Morphological Neologisms: The Emergence of Social Media Slang on TikTok

Neologisme Morfologi: Kemunculan Slanga Media Sosial di TikTok

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Abstract: This study explores recent social media slang, neologised or popularised on TikTok, the social media application that allows the creation and sharing of short videos. It identifies the slang words and investigates semantic shifts, functions, origins and morphological processes involved in slang formations. Twenty new slang words were identified from extracts collated from fifty-one TikTok videos. Of the four criteria of slang: low degree of formality, taboo term, regular usage, and special familiarity, it is found that all the slang words fulfil the fourth criterion as they are only familiar to social media users. Most of the slang words are used as a form of group association in which these words are commonly known to people who are aware of TikTok or social media trends. For the word formation methods of which there are eight: affixation, compounding, conversion, shortening, sound-imitation, reduplication, creative respelling, and semantic shift, the identified slang words were largely formed through semantic shifts, whereby these words are existing ones that have evolved into having new meanings. Results of the analyses of the identified slang words lead to the deduction that all of them are unrelated to the health or medical sector even though these words were made popular during the COVID-19 pandemic that was ravaging the whole world.

Keywords: Morphological neologisms, semantic shifts, slang words, TikTok;

Abstrak: Kajian ini meneroka slanga media sosial terkini, yang dicipta dan dipopularkan di Tiktok, iaitu aplikasi media sosial yang membenarkan penciptaan dan perkongsian video-video pendek. Kajian ini mengenalpasti slanga dan mengkaji perubahan semantik, fungsi, asal-usul dan proses morfologi yang terlibat dalam pembentukan slanga. 20 slanga baru telah dikenalpasti daripada ekstrak yang telah dikumpulkan daripada 51 video TikTok. Daripada empat kriteria slanga: tahap formaliti yang rendah, istilah pantang-larang, penggunaan biasa, dan kebiasaan khas, telah didapati bahawa semua slanga memenuhi kriteria keempat kerana slanga tersebut hanya dikenali oleh pengguna media sosial. Kebanyakan slanga digunakan sebagai tanda asosiasi kepada kumpulan tertentu, dimana perkataan-perkataan ini hanyalah dikenali oleh orang yang tahu tentang TikTok dan trend media sosial tersebut. Untuk kaedah pembentukan perkataan dimana terdapat lapan kaedah: imbuhan, kata majmuk, penukaran, pengurangan, imitasi bunyi, reduplikasi, ejaan kreatif, dan perubahan semantik, slanga yang telah dikenalpasti sebahagian besarnya dibentuk melalui perubahan semantik, dimana perkataan-perkataan ini adalah perkataan yang sedia ada, namun telah diberikan makna baharu. Hasil analisis slanga yang telah dikenalpasti membawa kepada kesimpulan bahawa kesemuanya adalah

tidak berkaitan dengan sektor kesihatan atau perubatan walaupun kesemuanya telah dipopularkan semasa pandemik COVID-19 yang telah menjejaskan seluruh dunia.

Kata kunci: Neologisme morfologi, perubahan semantic, slanga, TikTok;

Introduction

Neologism is a continuous process that naturally happens in various circumstances as every language user has their own communicative goals. New words are created to fulfil immediate language needs and these lexical items are created by people of different social backgrounds. Age, gender, ethnicity, social class, interests, acquired language(s), and other factors influence neologism formations. The process of neologism in today's digitalised world majorly occurs online, making the newly coined words more distinctive and unfamiliar especially to the occasional and non-users of the technology. Thus, this study identifies new social media slang and investigates its meanings, functions, etymological origins, and the morphological processes involved in forming them to facilitate comprehension of the words.

Neologism, slang, and word formation

Neologism is the concept of forming new lexical items in a language through morphological processes. It is a form of linguistic innovation that may occur every day and spread rapidly to a specific population (Čilić and Plauc, 2021). Jamet and Terry (2018) explain that neologism is the newly coined words in a language or the process of forming lexical items by assigning new meanings to existing terms. In this study, neologism refers to new slang words from social media, obtained from TikTok videos. The concept of neologism also encompasses its morphological aspects involving word formation processes.

Slang refers to informal expressions or words used in a particular context, especially among the members of a group in society. Yule (2006) defines slang as a form of colloquial speech used by people who claim to belong to a specific social group. Neologised social media slang is formed and used in novel online contexts. Identifying and classifying a word as slang can be based on four criteria proposed by Dumas and Lighter (1978) in which a minimum of two out of the four must be fulfilled.

