Importantly, Crystal emphasized the need for linguistic studies to continuously update their focus, as internet language evolves at an unprecedented pace. He advocated for collaboration between linguists and lexicographers to document emerging trends comprehensively. This recommendation is particularly relevant to TikTok, where language trends shift rapidly due to the platform's algorithmic amplification and global user base. By treating internet language as a valid area of scholarly inquiry, researchers can better understand the dynamic interplay between digital technology and linguistic evolution.

TikTok, as a dynamic and trend-driven platform, has become a powerhouse for creating and popularizing slang. Slang terms originating on TikTok often transcend the platform, influencing mainstream English, including spoken language, social media, and even marketing. This phenomenon illustrates how TikTok acts as a linguistic incubator, fostering creativity and shaping modern communication.

Here are some examples of slang and trends:

1. 'Let them cook'

This slang phrase used as a command to let a person freely do something they are good at, without interference. The phrase is used with various pronoun constructions, such as let him cook or let her cook.

The slang *let him cook* is often attributed to rapper Lil B, who has used it on his social media since at least 2010. Lil B often uses the phrase to mean to let someone do something they are good at, such as making rap music. Lil B often refers to himself as a "master chef" and refers to other talented rappers or people with swag as "cooks." Lil B also used the *cook* slang in his music, such as the song "I Cook" (2010), and created a popular dance move that imitated a person cooking. The slang spread and became popular among sports fans to refer to letting an athlete play without holding them back [7].

2. 'Ate'

The slang term Ate on social media is generally used to show admiration, respect, or praise for someone who has done an excellent job at something. It is often used in the context of fashion, music, or performance but can be used in a variety of other contexts as well.

The phrase Ate in its modern slang usage is believed to have originated in the African American and LGBTQ+ communities in the 2000s. It emerged as a term of admiration and praise used to describe a person, usually a woman, who was performing exceptionally well in a drag show, dance competition, or other forms of performance [8].

Over time, the usage of Ate expanded beyond these communities and gained popularity on social media platforms like TikTok.

3. 'Roman empire'

In 2023, Swedish influencer Saskia Cort encouraged her followers to ask the men in their lives how often they thought about the Roman Empire. As more people



began stitching the video, women started recording their male partners, friends, and relatives to ask them the question. Most men revealed that they think about the Roman Empire every day, which baffled a lot of viewers and caused the trend to go viral on TikTok.

It has since evolved into a catchphrase. Whether it's your favorite movie, celebrity moment, meme, or a personal event, having a "Roman empire" describes something that you think about daily. It's often used to open up a conversation about your favorite topic.

#### 4. 'Delulu'

Delulu is a slang term derived from the word "delusional," originating from the K-pop fan community in 2014. It is often used on social media to describe someone who holds unrealistic or overly idealistic beliefs or fantasies, especially about their favorite celebrities or influencers. It can even refer to those with an unhealthy obsession with a celebrity or crush.

To pronounce "delulu," you can follow the phonetic spelling as "dih-loo-loo." The term became famous in 2022 through TikTok, where it's used to highlight exaggerated fantasies or expectations.

#### 5. 'Winter arc'

It refers to a period where individuals use the coldest, darkest days of the year as a means to refocus, pre-visualize, and arrive at their desired destination. It is a time where every man must face the mental and physical challenges of winter. A time to put your head down and get things done.

**Conclusions.** TikTok, with its vast user base and innovative content model, has emerged as a linguistic and cultural force. Its multimodal approach, blending text, sound, and visuals, fosters a creative environment where language evolves rapidly to meet the demands of digital communication. Slang, often born from specific subcultures, finds a global stage on TikTok, transcending boundaries and reshaping modern English.

As illustrated by terms like "let him cook," "ate," and "delulu," TikTok slang reflects not only creativity but also the platform's participatory culture. These expressions are not merely fleeting trends; they enrich the lexicon, introduce playful syntactic changes, and influence communication in broader social and professional contexts.

Scholars like David Crystal and Gretchen McCulloch have highlighted how internet-driven linguistic shifts reflect the natural evolution of language. TikTok exemplifies this, contributing to the rise of informal, interactive communication styles that resonate particularly with younger generations. The platform also accelerates generational divides in digital fluency, making slang and multimodal storytelling central to modern identity and cultural expression.

Overall, TikTok's impact on language demonstrates the dynamic interplay between technology, culture, and communication. By shaping how we express

humor, identity, and relatability, it underscores the ever-evolving nature of language in the digital age. Researchers, linguists, and educators must continue to study these trends, acknowledging the importance of platforms like TikTok in documenting and influencing contemporary language use.

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