



Investigating The Role of Semantic Change in Slang Word on Instagram and Its Influence on Informal Spoken Language in The Classroom

Lailatul Jannah¹, Dinar Vincy Yunitaka Bahrudin², Ina Daril Hanna³

^{1,2,3} Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Madura, Pamekasan, Jawa Timur

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01	<i>This study investigates the types of semantic change in slang words on Instagram and examines how these changes are adopted and reflected in students' informal spoken language in the classroom. This research employs a qualitative case study design involving third-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Islam Madura. The data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and students' spoken performance during guided informal speaking activities. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that four types of semantic change are identified in Instagram slang, namely extension, narrowing, degeneration, and regeneration of meaning, with degeneration being the most dominant type. Furthermore, the results show that these semantically shifted slang words are actively adopted by students in their informal spoken language. Based on (Brown's 2004) speaking aspects, the use of slang contributes positively to students' fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as they are able to express ideas more naturally and understand contextual meanings effectively. However, limitations are still found in accuracy and pronunciation, particularly in grammatical structure and word formation. In addition, the study indicates that Instagram plays a significant role as a source of linguistic input that accelerates vocabulary development and influences students' speaking behavior. The findings highlight that semantic change in digital environments not only affects lexical meaning but also shapes real-time language use in classroom interaction. In conclusion, this study confirms that Instagram slang functions as a dynamic linguistic resource that enhances informal communication while simultaneously presenting challenges in linguistic accuracy. Therefore, educators are encouraged to integrate awareness of digital language use into classroom practice to support balanced language development.</i>
Revised: 2026 06-18	
Accepted: 2026 06-019	
Keywords: Semantic Change; Slang word; Instagram: Informal Spoken Language	
DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10380	
Corresponding Author: Lailatul Jannah Lely.jnnh14@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Madura, Pamekasan, Jawa Timur	

1. Introduction

Language is inherently dynamic and continuously evolves in response to social, cultural, and technological developments. One of the most significant aspects of this evolution is semantic change, in which the meanings of words shift over time Lutfiah et al., (2024). In contemporary society, the rapid development of digital communication has accelerated this process, particularly through social media platforms. Among various linguistic phenomena, slang represents a highly dynamic and creative form of language used to express identity, solidarity, and group affiliation. Social media, especially Instagram, has become a prominent platform for the dissemination of slang due to its interactive features and rapid information exchange Novianita et al., (2023). As a result, many slang expressions circulating on Instagram undergo semantic change, such as extension, narrowing, amelioration, and pejoration, often deviating from their original meanings.

The influence of Instagram slang extends beyond online communication and enters offline contexts, particularly in students' informal spoken language in the classroom. Previous studies have examined semantic change in social media, mainly focusing on platforms such as TikTok Marpaung & Damanik, (2025), while research on Instagram and its impact on classroom communication remains limited. Furthermore, most studies tend to focus on identifying types of slang without examining how semantic changes are adopted in real-life interactions. This gap highlights the need to explore the relationship between digital language practices and spoken language use in educational contexts. Therefore, this Research aims to investigate the types of semantic change found in Instagram slang and to analyze how these changes are reflected in students' informal spoken language in the classroom.

2. Method

This Research employed a qualitative research design with a case Research approach to investigate semantic change in Instagram slang and its influence on students' informal spoken language. A qualitative approach was appropriate as this Research focuses on meaning, language use, and contextual interpretation rather than numerical data. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding social phenomena as constructed through interaction Baxter & Jack, (2015). The research was conducted at the English Education Department of Universitas Islam Madura, involving third-semester students selected purposively based on their active use of social media and familiarity with informal spoken English (Sugiyono, 2018). The data consisted of primary and secondary sources. The primary data included slang words collected from Instagram posts and students' spoken language obtained through guided classroom speaking activities, while the secondary data included relevant literature, screenshots, and audio recordings (Sugiyono, 2018).