The first criterion is that the use of a word lowers the degree of formality of any formal or serious speech or writing (Dumas & Lighter, 1978). For example, in "They spend one hundred billion *bucks* annually for defence", the use of *bucks* instead of dollars or other currencies reduces the degree of formality of the sentence making it a slang word. Secondly, slang is equipped with the notion of "special familiarity", (Dumas & Lighter, p14), in which it will intuitively suggest a sense of familiarity to the users with a close association to the term. As an example, *bummer* in "Today was a *bummer*", means "disappointment" and the word is familiar to fluent speakers of American English. Thirdly, slang may be regarded as a taboo term in a formal discussion. For instance, *shit* in "I'd like this job, Sir, because the one I have now is *shit*" is taboo as the addressee is the addresser's potential employer. In other words, slang may violate the general rule of language use as it is to be used in informal circumstances. Finally, slang can be identified on a daily or regular basis as it aims to give comfort to the user by avoiding any necessary elaborations to the intended audience, even if used unintentionally. Slang acts as an alternative vocabulary for language users to use in daily communication as they are catchy words or expressions (Eble, 1996).

Deducing meanings and functions of slang can be based on reasons for using them. Coleman (2012) proposes five reasons, and they are: to express themselves, such as by showing emotions or excitement, *OMG* is an example of such a word; to create humour in communication, like the use of *LOL*; to show association to a specific social group where *fam*, for instance, is used to address close friends; and to give ambiguity and make messages open for personal interpretations. An example of this category is *sick* which may be used to show admiration or criticism. The final reason is to create concise expressions as in *BRB* which is an abbreviation for "be right back". The four criteria of slang as proposed by Dumas and Lighter (1978) have been used in this study to identify them. Coleman's (2012) five reasons for the use of slang have been utilised to determine the meanings and functions of identified slang words.

The word formation process is a concept of morphological analysis of lexical items (Babich, 2010). Word formation is interrelated to neologism, whereby both concern the coinage of new words, either with new roots or new words formed from existing words through a certain morphological process. In this study, eight methods which are affixation, compounding, conversion, shortening, sound-imitation, reduplication, creative respelling, and semantic shift are the foci.

First, affixation is the process of adding affixes to base or root words. The three types of affixes are prefixes that precede a root (the *in-* and *un-* in *in*capable and *un*happy); suffixes that appear after a root (the *-ship* and *-ly* in friend*ship* and slow*ly*); and infixes that occur within a compound word or a root (as in the *-s-* in town*s*people). Next, compounding forms new words by combining two or more existing words from the same or different word classes. It is also one of the most productive and dominant methods of word formation other than affixation (Babich, 2010). The newly formed words can be categorised as compound nouns (playtime, hairpiece), compound verbs (stir-fry, whitewash), or compound adjectives (sky-high, squeaky-clean) (Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). Conversion refers to the method of forming new words by converting the word class of an existing word to another. As Carstairs-McCarthy explains, conversion is one of the processes in derivational morphology that changes a lexeme to another word class without any physical change to the word. For example, *beat* can be categorised as a verb in the sentence "He *beats* him", but it has undergone conversion to a noun as in "The music *beats* are fun".

Shortening is a method of forming a new word through its contraction while retaining the meaning and the word class of the lexeme (Babich, 2010) and it can be classified into four. The first, which is clipping, shortens words by cropping parts of the original and deleting the rest. There are three clipping categories; procope drops the initial part of words (*phone* for tele*phone*, *bus* for omni*bus*), syncope removes the middle part (*maths* for *math*ematic*s*, *ma'am* for *ma*dam) and apocope deletes the final part of the words (*limo* for *limo*usine, *ad* for *ad*vertisement). Blending is a method that shortens words by combining two existing ones and removing some parts from one or both words (Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). Examples of blended words are *brunch* from breakfast and lunch and *motel* from motor and hotel. A word can also be partially blended as exemplified by *cheeseburger* from cheese and hamburger. It should be noted that blending and clipping are often applied to words together.

Acronyms are formed by taking only the initial letters of words or long phrases, which are then pronounced as a word of their own (Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). This is commonly seen in the names of organisations and jargon such as *NASA* (National Aeronautics and Space Administrations) and *GIF* (Graphics Interchange Format). Initialisms are words formed by taking the initial letters, but the words are pronounced by the name of each letter (Carstairs-McCarthy). An example of this is *IIUM* (International Islamic University Malaysia).

