

**Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine**  
**Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv**  
**Educational and Scientific Institute of Philology**  
**Department of English Philology and Intercultural Communication**

**Bachelor's thesis**

**YOUTH SLANG IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES: DIACHRONIC  
APPROACH**

**Victoria Feduniak,**

4th year student of the Education Program

‘English Studies and Translation  
and Two Western European Languages’

Field of science: 03 “Humanities”

Specialty: 035 “Philology”

Supervised by:  
associate professor  
Kateryna Karpova

**«Допущено до захисту»**

Протокол № 11 засідання кафедри англійської філології  
та міжкультурної комунікації від 26 травня 2025 року  
Завідувач кафедри д.філол.н., проф. Алла БЄЛОВА

## АНОТАЦІЯ

**Федуняк В. А. Молодіжний сленг в англomовних країнах: діахронічний підхід. Кваліфікаційна робота на здобуття ступеня бакалавра.**

Дослідження присвячене діахронічному аналізу молодіжного сленгу в англomовних країнах. Актуальність зумовлена швидкими темпами мовних змін у молодіжному середовищі, впливом цифрових технологій і глобалізації на лексику, а також потребою в науковій систематизації процесів оновлення неформального мовлення.

Мета – виявити закономірності розвитку молодіжного сленгу у ХХ–ХХІ століттях, проаналізувати зміни у значеннях, вживанні та сприйнятті окремих сленгових одиниць у часовому і регіональному аспектах. У роботі також окреслено вплив соціокультурних та технологічних чинників на появу і трансформацію сленгових одиниць.

Об'єкт дослідження – сленг як динамічне лексичне явище в англійській мові.

Предмет – зміни в значенні, функціонуванні та сприйнятті молодіжного сленгу в англomовних країнах (США, Велика Британія, Канада, Австралія) у діахронічному вимірі.

У роботі застосовано комплексну методологію: описовий метод, елементи дискурс-аналізу, семантичний та порівняльний аналіз. Теоретичне підґрунтя охоплює праці вітчизняних і зарубіжних лінгвістів, зокрема в галузі соціолінгвістики, молодіжного мовлення та діахронічної лексикографії.

Наукова новизна полягає у спробі поєднати діахронічний підхід із аналізом соціальних тенденцій мовної поведінки молоді, що дозволяє встановити типові моделі семантичних зсувів, класифікувати функції сленгових одиниць та простежити регіональні особливості у вживанні лексики.

У результаті дослідження було опрацьовано 30 сленгових одиниць, простежено їх семантичну еволюцію, виявлено найтипівіші способи словотвору та комунікативні функції, які виконує молодіжний сленг у сучасному англomовному просторі.

**Ключові слова:** молодіжний сленг, неформальна комунікація, лексика, діахронія, семантика, соціолінгвістика, мовна інновація.

## ABSTRACT

**Feduniak V. A. Youth Slang in English-speaking Countries: Diachronic Approach. Bachelor's degree qualification paper.**

This thesis explores the diachronic development of youth slang in English-speaking countries. The relevance of the study stems from the rapid pace of linguistic change among younger speakers, the impact of digital communication and globalization on vocabulary, and the growing need for systematic academic analysis of informal language.

The research aims to identify trends in the evolution of youth slang throughout the 20th and 21st centuries by analyzing semantic shifts, usage changes, and perception across different historical periods and regional contexts. It also addresses the sociocultural and technological factors that contribute to the emergence and transformation of slang expressions.

The object of the study is slang as a dynamic lexical phenomenon in English. The subject is the semantic, functional, and perceptual shifts of youth slang across English-speaking regions, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

The methodology combines descriptive analysis, elements of discourse analysis, semantic study, and comparative methods. The theoretical foundation draws on both Ukrainian and international linguistic scholarship in the fields of sociolinguistics, youth language, and diachronic lexicography.

The novelty of the research lies in combining a diachronic linguistic approach with an analysis of youth communicative behavior to uncover typical patterns of slang development. The study categorizes slang units by their communicative functions, semantic transformations, and regional variation.

A total of 35 slang terms were analyzed, with attention to their etymology, semantic evolution, dominant word-formation patterns, and communicative functions in contemporary informal English.

**Keywords:** youth slang, informal communication, lexicon, diachrony, semantics, sociolinguistics, language innovation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. SLANG AND LANGUAGE CHANGE: A REVIEW OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES.....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1. Definition of slang and its linguistic characteristics.....	9
1.2. The role of youth in the development of slang.....	11
1.3. The Concept of Diachronic Linguistics.....	13
1.4. Factors Influencing Slang Evolution.....	15
1.5. The Functions of Slang in Communication.....	16
1.6. Classifications of Slang.....	18
<b>2. RESEARCH AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SLANG TERMS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
2.1. Semantic change and societal perception of slang in diachronic perspective.....	26
2.2. Methodological framework for the diachronic study of slang.....	42
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Appendix 1. Table of word formation processes of analyzed slang terms.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Appendix 2. Table of primary communicative functions of slang terms.....</b>	<b>50</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Language is an evolving system that is shaped by many environments such as technological, social and cultural in which it exists and operates. One of the most vibrant examples of this evolution is youth slang—a form of linguistic expression that can give us a view of generational identity and change. This thesis explores how slang terms used by youth changed overtime, serving as markers of both cultural dynamics and linguistic innovation.

Firstly, the **relevance** of this study lies in the fact that language is not a static construct, but a dynamic system that is constantly adapting to the changing communicative needs of its users. One of the most striking indicators of this evolution is slang, a linguistic phenomenon that reflects current social trends, group identity and changing cultural values. Slang is an intersection of novelty and informality, often appearing in spoken language and then gradually penetrating written texts, the media and even dictionaries. Although historically slang has been marginalised in linguistic research due to its ephemeral and informal nature, recent research has begun to recognise slang as a legitimate and rich area of sociolinguistic study.

The role of youth slang in shaping language trends is a significant one. As agents of cultural and social change, young people frequently occupy a vanguard position in the process of defining new expressions, existing words and meanings through creativity, rebellion and identity. The language choices of young people are shaped by a rapidly changing environment, including technological developments, popular culture, social media and globalisation. This makes youth slang an excellent tool for monitoring language change in real time.

The study of youth slang is of particular importance as it provides insight into the linguistic creativity, social identity and cultural values of the younger generation. Unlike standard language, which often reflects institutional norms, youth slang emerges organically as a result of everyday communication and is characterised by accelerated innovation, flexibility and expressiveness. The role of slang in this

context goes beyond mere communication; it also functions as a symbol of group affiliation, rebellion and intergenerational differences.

It is widely acknowledged that young people exhibit a high degree of sensitivity to technological and social change. Consequently, their use of slang can frequently serve as an early indicator of general linguistic trends. The study of the slang of young people provides researchers with valuable insights into the evolution of language in response to a changing cultural landscape, as well as the creation, adoption and transmission of new lexical items across time and space.

Youth slang, in particular, serves as a key driver of linguistic innovation. As agents of cultural and social change, young people frequently occupy a forefront position in the process of defining new expressions, existing words and meanings through creativity, rebellion and identity. The language choices of young people are shaped by a rapidly changing environment, including technological developments, popular culture, social media and globalisation. This makes youth slang an excellent tool for monitoring language change in real time.

The **object** of this research is youth slang as sociolinguistic phenomenon.

The **subject** of this research is the diachronic transformation of youth slang across English-speaking countries while focusing on semantic shifts, changes in usage and connotations.

This study specifically focuses on the diachronic analysis of youth slang in English-speaking countries, with the purpose of tracing the development of selected slang expressions across different historical periods and regional varieties. While examining the evolution of selected slang expressions from different time periods and regions, this study seeks to answer the following **research questions**:

- How has youth slang evolved over time across English-speaking countries?
- What sociocultural and technological factors have influenced the changes in youth slang?
- In what ways do regional variations in slang reflect broader cultural and linguistic trends?

The **aim** of this study is to investigate how youth slang has evolved across different time periods. The following **objectives** are:

- To compile a representative sample of slang terms used by youth across English-speaking countries;
- To identify semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic changes over time;
- To explore regional variation and the influence of digital communication on slang usage;

The study contributes to the growing body of research on specifically informal language, youth sociolinguistics, and the mechanisms of lexical change in modern English as it changes rapidly.

The **structure** of the work consists of the following parts: introduction, two chapters, conclusions, and references.

The **material** used in the study includes online slang dictionaries, corpora, media sources, and digital platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, and Reddit, where slang usage is prevalent and evolving.

The methodology is based on qualitative and descriptive linguistic analysis, particularly diachronic and comparative approaches. These methods are used to track the semantic and social transformation of slang terms across time and space.

