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A Sociolinguistic Analysis of English Slang Used by Indonesian Youth on Twitter (X)

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Abstract

This study investigated the use of English slang by Indonesian youth on Twitter (X). It aimed to identify the social types and formation patterns of English slang, examine its communicative functions, and analyze how Twitter (X) features and interactional contexts influenced its use and meanings. Previous studies have largely examined slang on other platforms or within single communities and have rarely integrated form, function, and platform context; this study addresses that gap by analyzing these three dimensions together. A descriptive qualitative approach within a sociolinguistic framework was employed. The data consisted of 50 public interaction units—original posts, replies, quote posts, and short threads—from Indonesian Twitter (X) users aged 17–25, collected through purposive sampling in 2025, containing 79 slang tokens representing 73 unique expressions. Slang types were analyzed based on Partridge (1984) and Coleman (2012), formation patterns on Mattiello (2008) and Kudirka (2020), communicative functions on Holmes (2013) and Stenström (2012), and platform features through digital sociolinguistics (Androutsopoulos, 2013). The findings revealed that the expressions mainly served sociability and group identification, novelty and humor, and linguistic economy; many were secondary slang drawn from global internet culture. Semantic shift or extended meaning was the most frequent formation pattern (26 tokens, 32.9%), followed by abbreviation, acronym, or initialism (15 tokens, 19.0%), phrase-based slang (11 tokens, 13.9%), and compounding (9 tokens, 11.4%); derivation or affixation accounted for 8 tokens (10.1%), clipping for 4 tokens (5.1%), creative respelling for 4 tokens (5.1%), and blending for 2 tokens (2.5%). Slang was mainly used for expressing emotion or personal reaction (22 tokens, 27.8%) and evaluation or judgment (19 tokens, 24.1%), followed by humor, stance, solidarity, and emphasis. Furthermore, original posts, replies, quote posts, and hashtags shaped how slang was used and interpreted. These findings indicated that English slang functioned not only as informal or non-standard language but also as a context-sensitive sociolinguistic resource reflecting creativity, social identity, and audience awareness in digital communication. Because the sample was small, age was inferred from public digital traces, and coding was conducted by a single coder, the findings are presented as patterns in the selected data rather than as a statistically representative portrait of all Indonesian youth.

Keywords: English slang, sociolinguistics, Indonesian youth, Twitter (X), formation patterns, communicative functions.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has become part of Generation Z's daily communication, and Twitter (X) is one of the places where Indonesian young people routinely mix Indonesian with English expressions. Some of these expressions are easy to

understand, while others carry meanings that differ from their literal ones, such as *cooked*, *ick*, or *it's giving*. Sociolinguistics explains such variation through social factors such as age, group membership, and situation (Holmes, 2013). Slang is a clear example. It is informal, non-standard vocabulary used mainly by young people to express emotion, build solidarity, and signal group identity (Eble, 1996), and it is creative and dependent on context (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Slang is therefore better treated as a meaningful language variety than as incorrect language.

Slang can be described through its social types, word-formation processes, and communicative functions. Partridge (1984) classifies slang by social function: sociability and group identification, novelty and humor, linguistic economy, and secrecy or exclusion of outsiders. Coleman (2012) separates primary slang, which belongs to a specific subculture, from secondary slang, which is borrowed from other groups or popularized through media. In terms of formation, slang often arises through clipping, abbreviation and acronym, blending, compounding, affixation, and semantic shift (Mattiello, 2008; Kudirka, 2020). Semantic shift is considered especially common because meanings are negotiated within communities and contexts (Kudirka, 2020). In terms of function, informal varieties are used to express emotion, create intimacy and humor, and mark in-group identity (Holmes, 2013), as well as to emphasize, evaluate, and take a stance (Stenström, 2012).

