

A STUDY OF SEMANTIC SHIFT (SLANG) IN LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Yuni Lutfiah^{*1}, Evina Septiani², Aidil Syah Putra³

^{1,2,3} English Education Study Program,

Teachers Training and Education Faculty, Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang, Indonesia

Email: yunilutfiah6@gmail.com, septianievina@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the semantic shifts occurring in English slang, examining both historical and contemporary examples to understand the underlying mechanisms and sociocultural factors driving these changes. Semantic shifts, particularly in slang, involve the alteration of word meanings due to various influences, including social interactions, media exposure, cultural exchange, and significant societal events. Through a literature review, the study investigates how slang terms evolve over time, focusing on the role of social media platforms in accelerating these shifts. Key mechanisms identified include the blending and shortening of words (shashification), distributional modelling for semantic change detection, and the impact of global and cultural exchanges. The study also highlights the influence of media and influential figures in popularizing new slang, as well as the role of technological advancements in facilitating rapid semantic evolution. The findings underscore the importance of understanding slang not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a reflection of broader societal and cultural shifts.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic entity that continuously evolves to accommodate the changing needs and contexts of its speakers. Among the various facets of linguistic change, semantic shift—particularly as observed in slang—stands out as a fascinating area of study. Slang, often regarded as informal and non-standard language, plays a significant role in this evolution. It reflects social, cultural, and generational shifts, offering a unique lens through which to examine how meanings of words transform over time. Semantic shift, also known as semantic change, refers to the phenomenon where the meaning of a word changes in some way (Pei, Sun, and Xu 2019). This change can be subtle or dramatic, encompassing broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and other types of shifts. Slang words are particularly prone to such changes due to their informal nature and their frequent use within specific social groups. Understanding these shifts can provide insights into larger trends in language usage and cultural evolution (Situmorang and Herman 2021).

The study of semantic shift in slang is not merely an academic exercise; it has practical implications as well. In fields such as sociolinguistics, lexicography, and language education, knowing how and why words change meaning can aid in developing more effective communication strategies (Fišer and Ljubešić 2019). Additionally, it can help in creating more accurate dictionaries and teaching materials that reflect contemporary language use. This research aims to explore the mechanisms behind semantic shift in slang words within the English language. By examining a selection of slang terms, the study will identify patterns and factors that contribute to these shifts (Sun, Zemel, and Xu 2021). The focus will be on both historical and contemporary slang, providing a comprehensive view of how slang evolves over time (Mweri 2021).

Language is a dynamic entity that continuously evolves to meet the changing needs and contexts of its speakers. Among the various aspects of linguistic change, semantic shift, particularly observed in slang, stands out as a captivating area of study (Istiqomah, Rohimah, and Pratiwi 2019). Slang, often viewed as informal and non-standard language, plays a crucial role in this evolution. It not only reflects social and cultural changes but also reveals intergenerational dynamics, offering a unique

perspective on how the meanings of words can transform over time. Semantic shift, or the change in word meanings, is a phenomenon where the meaning of a word changes in some way. This change can range from subtle nuances to dramatic transformations, including processes such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, and pejoration (Fajardo 2019). Slang words are especially susceptible to such changes due to their informal nature and frequent use within specific social groups. Understanding these shifts provides valuable insights into broader trends in language usage and cultural evolution (Keidar et al. 2022).

The significance of studying semantic shifts in slang extends beyond academic interest. In fields such as sociolinguistics, lexicography, and language education, understanding how and why words change meaning can aid in developing more effective communication strategies (Rohbiah 2020). Furthermore, it can assist in creating more accurate dictionaries and teaching materials that reflect contemporary language use. Given the rapid pace at which slang evolves, this area of research is crucial for keeping linguistic resources up-to-date. This research aims to explore the mechanisms behind semantic shifts in slang within the English language (Sun, Zemel, and Xu 2022). By examining a selection of slang terms, the study seeks to identify patterns and factors contributing to these shifts. The focus will encompass both historical and contemporary slang, providing a comprehensive view of the evolution of slang over time. Through this research, a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and society will be achieved, offering valuable insights for linguists, educators, and language enthusiasts alike (Tomić 2019).