# 1. SLANG AND LANGUAGE CHANGE: A REVIEW OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

## 1.1. Definition of slang and its linguistic characteristics

Slang is considered to be the one of the most complex and fluid linguistic phenomenon that resists any rigid kinds of classifications. While no single definition is able to fully encapsulate its scope, slang is most commonly understood as an informal and often subversive form of language that emerges within specific social or age groups. According to Bethany K. Dumas and Jonathan Lighter (1978), slang can be identified through a set of defining features: it is typically lower in prestige than standard language, conveys familiarity or solidarity, and frequently violates norms of polite or formal discourse. Linguistically, slang can be characterized by several traits. Phonologically, it may include various clipped forms of common words (e.g., *bro* for *brother* or *sis* for *sister*), blends (e.g., *hangry* from *hungry* + *angry*), or many rhyming constructions (e.g., *okay-dokey* for *okay*). Morphologically, slang relies on various word formation processes such as compounding (*squad goals*), conversion (*ghost* as a verb), and borrowing (*bae*, possibly from African American Vernacular English or Danish *bæ*) (Matthews, 2014). Semantically, slang often involves metaphor, irony, exaggeration, or semantic shift, where existing words acquire new meanings specific to youth, generation or subcultural contexts (Crystal, 2003).

From a functional perspective, slang fulfills a number of roles in the communication process. The formation of in-group solidarity, the expression of shared values or experiences, and the establishment of markers for generational or subcultural identity are all effects of this phenomenon (Eble, 1996). Furthermore, slang facilitates the challenging of established linguistic norms, the engagement in linguistic play, and the creative response to evolving social dynamics. As Coleman (2012) observes, slang not only reflects group-specific expression but also serves as a historical chronicle, with its meanings evolving and shifting over time.

The informal nature of slang, its mutability, and its reliance on social context have historically made it resistant to institutional codification. In contrast to standard or literary language, slang rarely adheres to fixed grammatical rules or semantic

conventions, rendering its definition, documentation, and regulation challenging. Expressions of this nature frequently emerge spontaneously within specific communities, rapidly gaining popularity before becoming outdated or superseded by more recent forms. Consequently, colloquial language is subject to recurrent and capricious cycles of emergence, mainstream adoption, and eventual obsolescence. These brief life cycles – often termed "linguistic fads" – present considerable challenges to conventional linguistic analysis, which generally depends on more stable, standardised, and formally documented language data.

Moreover, the ephemeral and socially marked nature of slang has historically contributed to its marginalization in academic and institutional discourse. For centuries, slang was viewed as a form of linguistic corruption – a “contaminated” register that degraded the purity of standard language. Prescriptive grammarians and early lexicographers frequently dismissed slang as vulgar, indecent, or even dangerous, associating it with the speech of criminals, the working class, or rebellious youth. As Coleman (2012) notes, slang was long perceived as “dirty language” – not in the literal sense, but in its challenge to linguistic authority and social norms. This stigmatization contributed to its exclusion from formal education, dictionaries, and academic studies until relatively recently.

However, contemporary linguistics has increasingly recognized the cultural, social, and communicative significance of slang. Scholars now argue that its resistance to formalization is not a deficiency but a feature that reveals the flexibility and creativity of language in use. Slang's fluidity allows it to adapt quickly to shifting cultural references, social identities, and communicative needs, making it a powerful tool for group solidarity, expressive depth, and identity formation. Rather than viewing slang as linguistic “debris,” modern sociolinguistic approaches emphasize the need for context-sensitive, function-oriented frameworks that account for both its linguistic structures and its social meanings. A recent comparative study by Nikolaieva et al. (2023) emphasises on the complexity of slang as a linguistic phenomenon highlighting its specific cultural traits and resistance to direct translation. The authors also propose a classification of slang not only by thematic

and morphological factors but also sociolinguistic relevance and pragmatic function. This shift has paved the way for serious scholarly inquiry into slang's diachronic development, regional variation, and role in youth-driven language change.

### **1.2. The role of youth in the development of slang**

Youth play a pivotal role in the ongoing evolution of language, particularly in the creation and diffusion of slang. Linguists have long observed that adolescents and young adults are at the forefront of lexical innovation, often acting as linguistic trendsetters within their communities (Eckert, 2000). This tendency arises from their developmental stage: young people are in the process of forming social identities, experimenting with self-expression, and establishing independence from adult norms. As such, language becomes a tool for asserting autonomy, negotiating group membership, and resisting mainstream authority.

One of the key reasons for youth-led linguistic innovation lies in the sociopsychological function of language in adolescence. Language is often perceived just as a tool for communication for people. Language is actually used not merely to communicate, but to perform identity, signal group membership, and establish social hierarchies. According to Eble (1996), slang operates as a form of in-group communication – a flexible and adaptive form of language that allows young people to express their solidarity with peers while excluding outsiders. Through the use of slang, youth is able to establish micro-communities of practice in which specific terms or phrases acquire social value. The act of knowing and using the “right” slang expressions at the right time is an assertion of social belonging and cultural fluency.

Moreover, youth slang is a powerful tool for challenging linguistic and social conventions. As Bucholtz (1999) argues, youth often engage in “radical vernaculars” – linguistic practices that deviate from standard norms as a form of resistance to authority, society and adult expectations. Slang, therefore, becomes both a creative and subversive practice, enabling young speakers to reject mainstream ideologies while shaping alternative forms of expression rooted in their own experiences, subcultures, and affiliations. As Kovalchuk (2020) emphasises, slang has a profound sociocultural function as well as a linguistic one, it reflects the identity, affiliations

and communicative values of specific social groups, particularly young people. She notes that youth slang helps to shape a distinct worldview and language behaviour model, acting as both a response to and an expression of rapidly changing social realities.

In today's digital era, the influence of youth on language innovation has intensified. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat serve not only as communication tools but as fields for real-time language evolution, where new slang expressions are coined, tested, and spread with unprecedented speed. Digital spaces allow for the co-existence of multiple dialects, registers, and cultural influences, resulting in a richly hybridized lexicon that defies geographic boundaries (Androutsopoulos, 2006). For example, terms like *yeet*, *sus*, *simp*, *no cap*, *slay* and *rizz* have emerged, evolved, and entered widespread usage within a few years or even months, propelled almost entirely by youth communities online.

Music, internet and pop culture further enhance the innovative role of youth in language. Hip-hop and rap, in particular, have been instrumental in shaping youth slang globally, with terms like *bling*, *dope*, and *flex* originating in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and later being appropriated and adapted by broader youth cultures (Cutler, 2007). These terms have not only semantic meaning but also cultural weight, as they reflect issues of race, class, and identity that are central to young people's self-expression. The media facilitate the rapid spread of slang across communities and nations, making youth slang both local and global.

Another significant factor contributing to youth linguistic innovation is transience. The period of adolescence is characterised by perpetual transformation in multiple domains, including interests, social groups, emotional dynamics, and the social environment. The language used to communicate within these groups reflects the aforementioned instability; slang terms are often short-lived and rapidly evolve as new trends emerge. This ephemeral nature is a key factor in maintaining the vibrancy and constant evolution of slang. However, it also poses significant challenges to its study, as many expressions emerge and disappear before they can be systematically documented in formal corpora (Coleman, 2012; Amari, 2010).

Young people are at the centre of linguistic innovation not only because they often use slang, but also because they actively shape and rethink the boundaries of informal language. Their language practices reflect broader processes of identity formation, group dynamics, media influence and technological change (Tagliamonte, 2016; Fobar, 2024). The analysis of youth slang is therefore not only a study of language, but also of social behaviour, cultural values and generational change.

### **1.3. The Concept of Diachronic Linguistics**

Diachronic linguistics, also referred to as historical linguistics, is the branch of linguistic study that focuses on how languages change over time. Unlike synchronic analysis, which examines a language at a specific point in time, diachronic analysis explores the evolution of linguistic features – including phonetics, morphology, semantics, syntax, and vocabulary – across various historical periods (Murray, 2017). As noted by Saussure (1916), the founder of structural linguistics, the distinction between synchronic and diachronic perspectives is crucial for understanding both the structure and development of language systems.

The diachronic approach involves tracing the transformation of linguistic elements over time, investigating processes such as semantic shift, lexical obsolescence, borrowing, sound change, and grammaticalization (Campbell, 2013). In the context of slang, these processes are particularly prominent, as slang terms often undergo rapid semantic and pragmatic shifts. Words may start out with a very specific or subcultural meaning and gradually expand, shift, or fade from usage altogether (Coleman, 2012). For example, the slang term *cool*, once referring primarily to temperature evolved through youth speech in the mid-20th century to denote approval, style, or emotional detachment (Partridge, 2008). We can also take a look at the slang term *crush*, primarily referring to the act of breaking or destroying something evolved also in 20th century to express strong romantic feelings towards someone – a semantic shift that reflects both linguistic and cultural change (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

Diachronic linguistics is the scientific study of the evolution of language over time, encompassing both internal changes in the lexicon and external factors that

drive linguistic change. These include social transformations, technological advances, cultural contact, migration, and changes in communication practices (Aitchison, 2001). These phenomena are especially relevant in youth communities. Youth slang is sensitive to such forces, making diachronic analysis an effective method for identifying and contextualizing patterns of innovation and lexical evolution across generations (Eble, 1996).

In recent decades, diachronic studies have increasingly incorporated digital corpora, historical dictionaries, and media archives to document the trajectories of slang expressions over time. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), for instance, provides valuable diachronic insights through its recorded first usages and etymological entries. Moreover, large-scale corpora such as the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), Urban Dictionary that is an online dictionary that primarily documents slang, colloquial expressions, internet jargon, and non-standard language or Google Ngrams allow researchers to track frequency trends and usage shifts for slang terms with remarkable precision.