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted during speaking activities to examine students' use of slang in natural interaction, while semi-structured interviews were used to explore students' understanding and perceptions of slang meanings. Documentation such as screenshots, recordings, and field notes was used to support the data collection process Creswell, (2013). The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure validity, this Research applied data and methodological triangulation by comparing multiple data sources and using different data collection techniques Creswell, (2013).

3. Result

Types Semantic Change

This section presents the findings of the research focusing on the types of Semantic Change That Found in Instagram. The Semantic Change are classified into four main categories by Rohbiah, (2020): Extention of Meaning, Narrowing of Meaning, Degeneration of Meaning and Regeneration of Meaning

Extention of Meaning

This kind of change means the widening of a words signification until it covers more than the idea originally conveyed.

Table 1. Extention of Meaning

No	Words	Dictionary meaning	Slang meaning
1.	Briliiant	Brilliant/radiant	Intelegent/Good
2.	Crash	Collision	Fall/Fall asleep suddenly

Table 1 shows that the meaning becomes broader/more general then the original meaning. For instance, the word *brilliant*, which originally refers to "very bright," has shifted into a more abstract meaning, referring to something "very good" or "intelligent." Similarly, the word *crash* extends from a physical collision to a figurative meaning, such as "falling asleep suddenly."

This shift occurs because digital communication tends to prioritize expressive and evaluative meanings rather than literal ones. In the context of Instagram, users frequently reinterpret words to convey emotions, opinions, and experiences more efficiently. As a result, the meaning becomes more flexible and applicable across various contexts

Table 2. Narrowing of Meaning

No	Words	Dictionary Meaning	Slang Meaning
1.	Busted	Broken/Damaged	Caught (doing Something Wrong)
2.	pout	Scolding (General)	Pouting (certain Emotion)

Table 2 shows The Meaning becomes more specific than the Original Meaning, where the meaning of a word becomes more specific. For example, the word *busted*, which originally means “damaged” or “broken,” is now commonly used in slang to mean “caught doing something wrong.” Likewise, *pout* becomes more specific in referring to a particular facial expression associated with certain emotions. This narrowing process reflects the tendency of slang to develop context-specific meanings that are easily recognized within a particular social group. On Instagram, repeated usage in similar contexts reinforces a more specialized meaning, limiting its broader interpretation.

Table 3. Degeneration of Meaning

No	Words	Dictionary Meaning	Slang Meaning
1.	Salty	Salty (tested)	Upset/someone Annoyed
2.	Nuts	Very liking/Anthusiatic	Crazy
3.	Cap	Hat	Lie
4.	Gutted	Destroy/empti	Very disampointed

Table 3 shows the initial meaning of neutral/positive becomes negative. Degeneration of meaning is found to be the most dominant type of semantic change in this research. Words such as *salty*, *nuts*, and *cap* illustrate how meanings shift from neutral or positive to negative connotations. For example, *salty*, which originally refers to taste, is now used to describe someone who is upset or annoyed. Similarly, *cap*, which means “hat,” is reinterpreted as “a lie.” This dominance of pejoration suggests that slang on Instagram is heavily influenced by emotional expression, particularly negative emotions such as frustration, sarcasm, and criticism. The informal and interactive nature of social media encourages users to create expressive language that captures these emotions quickly and effectively.

Table 4. Regeneration of Meaning

No	Word	Dictionary Meaning	Slang Meaning
1.	Silly	Stupid	Cheerful/Funny
2.	Smitten	Hit/Hard	Interested/in love
3.	Chill	Cold	Quiet/Relaxed
4.	Slay	Killing	Beautiful

Table 4 shows the initial meaning of Negative becomes to Positive, where meanings shift from negative to more positive connotations. Words such as *silly*, *chill*, and *slay* demonstrate this phenomenon. For instance, *slay*, which originally means “to kill,” is now widely used to express admiration, meaning “to perform very well” or “to look amazing.”

This positive shift can be explained by the role of social media in shaping identity and self-expression. Instagram users often use language to build a positive image, express admiration, and create a sense of belonging. Therefore, negative meanings are reinterpreted into more positive and socially acceptable expressions.

