INTERNET SLANG AND LEXICAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH: EVIDENCE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract. The rapid development of social media has significantly influenced the English language, particularly its vocabulary. Digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Reddit, and YouTube have become major sources of lexical innovation, where new words, abbreviations, acronyms, and expressions are created and spread worldwide within a short period. This study examines the influence of internet slang on lexical change in contemporary English by analyzing the formation, functions, and dissemination of new lexical items across social media platforms. The research employs descriptive, comparative, and semantic analysis to investigate the linguistic features of internet slang. The findings indicate that social media accelerates the creation of neologisms, semantic shifts, lexical borrowing, clipping, blending, and acronym formation. Furthermore, many internet slang expressions gradually move beyond online communication and become part of everyday spoken and written English. The study concludes that internet slang has become one of the primary driving forces behind lexical change in modern English and reflects ongoing technological, cultural, and social developments.
Keywords: Internet slang, lexical change, social media, English vocabulary, neologisms, digital communication.

Introduction. Language continuously evolves in response to social, cultural, and technological developments. Among the most influential factors shaping modern English is the widespread use of social media. Digital communication has transformed the way people interact, creating new linguistic patterns and introducing innovative vocabulary into everyday communication.

Internet slang refers to informal words, abbreviations, acronyms, and expressions commonly used in online environments. Initially limited to specific online communities, many of these expressions have gradually entered mainstream English. Terms such as LOL, OMG, selfie, hashtag, ghosting, doomscrolling, rizz, simp, and FOMO have become widely recognized by English speakers worldwide.

The rapid diffusion of internet slang demonstrates that lexical change no longer occurs only through traditional social interaction but is increasingly driven by digital communication. Social media users actively participate in creating and popularizing new vocabulary, making online platforms important sites of linguistic innovation.

This article explores the relationship between internet slang and lexical change in contemporary English, focusing on the linguistic mechanisms responsible for vocabulary expansion and semantic development.

Internet Slang as a Source of Lexical Innovation

Internet slang is characterized by creativity, brevity, and communicative efficiency. Users frequently shorten words, create acronyms, blend existing words, or assign new meanings to familiar expressions. These innovations help users communicate quickly while strengthening group identity within online communities.

Several common word-formation processes can be identified.

Acronyms: LOL (Laugh Out Loud), BRB (Be Right Back), IMO (In My Opinion), TBH (To Be Honest)

Clipping: Insta (Instagram), Admin (Administrator), App (Application)

Blending: Netizen (Internet + Citizen), Bromance (Brother + Romance), Infotainment (Information + Entertainment)

Semantic Shift

Existing words often develop new meanings in online discourse. For example, the word ghosting originally referred to ghosts but now describes suddenly ending communication with someone without

explanation. Similarly, viral has expanded from a medical term to describe content that spreads rapidly online.

The Role of Social Media Platforms

Different social media platforms contribute to lexical innovation in different ways.

TikTok has popularized expressions such as rizz, delulu, girl math, and NPC. These expressions spread rapidly through short-form videos and are frequently adopted by younger generations.

On X (formerly Twitter), concise communication encourages abbreviations, hashtags, and creative lexical innovations. Expressions such as ratio, cancel culture, and doomscrolling have become common features of online discourse.

Instagram promotes vocabulary associated with lifestyle, fashion, and visual culture. Terms including selfie, influencer, story, and reel have entered mainstream English.

Reddit contributes specialized vocabulary through discussion communities, introducing terms such as AMA (Ask Me Anything), karma, and OP (Original Poster).

Linguistic Features of Internet Slang

Internet slang demonstrates several important linguistic characteristics.

First, it favors economy of expression by reducing the number of characters required to communicate ideas. Second, it reflects creativity through the formation of novel lexical items. Third, it responds quickly to social and cultural changes, allowing new vocabulary to emerge almost instantly.

Many internet slang expressions initially appear within specific online communities before expanding into general English usage. Some disappear after a short period, while others become permanent additions to the English lexicon.

Discussion

The increasing influence of internet slang illustrates how digital communication has transformed lexical development. Social media enables rapid dissemination of new words across geographical and cultural boundaries. Unlike traditional lexical change, which often develops gradually over many years, internet slang can achieve global recognition within weeks or even days.

Furthermore, internet slang reflects changing social values, technological innovation, and cultural identity. The vocabulary created online often mirrors contemporary issues such as digital relationships, online behavior, mental health, and virtual communities.

Although some linguists argue that excessive use of internet slang may reduce formal language proficiency, others view these innovations as evidence of the flexibility and adaptability of English. Many expressions once considered informal eventually become accepted in dictionaries and academic research.

Conclusion

Internet slang has become one of the most influential factors contributing to lexical change in contemporary English. Social media platforms function not only as communication tools but also as environments where new vocabulary is created, modified, and disseminated worldwide. The processes of acronym formation, blending, clipping, and semantic shift demonstrate the dynamic nature of English vocabulary in the digital age.

As digital communication continues to expand, internet slang will remain a significant source of lexical innovation. Future research may employ corpus linguistics and computational methods to investigate the long-term integration of internet slang into standard English and its influence on global communication.

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