Diachronic linguistics is an important theoretical and methodological framework for the study of the development of language over time, and is therefore particularly suited to the analysis of the development of slang in youth communities (Tsaralunga, 2019). Rather than viewing slang as a transitory or peripheral aspect of language, the diachronic approach recognises it as a dynamic and socially significant phenomenon, reflecting ongoing cultural and generational changes (Eble, 1996). This perspective allows for a multifaceted analysis of how lexical items have changed their form, meaning and usage over historical periods, reflecting broader patterns of linguistic innovation and social change (Aitchison, 2001).

In the context of this thesis, the diachronic approach will be applied to youth slang in English-speaking countries in order to trace the life cycles of selected slang expressions. The objective of this study is to identify patterns of semantic shift, to examine generational differences in usage, and to identify the key sociocultural and technological factors that influence the emergence, popularity, and decline of slang. This approach has the potential to shed light on internal linguistic mechanisms,

including metaphor, semantic broadening or narrowing, and morphological play. Furthermore, it highlights the external pressures exerted by globalisation, digital communication, and media-driven youth culture.

In this analysis, youth slang is presented as a lens through which contemporary linguistic change and identity formation can be observed. As a rapidly changing form of expression that responds to changing norms, technologies, and peer dynamics, youth slang is a linguistic sign of the times (Tagliamonte, 2016). Its diachronic study not only deepens our understanding of informal language development, but also contributes to broader debates in historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies by highlighting the role of the young generation in shaping the future of English (Aitchison, 2001; Eble, 1996).

#### **1.4. Factors Influencing Slang Evolution**

The emergence and development of slang is inextricably linked to the sociocultural environment in which it is produced. Slang is frequently regarded as spontaneous and informal, yet it is in fact profoundly influenced by broader external forces, most notably technological advances, mass media and popular culture, and globalisation. These factors not only influence the creation of new slang expressions but also affect the rate at which such terms are adopted, repurposed, or discarded (Androutsopoulos, 2011). In youth communities, which are especially attuned to trends and social shifts, these influences are amplified, making slang one of the most dynamic components of language (Bucholtz, 2002).

In the 21st century, the rapid spread of digital technologies has had a transformative impact on language use, especially among young people. The internet, smartphones and social media platforms have transformed everyday users into both consumers and creators of language innovation (Crystal, 2011). This democratisation of language production has contributed to the rapid creation, modification and dissemination of slang in different communities (Danet & Herring, 2007).

#### **1.5. The Functions of Slang in Communication**

Slang serves a wide range of communicative functions that go beyond its traditional association with informality and subcultural expression. While often

marginalized in linguistic studies as it was mentioned earlier, slang fulfills critical social, pragmatic, and expressive roles, particularly among young speakers (Mattiello, 2007). As a linguistic resource, it reflects not only creativity and brevity but also the desire of youth to shape identity, assert group membership, and negotiate power dynamics in everyday interactions.

One of the primary functions of slang is to signal social belonging. Slang operates as a linguistic marker of in-group membership, distinguishing those who are "in the know" from outsiders. As Eble (1996) argues, the use of slang is often less about novelty and more about community alignment – speaking the same way as one's peers reinforces trust and familiarity. Among youth, especially adolescents navigating social hierarchies, slang functions as a tool for inclusion, forming bonds based on shared knowledge and cultural literacy.

At the same time, slang also creates exclusivity. By developing or adopting unique vocabulary, youth may intentionally exclude others, such as adults, authority figures, or unfamiliar groups. This form of linguistic boundary-setting reinforces subcultural identities and allows for the maintenance of privacy within social networks (Bucholtz, 1999). In this way, slang performs both unifying and separating functions.

Slang is actually inherently expressive. It allows its users to intensify meaning, inject humour, express attitude and convey emotional nuance in ways that standard language may not allow (Dynell, 2012). Words such as *savage*, *lowkey*, *dead*, or *mood* have taken on rich semantic loads in youth discourse, often functioning as emotional amplifiers that signal irony, intensity, or affective stance that signal irony, intensity, or affective stance. These expressions often depend on context, shared experience and tone, making them effective tools for building rapport and expressing subtle shifts in attitude (Bucholtz, 2002).

Additionally, slang allows for creative linguistic play. Speakers manipulate sounds, meanings, and even syntax to invent new ways of expressing familiar ideas. This kind of linguistic innovation is not simply ornamental—it is a means of reclaiming language, subverting authority, and resisting rigid norms of “proper”

speech (Androutsopoulos, 2001). The playful nature of slang supports its role in storytelling, joking, exaggerating, and dramatizing, all of which are central to adolescents and online communication.

Historically, slang has been used as a code of disguise, particularly within marginalised or criminalised groups, to conceal meaning from outsiders (Coleman, 2012). Young people may adopt slang to talk about taboo subjects – such as sex, drugs or rebellion – in ways that evade adult or institutional understanding (Eble, 1996). This function of slang continues today, particularly in online discourse, where euphemisms and coded expressions are constantly being developed to evade moderation or censorship (e.g. unalive for 'dead', spicy content for explicit material).

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, this secretive function represents more than simple concealment – it is a form of resistance. By creating and circulating language that is difficult to track or control, speakers reclaim autonomy over their communicative space (Eble, 1996).

Another functional advantage of slang is its economy of expression. Many slang expressions are shorter, more powerful or more versatile than their standard equivalents. For example, a phrase like 'that's valid' can convey agreement, approval or even subtle judgement, depending on the intonation and context in which it is used (Tagliamonte, 2016). Similarly, *sus* (from suspicious) conveys a clear judgement in a single syllable and is impressive.

This tendency toward linguistic compression is especially evident in digital communication, where space, time, and immediacy often demand brevity. Slang is able to satisfy the need for quick, expressive, and socially resonant speech - a quality particularly valuable in meme culture, texting, and comment-based platforms (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008).

### **1.6. Classifications of Slang**

Although slang is often perceived as chaotic and unstructured, many scholars have proposed frameworks for categorising its diverse forms and functions. Classifying slang is essential for linguistic analysis because it reveals the internal organisation of what might otherwise appear to be a disordered vocabulary (Eble,

1996; Mattiello, 2008). While slang resists rigid taxonomy due to its fluidity and rapid lexical turnover, it can nonetheless be grouped by thematic domains (e.g., drugs, fashion, relationships), communicative purposes (e.g., humour, secrecy, resistance), morphological processes (e.g., clipping, compounding, blending), and sociolinguistic variables (e.g., age, region, subculture) (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990)

One of the common ways to classify slang is by topic or semantic field . Many slang terms refer to recurring themes in the lives of young people and subcultures, reflecting the concerns, interests and taboos of a particular generation or group (Eble, 1996; Mattiello, 2008). The most common thematic categories are:

- Substance use : eg, weed, blaze, hit, high
- Sex and relationships : eg, hook up, crush, situationship, smash
- Insults and evaluations : eg, basic, tool, Karen, wack, savage
- Money and materialism : eg, stack, bread, drip, bling
- Technology and online culture : eg, ghosting, DM, clout, stan
- Fashion and appearance : eg, fit, glow up, serve, snatched, slay

Such classification helps us to connect slang usage with social behavior, popular culture, and changing values across time.

Slang can also be classified based on its communicative purpose or social function (Eble, 1996). Functional categories include:

- Expressive slang : used to express feelings or attitudes ( fire, vibe, dead, lowkey )
- Group identity slang : signals belonging to a specific community or peer group ( mandem, fam, bro, sis )
- Humorous slang : serves a comedic or playful function ( sus , boomer , cringe )
- Secretive slang : used to obscure meaning from outsiders ( code words for drugs, sex, or illegal activity )
- Evaluative slang : expresses approval or disapproval ( lit , slaps , mid , trash )

This typology is particularly useful for sociolinguistic analysis, as it represents how speakers use slang not only for vocabulary, but also for managing relationships, identities, and social hierarchies .

If taking a look at it from a linguistic perspective, slang can also be classified by word formation processes, which are often highly creative and reflective of broader trends in informal English (Yule, 2020; Mattiello, 2008). Common processes include:

- Clipping: shortening existing words ( bro ,fam, sus, rizz )
- Blending: merging two words ( hangry, bromance, chillax )
- Borrowing: adopting from other languages or dialects ( bae, kawaii, jawn )
- Conversion: shifting a word's grammatical category ( ghost [noun → verb], simp [noun → verb])
- Reduplication/rhyming: forming catchy expressions ( hoity-toity, super-duper, okey-dokey )

These processes tell about slang's linguistic innovation, contributing to the evolution of English vocabulary in informal registers (Bauer, 1983; Coleman, 2012).