The fifth-word formation process according to Babich (2010) is sound imitation or onomatopoeic, which occurs when new words are formed by imitating sounds of a thing, such as those produced by animals, inanimate objects, or actions. Examples include *buzz* (the sound of bees) and *splash* (the sound of water). Next is reduplication where root words are duplicated in two ways; with no phonetic changes (*bye-bye*) and with modification to a root, consonant, or vowel (*chit-chat* changes from /ɪ/ to /æ/). Adding to the mentioned processes is creative respelling. This method, usually used in informal conversations, refers to the modification of spelling while retaining the meaning of the words. For example, "thanks" is spelt as *thanx* and "going to" is contracted to *gonna*.

The final process in forming words involves semantic shift. The process does not alter the physicality of the words, but it refers to existing words that change their attributes semantically. Babich (2010) explains the four types of semantic change. Semantic broadening broadens the meaning of a word. For example, *bird* originally meant small fowl, but it is now understood as a type of winged creature. Semantic narrowing shifts the meaning of a word to become more specific and less inclusive. For instance, *meat* originally refers to any kind of food, but it is narrowed down to the flesh of animals. Third, degradation changes the meaning of a word to be perceived negatively. For example, the original meaning of *silly* was happy and prosperous, but it is degraded to denote foolishness. The fourth type is elevation, and it transforms a word into a more positive meaning. For example, the meaning of *knight* is elevated from an ordinary boy to a nobleman.

Research on neologisms includes those by Al-Salman and Haider (2021), Akut (2020), Izazi and Tengku-Sepora (2020), and Fikriah (2019). Al-Salman and Haider studied the trending English neologisms during the COVID-19 pandemic and identified the most dominant word formation method. They identified 208 COVID-19-inspired neologisms from various sources and checked whether the words had been listed in online dictionaries. The findings show that COVID-19 has broadly impacted linguistic discourse and that the word formation processes involved are so wide-ranging, strongly suggesting the linguistic vitality of neologisms during a crisis.

Akut (2020) conducted a study shortly after the testing period of COVID-19 was over and the focus was on analysing the main word class of newly coined words. It was found that neologisms during the pandemic are majorly content words, which are nouns and verbs. The result of this study also presented the morphological processes involved, in which the new words are mostly characterised as compound words while only a few are

of complex structures. Similarly, Fikriah (2019) has analysed neologism in a news portal the Jakarta Post. It involved exploring the meanings of new words after identifying the word formation methods involved. Data came from Jakarta Post's popular culture and lifestyle sections. Results show that 31 neologisms were identified, with all the above-mentioned word formation processes involved.

Budiasa et al. (2021) focused on the usage of slang on Indonesian social media and the forms, functions, and meanings of current slang were analysed. Budiasa et al. found out that there are diverse forms of social media slang, in which the categories discussed in this study are fresh and creative, flippant, imitative, acronym, and clipping. The findings show that Indonesian social media slang is currently very diverse and creative, as every category of word formation has its own list of slang words. Another research concerning social media slang by Izazi and Tengku-Sepora (2020) explored the variations of slang used by Malay users on Twitter, focusing on the keyword *makan* (eat). Twitter Advanced Search feature was used to show tweets with the keyword only, and then the filtered tweets were labelled into specific categories of word formation. The analysis indicates that Malay users utilised a variety of slang such as shortened words, onomatopoeic words, and acronyms in discussing *makan* on Twitter.

The present study focuses on analysing the morphological processes involved in coining new slang on another social media platform, TikTok. It also presents the etymology of the slang words by providing their meanings and the functions to help ensure the correct use of the words by language users.

Method

This study applied a content analysis approach in examining social media slang neologisms. New slang words and phrases were collated from March 2020 to February 2023 from 51 TikTok videos, their captions, and other users' comments. The meanings, functions, and word formation methods of those slang words were descriptively analysed. Initial data analysis involved organising the slang into three sections. The first section responded to Research Question 1, in which the criteria to identify slang explained by Dumas and Lighter (1978) were applied. The following section analysed the meanings based on the usage in the extracts, and then the functions of the words were linked with the reasons for using slang explained by Coleman (2012). For the third research question, Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) and Babich (2010) were referred to in analysing the word formation methods of the slang.

Findings

Results and findings are presented according to the study's research questions.

The neologised slang from TikTok

The twenty identified social media slang words were single words, phrases and abbreviations. As proposed by Dumas and Lighter (1978), a word, a phrase or an expression must at least fulfil two out of four specified criteria to be identified as slang. Table 2 lists the 20 TikTok slangs that have fulfilled the criteria.

