

Evaluating the Evolution of the English Language Based on Slang Terminology Used on TikTok

Abigail Mackey

Faculty: Mythili Menon

Department of English, Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

INTRODUCTION: Social media usage is a recent, yet normalized factor in the lives of people young and old. With this newfound ability to interact and communicate with people all around the world, various linguistic developments have occurred to enhance the experience of digital conversation. Most notably, slang has developed in such a way that it could be indicative of how language is developed and what is considered meaningful or not.

PURPOSE: This study will evaluate the perception of slang terminology seen on the massively popular social media site TikTok and whether or not said terms are appropriate in certain contexts. This is alongside some terms that have existed for years, and that show signs of entering the English lexicon as formal, or 'standard' English, despite their former standing as immature slang.

METHODS: A selection of slang terminology seen on TikTok will be provided using two Likert scales and participants will be asked to determine whether terms are understood as a slang term, a standard/usual term, or both, as well as whether they are appropriate to use in certain contexts. Then, participants will evaluate a selection of sentences and determine whether the sentences are grammatical or not.

RESULTS: Every term presented to the participants were noted as being understood in some fashion, and semantic analysis revealed that sentences intended to be grammatical or ungrammatical were typically noted as such. Further analysis revealed that older terms [wanna] and [gonna] could be going through significant morphological change, while less popular terms might be used infrequently due to instances of usage considered appropriate being hyper-specific.

CONCLUSION: Linguistic evolution is occurring first via morphological and semantic means, and primarily in younger generations. While face-to-face conversation is still the best way to solidify novel language, language that is discovered on-screen and reproduced in physical conversation can become assimilated and readily understood, no matter how much they stray from formal English, and are often preferable in familiar company.