*Figure 1. caption*

Figure 1 showing speaking practice activities in the classroom, The students who spoke were seen actively practicing their speaking skills using slang that had been taught by the teacher. They try to speak more naturally, such as in everyday conversation, so that they are not as rigid as the use of formal language. Some students appear in front of the class to express their opinions, have a dialogue, or have a brief conversation. This activity helps to increase their confidence, fluency, and ability to use more contextual and realistic English expressions.



Figure 2. caption

Meanwhile, figure 2 shows students who are listening with active involvement and paying attention to their friends who are talking. They not only listen, but also understand, respond, and sometimes give feedback or answers casually using the same slang. This role is important for practicing listening comprehension skills, enriching vocabulary, and understanding the use of slang in the right context. In addition, this interactive atmosphere encourages students to learn from each other.

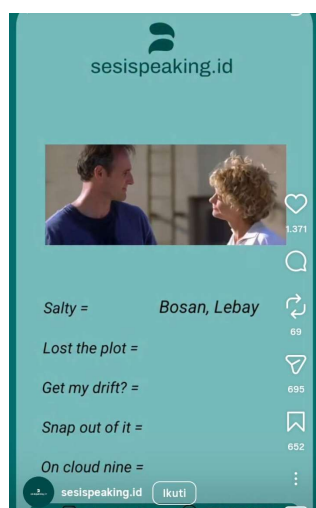


Figure 3. caption

Figure 3 shows screenshots of Instagram social media that show the use of slang in the context of digital communication. In the image, you can see several examples of slang words that have changed their meaning from their original meaning to more contextual according to user trends and cultures. The slang is used in captions, comments, or uploads, which reflects how language continues to evolve among social media users. This screenshot shows that the use of slang on Instagram not only serves as a communication tool, but also as a form of expression of identity and language creativity in the digital era.

The Influence of Semantic Change on Student's Speaking

This section addresses the second research problem by analyzing how semantic change in Instagram slang is reflected in students' informal spoken language based on the speaking aspects proposed by Brown (2004), namely fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension.

To strengthen the findings, several representative utterances produced by

No.	Student	Fluency	Accurancy	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Comphrehention
1.	NA	Smooth	Good	Good	Good (Salty,Cap)	Good
2.	NF	Fair	Error (tense)	Error (salty)	Good	Good
3.	Putri	Smooth	Minor Error	Good	Very Good	Good
4.	AF	Smooth	Good	Good	Good	Good
5.	UR	Smooth	Minor error	Error (Capping)	Good	Good
6.	Ainun MF	Smooth	Good	Very Good	Good	Good
7.	Ifrohah	Smooth	Good	Very Good	Very Good	Good
8.	Karlina	Smooth	Good	Error (Crash)	Good	Good
9.	Nurul	Smooth	Good	Error (Pout)	Good	Good
10.	Nurul F	Smooth	Good	Error (Silly)	Good	Good
11.	Maimuna	Smooth	Good	Good	Good	Good
12.	Anik M	Smooth	Good	Good	Good	Good
13.	Lailin	Smooth	Good	Good	Good	Good
14.	Aulia NI	Smooth	Good	Very Good	Very Good	Good
15.	Elfina F	Smooth	Error (Tense)	Good	Good	Good

students during the speaking activity are presented below:

➤ **Fluency & Vocabulary (NA):**

"I'm so salty right now."

→ This utterance was produced smoothly without hesitation, indicating strong fluency and appropriate use of slang vocabulary.

➤ **Accuracy Issue (NF):**

"Do you busted cheating today?"

→ This sentence shows an error in tense and interrogative structure, reflecting limitations in grammatical accuracy.

- **Pronunciation Issue (NF):**
“I’m so slaty now.”
→ The mispronunciation of “salty” indicates phonological inaccuracy, although the intended meaning remains understandable.
- **Balanced Competence (Putri):**
“She feels salty when she loses.”
→ This sentence demonstrates appropriate use of slang with correct grammatical structure and clear pronunciation.
- **Morphological Issue (UR):**
“He is caping right now.”
→ The incorrect form “caping” instead of “capping” shows a minor error in word formation.