Slang can also be classified based on the sociolinguistic groups that use it. Slang rarely can be universal; it most often reflects age, ethnicity, geography, subculture, or profession (Holmes, 2013; Mattiello, 2008). Some broad sociolinguistic categories include:

- Youth slang: typically created and used by adolescents and young adults
- Internet slang: spread and popularized through digital platforms
- Ethnolectal slang: linked to specific ethnic or racial communities (eg, AAVE, Chicano English)
- Occupational slang: used within specific professions (eg, medical slang, military slang)
- Criminal slang: associated with underground or deviant social groups
- Regional slang: tied to local dialects (eg, Cockney rhyming slang, Southern US slang)

This type of classification is essential for understanding slang in context - highlighting how identity, community, and location can shape informal language (Eble, 1996; Androutsopoulos, 2006).

Despite its resistance to standardization, slang can be studied through multiple lenses of classification. Whether approached through semantic domains, communicative function, word formation, or social context, these typologies reveal that slang is not chaotic but highly responsive to social needs and linguistic creativity. Classifying slang not only aids academic study but also allows for a deeper understanding of how language reflects lived experience, particularly in fast-changing youth cultures.

In summary the first part of this thesis outlined the linguistic characteristics of slang, emphasizing its semantic flexibility, dynamic formation patterns, and role in social identity construction. Special focus was given to the innovation-driven nature of youth language, with young speakers acting as primary agents of slang creation and dissemination. This part also addressed the significance of diachronic linguistics as a methodological framework, enabling researchers to trace lexical change over time. Furthermore, it highlighted external factors such as media, technology, and globalization, which have accelerated the evolution and dissemination of slang. Various functional and typological classifications of slang were examined, revealing its communicative depth and structural creativity. This chapter lays the groundwork for the analysis by establishing the theoretical tools and categories needed to interpret the data.

## **2. RESEARCH AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SLANG TERMS**

The development of youth slang in English-speaking countries is a dynamic and multifaceted process, driven by cultural, social and technological influences as we mentioned in the previous chapter. To capture the uniqueness of this phenomenon, this chapter focuses on a comparative analysis of selected slang terms, so we can examine how their meanings, usage and social perceptions have changed over time

and regions. The aim is to identify patterns of slang evolution and to understand the socio-cultural factors that shape these changes.

The analysis consists of several key components. First, regional differences are analyzed by examining how certain slang expressions differ in major English-speaking regions such as the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada. This comparative analysis represents how local cultures and historical contexts influence the emergence and development of slang expressions.

Then we delve into the case studies of diachronic slang evolution, presenting some examples of youth slang that have changed significantly in its main meaning in the standard language and use over the decades. By tracing the historical development of selected expressions, the analysis reveals the underlying mechanisms that drive lexical change.

In final section of this chapter we summarize the findings and demonstrate connections between the evolution of slang and broader linguistic, cultural, and social trends. The chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how youth slang acts as a marker of identity, social belonging and generational change. While taking this comprehensive approach, the chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how youth slang acts as a marker of identity, social belonging and generational change.

Slang is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic and mainly regionally specific aspect of language. Across English-speaking countries, regional differences significantly influence the development and use of slang expressions. Factors such as historical context, cultural identity, socio-political influences and the influence of the media affect how slang expressions develop differently in different regions. This chapter examines how the same term or idea is expressed through different forms of slang in the selected regions such as: the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, emphasising the role of local context and cultural norms.

- **Slang in the United States**

Slang in the United States is a dynamic and ever-changing part of the English language. It is influenced by many factors, including cultural diversity, regional

differences, social groups, and technological advances. The USA is known for its rich and varied slang repertoire which is heavily influenced by its multicultural population and the global impact of American popular culture. With clear differences between the East Coast, West Coast, the South, and urban versus rural areas, American slang often reflects the country's regional diversity.

For example, the term *"hella"* which means *"very"* or *"a lot"*, is predominantly used in California, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area. In contrast, the same concept in meaning might be expressed as *"mad"* on the East Coast (eg, *"That's mad cool"*). Moreover, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has had a profound influence on mainstream slang, popularizing terms like *"lit"*, *"woke"*, and *"bae"* through music and digital culture (Cutler, 2007).

American slang is also characterized by tendencies towards brevity and innovation, often using clipping and blending to form new slang words and expressions. For example terms such as *"hangry"* (*hungry* + *angry*) and *"bruh"* (a shortened term for *"brother"*) reflect a tendency towards linguistic economy and is predominantly driven by the fast-paced nature of urban environments and especially nowadays by digital communication.

- **Slang in the United Kingdom**

In contrast, talking about British slang is more regionally fragmented, reflecting very noticeable country's rich dialectal diversity. Terms can vary significantly between London, Manchester, Liverpool, Scotland and Wales. For example, in London's multicultural youth communities, expressions such as *"peng"* (attractive) and *"bare"* (a lot) are common, while in Scotland, *"braw"* serves a similar purpose in communication, meaning *"good"* or *"fine"*.

We can also highlight the influence of Cockney rhyming slang which is a type of slang in which some certain words are used instead of other words they can rhyme with stays notable in London, though its usage has diminished among younger speakers. As examples terms like *"apples and pears"* (stairs) and *"dog and bone"* (phone) still appear in media and as markers of working-class identity. British slang is also often characterized by playful word formation and irony, as we can observe in

expressions such as “*knackered*” meaning extremely tired and “*gutted*” meaning deeply disappointed.

- **Slang in Australia**

Australian slang which is also known as “Strine” is often characterized as colloquial and laid-back. Although it draws significantly from British English it has evolved into a distinct variant. One of the most recognizable features of Australian slang is diminutives, where words are shortened and often given an “-ie” or “-o” ending (eg., “*arvo*” for afternoon, “*servo*” for service station, “*breakfast*” becomes “*brekkie*”). This practice reflects a cultural inclination towards informality and also serves to build a social rapport .

Australian slang also tends to embrace unique local expressions that reflect the country's rural and beach culture , such as “*bogan*” (person considered to be unsophisticated) and “*fair dinkum*” (genuine, real). While some slang remains distinctly local, globalization and media introducing more and more American and British slang into everyday Australian English language, resulting a hybrid linguistic identity.

- **Slang in Canada**

Canadian slang is influenced by both American English and British English , but also includes expressions that are uniquely Canadian expressions reflecting the country's multicultural and bilingual identity. We can mention terms like “*toque*” (a knitted hat) and “*chesterfield*” (a couch) reflect historical ties to Great Britain, while expressions such as “*double-double*” (a coffee with two creams and two sugars) and “*keener*” (an overly eager person) emphasize the local cultural context .

The role of regional variation is also a crucial factor with a marked distinction particularly between Anglophone and Francophone regions. In Quebec the use of English slang may incorporate French terms or anglicized versions of French words, resulting in a creation of a blended sociolect . Canadian youth slang is also heavily influenced by American popular culture, particularly in urban areas like Toronto, where terms from AAVE and Caribbean English (eg., “*ting*” , “*waste yute*” ) have become mainstream in this context.

The comparison of slang across these four regions reveals a strong correlation between the use of slang between cultural identity and regional diversity. While the processes of globalization and digital communication have contributed to the international spread of certain slang terms, local nuances and sociolects continue to shape the development of youth slang within specific regions.

For example, while the American term "*sick*" that means "*excellent*" has become globally recognized, the British equivalent "*wicked*" and the Australian "*heaps good*" carry the same sentiment but maintain a regional flavour. These variations highlight the localized nature of linguistic innovation, despite the increasing transnational flow of popular culture.

Understanding these regional differences is a very essential part for capturing the full spectrum of slang usage and appreciating the cultural dynamics that shape language evolution.

Social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter (now X), Reddit, Instagram, and Snapchat function as incubators of slang, enabling users to experiment with language in real time and across cultural boundaries. Expressions like *yeet*, *slaps*, *rizz*, *no cap*, *based*, or *mid* have all risen to popularity through digital channels. These terms frequently appear in short-form video content, captions, memes, or comments, gaining traction as they are remixed and reused across different contexts. In these online environments, youth are not just passive receivers of linguistic trends – they are active agents of change, co-creating a new and constantly evolving lexicon.

Moreover, the linguistic constraints and culture of immediacy in online communication have been given rise to novel forms of abbreviation and orthographic innovation. Acronyms like *OMG* (oh my God), *SMH* (shaking my head), and *IDK* (I don't know), as well as stylized spellings (*thicc*, *gurl*, *boi*), exemplify the creative adaptations required by digital discourse (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008). Emojis, gifs, and stickers further blur the lines between visual and verbal communication, leading to multimodal slang that relies on a shared cultural literacy.

The media have long been a powerful force in shaping popular language, and their influence on slang is particularly visible. In the 20th and 21st centuries, television, film, music, and celebrity culture have contributed significantly to the spread and legitimization of slang terms. These media not only reflect linguistic trends but actively create them.

Music, especially genres like hip-hop, rap, punk, and pop, plays a central role in propagating slang. Hip-hop culture, originating in African American communities in the 1970s, has introduced a wide array of slang expressions into mainstream English, including terms like *dope*, *bling*, *flex*, *woke*, and *shade* (Cutler, 2007). Many of these terms, once associated with niche or marginalized groups, have been adopted across national and cultural boundaries through global music distribution, fashion, and online fandoms.

