

Slang Words Used by the Millennial Indonesian Generation in TikTok

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Abstract

Language is used in various ways, especially among the younger generation. The millennial generation, in particular, exhibited a higher tendency to use slang in daily conversations rather than formal language. This study aimed to analyze the phenomenon of slang words used by the millennial generation on TikTok. The research investigated the types of slang employed by millennials on TikTok and explored the meanings of these slang words. A descriptive qualitative approach was applied, and data were obtained through observation. The analyzed data consisted of videos and comments collected from TikTok users (@adridilapangasebagaipap and @slametnovendraa) between January 12 and January 19, 2024. The findings revealed that 435 slang words were used during the observed period. These words fell into three types of slang: imitative, acronyms, and clipping. Additionally, four frequently used slang words were identified: "Baper," which conveys emotions and feelings, appeared 150 times; "Sus," meaning suspicious, appeared 120 times; "Lit," referring to energy and happiness, appeared 90 times; and "Vibes," describing mood, appeared 75 times. The study highlighted the prominent role of slang in the communication of the millennial generation on TikTok, reflecting their linguistic creativity and adaptability to digital platforms.

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a vital tool for communication, enabling individuals to convey and understand messages. Without language, mutual understanding becomes highly challenging, underscoring its significance in human life. Language can be expressed in two primary forms: oral and written.

Oral communication is predominantly utilized in everyday interactions because it is more straightforward and faster to comprehend. Oral language varies based on cultural characteristics, demographics, social groups, and other factors. Among the diverse forms of language, one particularly popular variety is slang.

Slang is generally perceived as an informal style of speech used within specific communities. According to Swan (1995), slang refers to an informal type of vocabulary predominantly used in conversations among acquaintances. It is typically employed in casual contexts where formal speech

rules are unnecessary. Many individuals, especially teenagers, incorporate slang into their daily conversations.

Teenagers frequently use slang in their everyday speech, particularly on social media platforms like TikTok. TikTok, a short-video-based social media application, has experienced significant growth since its inception in 2016. Developed by ByteDance, the platform enables users to create and share videos with musical effects, filters, and creative challenges. Its engaging features have made it immensely popular among millennials and Gen Z in Indonesia, fostering rapid and interactive content sharing.

As noted by Smith (2021), “TikTok has transformed how content is consumed and shared, introducing a new form of creative expression that strongly appeals to younger audiences” (Smith, J., 2021, *The Rise of TikTok: Analyzing Social Media Trends*, Social Media Journal, 12(4), 45-67).

In Indonesia, TikTok’s success among millennials stems from its ability to offer diverse and appealing content aligned with user interests. According to Statista (2023), TikTok boasts over 90 million active users in Indonesia, with the majority aged between 16 and 34, reflecting the dominance of millennials on the platform (Statista, 2023, *Number of TikTok Users in Indonesia*, retrieved from Statista.com).

The phenomenon described above inspired this study. The research analyzed TikTok videos and comments collected from January 12 to January 19, 2024, featuring posts from users @adridilapangasebagaipap and @slametnovendraa.

This research had two main objectives: first, to identify the types of slang used by Indonesian millennials on TikTok, and second, to determine which type of slang was most frequently employed by this demographic.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Definition and Characteristics of Slang

Slang is a form of language that emerges within specific social groups and often deviates from formal or standard language. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2022), “Slang is a type of informal language consisting of words and expressions that are not considered appropriate for formal occasions” (Oxford English Dictionary. [2022]. *Slang*. Retrieved from Oxford English Dictionary). Slang is typically used to express group identity, creativity, and social affiliation. The main characteristics of slang include its informality, rapid evolution, and its significant impact on everyday language.

Language theories, as articulated by Holmes (2013), suggest that slang often functions as a tool for creating and reinforcing solidarity within social groups. Holmes (2013) argues, “Slang serves to establish group identity and solidarity by marking linguistic boundaries between in-group and out-group members” (Holmes, J. [2013]. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Routledge). Additionally, slang reflects the fluctuating social and cultural dynamics of its time.