Table 2. List of Slang and the Fulfilled Criteria

	Slang	Criteria of Slang (Dumas & Lighter, 1978)			
		Low degree of formality	Special familiarity	Taboo Term	Daily/regular usage
1	*bussin*	/	/		
2	*cap*	/	/		
3	*CEO*	/	/		/
4	*couch guy*	/	/		
5	*chupagetti*	/	/	/	
6	*DC*	/	/		/
7	*duet*		/		/
8	*FYP*	/	/		/
9	*Heather*	/	/		
10	*IB*	/	/		/
11	*main character*	/	/		
12	*material gworl*	/	/		
13	*mid*	/	/		
14	*pick me*	/	/		
15	*pov*	/	/		/
16	*sheesh*	/	/	/	
17	*stitch*		/	/	
18	*story time*	/	/		/
19	*yassify*	/	/	/	
20	*you're done*	/	/		
Total		18	20	3	8

The extracted slang words are part of internet language and therefore all of them fulfilled the notion of "special familiarity" in which the intended meaning and use of the slang might only be known to TikTokers or some language users familiar with the words. It can next be identified that only two (*duet* and *stitch*) out of 20 words do not fulfil the criterion of "a low degree of formality", as these two are existing words that can be used in both formal and informal discussion. However, these words have their own meanings when used on TikTok, making them to be classified as slang. For the criterion of "daily or regular usage", eight out of 20 fulfil this and they are *CEO, DC, duet, FYP, IB, pov, stitch,* and *story time*. These eight words are widely used on TikTok as they are regarded as the main TikTok features and trends. For the criterion "taboo terms", only three words (*chupagetti, sheesh* and *yassify*) are thus categorised. The three are regarded as taboo because the actual meaning of the words and their origins denote, to a certain degree, inappropriate and controversial meanings.

Thus, in answering the first research question of identifying the new social media slang, specifically on TikTok, 20 words and phrases have been identified from the extracts collected from 51 videos. All slang words fulfilled two out of the four criteria outlined by Dumas and Lighter (1978), in which the criterion of "having a special familiarity" is fulfilled by all, while there are only three "taboo terms", making it the least fulfilled criterion.

Meanings and functions of the neologised slang

The meanings and functions of the twenty identified slang have been deduced from the way the words and phrases are used in the compiled extracts. The neologisms (italicised) are presented below together with the extracts in which they appear. Their meanings are discussed first, followed by a tabulation of their functions according to Coleman (2012).

The first slang word is *bussin* and it appears as follows:

[1] "this baked spaghetti *bussin bussin*"
[2] "Your outfit photos boutta be *BUSSIN*"
[3] "this filter *bussin*"

It can be concluded from the extracts that *bussin* is used to express the good quality of something, not only for food as in [1], but also for a person's attire [2] or anything that the TikTok users were trying to describe as very good or meet their expectations [3].

Next is *cap* and the data also provide three instances of TikTok use.

[4] "fact or *cap*?"
[5] "strongest neck in the world, no *cap*"
[6] "STOP THE *CAP*"

It can be inferred from the above that *cap* is used when TikTokers are expressing acceptability of statements. In [4], *cap* carry the opposite meaning to that of "fact" which can mean "fake" or "falsehood". When *cap* is used as a phrase *no cap* [5], it emphasises the opposite, that the users are indeed telling the truth or a fact.

CEO is best known as the abbreviation of *Chief Executive Officer*, which refers to the leader of an organisation or a company.

[7] "I'm the *CEO* of always finding the best sounds"
[8] "*ceo* of sounds & chaos"
[9] "*ceo* of changing forehead size"

However, as evident from extracts [7] to [9] the slang *CEO* on TikTok is used when people express humorously about an individual who is good or extremely skilful at something that they do.

The fourth slang is *couch guy* and they are exemplified as follows:

[10] "*Couch guy* takes Oxford"
[11] "who needs a *couch guy*?"
[12] "may I present to you a different kind of #*couchguy*"

The phrase *couch guy* originated from a 2021 TikTok video by @laurenzarras who was surprising her boyfriend. The video went viral when other TikTok users assumed that the boyfriend was displeased to see his girlfriend and that he might be in a secret relationship with the girl sitting beside him on the couch during the surprise meeting. Hence, the label *couch guy* is formed and then used by other users to refer to someone's partner who is being surprised after a long separation. It has also been used when content creators are referencing the original video, including making parodies of the original situation.

Chupagetti, [13], was popularised by a Filipino TikToker, @tyronetiaga0, when he posted a video with the caption "*chupagetti* effect" in 2021.