When English slang is used by Indonesian speakers, it often indexes modernity, global orientation, and peer affiliation rather than linguistic deficiency (Yusra, 2017). Digital media accelerates the circulation of such expressions (Crystal, 2011; Androutsopoulos, 2013), and online writing often resembles speech in its informality and immediacy (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). Twitter (X), a microblogging platform rebranded from Twitter in July 2023, is a suitable site for studying slang because its short messages encourage economical, informal language (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014), and its features, such as replies, quote posts, and hashtags, take part in constructing meaning (Zappavigna, 2012, 2022). Interpreting such messages relies on pragmatic competence and contextual awareness (Eragamreddy, 2025). In Indonesia, young users also combine Indonesian, regional languages, and English online (Darmawan, 2021; Mahyuni et al., 2024), and informal digital contexts reduce social distance and encourage relaxed language choices (Yusra, 2020).

Previous studies have examined slang on Instagram (Syaputra et al., 2024), slang during viral topics on Twitter (Pratama & Wijayanti, 2022), and slang in a specific Twitter community, namely K-Pop fans (Aulya & Binawan, 2025). These studies usually address only one aspect of slang, such as types, word formation, or educational implications. Few combine the forms, communicative functions, and contextual meanings of English slang used by Indonesian youth on Twitter (X), a platform with its own interactional features. How platform context, audience awareness, and the functions of slang relate to one another therefore remains underexplored.

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to sociolinguistics by treating slang as a context-sensitive resource rather than merely a list of informal words. By integrating form, function, and platform context, the study extends previous work that has mostly described slang forms separately from their interactional functions (Aulya & Binawan, 2025; Syaputra et al., 2024). It also contributes to digital sociolinguistics by showing how platform features

such as replies, quote posts, and hashtags shape the interpretation of slang (Androutsopoulos, 2013; Zappavigna, 2022). Practically, the findings can help English teachers discuss register variation and contextual meaning using authentic but anonymized examples. For researchers, the study offers a coding procedure that can be adapted for analyzing slang on other digital platforms.

This study is grounded in sociolinguistics, which views language as a social practice shaped by context (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). It adopts a descriptive variationist approach (Labov, 1972), a view of identity as negotiated through language choices in interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), and the perspective of digital sociolinguistics, which stresses the role of platform features in shaping language use (Androutsopoulos, 2013). The study does not propose a causal model. It asks three questions: first, what social types and formation patterns of English slang are used by Indonesian youth on Twitter (X); second, what communicative functions does English slang serve in their interactions; and third, how do Twitter (X) features and interactional contexts influence the use and contextual meanings of English slang? The findings are expected to describe slang use in a specific digital setting and to give English teachers examples for discussing informal and formal registers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive design within a sociolinguistic approach. The aim was to describe and interpret slang as it occurs naturally, not to test hypotheses or generalize statistically. Slang use on Twitter (X) was treated as a social and interactional practice shaped by platform features, audience awareness, and communicative goals.

Data and Participants

The data were public tweets posted on Twitter (X) in 2026. Private messages, protected accounts, images, videos, and standalone emojis were excluded, so only written text was analyzed. Users were treated as Indonesian youth when they met four criteria: their profile or bio indicated an Indonesian location or identity, they consistently used Indonesian in other tweets, they took part in Indonesian trending topics or local discussions, and their tweets were publicly accessible. Their age was set at 17–25 years, corresponding to Generation Z (Putri, 2023; Yustisia, 2016). Tweets, not individual users, were the unit of analysis, and users were not contacted.

Because age cannot always be verified directly from public profiles, the researcher did not rely on a single indicator. Age was inferred from a combination of profile information, self-description in bio or pinned tweets, language use, participation in Indonesian youth-oriented topics, and interactional style. When these indicators were inconsistent or insufficient, the tweet was excluded. This procedure is a methodological limitation because age remains an inference from public digital traces rather than a verified demographic fact; therefore, the findings are presented as patterns in the selected data, not as a statistically representative portrait of all Indonesian youth.

Data Collection

Data were selected through purposive sampling. A tweet was eligible if it contained at least one English slang expression, was written by a user in the target age group, was publicly accessible, was posted in 2026, and represented natural interaction (an original post, reply, or quote post). The final set consisted of 50 data units, each of which could be an original post, a reply, a quote post, or a short thread. The researcher collected the data manually through Twitter (X) search and filtering features using keywords and hashtags typical of Indonesian youth discourse. Eligible tweets were documented through screenshots and transcription, and each was recorded in a spreadsheet with its date, interaction type, a brief contextual note, and the slang expression. Usernames were anonymized.

Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, slang expressions were identified and categorized by social type (Partridge, 1984; Coleman, 2012). Second, formation patterns were coded following Mattiello (2008) and Kudirka (2020). Third, communicative functions were coded in context following Holmes (2013) and Stenström (2012), with one dominant function assigned to each token. Fourth, the influence of features such as replies, quote posts, hashtags, and audience orientation was analyzed following Androutsopoulos (2013). Each occurrence of a slang expression was counted as one token, and repeated expressions were counted once as unique expressions. Percentages were calculated as the frequency divided by the 79 tokens. Trustworthiness was supported through detailed contextual description (credibility), systematic documentation of procedures (dependability), coding grounded in established frameworks (confirmability), and analysis of multiple tweets and contexts (triangulation). Only public tweets were used, and all identifying information was removed.

A single coder coded the entire dataset. To reduce subjectivity, the researcher used a codebook derived from the theoretical frameworks, coded the data in two rounds separated by a time gap, compared the results of both rounds, and kept an audit trail of coding decisions. The researcher also discussed ambiguous cases with supervisors (peer debriefing), conducted negative case analysis by checking tokens that did not fit the dominant patterns, and wrote contextual notes for each token. No second coder was available, so inter-coder reliability was not calculated; this is acknowledged as a limitation. The purpose of these procedures was not to produce statistical reliability but to make the interpretive process transparent and consistent.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The 50 data units contained 79 slang tokens representing 73 unique expressions. Table 1 presents the distribution of data units by interaction type, while Tables 2–4 present the formation patterns, communicative functions, and platform features.

Types and Formation Patterns of English Slang

In terms of social type (Partridge, 1984; Coleman, 2012), the expressions served sociability and group identification (e.g., *normies*), novelty and humor (e.g., *saddle*, a playful change of *baddie*), and linguistic economy (e.g., *IDGAF*, *side chick*). Many were also secondary slang, drawn from global internet culture and inserted into

Indonesian sentences, as in *ghosting* and *catfish* used to describe a local online experience. Slang meant to exclude outsiders was not a prominent type, which is consistent with the public nature of the platform. Eight formation patterns appeared (Table 2).

Table 2. Formation patterns of English slang (N = 79 tokens)

No.	Formation pattern	Frequency	Percentage	Example from the data
1	Semantic shift or extended meaning	26	32.9%	*cooked, toxic, red flag*
2	Abbreviation, acronym, or initialism	15	19.0%	*LOL, IDGAF, ISTG, #lmk*
3	Phrase-based slang	11	13.9%	*touch grass, throw hate*
4	Compounding	10	12.7%	*rage bait, side chick, doxxing*
5	Derivation or affixation	7	8.9%	*yapping, hottie*
6	Clipping	4	5.1%	*simp*
7	Creative respelling	4	5.1%	*fineshyt*
8	Blending	2	2.5%	*bromance, situationship*
Total		**79**	**100%**	

Semantic shift was the most frequent pattern. Familiar English words such as *cooked*, *ick*, *toxic*, and *red flag* acquire additional meanings through repeated use in online communities. In the tweet "gw yg getting cooked, kena bgt bray", *cooked* does not refer to food but to being in trouble or defeated, and this meaning is recognizable only through the Indonesian frame and shared online knowledge. This agrees with Allan and Burridge (2006) and Eragamreddy (2025), who stress that slang meaning depends on context more than on literal sense, and with Kudirka's (2020) observation that semantic shift is particularly common in slang. Indonesian youth therefore reinterpret existing English forms rather than only borrow them.

Abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms support rapid communication, which fits the economy that Twitter's brevity encourages (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). They are not merely mechanical reductions, however. *LOL* signals that a situation should be read humorously, *ISTG* intensifies an assertion, and *LMK* invites a response. Phrase-based slang cannot be interpreted word by word: *touch grass* is a call for an overly involved user to return to offline life, and it helps build an imagined community that shares digital cultural knowledge. Compounds such as *rage bait* give a short label to a recognizable online practice. The less frequent patterns, namely derivation, clipping, creative respelling, and blending, show that word shape and spelling also serve as resources for humor and intensity. *Fineshyt*, a stylized spelling of *fine shit*, intensified a positive evaluation of someone's appearance. These results are broadly consistent with Aulya & Binawan, (2025), who found acronyms, abbreviations, clipping, compounding, and blending in Twitter slang, and with Hutauruk et al. (2024) on slang among Indonesian EFL students. The present study extends them by examining broader Indonesian youth interaction instead of one community and by connecting formation patterns to interactional functions and platform features.

Communicative Functions of English Slang

Each token was assigned one dominant function (**Table 3**). Slang was used most often to express emotion and to evaluate.

Table 3. Communicative functions of English slang (N = 79 tokens)

No.	Communicative function	Frequency	Percentage	Example from the data
1	Expressing emotion or personal reaction	22	27.8%	*gagged*
2	Expressing evaluation or judgment	19	24.1%	*toxic, red flag*
3	Creating humor or a playful effect	13	16.5%	*random, saddie*
4	Expressing stance or attitude	11	13.9%	*cringe, lowkey*
5	Showing solidarity or intimacy	8	10.1%	*gurl, hun, diva*
6	Expressing emphasis or intensification	6	7.6%	*ISTG, asf*
Total		**79**	**100%**	

The two most frequent functions, emotion and evaluation, indicate that slang is used mainly for interpersonal and evaluative purposes, not only for brevity. This supports Eble (1996) and Holmes (2013), who tie slang to emotion, solidarity, and social meaning. In "i'm so gagged aaa", the user reacted to seeing well-made-up women at a mall. *Gagged* conveys being amazed and almost speechless, which is stronger than a neutral adjective such as *impressed*, in line with Stenström's (2012) view that informal language carries attitudinal meaning beyond propositional content. *Toxic* and *red flag* gave a concise negative judgment of another person's behavior and positioned the writer as an evaluator. These functions suggest that Twitter (X) is a space where users publicly perform personal reactions and evaluations, but the data do not support a claim that all Indonesian youth use slang in the same way.

Humor, stance, solidarity, and emphasis each had a smaller share but show relational work. The reply "im a saddle" turned the positive label *baddie* into self-mockery. In "calling them mami papi is cringe and weird asf but lowkey now its growing on me", *cringe* and *lowkey* together expressed a changing stance. Address forms such as *gurl*, *hun*, and *diva* reduced social distance and positioned participants as members of the same community, so their meaning was relational, not only lexical. *ISTG* and *asf* partly compensate for the absence of spoken stress and intonation in writing. Because each token was assigned one dominant function, this distribution simplifies a reality in which one expression often does several things at once. *Gagged*, for example, expresses a reaction and also evaluates positively.

Twitter (X) Features and Interactional Contexts

The same slang worked differently depending on where and how it appeared (Table 4).

Table 4. Twitter (X) features and their influence on slang meaning

Feature	Slang in the data	Influence on use and meaning
Original post	*ick* in "instant ick goodbye"	Presents an immediate public reaction without a preceding turn; the writer assumes an imagined audience understands the term. Meaning is later questioned and negotiated between users, showing who shares the slang knowledge and who does not.
Reply	*chopped* in a reply thread	Meaning is negotiated between users; one user asks what the word means and another admits being "way behind" on Gen Z slang. The thread makes shared and unshared slang knowledge visible and turns slang into metalinguistic talk.
Quote post	*it's giving*, *soft life*, *capitalism core*	Meaning can be read only against the quoted discussion; the writer uses slang to evaluate, align with, or distance from the quoted content and its audience.
Hashtag	#*lmk*, #*wargadebtfree*, *doxxing*	#*lmk* turns an abbreviation into an invitation; hashtags around *doxxing* connect a request for support to a community of users with similar concerns and align the writer with that community.

