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MODERN ENGLISH SLANG ON TIKTOK: A LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Abstract. The article examines the phenomenon of modern English slang emerging from TikTok, focusing on its linguistic innovation, social meaning, and cultural diffusion. It highlights key slang expressions such as “rizz,” “delulu,” “it’s giving,” and “slaps,” analyzing how they reflect creativity, identity, and online performativity.

Keywords: TikTok, slang, English language, digital communication, youth culture.

In recent years, TikTok has become a dominant platform shaping global digital communication. Beyond being a source of entertainment, TikTok functions as a linguistic laboratory where slang rapidly evolves. Modern English slang emerging from TikTok demonstrates how language, culture, and technology intersect in new ways [1, p. 18].

One of the most widespread examples is the word “rizz,” derived from “charisma,” meaning charm or attractiveness in romantic contexts. The term gained massive popularity after being used by influencer Kai Cenat, whose videos featuring “rizz” went viral in 2022 [2, p. 3]. Similarly, “delulu,” short for “delusional,” is used

to describe someone who has unrealistic fantasies, often in humorous contexts [6]. For instance, users may say, “I’m delulu for thinking he’ll text first”.

TikTok slang often involves abbreviation, sound play, and repurposing of older words. “Slaps,” for example, means something (usually music) is excellent or enjoyable — “This song slaps!” [4, p. 47]. Another common expression is “it’s giving,” used to describe an aesthetic impression: “It’s giving main character energy.” Such expressions demonstrate linguistic economy and humor, where users convey social meaning through minimal language.

Moreover, slang on TikTok is closely tied to digital identity. Phrases like “main character energy” or “era” (e.g., “I’m in my healing era”) allow individuals to express self-narratives in cinematic terms [3, p. 62]. This reflects what sociolinguists call “digital performativity,” where language becomes a tool of self-presentation and creativity [1, p. 22].

The speed at which TikTok slang spreads is unprecedented. Unlike traditional slang that diffused regionally, TikTok’s algorithm enables global reach within hours. This makes linguistic trends highly transient — a phrase can dominate for a month before disappearing [5, p. 78]. Yet, even short-lived terms influence memes, humor, and broader online discourse.

Critics claim that TikTok slang may fragment English into isolated micro-lects, but others argue that it shows linguistic vitality. As Crystal notes, “The Internet doesn’t destroy language — it multiplies it” [3, p. 105]. TikTok’s linguistic creativity highlights English’s adaptability and cultural dynamism in the 21st century.

In conclusion, modern English slang from TikTok captures the fluid, performative nature of digital communication. Expressions like “rizz,” “delulu,” and “it’s giving” illustrate how users reinvent language to express identity, humor, and belonging. TikTok slang is not linguistic decay but rather a living record of how young people shape and transform global English.

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