[13] "here's the recipe for *CHUPAGETTI*"

The word then became a trend where people commented to strangers' videos with "here's the recipe for "*CHUPAGETTI*". *Chupagetti* does not have any definite meaning as it is only a combination of words that are randomly formed. However, *chupagetti* is regarded as a taboo term as *chupa* means *suck* in Tagalog. *Getti* originates from *spaghetti*, hence, *chupagetti* is *chupa* and *getti* combined.

As can be analysed from extracts [14] and [15], *dc* is used alongside a person's name, and pronouns, or in tagging the username of a TikToker.

[14] "Anyways *dc*: me"
[15] "*dc*: @Tracy Joseph"

DC is an initialism of *dance credit*, used when TikTokers are giving credits to the original creator of a dance trend.

From *duet,* to mean a pair of singers singing a song together, the word has semantically evolved. Extracts [16] to [18] below imply that the TikTok slang *duet* still denotes a similar meaning to the original.

[16] "so we all just coming here from *duets* huh"
[17] "can't wait to hear your *duets*"
[18] "#*duet* with @charlidamelio"

TikTok *duet* refers to the social media platform's feature of that shows two videos on a split-screen that play simultaneously. *Duet* is used when people post their own video side-by-side with a video created by another creator. Similar to *duet,* the slang *stitch* is a TikTok feature that allows users to integrate another creator's video into their own.

[19] "#*stitch* with @mcasey991"

It is used like in [19] when people respond to another creator's content by replying to queries, continuing a skit, and etcetera.

Similar to *duet* and *stich*, *FYP* as shown in extracts [20] to [22], is found to refer to a TikTok feature.

[20] "This lives on your *fyp* rent free"
[21] "Blow this video up if it ends up on your *FYP*!!"
[22] "If this is on your *fyp* claim it, interact and share"

FYP is an initialism for *For You Page,* used when people talk about the TikTok app homepage.

A newly formed abbreviation is *IB* and based on extract [23], its function is similar to *DC* (dance credit).

[23] "IB: @Adnan"

IB or *inspired by* is used when people are giving credit to the original creator of any TikTok content that they are copying. TikTokers tag other TikTok usernames to give credit for the content they post on their personal accounts.

The slang word *heather* was inspired by Conan Gray's song of the same title (Gray, 2020), and it was widely used by TikTok users in late 2020. In the song, Gray talks about a character he envies that has caught the attention of the person he has fallen for. On TikTok, *heather* refers to a person who is seen as perfect and has

everything such as being popular, beautiful, and loved by everyone.

[24] "I wish I were *Heather*"
[25] "Ok so my mom was ACTUALLY *heather*"
[26] "Life is hard when ur sister is literally *heather*"

Heather is used when people talk about a person that they envy or wish to emulate. As in extracts [24] to [26], it then became a TikTok trend where users compiled pictures or videos of a person with the captions referencing the perfect *heather*.

It can be inferred from extracts [27] to [29], that the slang *main character* refers to an individual who is significant or important in a setting.

[27] "thinking i look like the *main character* while i do homework in my room"
[28] "He's the *main character*."
[29] "Saw this kid on my bus trying to be the *main character*."

This phrase can be comprehended naturally by TikTok users as it originally refers to a person who holds a leading role in a film or fictional work in general. On TikTok, the term is widely used when content creators create scenarios imagining themselves as influential.

The slang *material gworl* originates from Saucy Santana's (2020) song "Material Girl". The version of the song with a fully boosted bass went viral in late 2021 whereby the pronunciation is heard as *material gworl* [gwɔrl] instead of the standard *girl* [gəl]. In the collected data, the slang appears as follows:

[30] "now I can be a real *material gworlll*"
[31] "My parents sent me a pic of them having a *MATERIAL GWORLLL* moment this morning"
[32] "#pov: The popular kids make fun of me but didn't realize im secretly a *MATERIAL GWORLL*"

As shown in [30] to [32], *material gworl*, with its spelling variations, refers to the trend of displaying women's power, used for content where females are showing their success, wealth, and life achievements.

The slang *mid* originated from a speech by wrestler Maxwell Jacob Friedman when he severely criticised or "roasted" the Midwest (of USA) saying, "It's called the Midwest because every single thing in it is mid" (All Elite Wrestling, 2021).

[33] "tag @wendys let them know they *mid*"
[34] "the difference is I'm not *mid*"
[35] "if she's *mid*…what are we…"

On TikTok, *mid* is used to describe something as average in quality as in [33], show others that they are unimpressed [34], or describe people of typical and average looks [35].