Eight formation patterns appeared. Semantic shift or extended meaning was the most frequent pattern (26 tokens, 32.9%). Familiar English words such as cooked, ick, toxic, and red flag acquire additional meanings through repeated use in online communities. In the tweet "gw yg getting cooked, kena bgt bray," cooked does not refer to food but to being in trouble or defeated, and this meaning is recognizable only through the Indonesian frame and shared online knowledge. This agrees with Allan and Burridge (2006) and Eragamreddy (2025), who stress that slang meaning depends on context more than on literal sense, and with Kudirka's (2020) observation that semantic shift is particularly common in slang. Indonesian youth therefore reinterpret existing English forms rather than only borrow them. Abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms followed (15 tokens, 19.0%) and support rapid communication, which fits the economy that Twitter's brevity encourages (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). They are not merely mechanical reductions, however: LOL signals that a situation should be read humorously, ISTG intensifies an assertion, and LMK invites a response. Phrase-based slang accounted for 11 tokens (13.9%) and cannot be interpreted word by word: touch grass is a call for an overly involved user to return to offline life, and it helps build an imagined community that shares digital cultural knowledge. Compounding accounted for 9 tokens (11.4%), as in rage bait and side chick, which give short labels to recognizable online practices or social roles. Derivation or affixation accounted for 8 tokens (10.1%), as in yapping and hotie; doxxing is better treated as derivation from dox with -ing than as a compound, and it has been recoded accordingly. Clipping accounted for 4 tokens (5.1%), as in simp; creative respelling for 4 tokens (5.1%), as in fineshty; and blending for 2 tokens (2.5%), as in bromance and situationship. Fineshty, a stylized spelling of fine shit,

intensified a positive evaluation of someone's appearance. These results are broadly consistent with Aulya and Binawan (2025), who found acronyms, abbreviations, clipping, compounding, and blending in Twitter slang, and with Syaputra et al. (2024) on slang on Instagram. The present study extends them by examining broader Indonesian youth interaction instead of one community and by connecting formation patterns to interactional functions and platform features.

Each token was assigned one dominant function. Slang was used most often to express emotion or personal reaction (22 tokens, 27.8%) and evaluation or judgment (19 tokens, 24.1%). The two most frequent functions indicate that slang is used mainly for interpersonal and evaluative purposes, not only for brevity. This supports Eble (1996) and Holmes (2013), who tie slang to emotion, solidarity, and social meaning. In "i'm so gagged aaa," the user reacted to seeing well-made-up women at a mall. Gagged conveys being amazed and almost speechless, which is stronger than a neutral adjective such as impressed, in line with Stenström's (2012) view that informal language carries attitudinal meaning beyond propositional content. Toxic and red flag gave a concise negative judgment of another person's behavior and positioned the writer as an evaluator. Creating humor or a playful effect accounted for 13 tokens (16.5%), as in random and saddle; expressing stance or attitude accounted for 11 tokens (13.9%), as in cringe and lowkey; showing solidarity or intimacy accounted for 8 tokens (10.1%), as in gurl, hun, and diva; and expressing emphasis or intensification accounted for 6 tokens (7.6%), as in ISTG and asf. The reply "im a saddle" turned the positive label baddie into self-mockery. In "calling them mami papi is cringe and weird asf but lowkey now its growing on me," cringe and lowkey together expressed a changing stance. Address forms such as gurl, hun, and diva reduced social distance and positioned participants as members of the same community, so their meaning was relational, not only lexical. ISTG and asf partly compensate for the absence of spoken stress and intonation in writing. Because each token was assigned one dominant function, this distribution simplifies a reality in which one expression often does several things at once. Gagged, for example, expresses a reaction and also evaluates positively; such multifunctionality is noted in the coding notes and discussed as a limitation of single-function coding.