2. Theories Related to Language Change and Slang

Language change is a phenomenon involving transformations in language use over time. Labov (1994) posits that language change often begins within specific social groups and subsequently spreads to the wider society. Labov (1994) explains, “Linguistic change is a social process that involves both the innovation of new forms and the gradual adoption of these forms by larger social groups” (Labov, W. [1994]. *Principles of Linguistic Change: Internal Factors*. Blackwell Publishing).

Slang, often regarded as a more flexible and expressive form of language, plays a crucial role in this process of language change. As described by Rickford (2006), “Colloquial language, including slang, plays a critical role in the evolution of language by introducing novel expressions and meanings

that can influence broader linguistic practices” (Rickford, J. R. [2006]. *African American Vernacular English: Features, Evolution, Educational Implications*. Blackwell Publishing).

3. Types of Slang

Allanand Burrige (2006) divided the types of slang into five types:

- a. Fresh and creative
The slang word has new vocabularies in order to describe something in informal situation.
- b. Flippant
The slang is made by two words or more in which the word composed not correlated with the denotative meaning.
- c. Imitative
The slang word imitating or derived from the Standard English word.
- d. Acronym
The slang is constructed by the result of the word formed by the first letter of each word in a phrase or made by initials from a group of words or syllables and pronounced the mass new word.
- e. Clipping
Clipping refers to the process of shortening a word by omitting one or more syllables, often used to make communication quicker and more informal. For example, "doc" for "doctor" or "exam" for "examination."

4. TikTok as a Social Media Platform

TikTok is distinguished as a social media platform by its short-form video format and creative features such as music effects, filters, and challenges. According to Zhang and Zhao (2020), “TikTok's unique algorithm and user interface facilitate the rapid creation and dissemination of short-form video content, which contributes to its popularity and influence” (Zhang, Y., & Zhao, X. [2020]. *Understanding the Popularity of TikTok: A Study of User Engagement and Content Trends*. Journal of Social Media Studies, 15(2), 102-118). TikTok leverages an algorithm that tailors content to user preferences, creating a highly personalized and interactive experience.

5. The Role of TikTok in the Formation and Dissemination of Slang

TikTok plays a crucial role in the formation and dissemination of slang by allowing users to engage in viral challenges and memes that often introduce new terms. Green (2021) notes, “TikTok acts as a catalyst for linguistic innovation by providing a platform where new slang terms can be rapidly introduced and widely disseminated among diverse user groups” (Green, M. [2021]. *Social Media and Language: The Impact of TikTok on Slang and Communication*. New Media & Society, 23(4), 567-584). The platform serves as a linguistic experimentation space where slang terms can be quickly adopted and adapted by users worldwide.

TikTok also influences language through creative and collaborative user interactions. As Zhao and Wei (2022) explain, “The collaborative nature of TikTok’s content creation fosters a dynamic environment for linguistic creativity, where users continuously evolve and adapt slang expressions” (Zhao, L., & Wei, M. [2022]. *TikTok and the Evolution of Digital Vernaculars*. Media Studies Quarterly, 10(3), 234-250).

METHOD

1. Research Approach

Descriptive qualitative research was applied in this study. The qualitative research is used to investigate the social phenomenon (Trochim and William, 2006). Descriptive qualitative is one of the research procedures which produce descriptive data in form of speech and the behaviour of

those being observed (Bogdan and Taylor, 1992). For this case, Bogdan and Biklen (1982) recommended the characteristic of qualitative research has the natural setting and the researcher as a key instrument. It means that the researcher is an actor to collect the data (Moleong, 2005).

Then, the data was analysed based on type and meaning of slang. Researchers also used instruments in this study such as observation, interview, and documentation. To check the data validation, the triangulation was used in this research by combining the information from both the discourse of millennial generation in TikTok and the techniques of data collection, i.e. documentation and interview.