Furthermore, film and television have been identified as significant contributors to the popularisation of slang. The following phrases are illustrative of the manner in which media catchphrases can become part of everyday speech: “*on fleek*”, “*fetch*” (from *Mean Girls*) and “*that's hot*” (popularised by Paris Hilton). This phenomenon is especially prevalent when such catchphrases are amplified by internet culture. Influencers and streamers on YouTube and Twitch frequently coin expressions that are adopted by their audiences and disseminated through online communities.

In this sense, media acts not only as a mirror but as a megaphone for youth slang – elevating certain terms to global for youth slang – elevating certain terms to global recognition and embedding them in public consciousness.

The process of globalization has profoundly affected the development of slang, turning it into a transnational linguistic phenomenon. As cultural products, ideas, and people move across borders, so too does language. In today's hyperconnected world, slang terms no longer remain confined to specific regions or subcultures; they are adopted, adapted, and recontextualized by youth communities across continents.

Cross-cultural borrowing is now a key feature of modern slang. Terms from Japanese ( *kawaii* ), Korean ( *aegyo*, *oppa* ), Nigerian Pidgin ( *wahala*, *japa* ),

Caribbean English ( *ting, gyal, irie* ), and many others have entered English-speaking slang repertoires through music, anime, internet memes, and global diasporic communities (Androutsopoulos, 2010). Young people in English-speaking countries frequently borrow and remix elements from other languages, often mixing them with local idioms to create hybrid expressions that reflect both global awareness and local identity.

At the same time, local slang remains a vital part of young people's identity. While the internet allows for widespread dissemination, regional differences persist. For example, the slang of London's multicultural youth (e.g. *mandem, wasteman, ting* ) differs markedly from that of the American South or Australian inner cities. These regionalisms often reflect socio-political realities of different times, class differences or racialised experiences, underlining the complex interplay between global trends and local sociolinguistic contexts.

### **2.1. Semantic change and societal perception of slang in diachronic perspective**

To trace the evolution of slang within youth culture, the following part presents a selection of 35 slang terms that have shifted significantly in meaning, usage, and perception over time. These expressions, drawn from music, internet discourse, regional dialects, and subcultural communities, illustrate how slang functions as a dynamic reflection of changing social identities, values, and technologies. The terms were chosen for their broad generational relevance, regional diversity across English-speaking countries, and for their links to larger cultural movements such as hip-hop, LGBTQ+ discourse, and online meme culture. By analyzing their diachronic development, this selection of terms offers insight into how language both shapes and is shaped by youth identity.

#### 1. Cool

Origin: Originally associated with describing a temperature. The slang usage of “*cool*” emerged in the 1940s jazz culture to describe a calm, stylish and composed demeanor. In 1960s it became a hallmark of the countercultural movement, signifying rebelliousness and non-conformity.

Current Usage: Nowadays this word has become mainstream expressing approval or admiration.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: From literal to figurative.

## 2. Sick

Origin: Originally used to tell that the person is ill holding purely a negative connotation. By the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in surfing or skateboarding communities this word gained a positive connotation and began to mean impressive or excellent.

Current Usage: Nowadays is used to describe something that is incredibly fantastic or cool.

Regional Usage: UK, US, Australia.

Perception Shift: From negative to positive connotation.

## 3. Dope

Origin: Originally from drug culture in the early 20th century, "*dope*" initially referred to illicit substances.

Current Usage: In the 1980s, it shifted to mean something impressive or high quality, largely influenced by hip-hop culture.

Regional Usage: US.

Perception Shift: Still maintaining two meanings but shifted more from negative to positive compliment.

## 4. Lit

Origin: Originally, this word meant intoxicated (early 20th century). By the 2010s, it evolved to signify something exciting or energetic, particularly through the influence of hip-hop music and social media.

Current Usage: Generally nowadays it means awesome or fun (e.g., "The party was lit").

Regional Usage: US (predominantly North America), Australia.

Perception Shift: From negative connotation to positive.

## 5. Flex

Origin: Originally it means to bend or contract muscles. In the early 20th century it was associated with bodybuilding and sports and by the 2010s this word evolved through hip-hop culture meaning “showing off”, especially when we are talking about wealth or achievements.

Current Usage:

Regional Usage: US mainly but also common in global social media context.

Perception Shift: From physical demonstration to metaphorical meaning.

## 6. Sus

Origin: Short form of the word “suspicious”, originally used in AAVE as a way to label someone who is untrustworthy. The term began to become mainstream in 2020 during COVID mostly due to the online game Among Us.

Current Usage: Nowadays used to describe something that is sketchy.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: From niche street culture to mainstream internet culture but the meaning remained the same.

## 7. Ghosting

Origin: Term was originated in 2000s and began to be more popular in 2010s coinciding with the rise of online dating apps like Tinder and it initially described the act of abruptly ending the communication (romance related) without any explanation.

Current Usage: Nowadays the meaning remains the same but the term itself is used for all types of communications and not only romance related ones.

Regional Usage: US mainly but also became global through the digital culture.

Perception Shift: From relationship-specific to general social behaviour.

## 8. Rizz

Origin: This term is relatively recent and it emerged on social platforms like TikTok in early 2020s and it is a clipped form for the word “charisma” or is used to show the ability to flirt smoothly.

Current Usage: Nowadays it means to have romantic ability and charm.

Regional Usage: US and has spread through social media.

Perception Shift: Still emerging, primarily having a positive connotation.

## 9. Bae

Origin: Originating as a shortened form of the word “baby” but it can also be an acronym that stands for “before anyone else”. This term has appeared in rap and social media in 2000s.

Current Usage: Refers to someone cherished or to a significant other.

Regional Usage: US, global.

Perception Shift: Initially romantic.

## 10. Lowkey

Origin: This term has originated in AAVE initially meaning something that is not very obvious.

Current Usage: It indicates mild enthusiasm or subtle intention.

Regional Usage: US.

Perception Shift: From hiding to expressing mild interest.

## 11. Salty

Origin: Originally in Navy slang (early 20th century) this term described the experience of sailors who were often grumpy. Also it referred to the presence of salt or a salty taste.

Current Usage: Nowadays it describes the feeling when someone is annoyed or offended.

Regional Usage: US, global.

Perception Shift: From literal meaning to figurative.

## 12. Woke

Origin: Originally coming from AAVE used since 1930s or even earlier referring to awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination. This term also acquired political connotation in 1970s.

Current Usage: Means being socially aware especially when we are talking about racial or social justice issues.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: It has expanded to the awareness of the problems of all minorities of society.

### 13. Bougie

Origin: Derives from the 16th-century French term “bourgeoisie” the emerging merchant class whose new wealth conferred them social status and privilege. Later was used to describe “middle class”. The shortened form emerged from AAVE where it originally described people who aspired to a higher social status through material means.

Current Usage: Nowadays it generalized its meaning to describe someone who is trying to appear fancy or wealthy through material goods but it also can be used seriously and not only ironically.

Regional Usage: US, global.

Perception Shift: From class-based description to mostly pretentiousness.

### 14. Basic

Origin: Originally used as an adjective when describing something plain, simple or fundamental. In 2010s this term gained a negative connotation and began being an insult often targeting women perceived as overly conformist in lifestyle or fashion.

Current Usage: Used mostly to describe something predictable or mainstream, often referring to tastes and behavior.

Regional Usage: US, UK

Perception Shift: From neutral description to derogatory slang.

### 15. Slaps

Origin: Originally means a physical hit or slap. Then in 2000s in hip-hop culture it began to describe a song with a strong beat or intense rhythm.

Current Usage: Generalized to mean something high quality, mostly music or performance.

Regional Usage: US.

Perception Shift: From physical action to expressing enjoyment.

### 16. Thirsty

Origin: Originally used to express the feeling of dehydration.

Current Usage: Now means a desperate need of attention or validation, especially in romantic context. This emerged in 2010s on social media.

Regional Usage: US, global.

Perception Shift: From literal to metaphorical.

#### 17. Throwing shade

Origin: Originally meant to create a shadow. In 1990s drag culture and the LGBTQ+ community it emerged as a term for indirect insult, gaining mainstream use through RuPaul's Drag Race.

Current Usage: Used to subtly insult or criticize someone, often indirectly.

Regional Usage: US.

Perception Shift: From literal shading to metaphorical criticism.

#### 18. Yeet

Origin: Original meaning is to throw or propel forcefully. Originated as a dance move in the early 2010s, evolving into a more general expression of excitement or force. Social media, particularly Vine, played a significant role in spreading this term.

Current Usage: Expresses excitement, approval, or to throw something with enthusiasm.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: From throwing action to exclamatory slang.

#### 19. Stan

Origin: Initially carried a dark and obsessive connotation, derived from Eminem's 2000 song "Stan" about a fan.

Current Usage: Now used as a playful term to express loyal fandom, especially on Twitter.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: From negative obsession to positive dedication.

#### 20. Vibe

Origin: Originally the term is coming from the word "vibration" and was associated with physical movement. In the 1960s, during the rise of the

countercultural and hippie movements , "*vibe*" began to acquire a metaphorical meaning , signifying a mood, feeling, or atmosphere.

Current Usage: Today the word "*vibe*" is used to describe the emotional atmosphere of a place, person or even a situation.

