Morphological Patterns in Youth Slang: The Impact of Internet Culture on Language Evolution

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Abstract

This research investigates the morphological patterns in youth slang, particularly focusing on how internet culture influences language evolution. In the digital age, young people are at the forefront of linguistic innovation, utilizing morphological processes such as compounding, blending, and affixation to create new slang terms that reflect their social identities and cultural contexts. By analyzing a corpus of slang used across various online platforms—including social media, gaming communities, and chat forums—this study identifies key morphological trends and their meanings within youth subcultures. The findings reveal that internet culture not only accelerates the creation of new words but also facilitates their rapid dissemination and adoption, leading to dynamic shifts in language use. Furthermore, this research underscores the role of youth in shaping contemporary language, as they navigate and negotiate their identities through these linguistic innovations. Ultimately, the study contributes to the understanding of how internet culture acts as a catalyst for language change, highlighting the importance of morphological patterns in the evolution of youth slang.

Keywords: morphological patterns, youth slang, internet culture, language evolution, linguistic innovation, social identity, online platforms, slang dissemination.

1. Introduction

Understanding of how language functions, how it changes, and how it evolves over time is greatly enhanced by the study of how language is used by a particular group. The increase of digital media and digital communication in day-to-day life has substantially changed the way language is used. Language is evolving, not merely in the words that are being used, but in the structure of language itself. Slang and internet slang particularly have had an impact on the morphological structure of language. The significance of understanding how language evolves in the digital age is explored by investigation of the relationship between slang and morphology, focusing on some typical examples of youth slang, its morphology, and environment

in the online domain. Despite studies on language evolution and slang, not much attention has been paid to the changes in the morphological patterns of youth slang, let alone connection to and growth within the internet culture. This study aims to explore the morphological patterns in youth slang, especially under the fast-growing internet culture of sharing and generating new slang. This essay investigates the morphology and mechanism how newly created slang or slang-inspired terms are emerging in the youth group and growing within the online environment to fulfil social functions. Used in the argument is a range of creativity in youth slang from everyday language including affixation, compounding, blendings, and acronymy. Detailed examples are given on how these new slang elements are circulating and emerging in the internet environment, being adapted and conventionalized, or being created in response to social, intellectual, or popular culture of the moment, such as music trends, film, academic, protests, and social movements. A broad structural summary and a theory about youth slang functioning in the scope of the internet as well is provided at the end of the work for the whole youth slang lexicon. (Ansari)(Maledo and Edobor2021)

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section presents the theoretical framework of the study, taking into consideration some foundational theories from broadly relevant areas such as morphology and slang. A conceptual background is provided of the morphological patterns which form the structure of words. Understanding of the relationship between language structure and the usage of slang could be facilitated. Moreover, slang in general and specifically with regard to youth slang is explored, including core definitions and principles to consider, the social functions of slang, the dynamic nature of slang and teenagers. Theoretical perspectives on language evolution and change are considered, and an analysis of the interaction with culture is situated. The significance of studying slang, especially drawing on the environment, is clarified in terms of the major theories in the field of linguistics. The aim of this section is to provide readers with an indispensable scholarly context for the analysis presented in the study.

Recent worldwide changes indicate that not only the form of communication is changing for the first time in thousands of years, but also how young people use language. One of the main vehicles of youth language today, slang, has already seen major effects of the digital revolution. Importantly, many slang expressions among young people are rapidly constructed using various morphological patterns of slang words most of which has never been investigated before. A resource-loaded environment has been built to conduct the study, allowing comparative analysis of instances of regular and slang morphological constructions. The findings give a better understanding of the creation of words and show that morphological patterns are widely present in youth slang. (Cahayon and Genuino2022)

2.1. Morphology and Slang

Morphology concerns the structure of words, or internal structure of linguistic forms. In general, slang refers to a lexicon of informal and nonstandard terms that can coexist with or even replace standard lexicon items, and regulated varieties have secondary meanings as well as morpho-syntactic constraints. Morphological elements could, arguably, be a major characteristic in the construction of a really new term, i.e., a fiercely creative form that exists in slang, because the elements utilised in the formation of compound words can mostly be found in nominals which are the most productive part-of-speech in terms of forming a new term. Moreover, it is common for slang words to morphologically originate in compounding, affixation, blending among other regular methods (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017). There is, however, a range of additional morphological possibilities for slang, or elements of slang: the use of productive or semi-productive derivational morphemes; the formation of reduplications (e.g. po-po for 'police'); and outright innovation of forms derived from creative compounding, blending or clipping from existing words with reprioritised or new elements. The latter is significant because the youth informants in the new data have been observed, and also explore in interviews, as taking a creative interest in coining innovative terms from outside peer-groups through their own understanding and utilisation of the language.