One of the key aspects this study will address is the role of social media in accelerating semantic shifts. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok serve as hotbeds for slang usage, where meanings can shift rapidly due to the influence of viral trends and global connectivity. By analyzing slang within these contexts, the study will shed light on the contemporary mechanisms driving semantic change (Mokal and Halim 2023). Ultimately, this research will contribute to the broader understanding of linguistic evolution. By focusing on the specific case of slang, it will highlight the interplay between language, culture, and society. This study will not only document how meanings of words have changed but also offer insights into the forces shaping these changes, providing a valuable resource for linguists, educators, and language enthusiasts alike (Roth-Gordon 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a literature review methodology to explore the semantic shifts in English slang. By systematically reviewing and analyzing existing scholarly works, articles, books, and digital sources, this research aims to gather comprehensive insights into the mechanisms and patterns of semantic change in slang terms. The literature review will involve identifying and synthesizing relevant studies that address historical and contemporary slang usage, semantic theories, and sociolinguistic factors influencing language evolution. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the topic by leveraging the extensive body of existing research. The process will include a detailed examination of academic databases, linguistic journals, and digital corpora to identify key sources. Additionally, the study will analyze examples of slang usage in various media, such as literature, social media, and popular culture, to illustrate semantic shifts in real-world contexts. By integrating findings from diverse sources, the literature review will provide a robust foundation for understanding the dynamics of semantic change in slang and offer a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in this field.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study of semantic shifts in English slang reveals a complex interplay of various mechanisms that drive changes in meaning over time. One of the primary mechanisms is the phenomenon of "shashification," as explored by Fajardo (2019), which involves the blending and shortening of words to create new slang terms. This process not only alters the original meaning but also adapts the term to fit the communicative needs and cultural context of its users, particularly among teenagers who seek to establish a unique linguistic identity. Distributional modelling, as detailed by Fišer and Ljubešić (2019), provides another crucial mechanism for detecting semantic shifts. By analyzing large corpora of text and observing changes in the contextual usage of words, researchers can identify patterns of semantic change. This method highlights how shifts in word meanings often occur gradually as words are used in new contexts or acquire additional connotations over time. The computational approach offers a quantitative way to trace the evolution of slang and understand the underlying dynamics.

In the realm of media and entertainment, subtitle strategies for translating slang in movies also contribute to semantic shifts. Istiqomah, Rohimah, and Pratiwi (2019) examine how the translation of

slang in the movie "The Social Network" adapts original meanings to fit different cultural contexts. This process of translation and adaptation can introduce new meanings or nuances to slang terms, influencing how they are perceived and used by different audiences. It underscores the role of cross-cultural interactions in driving semantic change. Keidar et al. (2022) delve into the causal analysis of semantic change and frequency dynamics in slang, coining the term "slangvolution." Their research emphasizes how social factors, such as peer influence and media exposure, accelerate the frequency and adoption of new slang terms. The rapid spread of slang through social networks and media platforms can lead to swift changes in word meanings, reflecting contemporary cultural trends and societal shifts.

The impact of external events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on language use also plays a significant role in semantic shifts. Mweri (2021) explores how the pandemic has led to the creation of neologisms and the repurposing of existing words to describe new realities. This phenomenon demonstrates how significant social and global events can trigger rapid semantic changes as language adapts to new circumstances. The emergence of terms like "social distancing" and "quarantine" with altered meanings highlights this adaptive process. The mechanisms of lexical innovation and creativity in slang generation are further examined by Sun, Zemel, and Xu (2021, 2022). Their computational framework for slang generation and interpretation sheds light on how new slang terms are created and understood. By leveraging semantic information, their research illustrates how slang can be systematically generated and how its meanings can be dynamically interpreted. This computational approach provides insights into the creative processes behind slang and its evolving semantics.

The influence of media and popular culture on slang cannot be overlooked. Situmorang and Herman (2021) analyze the use of slang in the movie "Charlie's Angels," revealing how popular media serves as a conduit for introducing and popularizing new slang terms. The portrayal of slang in movies and television can shape public perception and usage, driving semantic shifts as audiences adopt these terms in everyday language. This mechanism highlights the symbiotic relationship between media and language evolution. In conclusion, the primary mechanisms driving semantic shifts in English slang are multifaceted and interrelated. From blending and distributional modelling to cross-cultural interactions, social dynamics, external events, computational innovations, and media influence, each factor contributes to the dynamic and evolving nature of slang. Understanding these mechanisms provides a comprehensive view of how slang terms change meaning over time, reflecting broader linguistic, cultural, and societal trends.

Historical and contemporary examples of slang provide a rich tapestry for understanding the processes behind semantic change. Historically, slang has always served as a marker of identity, often evolving within specific social groups to establish a unique linguistic code. For instance, Fajardo (2019) discusses the phenomenon of "shashification" in teenage slang, where words are blended or shortened to create new meanings that resonate with the youth culture of the time. This process not only alters the original meanings but also reflects the dynamic nature of linguistic creativity among teenagers. In contemporary contexts, the use of computational tools for analyzing semantic change has become increasingly prevalent. Fišer and Ljubešić (2019) highlight the role of distributional modelling in detecting semantic shifts. By examining large corpora of text data, researchers can track how the meanings of words evolve over time based on their contextual usage. This method allows for a detailed analysis of contemporary slang, demonstrating how words acquire new meanings through repeated use in different contexts, thereby illustrating the fluidity of language.