Regional Usage: UK, US, global.

Perception Shift: From literal vibration to figurative emotional tone.

## 21.Slay

Origin: Originally this term comes from Old English "*slean*" , meaning "*to strike*" or "*kill*" . Traditionally, it has been used in literary contexts and classical texts to denote defeating or killing someone in battle . For centuries, "*slay*" carried a purely violent connotation, often appearing in mythological stories and epic poetry (eg, "*Beowulf slayed the dragon*"). In the 20th century , particularly within African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and LGBTQ+ ballroom culture , the word began to acquire a metaphorical meaning , signifying dominating or excelling at something, especially in the context of performance or style . This shift was significantly influenced by drag culture in the 1980s and 1990s , where performers would "*slay*" the competition by delivering an outstanding performance.

Current Usage: Used to describe exceptional performance or appearance, especially in fashion and drag.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: From literal violence to metaphorical excellence.

## 22.Ate

Origin: Originally the word means the process of consuming food, being a past simple form of "*eat*". However in the 2010s the word began to take on a metaphorical meaning, signifying someone who performed exceptionally well or dominated some situation.

Current Usage: Nowadays it means to excel, perform flawlessly, or impress dramatically, especially in terms of appearance, dance, or fashion and is often accompanied by the phrase "*and left no crumbs*".

Regional Usage: US, global.

Perception Shift: From literal consumption to figurative domination or excellence.

### 23.Serve

Origin: Originally the meaning is “*to provide*” or “*to deliver*” in a neutral or professional context. This reinterpretation aligned with the competitive nature of ballroom battles, where performers aim to dominate the runway or outshine rivals through fashion and attitude. The term's association with drag culture brought it further into the spotlight, particularly with the rise of RuPaul's Drag Race in the 2010s. Phrases like “*servicing face*” (displaying flawless makeup or expression) and “*servicing body*” (showcasing an impressive physique) became commonplace within queer and fashion communities.

Current Usage: Nowadays platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have been instrumental in popularizing “*serve*” as a fashion and performance compliment. The expression “*serve looks*” often accompanies posts showing stylish outfits or makeup transformations.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: The term has maintained a positive connotation throughout its evolution, but now also carries a sense of fashionable boldness.

### 24.Periodt

Origin: Originally the term “*period*” was only used to indicate the end of the sentence. However, in AAVE this word evolved into a spoken rhetorical device to emphasize a point, especially when no argument or further discussion is welcomed. Later in 2010s the spelling “*periodt*” emerged, especially within Black Twitter, drag culture, and later TikTok, as a way to intensify the finality or authority of a statement. It often carries a tone of assertiveness, sass, or defiant emphasis.

Current Usage: Nowadays it is used at the end of a sentence to emphasize that a statement is definitive, final, and not up for debate.

Regional Usage: US, UK, global.

Perception Shift: From punctuation marker to slang for verbal emphasis.

### 25.Freaky

Origin: "*Freaky*" derives from "*freak*", which originated in the 16th century to describe something unnatural or abnormal, especially in the context of unusual physical traits or behaviors. By the 19th–20th centuries, it was used to describe people who were socially or physically deviant – often pejoratively. The adjective "*freaky*" began appearing in the 1960s, initially meaning strange or bizarre – particularly under the influence of psychedelic counterculture. However, by the 1980s–1990s, especially through funk, hip-hop, and R&B, it acquired a new meaning: sexually adventurous, uninhibited, or kinky.

Current Usage: Nowadays this term is generally used to describe someone sexually bold or suggestive, something weird or unusual or someone who is bold, wild or daring in their behaviour.

Regional Usage: Global.

Perception Shift: From negative connotation in meaning associated with physical deviance to mostly sexual connotation.

## 26. Cheeky

Origin: The word "*cheeky*" comes from the noun "*cheek*", meaning impudence or disrespect, dating back to Middle English. The adjective "*cheeky*" began appearing in the 19th century, especially in British English, to describe someone who was disrespectfully bold or insolent – typically a child or subordinate speaking out of turn.

Current Usage: Nowadays it is used to describe someone who is mischievous or playfully rude, often in a light-hearted or charming way. Also the term is very common and widely understood, can range from childish sass to witty flirtation.

Regional Usage: UK, global.

Perception Shift: From negative connotation to mostly positive.

## 27. Tweaking

Origin: The verb "*tweak*" originally meant to pinch or twist sharply, dating back to Middle English ("*twikken*", 15th century). Over time, it evolved to mean make fine adjustments or alter slightly (e.g., "*tweaking the engine*"). In the late 20th century, especially in American street slang, "*tweaking*" took on an entirely different

meaning related to drug use – particularly the hyperactive, paranoid behavior associated with methamphetamine abuse.

Current Usage: Nowadays it is mostly used to mock someone's over-the-top emotional reaction or mental spiral.

Regional Usage: US, global.

Perception Shift: From literal mechanical adjustment or drug-related hyperactivity to figurative overreaction.

## 28. Diva

Origin: The term "*diva*" originates from the Italian word "*diva*", meaning "*goddess*" or "*divine one*". It was historically used in opera culture during the 18th and 19th centuries to describe a highly talented and celebrated female opera singer, particularly those known for their powerful performances and commanding presence. The term is derived from the Latin "*divus*", meaning "*divine*". The word "*diva*" maintained a positive connotation for centuries, signifying an extraordinary female talent, particularly in classical music. However, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the term started to acquire a more negative nuance, especially when used to describe individuals who demand special treatment or exhibit high-maintenance behaviour. As powerful female singers like Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, and Beyonce became associated with both their musical talent and their perceived demanding nature, the term "*diva*" evolved to reflect this duality.

Current usage: Nowadays the term mostly carry a positive connotation, indicating confidence and strong presence, especially in music and performance contexts.

Regional usage: UK, US, globally recognised.

Perception shift: From admiration and talent (19th century) to self-importance and arrogance (late 20th century). More recently, the term has been reclaimed in some communities as a marker of self-assurance and empowerment.

## 29. No cap

Origin: Originally this term comes from Southern Black American communities, especially in Atlanta rap culture, in the early 2010s. It comes from

AAVE , where "*cap*" means "*lie*" or "*exaggeration*" . The phrase "*no cap*" literally means "*no lie*" as a way of affirming the truthfulness or sincerity of a statement.

Current usage: Nowadays it is used when you want to tell that you are being completely honest or it can also emphasize something genuinely impressive or undeniable.

Regional usage: US, global.

Perception shift: Shifted from a truth-affirming phrase within AAVE and Southern hip-hop culture to a mainstream Gen Z expression used globally to emphasize honesty or intensity in casual speech.

### 30. Jam

Origin: As a verb this term originates in 19th-century American English, meaning to force something tightly into a space. However, the slang sense emerged in early 20th-century jazz culture, where "jam session" referred to musicians improvising together freely . By the 1960s–70s , it also came to mean dancing or enjoying music. In the 1990s , "*jam*" began being used to refer to someone's favorite song or a track with a particularly good beat or vibe.

Current usage: Nowadays this term is used to express enjoyment about music or dancing. Also to describe a favourite song or to improvise or perform collaboratively (still used by musicians).

Regional usage: US, global.

Perception shift: Shifted from describing musical improvisation among jazz musicians to a casual term for enjoying music, dancing, or identifying a favorite song, now widely used in youth and pop culture.

### 31. Cringe

Origin: The word "cringe" originates from Old English *cringan*, meaning "to yield," "fall in battle," or "become bent". Over time, it evolved to mean "to recoil in embarrassment or disgust". The verb form "cringe" first appeared in the 15th century, meaning "to bend or crouch, especially with servility or fear". The noun form "cringe" followed shortly after, in the 16th century For centuries, it had a physical and

emotional connotation — reacting to danger or shame. By the 20th century, it took on a more psychological nuance, referring to feelings of second-hand embarrassment.

In the 2010s–2020s, especially through internet culture, "cringe" evolved into a genre of online content and a term for describing awkward, embarrassing, or socially out-of-touch behavior, often in a mocking or ironic tone.

Current usage: Nowadays this term is used when talking about something embarrassing, awkward or uncomfortable to witness. The term also refers to outdated trends, performative behaviour.

Regional usage: Global.

Perception shift: From describing a physical reaction to fear or shame to a slang term for socially awkward or embarrassing behavior, especially in digital and meme culture.

### 32. Tea

Origin: Originally comes from Black drag and ballroom culture, particularly in the Southern US. The term is thought to have evolved from the phrase "*truth*", with "*T*" or "*tea*" being shorthand for personal truths or secrets. It became widely recognized in the 1990s, especially through LGBTQ+ subcultures, and was later popularized by RuPaul's Drag Race, where queens would "spill the tea" during candid conversations.

The term gained mainstream popularity in the 2010s, becoming a staple of internet and Gen Z slang, often used both seriously and playfully.

Current usage: Nowadays is used in the context of sharring gossip or truth (to spill tea), observing drama quietly or act nonchalant while enjoying gossip or we can use this term to emphasize or confirm the truth of the situation (that's the tea).

Regional usage: Global.