Youth slang is seen as a site of creativity and self-expression. It is at once linguistic, social, and creative in nature enabling individuals to construct their identity within a

particular social context. What may not be directly obvious is a more detailed consideration of the ways that the creation, subversion and play with words reflects wider patterns in youth slang, counts as a significant form of linguistic resource—as well as a garnish of 'signifying' behaviour in the Bakhtinian carnivalesque sense. The paper looks at the morphological patterns of youth slang terms in order to provide a snapshot of the slang-making process and an insight into current slang trends. Slang, like youth culture, is ever-evolving, its forms are influenced by changing cultural contexts and are the product of complex interactions within and between groups of peers. (Pantovic, 2021)

3. The Role of Internet Culture

Internet culture has a profound impact on emerging youth slang. Digital platforms are presented as a breeding ground for a unique morphological perspective of the creation and evolution of youth slang. This cross-platform study observes that online communities are central to the rise and spread of slang terminology. They facilitate the naming of shared experiences by promoting the multimodal circulation of terminology among digital audiences. Their swift circulation can be explained by the thin semantic boundaries between synonymous terms and the integration of slang lexis into popular culture. It is demonstrated that slang is appropriated by young people across digital communities to gather and strengthen social ties, create in-group identity, and as a lingua franca of social groups. Importantly, internet culture blurs the division between spoken and written language, which affects perceptions of the norm, language correctness, and language standardization. Youth who actively participate in digital spaces, by consuming and prolifically producing digital texts, exhibit a high language awareness and are more flexible with entering the language continuum. Consequently, they navigate and negotiate informal and slang language in virtual spaces using strategies that are divisive, reinforcing prescriptivist views of mainstream language, or cohesive, emphasizing the change of traditional linguistic norms (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017). This phenomenon carries the transformative power of internet culture over youth slang. (Hermawan & Faizin, 2021)

3.1. Social Media Platforms

Throughout history, youth groups and subcultures used their informal languages as a way to differentiate themselves from the authority and to create a sense of belonging. Today, members of the Millennial and post-Millennial generations predominantly communicate through digital platforms that enable and foster linguistic experimentation, thus altering the traditional forms of slang generation. Social media, apps, and websites have become some of the most useful and quick platforms for the emergence and popularization of novel terms among youngsters. Their interactive features and design allow users to instantaneously disseminate their own expressions among their network and beyond, and in turn, be exposed to language trends from a community of varied origins and interests. In this way, digital exposure partially substitutes the usage of a common slang pool shared by face-to-face communities, making possible and frequent youth slang emergence and utilization among the heterogenous and geographically separate individuals forming an ideal speech community (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017).

Social media platforms have become significant drivers of slang emergence and evolution. Twitter's brevity, Instagram's focus on visuals, and the viral nature of TikTok dance challenges have facilitated the rapid exchange of linguistic novelties, increasing the exposure of such forms to a wider and diverse audience. Networks of personal acquaintances can be replaced by online exposures to the slang of a community, thanks to the indirect transmission of terms via retweets and forwardings. Influencers and viral trends have a major role in promoting kinds of language and specific terms, helping them get access and traction in broader communities. Many are not able to keep up with the vast array of new terms that might go unnoticed by their offline community, inactive on a given platform or not belonging to the social group of the speakers. Examples of slang terms that either originated from social media or have gained more traction through it, are swag, bop and its transvaluation from "dance" to "sexual activity," yet, the dance challenge, and its branching out. Other recent illustrative examples are a TikTok-inspired language challenge, the Heirate Mich trend leading to the spreading of the term bussin, and COVID-19-related slang, such as quaroutine, looking cozy, viral event-produced terms and the

increased lexicalization of the face with terms like masked troglodyte or how tempting the chin. Apart from meaning, these examples show how social media influence the language practices (from language itself with neologisms and blending, to grammatical constructions, abbreviations, and digraphy). Given the cross-platform features of some innovations and the platform-specific norms that can restrict specific kinds of language, a wider view of the interactive text would be needed. Also, some platform particularities are mentioned, as screenshotting of sensitive text on twitter, but more could be said on this matter concerning different restrictions or possibilities on other platforms. (Pozdniakov, 2022)