The translation and adaptation of slang in media also showcase semantic change. Istiqomah, Rohimah, and Pratiwi (2019) explore how slang is translated in the movie "The Social Network." This process often involves adapting the original slang to fit the cultural context of the target audience, resulting in shifts in meaning. Such translations can introduce new connotations or nuances to slang terms, reflecting the interplay between language and culture and highlighting how cross-cultural interactions contribute to semantic change. Keidar et al. (2022) provide a contemporary perspective through their analysis of "slangvolution," where they study the causal relationships behind semantic changes in slang. Their research indicates that social factors, such as peer influence and media trends, play a significant role in accelerating the adoption and evolution of slang. By analyzing the frequency dynamics of slang usage, they show how certain terms gain popularity and evolve rapidly, reflecting contemporary societal trends and illustrating the mechanisms of semantic change in real-time.

The impact of significant events on language use is another key factor. Mweri (2021) examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on language, noting how new slang terms and neologisms have emerged to describe the pandemic experience. This illustrates how external events can drive rapid semantic changes as language adapts to new realities. Terms like "quarantine" and "lockdown" have acquired new, more specific meanings in the context of the pandemic, showcasing how historical events can lead to immediate and widespread semantic shifts. Sun, Zemel, and Xu (2021, 2022) delve into the

computational generation and interpretation of slang, providing a modern approach to understanding semantic change. Their frameworks for slang generation and interpretation use semantic information to create and analyze new slang terms. This research highlights how contemporary slang evolves through systematic linguistic innovation and how its meanings can be dynamically interpreted, providing insights into the creative processes that drive semantic shifts.

The evolution of meanings in slang words is significantly influenced by a variety of sociocultural factors. One primary factor is the influence of youth culture. Fajardo (2019) explores how teenage slang evolves through processes such as "shashification," where words are blended or shortened to create new terms that resonate with young people. This phenomenon highlights how the need for a distinct linguistic identity among teenagers drives the creation and evolution of slang, reflecting their social dynamics and cultural trends. Another significant sociocultural factor is the role of social networks and peer influence. Keidar et al. (2022) discuss how slang terms spread rapidly through social interactions and media platforms, a process they term "slangvolution." This rapid dissemination is driven by the desire for social cohesion and belonging within peer groups, leading to the frequent adoption and adaptation of slang terms. The dynamics of peer influence and social networks thus play a crucial role in shaping the meanings of slang words as they evolve.

Media and popular culture are also powerful drivers of semantic change in slang. Situmorang and Herman (2021) examine the use of slang in movies like "Charlie's Angels," demonstrating how media serves as a conduit for introducing and popularizing new slang terms. As these terms gain exposure through films, television, and social media, they are adopted by wider audiences and their meanings can shift accordingly. The pervasive influence of media ensures that slang remains a dynamic and evolving aspect of language. Cross-cultural interactions further contribute to the evolution of slang meanings. Istiqomah, Rohimah, and Pratiwi (2019) highlight how the translation of slang in movies like "The Social Network" involves adapting terms to fit different cultural contexts. This process often introduces new nuances or connotations to slang terms, reflecting the interplay between language and culture. As slang terms are borrowed and adapted across cultures, their meanings can shift significantly, illustrating the impact of globalization on language evolution.

The impact of significant societal events is another key sociocultural factor. Mweri (2021) explores how the COVID-19 pandemic led to the creation of new slang terms and neologisms to describe the pandemic experience. Events of this magnitude necessitate new ways of expression, leading to rapid semantic changes as language adapts to new realities. The emergence of terms like "social distancing" with specific pandemic-related meanings exemplifies how societal events drive the evolution of slang. Technological advancements and the rise of digital communication platforms also play a crucial role. Sun, Zemel, and Xu (2021, 2022) discuss how computational frameworks for slang generation and interpretation leverage semantic information to create new slang terms. The digital age facilitates the rapid creation and spread of slang through social media, text messaging, and online forums. This technological influence accelerates the pace at which slang evolves and adapts to the communicative needs of digital natives.