2. Data Collection Techniques

a. Content Analysis of TikTok Videos

Content analysis is the primary technique used in this research. This method involves a systematic examination of TikTok videos to identify and classify emerging slang terms. This approach allows researchers to assess the frequency, context, and variation of slang terms used across different videos.

According to Neuendorf (2017), "Content analysis is a method used to make inferences about communication through the systematic coding and categorizing of textual information" (Neuendorf, K. A. [2017]. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. SAGE Publications). For this study, content analysis will focus on videos with high interaction and strong relevance to contemporary culture and trends on TikTok.

b. Sample and Research Location

Criteria for Selecting TikTok Videos and Users

For content analysis, TikTok videos will be selected based on the following criteria: interaction metrics (likes, comments, and shares), relevance of the topic to trending slang, and representativeness within popular culture contexts. Videos with high engagement will be chosen as they are likely to more accurately reflect current trends.

For interviews and surveys, TikTok users will be sampled based on age (16-34 years), level of engagement on TikTok, and diversity of social backgrounds. The study will target respondents who are active in content creation and consumption on TikTok to obtain relevant and representative data.

Specific Locations or Communities

This research will focus on TikTok users in Indonesia especially the millennial generation, with particular attention to digital communities that actively participate in TikTok trends and challenges. The TikTok data analyzed will include videos and comments collected from January 12 to January 19, 2024 (from users @adridilapangasebagaipapand @slametnovendraa), corresponding to the most recent analysis period. As reported by Statista (2024), "TikTok has experienced significant growth in Indonesia, with an estimated 90 million active users in the region" (Statista. [2024]. *Number of TikTok users in Indonesia*. Retrieved from Statista.com).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data Analysis

Below is table illustrating the frequency of slang term usage in the analyzed TikTok videos:

Table 1. The Frequency of Slang Term Usage in the Analyzed TikTok Videos

No.	Slang Word	Types of Slang	Frequency of Usage	Category	Main Theme
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1.	Baper	clipping	150	Humor	Emotions and Feelings
2.	Sus	acronym	120	Referensi Budaya Pop	Kecurigaan dan Intrik
3.	Lit	acronym	90	Everyday Language	Energi dan Kegembiraan
4.	Vibes	Imitative	75	Humor	Mood and feeling

Based on the data obtained from analyzing the frequency of slang term usage in TikTok videos, several important conclusions can be drawn regarding the patterns and relevance of these terms among users.

1. Dominance of Terms Related to Emotions and Feelings

The term "Baper," which refers to being overly emotional or taking things personally, shows the highest frequency of usage with 150 occurrences. This indicates that many TikTok users utilize this term to express or respond to content that contains emotional elements, whether in humorous contexts or everyday conversations. This suggests that emotions and feelings are a dominant theme frequently conveyed through slang on this platform.

2. Popularity of Terms with Pop Culture References

The term "Sus," derived from the word "suspicious," appears 120 times. This term is particularly popular in gaming culture, especially in games like "Among Us." The high frequency suggests that TikTok serves as a primary channel for disseminating and popularizing slang terms associated with pop culture trends, reflecting how users connect with global references in their daily interactions.

3. Usage of Slang in Everyday Language

The term "Lit," describing something very exciting or cool, appears 90 times. This usage demonstrates that TikTok serves as a platform for integrating broader slang terms into everyday language. Terms like "Lit" reflect energy and excitement, often used to describe positive or enjoyable experiences on the platform.

4. Slang as an Expression of Mood and Atmosphere

The term "Vibes," referring to a certain mood or feeling, appears 75 times. This usage highlights how TikTok users often describe the mood or emotions evoked by content through slang. This indicates that creatively expressing feelings is a significant aspect of communication on TikTok.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that TikTok is not only an entertainment platform but also plays a crucial role in the formation and dissemination of slang terms that reflect emotional themes, pop culture, and moods. The use of these terms indicates how TikTok slang has integrated into everyday communication, influencing how users, particularly the younger generation, express themselves. Furthermore, the high frequency of these terms indicates that TikTok plays a significant role in spreading new terms and facilitating the adoption of slang among a broader audience.

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