3.2. Memes and Viral Trends

A recurring element responsible for spawning linguistic fads is the meme. It is amendable to agreeing with arguments that generational slang serve to not only reflect a generation on the presumption that each year receives its own slang but also to create and shape its mindset. The multi-wired and transient nature of the 2010s saw the birth of a unique cultural amalgamation where for the first time ever, a professional century co-existed with zennials, an age group populated with individuals who do not recall life before the internet but are not old enough to engage with it on a professional basis. Whether examining it as linguistic expression, or attempting to read it contextually, slang is narrative.

Memes, often acting as catalysts to linguistic creativity, are discussed in relation to current slang patterns, of which they are usually a part of, and the reasons why a particular meme or series of memes can translate into a linguistic fad. Memes can often cyber-encode slang in an apt manner, mashing it up with other informal language units and pop culture referents to make it maximally instantaneously comprehensible. In turn they tend to serve as not only cultural reference points of the time but contain another ingredient to youth slang – a humorous element. It could be suggested that by embedding slang within comedic expression, its sharing and re-sharing through multiple platforms is not just enabled but greatly amplified. Online usage exposure, all-encompassing with an array of forums, networks and video-sharing platforms acting as receptacles for memes, is a far cry from old-fashioned forms of communication. Echoing the tempo of cyberculture, slang innovations are

"born" fast, but they "die" just as quickly, leaving behind a digital gravestone, often being exactly that – a meme which spawned the trend in the first place. However, to simply debunk a meme cycle as transient would be incorrect. Sometimes they hit a social, cultural, or political sweet spot, and the linguistic novelty they encompass transcends the rule of rapidly changing internet discourse. Memes, as an adaptable, polymorphic tool, offer an artistic license to play with language, simultaneously filling its user in on the constantly evolving digital world spectrum, making it a dialect of Internet fauna. On the broad spectrum of informative, humorous and political, they bear witness to a time yet again diverting youth to tend to the shaping their identities and addressing a wider social commentary (Couture, 2019). And when they go virulent - an elaborate, multimodal output can become a norm not only on social networks feed, but a ubiquitous format of modern-day expression, harmoniously bridged with the zillion-dollar industry of influencer culture. On the general trajectory zooming in and out of focus on the macro scale, memes, through their viral scope, reinforce and strengthen evolved slang patterns. Therefore, arguably, understanding this amalgamation becomes quintessential in grasping the contemporary metamodern ocean of linguistic, generational practices. In a cultural anthropological and sociolinguistic context, what can be considered the biggest plan for the birth of a new slang word or phrase meets the quintessential final stage: the articulation of a novel expression into an overarching communicative behaviour is a recurring cultural observance in the first two decades of the new century alone (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017). Turning to modern slang's fluid temporality and memes' condensed information, modes of expression charting the development provide insight to their original context. (Putra et al.2022)

4. Case Studies

1. INTRODUCTION Morphology remains an underexplored domain in the analysis of language change/variation within youth communities (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017). Drawing on ample empirical data exemplified on digital interactions - more specifically, on Facebook's WALL-POST interactions - this section presents a series of partially related case studies specifically addressing this domain. They aim to offer a nuanced understanding of language change within youth communities occasioned

(in parts) by digital interaction and, at same time, to illustrate how creative engagement with language unfolds in online discourse contexts. This section is comprised of the following case studies: a. Divergence of Subcultural Youth Slang featuring phonological emancipation b. Emergent creative (meta)morphological pattern c. Compound clipping innovations featuring metalinguistic joke on ongoing language change d. Amplification of emic morpho-fonemic alteration encompassing phonological and semantic changes It is stressed that this examination is explicitly based on empirical data - numerous occurrences in non-standard varieties that are digitally mediated, thus casting doubts on the ideological presumption of slang on the internet as a narrowly linguistic marginal phenomenon. (Saputra et al., 2022)