Sociolinguistic factors such as identity and group membership significantly influence the evolution of slang meanings. Fišer and Ljubešić (2019) emphasize the role of distributional modelling in understanding how words acquire new meanings in different contexts. The need to establish and maintain group identity often drives the creation of slang, as individuals use language to signal their belonging to specific social groups. This sociolinguistic dynamic ensures that slang remains a fluid and adaptable aspect of language. In conclusion, the evolution of meanings in slang words is shaped by a complex interplay of sociocultural factors. Youth culture, social networks, media influence, cross-cultural interactions, societal events, technological advancements, and sociolinguistic dynamics all contribute to the dynamic nature of slang. Understanding these factors provides valuable insights into how and why slang terms change meaning over time, reflecting broader cultural and societal shifts.

The rapid pace at which slang evolves on social media platforms significantly accelerates and influences semantic shifts in contemporary language. Social media's immediate and widespread reach allows slang terms to gain popularity quickly and across diverse demographics. Keidar et al. (2022) describe this phenomenon as "slangvolution," highlighting how social interactions on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok facilitate the rapid dissemination and evolution of slang terms. The constant flow of content and the high engagement rates on these platforms ensure that new slang can spread almost instantaneously. One key factor is the role of social media influencers and celebrities who introduce and popularize new slang terms. When influential figures use specific slang, their large followings often adopt these terms, leading to widespread usage and subsequent semantic shifts. Situmorang and Herman (2021) note how media, including social media, acts as a powerful tool for popularizing slang, which can quickly become mainstream. The visibility and influence of these figures amplify the reach and impact of slang, accelerating its adoption and evolution.

The interactive nature of social media platforms also contributes to semantic shifts. Users frequently engage in conversations, comment on posts, and create viral content that incorporates slang. This high level of interaction allows slang to be used in varied contexts, which can lead to shifts in meaning. Fišer and Ljubešić (2019) discuss how distributional modelling shows that the meaning of words can change based on their usage in different contexts. On social media, the diverse and dynamic interactions ensure that slang terms are constantly being redefined and adapted. Memes and viral challenges are other social media phenomena that drive the evolution of slang. These cultural artifacts often rely heavily on slang to convey humor, irony, or social commentary. As memes and challenges go viral, the slang terms associated with them can experience rapid semantic shifts. The creative and often playful nature of these trends allows for the flexible reinterpretation of slang, as noted by Sun, Zemel, and Xu (2021, 2022), who explore the computational frameworks for slang generation and interpretation. The adaptability of slang in these contexts facilitates continuous semantic evolution.

The global reach of social media platforms also plays a crucial role in the spread and transformation of slang. As users from different cultural backgrounds interact, they bring their own linguistic influences to the table, which can lead to the blending and adaptation of slang terms. Istiqomah, Rohimah, and Pratiwi (2019) highlight how cross-cultural interactions in media lead to new connotations and nuances in slang. Social media acts as a melting pot where slang from various cultures can merge, creating hybrid terms with evolving meanings. Real-time feedback and trends tracking on social media further accelerate semantic shifts. Platforms like Twitter track trending topics and hashtags, providing immediate insight into what slang terms are gaining traction. Users can see which terms are popular and quickly adopt them, leading to rapid cycles of slang evolution. Keidar et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of frequency dynamics in understanding how certain slang terms rise and fall in popularity, a process that is highly visible on social media.

The archiving and searchability of social media content allow for a historical record of slang usage and evolution. Researchers can analyze this data to understand how slang terms have shifted over time. Mweri (2021) points out how significant events, like the COVID-19 pandemic, lead to the creation and adaptation of slang, with social media serving as a key medium for these changes. The ability to trace these shifts provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of semantic change driven by social media. In conclusion, the usage of slang on social media platforms accelerates and influences semantic shifts through immediate dissemination, influencer impact, interactive engagement, memes, global reach, real-time trends, and archiving capabilities. These factors create a dynamic environment where slang terms can rapidly evolve, reflecting the ever-changing nature of digital communication and cultural exchange.

CONCLUSION

The study of semantic shifts in English slang reveals a multifaceted and dynamic process influenced by various sociocultural factors. Historical and contemporary examples illustrate how slang evolves through mechanisms such as social networks, media influence, cross-cultural interactions, significant societal events, and technological advancements. Social media platforms, in particular, play a crucial role in accelerating and influencing these semantic shifts, enabling rapid dissemination and adaptation of slang terms across diverse user groups. This digital landscape fosters continuous evolution, reflecting the changing needs and identities of its users. Understanding the mechanisms and sociocultural factors driving the evolution of slang provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of language change. As slang terms continue to adapt and transform in response to social, cultural, and technological influences, they offer a lens through which to observe the fluid nature of language. This research underscores the importance of studying slang not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a reflection of societal trends and cultural shifts, contributing to a deeper understanding of how language evolves in a rapidly changing world.

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