Perception shift: Shifted from a code word for truth in Black LGBTQ+ communities to a mainstream slang term for gossip, drama, or emotional insight, especially in digital and pop culture contexts.

### 33. Brat

Origin: This term dates back to Middle English (14th century), where it originally meant “*a rag or piece of clothing*”, and later evolved to refer to a child of low status or beggar child. By the 18th–19th centuries, it solidified into a derogatory term for an ill-mannered or spoiled child, especially one who is loud, entitled, or demanding.

Current usage: Nowadays this term gained a huge popularity among youth, especially because of Charli XCX's album BRAT (released in June 2024). The album didn't invent the term, but it did redefine its cultural tone and amplify its relevance among Gen Z and pop culture communities. The term is used more flirtatiously or ironically, especially among Gen Z.

Regional usage: Global.

Perception shift: From a strictly negative label for spoiled children to a playful or self-assigned identity for mischievous, defiant, or teasing behavior, especially in online and subcultural contexts.

#### 34.Bad

Origin: The adjective “*bad*” has historically meant evil, unpleasant, or undesirable, dating back to Middle English. However, in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), starting in the 20th century, “*bad*” began to take on an ironic, positive meaning – especially in jazz and blues communities, and later in hip-hop.

Current usage: Nowadays this word is used to mean attractive, impressive or powerful.

Regional usage: US, global.

Perception shift: From a negative moral descriptor to a slang term for power, skill, or attractiveness.

#### 35.Savage

Origin: Orinally from Old French “*sauvage*”, meaning wild or uncivilized, “*savage*” was historically a colonial term used to dehumanize indigenous or non-European peoples. It carried strong racist and violent connotations for centuries.

In the 21st century, especially via hip-hop, Black Twitter, and meme culture, "*savage*" was reclaimed to mean someone who is bold, brutally honest, fearless, or cutthroat in a clever way.

Current usage: Nowadays it is used to praise someone who is unapologetically direct, fierce or victorious.

Regional usage: Global.

Perception shift: From a colonial insult denoting wildness or inhumanity to a term of admiration for unapologetic strength, cleverness, or dominance.

The analysis of these slang terms reveals several prominent linguistic tendencies. First, many words have undergone semantic shift, with formerly negative terms (*e.g., bad, savage, freaky*) being reappropriated to convey admiration, power, or desirability — a process particularly visible in AAVE and queer slang. There is also widespread use of metaphorical extension (*e.g., tea, ghosting, lowkey*), where everyday concepts are recontextualized to express social behavior or emotional states. Shortened or clipped forms (*e.g., bae, rizz, sus*) reflect a trend toward brevity and rhythm in digital communication, influenced by texting, memes, and TikTok formats.

A closer examination of the selected slang terms reveals several recurrent linguistic processes that account for their evolution and widespread adoption. One of the most prominent mechanisms is semantic shift, particularly amelioration, where words with originally negative or neutral meanings acquire positive connotations (*e.g., bad, savage, freaky, dope*). This process reflects a broader linguistic trend in youth slang to reframe deviance as desirability, especially in contexts of empowerment, rebellion, or style. Metaphorical extension is also a dominant factor. Terms like *tea* (for gossip), *ghosting* (social withdrawal), and *shade* (indirect insult) show how abstract concepts are expressed through concrete or sensory-based metaphors, enhancing expressiveness and emotional nuance. Similarly, subjectification – the process by which expressions encode the speaker's attitude – is evident in words like *lowkey*, *salty*, and *woke*, which carry layers of implied evaluation, mood, or stance.

On the morphological level, a detailed analysis of the 35 selected slang terms reveals the dominance of several key word-formation processes. In the appendix 1, we can see that conversion, or the shift of a word from one part of speech to another without a change in form, emerges as one of the most prevalent mechanisms, accounting for a significant portion of the corpus – approximately 33.3% (e.g., *cool*, *sick*, *dope*, *lit*, *flex*, *salty*, *woke*, *bougie*, *basic*, *slaps*, *thirsty*, *cringe*, *bad*, *savage*). This highlights the high linguistic economy and flexibility characteristic of modern slang. Interjections or words with a strong onomatopoeic or ideophonic character, such as *yeet*, *periodt*, *no cap*, *jam*, and *tea* (when used as an exclamation), constitute around 16.7%, underscoring the emotional and pragmatic functions of slang.

Clipping, including forms like *sus* (from suspicious), *rizz* (from charisma), and *bae* (if interpreted as a clipping of baby or babe), along with blending (as in the case of *stan*, derived from stalker + fan), collectively make up roughly 13.3% of the terms. This reflects a pervasive trend towards brevity and playfulness in digital communication. Other notable word-formation types include metaphorical development/semantic shift, which often accompanies conversion (e.g., *ghosting*, *throwing shade*, *slay*, *ate*, *serve*, *vibe*), together comprising about 20%. Terms like *diva*, *brat*, *tweaking*, *cheeky*, and *freaky* are predominantly borrowings or existing words that have undergone significant semantic broadening, making up the remaining 16.7%. These findings demonstrate that slang not only borrows from existing linguistic elements but also actively transforms them, creating new meanings and functions.

Beyond their syntactic behavior and morphological origins, the analyzed slang terms serve a variety of crucial pragmatic and communicative functions within youth discourse that is shown in the appendix 2. Foremost, they act as powerful markers of identity construction and in-group solidarity. Using terms like *bae*, *lowkey*, *no cap*, *yeet*, or *periodt* immediately signals membership in a specific social group, fostering a sense of shared understanding and excluding outsiders. This creates a linguistic boundary, reinforcing group cohesion and distinction.

Many terms function as potent expressive and evaluative tools, conveying strong emotions, attitudes, and judgments. Words such as *cool*, *sick*, *dope*, *lit*, *slaps*, *slay*, *ate*, *serve* are used to express intense admiration, approval, or success, often with a performative flair. Conversely, terms like *salty*, *cringe*, *sus*, *basic*, and *bougie* (when used pejoratively) serve to articulate disapproval, discomfort, or social critique. The very act of using these words carries an emotional charge, enriching communication beyond literal meaning.

These slang terms play significant roles in discourse management and interactional dynamics. Expressions like “*no cap*” (for no lie/truthfully) or “*that’s the tea*” (for that’s the gossip/truth) function as discourse markers, guiding the flow of conversation, signaling sincerity, or introducing new information. They contribute to the rhythm and fluidity of spoken and digital exchanges, often serving as conversational anchors. Finally, the playful and often ironic use of terms like *throwing shade*, *diva*, *brat*, *tweaking*, or *savage* highlights the performative and humorous aspects of youth language. This linguistic playfulness allows speakers to experiment with self-expression, challenge conventional norms, and inject levity into social interactions, showcasing the dynamic and creative adaptability of slang as a communication tool.

From a social and cultural perspective, the terms illustrate how slang acts as a tool for identity construction, irony, and group belonging. Many expressions originate from marginalized communities – particularly Black, LGBTQ+, and youth subcultures – before entering mainstream usage, often losing some of their original nuance. The influence of music (especially hip-hop and pop) is substantial, as is the impact of internet culture, which accelerates the spread and mutation of slang across regional and generational lines. Additionally, the widespread use of terms like *slay*, *serve*, and *brat* highlights how modern slang plays with hyperbole, theatricality, and self-expression, blurring the line between language and performance. This collection of slang terms not only demonstrates linguistic creativity, but also reflects evolving notions of authenticity, resistance, emotional intensity, and social dynamics in English-speaking youth culture.

In summary this chapter provided a diachronic and comparative analysis of 35 slang expressions used by youth in English-speaking countries. Each term was explored in terms of its historical origin, semantic development, current usage, regional variation, and perception shift. The analysis revealed several key trends: the metaphorical expansion of meaning, frequent use of clipping and borrowing as word-formation strategies, and the growing influence of digital platforms on slang proliferation. A classification of the terms was conducted based on semantic fields, formation types, and communicative functions, which underscored the multidimensional nature of youth slang. The findings confirm that slang is both a mirror of youth culture and a tool for linguistic innovation, shaped by sociocultural dynamics and intergenerational change.

## **2.2. Methodological framework for the diachronic study of slang**

The methodology of this study combines qualitative and descriptive approaches to explore the diachronic development of slang used by youth in English-speaking countries. The primary objective was to trace semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic shifts in selected slang terms over time and in different regions.

A corpus of 35 slang terms was compiled from a variety of sources, such as online slang dictionaries (e.g., Urban Dictionary), historical lexicons (Oxford English Dictionary, Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions), and linguistic literature on contemporary language change. Selection was based on several criteria:

- Documented usage across at least two decades
- Presence in youth-oriented speech or internet culture
- Evidence of semantic or social change over time
- Representation of multiple English-speaking regions (primarily the US, UK, Canada, and Australia)

Examples of historical and contemporary usage were gathered from both formal sources such as literary texts, music lyrics, newspaper archives and informal sources such as memes, tweets and TikTok comments. Particular attention was given to digital platforms such as TikTok and Twitter, where slang is often generated and

reshaped in real time. These were used to assess current meanings, usage contexts, and speaker perception.