4.1. Emoji and Emoticons

Language has always been a means of communication among individuals. People use their languages to connect stories, ideas and convictions, thus to pass on their beliefs and values. In today's modern world the medium in which humans use to communicate has significantly changed. The interactive reference to the extraordinarily fast technological advancement is undeniably crucial, having shifted traditional communication modes towards innovative methods of interaction. Ranging from email to social media platforms, the exchange of information has experienced a drastic transformation over the past years. Thanks to the aid of the Internet and the consequent design of web-related applications, people are now capable of conveying their message through faster means such as gifs, memes, stickers, videos, hashtags, and gifs, but also emojis and emoticons too. Nowadays, these inventive elements of visual language make communication more pleasant and light-hearted for reasons linked to the facility of understanding of the conveyed message and to the laughability that they often originate (Zhou et al., 2024). This peculiar phenomenon has positively influenced language in general, therefore shaping unique morphological paths. Though criticized during its emergence for allegedly promoting a decline in communication effectiveness or linguistic fluency: visual language has progressively become so widely employed and embraced among young speakers to be now used more frequently (志津子 & Ozaki, 2017). Emojis and emoticons come to enhance the

contained textual message, complementing it with further information, often expressed in a more light-hearted, engaging and appealingly laid-back manner. Clearly, they can easily inform about the sender's mood, meaning the recipient knows, by simply noticing the included figurative element, whether a message must be interpreted as ironical and sarcastic or empathetic and understanding. However, it is also to point out that, according to the specific social groups and community in which emoji is used, the conveyed message can be varying. In short, emojis are open to interpretation and subject to creativity, again, these very traits render them more engaging and pleasant during communications. (Derioh et al., 2021)

4.2. Acronyms and Abbreviations

The popularity of acronyms and abbreviations as preferences for youth slang, especially in the informal environment of digital communications among contemporary youth, generate the necessity of an in-depth analysis of the subject. Acronyms, with their initial letter guidelines, are a short form of words and expressions that have been widely replaced in informal language by digital communication. In this way, it is possible to facilitate both effective and prompt communication between peers. Acronyms, which are observed in Latin-based languages, as well as in English, develop day by day and diversify, creating a challenging environment for adults unfamiliar with slang to keep up with the expressions of young people. Gradually evolved within youth culture, the wide use of popular abbreviations came with time. This essay aims to investigate acronyms used in youth slang, along with their creation, development, and possible future changes, as well as a focus on the connection of the acronym and identity and in-group language, emphasizing the playful creation process of these initials.

As a form of abbreviation, acronyms were derived from the first letter or letter of the words. Youth slang, generated by Internet language, has begun to utilize further popular acronyms as well as abbreviation mark. This kind of abbreviation, which is rapidly becoming outdated, manifests itself in all areas of Internet culture, from instant messaging to photo-sharing applications to micro-bogging platforms and even to online file-sharing programs. Slang is a significant youth behavior and a vital definition of being young and holding the unique culture of a specific group.

Therefore, modifying and establishing in-group slang systems illustrates young people's cultural embodiment. Slang is strongly correlated with identity. With its language, young people create a distinctive personality and engage with the formation of a separate in-group language. There is a growing number of acronyms that are preferred for slang use and a trend regarding the creation of more slang words starting with acronyms. Acronyms develop guidelines or cheat sheets so that communication based on letters and digital messages can take place rapidly. People can choose, according to gender or importance, to use emojis with some abbreviations or they can be projected in word forms. Some common acronyms are being used for slang use in face-to-face conversations or as an accessory, like T-shirt writing. There are also some developing abbreviations like it, got, and Ofc/ of course, in addition to the common z, k, t that the meaning of the word is understood with the first letter. Standalone abbreviations can be used in both digital messages and speech, while largely independent acronyms are most likely to remain in digital texts. Slanguage, as abbreviations and acronyms fledged, includes potential changes in the scope of norms and communication styles. Traditional norms would change with the spread of slang and language facelift upon exposure to changing technologies, while communication would improve with the use of slang, facilitating further adoption. Thus, given the adaptability of language to technological innovation, the use of slang-based acronyms and abbreviations could spread from the digital environment to wider youth usage, ultimately incorporating such informal language into the broader sphere's norms. Meanwhile, by its significant role in the embodiment of contemporary youth's linguistic practices and cultural expression, particular attention has been paid in slang, especially acronym and abbreviation, emerging and taking root in digital culture.