The term *pick me* is used for girls with distinctive behaviours who try very hard to impress others, especially boys.

[36] "the *pick me* girl trying to stop a school fight"
[37] "she is such a *pick me*"
[38] "it's giving '*pick me*' vibes"

Exemplified by [36] to [38], the slang started to be used widely across the platform in 2021 when TikTokers created content such as skits of these types of girls that imply that they expect viewers, mainly boys, to show interest in them.

One final abbreviation found was *pov*. As generally known, POV is the abbreviation for *point of view*. However, the *pov* on TikTok is used when creators post content showing some viewpoints and sharing scenes of them and others experiencing things. This can be seen in extracts [39] to [41] below.

[39] "*pov* you just found out you have a secret talent"
[40] "*#pov* you see four students sing for the lead role in the school play"
[41] "*#Pov*: when you're too skinny"

Extract [41], for example, is where *pov* is used in explaining the experience of being skinny. The trend of posting *pov* videos gained great attention during the early period of COVID-19 as a lot of people became TikTokers during the lockdown.

From the informal exclamation of surprise or annoyance, the meaning of *sheesh* has evolved on TikTok involving its verbalisations in videos. Three instances, [42] to [44], were identified.

[42] "*Sheesh*… I almost fell"
[43] "*sheesh* that was close"
[44] "*sheeeesh* the new toilet tho"

The original TikTok sound of *sheesh* came from a 2021 video by a TikTok user, @meetjulio, showing a frog on a table while some voices were yelling *sheesh* in the background. As can be seen in [42] to [44], *sheesh* is widely used when content creators post reaction videos and hype people up. It is usually used with the "ice in my veins" pose by the NBA player (NBA refers to the American National Basketball Association), D'Angelo Russell, which includes a gesture pointing to the underside of an elbow.

The phrase *story time* refers to the act of the creator of a video telling more stories and explanations for the video they have posted which might be unclear to viewers. The use can be seen in extracts [45] and [46].

[45] "should I do a *storytime*?"
[46] "story time coming soon"

[47] "ok we NEED a story time PLEASE"

In [47], *story time* is also used by the viewers to request the creator to provide more details about the incidents in the posted video.

The term *yassification* [48], and its variations *yassify* [49] and *yassifying* [50], originated from Twitter, but was used widely on TikTok in 2021, which then led to other derived forms such as "to *yassify*".

[48] "the *yassification* of #pinocchio"
[49] "watch me *yassify* myself to the max"
[50] "start *yassifying* my truck with me"

The term *yassify* may be associated with the LGBTQ+ community, which is then regarded as a taboo term since it might be controversial to some people. On TikTok, *yassify* is used when TikTok creators show the outcomes of their actions, such as enhancing the appearance of themselves or their belongings such as pets and cars.

You're done is used on TikTok when viewers try to stop a creator who has gone overboard. The extract below provides an example of how the slang is used in a video.

[51] "*you're done. you're done.*"

The phrase was first mentioned on TikTok by @kittykatkittykatpur when someone was trying to pop a pimple on the face of the person in the video. Then, the person with the pimple stopped the person by saying "*You're done. You're done.*"

Based on the meanings of the slang words and phrases, they can be categorised according to reasons for using slang as proposed by Coleman (2012). Table 3 below shows the list of classified slang words and phrases.

Table 3. Classification of Slang based on Reasons for their use

	Reasons for Using Slang (Coleman, 2012)	Slang	Frequency
1	To show association to a social group	*CEO, couch guy, chupagetti, duet, heather, main character, material gworl, pick me, pov, stitch*	10
2	To express themselves	*bussin, cap, mid, sheesh, you're done*	5
3	To create brief and concise expressions	*DC, FYP, IB,*	4
4	To create humour	*sheesh*	1
5	To give ambiguity	*story time, yassify*	2
	Total		22

Table 3 shows that most of the slang (10) is used to show social group association, as they are TikTok trends that are joined by most users on that platform. For the next reason, there are five slang words and phrases used for self-expression, as they act as exclamation phrases showing users' feelings or reactions. Slang words that are used to create concise expressions are those that are abbreviated phrases. However, *CEO* and *pov* are not categorised the same as *DC, FYP, and IB* because they are not used as shortened forms of words on TikTok, rather, these refer to a specific concept or trend. For "giving ambiguity", *story time* and *yassify* are categorised under this as they cause the viewers to start speculating about posted issues.