The analysis employed tools from diachronic linguistics and sociolinguistics, with a focus on semantic change (e.g., amelioration, metaphorical extension), morphological innovation (e.g., clipping, blending, reduplication), and pragmatic functions (e.g., discourse marking, intensification, stance-taking). A comparative approach was used to observe differences in slang usage and interpretation across different English-speaking countries.

The selected slang terms were organized into a comparative table format. Each entry includes historical origin, shifts in meaning and perception, regional variation, and examples of usage. This structure enables both synchronic and diachronic analysis, providing insight into the cultural and linguistic mechanisms behind the emergence and evolution of youth slang.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the evolution of youth slang over time and space, focusing on English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Through a diachronic and comparative lens, it examined the trajectories of 35 slang expressions that have undergone semantic, pragmatic, and social transformations from their original meanings to their current usage in contemporary youth culture.

The analysis revealed key linguistic mechanisms such as semantic shifts, metaphorical extensions, reappropriations, and morphological innovations, that have played a pivotal role in the continuous renewal of slang. Many of the terms examined (e.g., bad, dope, savage) illustrated a shift from negative connotations to expressions of empowerment or admiration, especially within communities such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and queer subcultures, before being absorbed into mainstream discourse.

The central role of digital communication in accelerating the spread and mutation of slang was also identified. Platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube not only provide environments where slang is created and circulated but

also redefine its perception and on a global scale, often blurring regional boundaries and generational distinctions.

By analyzing slang diachronically, this thesis highlights the vital role of youth as agents of linguistic change, constantly reshaping informal language to suit their identities, values, and modes of self-expression. Slang does not merely emerge as a peripheral or playful aspect of language, but as a dynamic sociolinguistic tool, rich with cultural significance and reflective of broader historical shifts.

Ultimately, the study emphasises that the evolution of slang is not random, but deeply embedded in social dynamics, technological shifts, and cultural recontextualization – making it a valuable site for ongoing linguistic and anthropological inquiry.

## SUMMARY

У першому розділі роботи було здійснено комплексний огляд теоретичних підходів до вивчення сленгу як мовного явища, зокрема в молодіжному середовищі. Розглянуто лінгвістичні характеристики сленгу, його соціальні функції, типологічну класифікацію, а також визначено ключову роль молоді в процесах мовної інновації. Окрему увагу приділено діахронічному підходу як методологічному інструменту дослідження змін у значенні, функціонуванні та поширенні сленгових одиниць у різні історичні періоди. Аналіз впливу технологій, масової культури та глобалізації показав, що ці чинники значною мірою зумовлюють появу нових слів і модифікацію вже наявних виразів.

Другий розділ зосереджено на практичному аналізі 35 сленгових одиниць, відібраних з англomовного молодіжного дискурсу. Здійснено їх семантичний і функціональний аналіз, простежено історію виникнення, динаміку значення, регіональні особливості вживання та зміну сприйняття. Результати дослідження показали, що найбільш поширеним способом словотвору є семантичний зсув, що свідчить про активне переосмислення вже існуючої лексики. У функціональному аспекті переважають оцінні та експресивні одиниці, які відображають прагнення молоді до емоційного самовираження, групової ідентифікації та ситуативного оцінювання явищ. Побудовані класифікації та

статистичні діаграми дозволили візуалізувати тенденції, які підтверджують гіпотезу про сленг як маркер соціальної та мовної динаміки.

Таким чином, обидва розділи в сукупності дозволили не лише теоретично обґрунтувати природу молодіжного сленгу, а й продемонструвати його діахронічну еволюцію в реальному мовному вжитку. Отримані результати підтверджують актуальність сленгу як об'єкта наукового аналізу в межах соціолінгвістики, історичної лексикології та досліджень культурної ідентичності.

## REFERENCES

1. Anderson, L., & Trudgill, P. (1990). *Bad Language*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
2. Bethany K. Dumas, & Jonathan Lighter. (1978). Is Slang a Word for Linguists?
3. Campbell, L. (2013). *Historical Linguistics*.
4. Cecelia Anne Cutler. (2007). Hip-Hop Language in Sociolinguistics and Beyond.
5. Connie Eble. (1996). *Slang and Sociability*.
6. Danet, B., & Herring, S. C. (Eds.). (2007). *The Multilingual Internet: Language, Culture, and Communication Online*. Oxford University Press.
7. David Crystal. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*.
8. David Crystal. (2011). *Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide*.
9. Elisa Mattiello. (2008). *An Introduction to English Slang A Description of its Morphology, Semantics and Sociology*.
10. Eric Partridge. (2008). *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*.
11. (Farris) Jorgen Amari. (2010). Slang Lexicography and The problem of defining Slang.
12. Ferdinand de Saussure. (1916). *Course in General Linguistics*.
13. George Yule. (2020). *The Study of Language (7th edition)*.
14. Inna Tsaralunga. (2019). Methodological principles of diachronic study of linguistic variation in the Ukrainian language. Advanced Education.
15. Inna Tsaralunga. (2019). Methodological principles of diachronic study of linguistic variation in the Ukrainian language. Advanced Education.

16. Janet Holmes. (2013). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*.
17. Jannis Androutsopoulos. (2001). *From the streets to the screens and back again: on the mediated diffusion of ethnolectal patterns in contemporary German*.
18. Jannis Androutsopoulos. (2006). Multilingualism, diaspora, and the Internet.
19. Jannis Androutsopoulos. (2010). Localizing the Global on the Participatory Web. In *The Handbook of Language and Globalization*.
20. Jannis Androutsopoulos. (2011). *From Variation to Heteroglossia in the Study of Computer-Mediated Discourse*.
21. Jean Aitchison. (2001). *Language Change: Progress Or Decay?*
22. Julie Coleman. (2012). *The Life of Slang*.
23. Keith Allan & Kate Burridge. (2006). *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*.
24. Kovalchuk Yuliia Anatoliivna. (2020). Slang as sociocultural phenomenon.
25. Laurie Bauer. (1983). *English Word-Formation*.
26. Marta Dynel. (2012). *Language and Humour in the Media*.
27. Mary Bucholtz. (1999). You da man.
28. Penelope Eckert. (2000). *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice*.
29. P. H. Matthews. (2014). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*.
30. Robert W. Murray. (2017). *Historical linguistics: the study of language change*  
In W. O'Grady et al. (Eds.), *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction*.
31. Sali A. Tagliamonte. (2016). *Teen talk: The language of adolescents*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

32. Sali Tagliamonte, & Derek Denis. (2008). Linguistic ruin? LOL! Instant messaging and teen language.
33. Tetiana Nikolaieva, Yuliya Boyko, Oleksandr Yemets, Yuliia Herasymenko, & Iryna Dumchak. (2023). Slang Vocabulary of the Ukrainian and English Languages: Translation Aspect.

#### **Internet sources**

1. (n.d.). Oxford English Dictionary. <https://www.oed.com/>
2. (n.d.). Urban Dictionary, May 10: bonk. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/>
3. (n.d.). X. It's what's happening / X. Retrieved June 3, 2025, from <https://twitter.com/>
4. *English-Corpora: COHA*. (n.d.). English Corpora. <https://www.english-corpora.org/coha/>
5. Fobar, R. (2024, January 18). *New words are spreading faster than ever—thanks to teenage girls*. National Geographic. Retrieved June 5, 2025, from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/teenage-girls-innovate-new-language-linguistics>
6. *Google Ngram Viewer (Google Books Ngram Viewer)*. (n.d.). Google Ngram Viewer (Google Books Ngram Viewer). <https://books.google.com/ngrams/>
7. Ivanna Tsar. (2024). Language behavior of Kyiv youth during the Russian-Ukrainian war.
8. *Make Your Day*. (n.d.). TikTok. Retrieved June 3, 2025, from <https://www.tiktok.com/uk-UA/>

**Appendix 1. Table of word formation processes of analyzed slang terms**

<i>Word Formation Process</i>	<i>Examples from Corpus</i>	<i>Approximate Percentage (%)</i>
Conversion	cool, sick, dope, lit, flex, salty, woke, bougie, basic, slaps, thirsty, cringe, bad, savage	33.3%
Interjection / Ideophone	yeet, periodt, no cap, jam, tea	16.7%
Clipping & Blending	sus, rizz, bae, stan	13.3%
Metaphorical Development	ghosting, throwing shade, slay, ate, serve, vibe	20.0%
Borrowing / Semantic Broadening	diva, brat, tweaking, cheeky, freaky	16.7%

## Appendix 2. Table of primary communicative functions of slang terms

Communicative Function	Description	Examples from Corpus
Identity & In-Group Solidarity	To signal membership and reinforce cohesion within a specific social group.	bae, lowkey, no cap, yeet, periodt
Expressive & Evaluative	To convey strong emotions, attitudes, admiration, approval, or disapproval.	cool, sick, dope, lit, slaps, slay, ate, serve, salty, cringe, sus, basic, bougie
Discourse Management	To guide conversational flow, signal sincerity, or introduce new information.	no cap, that's the tea
Performative & Humorous	To engage in linguistic play, self-expression, irony, or to challenge norms.	throwing shade, diva, brat, tweaking, savage