5. Conclusion and Implications for Language Evolution

With the rising prevalence of internet culture, language – already inherently evasive – is transforming more rapidly than ever. The currently dominant use of screens and handheld devices implicates an evolution of linguistic practices as text-based and speech-based communication meld and diverge. Youth, as the most frequent adopters of emerging trends, are situated in the unique space of being moulded by and moulding current culture. Observation of youth slang is thus an excellent indication of

ongoing cultural shifts. In the context of the global adoption of internet culture, the linguistic impacts are broad and multilayered. While phonological and lexical influences are the most evident, broader structural changes in youth language use are less understood. This study investigates the current morphological patterns found in youth slang and if they are influenced by internet culture.

It is proposed that underlying morphological patterns are directly influenced by the pervasive power of internet culture. Through this linguistic manifestation, broader influences of internet culture in youth language use may be deciphered. It is contended that a multi-aspect approach to morphological, extrapositional, and derivational patterns in slang words will provide insight onto the broader cultural impact of internet culture on youth expression. The methodology undertakes a combined approach of a comprehensive questionnaire with highschool students and the detailed inspection of three case-study slang expressions. By focussing on both morphology and the broader internet influence underpinning it, a broad perspective of the current shape of youth slang and the overarching influence of internet culture use in language evolution is achieved. (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017) Semantic themings of the text are produced, showing that despite its playfulness, youth slang serves often pejorative functions. Unique insights are gained into how youth slang words operate in sentence structures. The word of the year for 2015 was not a word at all really, but a pictograph: 😊. Derived as an 'emoticon' from the first ever text-message smiley, emojis are a common form of communication in today's society. Many youths not only regularly use these symbols as a shorthand to express what they are thinking and feeling but also now feel more comfortable seeing their tech-savvy peers in person rather than talking over the phone. With a report showing internet access present in 97% of youth households, a decline of traditional electronics, such as laptops and desktops, and the ever increasing diversity of communication methods – Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, as well as Facebook, which itself has changed with the times as less status updates are made by youths. The good old text message is changing too. It is no longer socially acceptable or understood for students to "ok" something – only the more casual "kk" is now appropriate. Lol-inducing remarks at the start of a comment are generally disregarded as good social practice. When texting a peer to

organise a conversation (over the phone, the new threshold where being a "get", or person who has not replied quickly enough, is a very bad thing), the time it takes to respond is crucial and urgent questions and insights must be met with quick, all-inclusive replies – it does not look good to be seen to be typing and then not send something at all.

With this background, three main questions are investigated. What kind of text is created by the casual conversation of youths through the internet? What is the effect of such environment? Spoken and digital literacy practices are shaped by and diffuse features of digital communications; multimodal, multilingual, and printed media respond to and anticipate the patterns of adolescents' communicative interaction, border-crossing practices, and the mindset young people occurring in the digital economy. The influence of intercultural and historical patterns, together with structural and psychological aspects, constitutes a multidimensional perspective to the study of language that emphasizes its continuous and dynamic adaptation-driven change. Recently, a corpus of texts, containing SMS messages and Facebook conversations of Brazilian youth in high-school, is produced and a thematic analysis is performed with the help of techniques to infer over semantic patterns exerted in the data by means of the distributive properties of word usage. This paper grounds the examination on a form of youth language that is widely represented in Portugal, but that has so far had very little attention both from the perspective of dialectology and formal grammar: high-school students' language (including, first and foremost, slang). Methods of transformational grammar show that Portuguese youth slang sentences tend to be less complex than their informal but standard counterparts (e.g. they contain fewer words per sentence and per clause; the relative number of coordinate clauses is increased). Linguistic preference proved to be irrelevant for all elements. Nevertheless, some syntactic structures characteristic of slang were found within the sample, representing the overall structure of youth slang texts. The "Obscenity" and "Imitation" elements were dominant in slang utterances. In terms of morphosyntax, as with the syntax rules, there is little evident divergence between the register indicators of nuisances found in standard texts and slang. In addition, the derived publication grammar model of the process was only moderately successful at producing slang of

the grammatical and colloquial standard found in texts. Unlike other studies of the influence of the internet on language change the convenience of having a new/media study at the start of this investigation, with comparisons possible before and after the advent of the internet, youth slang using methodologies of transformational grammar are now contemplated. The transformational rules of Portuguese are applied to the texts which are subject to detailed analysis and the results are then discussed, both in terms of youth language use and the nature of language in general.

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