Language users who use slang words and phrases have their own reasons for using them. The real meanings and functions, alongside the origins, need to be acknowledged to ensure appropriate use of the slang. It has been observed that even though these slang words were coined and popularised during the worst period of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of them are completely unrelated to the health and medical sector. Equally important, based on the reasons for slang use (Coleman, 2012), most of the words on TikTok are used as a form of group association, in which all of them are the trends on TikTok whose use are most probably adopted by the content creators to make sure that they are not missing out and be part of the TikTok ingroup.

Morphological processes involved in forming new slang

To answer the third research question, the data were classified based on the morphological processes involved in forming them by referring to Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) and Babich (2010). Five main word formation methods were identified, and they are creative respelling, affixation, compounding, shortening, and semantic shift. Table 4 presents the results. It should be noted that a few slang words have been formed through more than one method.

Table 4. Classification of Slang based on Word Formation Method

Word Formation Method		Slang	Frequency	
Creative Respelling		*material gworl*	1	
Affixation	Suffixes	*yassify*	1	
Compounding	Compound Noun	*couch guy, main character, material gworl, pick me, story time*	5	
Shortening	Partial Blending	*chupagetti*	1	8
	Clipping	*mid, chupagetti*	2	
	Initialism	*DC, FYP, IB, CEO, pov*	5	
Semantic Shift	Semantic Broadening	*bussin, CEO, duet, heather, stitch*	5	9
	Semantic Narrowing	*pov*	1	
	Elevation	*cap, sheesh*	2	
	Degradation	*you're done*	1	
Total				24

It can be seen from Table 4 that an example of "creative respelling" is *material gworl*. It is formed through a combination of compounding and creative respelling. The word *girl* is spelled *gworl* following the pronunciation by the singer Saucy Santana (2020), in her song "Material Girl". As for "affixation", only *yassify* has been formed through this, in which the root of *yassify*, *yass* or *yas*, is an exaggerated form of *yes* and may be used to show admiration, while the suffix *-ify*, means "to make". *Yas* has probably been derived from "yes", to mean giving approval. When the root *yass* is added with the suffix *-ify*, it constitutes the meaning "to make something be admired". *Yass* is classified as a form of exclamation where *-ify* makes the derived *yassify* a verb.

Five slang words were formed using compounding and all of them are compound nouns. *Couch guy*, *material gworl* and *story time* combine two nouns, *main character* combines an adjective and a noun, while *pick me* combines a verb and a noun. As for "shortening", three different methods (partial blending, clipping, and initialism) are involved in forming eight identified slang words. *Chupagetti* is formed by partially blending the Tagalog word *chupa* and *spaghetti*. Specifically for *spaghetti*, its initial part has undergone procope clipping, keeping its final part, *-getti*. Even though *chupagetti* is formed by blending two words, it has no actual meaning as it is randomly created by a TikToker. The slang *mid,* meanwhile*,* is formed by clipping the original compound word, *Midwest*. *Mid* has been created by applying an apocope clipping as it drops the final part of *Mid*west. *DC, FYP, CEO, pov,* and *IB* are initialisms.

Table 4 also shows that all sub-classification of semantic shift were involved in forming almost half of the total collected slang. Semantic broadening formed *bussin*, *CEO*, *duet*, *heather,* and *stitch*. Originally, the *bussin* in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) describes the food as good and delicious (Nero, 2021). However, the TikTok slang *bussin* has a broader meaning as it describes other things such as outfits and appearance apart from food. *CEO* started off as an abbreviation for *Chief Executive Officer*, referring to the leader of an organisation. The meaning has evolved on TikTok as it is used to talk about anyone who is good at

what they are doing, not necessarily the leader of the trend.

The original meaning of *duet* is a performance by two persons. On TikTok, *duet* is not only limited to performances but used in a wider sense whereby anyone can *duet* another video by other TikTokers for any kind of content. Videos have been *dueted* when people would like to respond directly to another video by another user, with two videos playing on a split-screen, allowing viewers to simultaneously see both.

Originally, *Heather* refers to a person in Conan Gray's (2020) song. However, the TikTok slang *heather* has undergone semantic broadening as it is not a person's name. It could be anyone viewed as perfect or worthy of emulation. Similarly, for *stitch*, its original meaning is to join the sides of something. TikTok's *stitch* refers to the platform's feature that allows users to integrate their videos with other videos, with no limit, to the point that the first original video is untraceable. *Stitch* allows a user to include a video of another user, with the video of the other user to play first, not simultaneously.