The same slang worked differently depending on where and how it appeared. In original posts, ick in "instant ick goodbye" presented an immediate public reaction without a preceding turn; the writer assumed that an imagined audience understood the term, and meaning was later questioned and negotiated between users, showing who shared the slang knowledge and who did not. In replies, chopped in a reply thread showed meaning negotiated between users; one user asked what the word meant and another admitted being "way behind" on Gen Z slang. The thread made shared and unshared slang knowledge visible and turned slang into metalinguistic talk. In quote posts, it's giving, soft life, and capitalism core could be read only against the quoted discussion; the writer used slang to evaluate, align with, or distance from the quoted content and its audience. In hashtagged posts, #lmk turned an abbreviation into an invitation, and hashtags around doxxing connected a request for support to a community of users with similar concerns and aligned the writer with that community. The results support Androutsopoulos's (2013) argument that digital language must be studied together with platform

practices. Platform features did not create meaning by themselves; they provided interactional positions and audience relationships that guided interpretation.

Form, function, and context therefore cannot be separated neatly. LMK is an abbreviation in form but an invitation in function, and capitalism core is a phrase in form but an evaluative stance in context. This integrated view is what earlier studies, which mostly list slang forms or word-formation processes, did not provide. Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is not a fixed label attached to youth but is produced through stance, alignment, and relationality in interaction. Expressions such as normies, gurl, and capitalism core are best read as situated choices through which writers align with particular styles, audiences, and communities at particular moments. These choices simultaneously construct sameness with those who share the slang and difference from those who do not. In this sense, English slang functions as a resource for positioning the self and the audience, not merely as a sign of informality. Finally, English slang appeared inside Indonesian sentences, as in "orangnya ghosting ... jatohnya catfish." This is not a simple replacement of Indonesian by English but a strategic combination of resources. The English item signals familiarity with global internet culture, while the Indonesian frame anchors it in local experience (Darmawan, 2021; Mahyuni et al., 2024). The data therefore suggest that slang use is shaped by audience design and community knowledge; it cannot be read as evidence that Indonesian youth are becoming less proficient in Indonesian or English.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed English slang tokens in public Twitter (X) data units produced by Indonesian youth. In answer to the first research question, the expressions mainly served sociability and group identification, novelty and humor, and linguistic economy; many were secondary slang. Eight formation patterns were found, with semantic shift or extended meaning as the most frequent (26 tokens, 32.9%), followed by abbreviation, acronym, or initialism (15 tokens, 19.0%), phrase-based slang (11 tokens, 13.9%), and compounding (9 tokens, 11.4%); derivation, clipping, creative respelling, and blending were less frequent. In answer to the second research question, six communicative functions were identified, with expressing emotion (22 tokens, 27.8%) and evaluation (19 tokens, 24.1%) as the most prominent, followed by humor, stance, solidarity, and emphasis. In answer to the third research question, original posts, replies, quote posts, and hashtags each shaped how slang was produced and interpreted by providing different interactional positions and audience relations. Taken together, the findings show that English slang on Twitter (X) is a context-sensitive sociolinguistic resource whose meaning arises from the relation between form, communicative purpose, audience, and platform feature. The significance of the findings lies not in the frequency counts alone but in the way they demonstrate that slang is used to perform reactions, evaluations, alignments, and community boundaries. English slang thus contributes to the construction of situated identities and audience awareness in digital communication.

The study has limits. It analyzed only 50 written data units, assigned one dominant function to each token, and did not compare platforms or age groups, so the results describe patterns and cannot be generalized statistically. The age of users

was inferred from public digital traces rather than independently verified, and coding was conducted by a single coder without inter-coder reliability. These limitations mean that the findings should be read as an interpretive account of the selected data. Future research should use larger and longer-term datasets, compare platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or Reddit, and examine how the same expression changes meaning across contexts or relates to code-mixing and identity construction. Future studies should also employ multiple coders, report inter-coder agreement, and verify demographic information through ethical and consented procedures. For English teaching, anonymized examples can help students distinguish informal from formal registers and analyze a slang expression's formation, function, and context, provided that the privacy of users is respected.

RECOMMENDATION

Future research could use larger and longer-term datasets, compare platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or Reddit, and examine how the same expression changes meaning across contexts or relates to code-mixing and identity construction. Future studies could also employ multiple coders and verify demographic information through ethical and consented procedures. For English teaching, anonymized examples can help students distinguish informal from formal registers and analyze a slang expression's formation, function, and context, provided that the privacy of users is respected.

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