Pov, *cap,* and *sheesh* and *you're done* are categorised under semantic narrowing. *pov* was originally the abbreviation for *point of view*, used when people voice out opinions or perspectives as well as give examples and ideas. However, TikTok *pov* is used when content creators are giving an example of a situation. Thus, the word is formed through semantic narrowing as the original meaning of *pov* includes many aspects of opinion-giving, while on TikTok it is used in a limited and specific manner.

Cap and *sheesh* are formed through elevation (Babich, 2012). Elevations occur when words are semantically improved and their positivity increased compared to their original meanings. *Cap* in its original AAVE is usually associated with falsehood and negative statements (Steber & Carey, 2022). However, the meaning of the TikTok slang *cap* is elevated when it is frequently used as *no cap* in emphasising truths and proving facts. According to Li (2021), *sheesh* is initially used to express disappointment or annoyance. However, the TikTok *sheesh* is used to show positive reactions such as excitement and to hype people up. *You're done* is the only slang formed through the method of degradation. Originally, *you're done* is usually said upon task completion. However, the meaning of the TikTok slang *you're done* is degraded as it is used to stop people from doing something or what they are about to do.

Thus, in answering the RQ3, it can be concluded that the identified slang words were formed through the method of creative respelling, affixation, compounding, shortening, and semantic shift. The majority of them were formed through the semantic shift method, in which these slang words are existing lexical items but have been given new meanings or used for different purposes from their original functions.

Discussion

While studies such as those by Akut (2020) and Fikriah (2019) majorly focused on word formation method frequencies, this present one has focused on the etymology and morphological background of social media slang, specifically those used by TikTok users. Three main observations resulting from the findings of this study are the trend for the slang identification criteria, the meaning of the collected slang, and the frequency of semantic shift in the word formation method. In explaining the trend for the criteria to identify slang, it has been observed that all of the slang words fulfilled the notion of "special familiarity". This is highlighted as it supports Yule's (2006) idea that slang is only comprehensible to people who share similar viewpoints and attitudes. On the contrary, the criterion of slang as a taboo term is the least fulfilled, presumably because taboo terms are sensitive or controversial words, not to be used in a formal discussion as explained by Dumas and Lighter (1978). These words or phrases are not only viewed as sensitive in formal discussions, but many people also regard them as culturally inappropriate to be used in daily conversations.

It is observed that the meanings for all of the identified slang words are wholly unrelated to the medical or health terms, even though they were neologised and popularised during the pandemic. This can be linked to the claim by Miller et al. (2016) that the development of online platforms has created a new virtual world. People started to live in this new space, and some regard the virtual world as an alternative to escape reality. Some TikTokers may utilise slang as a coping mechanism in facing the challenging COVID-19 period. Because of this, many users dropped COVID-19-related issues while on TikTok, to have fun and to be entertained instead of focusing on the traumatising pandemic. It can be inferred that all 20 of the identified slang words are non-medical terms as they are formed to fulfil entertainment or escapism needs.

It can be seen from the findings that semantic shift is the most frequent word formation method involved, with nine out of 20 words formed through this. The high frequency can be linked to the fact that they are internet slang, favoured by youngsters. Eble (1996) states that slang is an alternative vocabulary that may have different meanings to different people. Thus, social media users adopt existing words to be used online as they are trying to create their own distinctive language in attempting to

distinguish themselves from others, especially the older generations. Equally important is the deduction that the findings from this study contradict Al-Salman and Haider's (2021) claim that COVID-19 has broadly impacted the linguistic field whereby the word formation processes involved are so wide-ranging. The findings from this study indicate that the majority of the slang was formed through semantic shifts. It is undeniable that neologism is a linguistic need during this pandemic, but the morphological processes involved are not as varied as in the findings in Al-Salman and Haider. The neologised words are fundamentally existing lexical items with new meanings and purposes.

Conclusion

Limitations faced while conducting this study include the difficulty in tracing the original video that first used or coined the slang due to the infinite number of videos on TikTok. Another acknowledged limitation was in finding a credible source to know the original meaning of a specific word, especially those originated from the AAVE, as most websites have no reliable author. This study aimed to identify neologised TikTok slang and data was collected during the period dominated by COVID-19-related issues. After analysing the meanings and functions, it is remarkable to note that the 20 slang words are all nonmedical terms even though these words were coined and popularised during the health crisis. To add, these slang words that were categorised according to the reasons for using slang by Coleman (2012), were found to mostly have been used as an association to a social group. For the word formation methods, the five involved were creative respelling, affixation, compounding, shortening, and semantic shift, referring to those proposed by Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) and Babich (2010). Many of the collected slang words were formed through semantic shift, leading to the conclusion that these words are existing lexical items with new meanings.

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