Based on the analysis of 15 students’ speaking performance (see Table), the following patterns were identified:

- **Fluency:**
14 out of 15 students demonstrated smooth fluency, while only 1 student showed slight hesitation.
→ This indicates that the majority of students are able to speak spontaneously and naturally when using slang expressions.
- **Accuracy:**
11 students produced grammatically correct sentences, while 4 students showed errors, particularly in tense usage and sentence structure.
→ This suggests that grammatical competence is still developing among some students.
- **Pronunciation:**
9 students showed good pronunciation, while 6 students exhibited minor pronunciation errors, especially in pronouncing slang words such as *salty*, *crash*, *pout*, *silly*, and *capping*.
→ However, these errors did not significantly hinder communication.
- **Vocabulary:**
All 15 students demonstrated good vocabulary mastery, with 3 students categorized as *very good* due to their ability to use a wider range of slang expressions appropriately.
→ This highlights the strong influence of Instagram slang on students’ lexical development.
- **Comprehension:**
All students (15 out of 15) showed good comprehension, as they were able to understand and respond appropriately in informal communication.

Based on the analysis of students’ speaking performance, supported by interview data, the influence of semantic change in Instagram slang can be clearly

observed across the five aspects of speaking proposed by Brown (2004): fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension.

First, in terms of fluency, the majority of students (14 out of 15) demonstrated smooth and spontaneous speech production. They were able to express their ideas without significant hesitation, particularly when using familiar slang expressions. For example, one student stated, *"I'm so salty right now,"* which was delivered naturally and confidently. This finding is supported by interview data, where students reported that slang helps them speak more easily and naturally. One student stated, *"Slang makes conversation more relaxed and expressive,"* indicating that familiarity with slang reduces speaking anxiety and supports fluency.

Second, regarding accuracy, although most students (11 out of 15) produced grammatically acceptable sentences, several errors were still identified, particularly in tense usage and sentence structure. For instance, the utterance *"Do you busted cheating today?"* reflects incorrect grammatical construction. This finding aligns with interview responses indicating that students do not always fully understand new slang when they first encounter it. One student mentioned, *"I do not always understand it because that slang is new,"* suggesting that semantic understanding may develop faster than grammatical accuracy.

Third, in the aspect of pronunciation, 9 students demonstrated clear and understandable pronunciation, while 6 students showed minor inaccuracies. Mispronunciations such as *"slaty"* instead of *"salty"* and incorrect forms such as *"caping"* instead of *"capping"* were identified. However, these errors did not significantly affect communication. Interview data further supports this finding, as students reported that their peers generally understand the slang used in class. As one student stated, *"Yes, sometimes my friend understands the slang,"* indicating that communication remains effective despite minor pronunciation issues.

Fourth, in terms of vocabulary, all students demonstrated good mastery of informal lexical items, with several students categorized as very good due to their ability to use a wider range of slang expressions appropriately. Words such as *salty*, *chill*, *slay*, *cap*, and *brilliant* were used contextually in speaking activities. This finding is strongly supported by interview data, where students acknowledged that Instagram is a primary source of slang acquisition. One student stated, *"I learn slang from Instagram and friends,"* and another added that Instagram influences the way they speak because they are frequently exposed to new slang expressions. This confirms that digital platforms significantly contribute to vocabulary development.

Finally, in the aspect of comprehension, all students demonstrated a good level of understanding, as they were able to interpret and respond appropriately to slang expressions in conversation. Interview results further reveal that students are aware of semantic change, as they recognize that slang meanings often differ from dictionary definitions. One student stated, *"Yes, the meaning is sometimes*

different with dictionary,” and another explained that slang meanings may change over time. This indicates that students possess not only linguistic competence but also an emerging awareness of semantic change.

Additionally, interview findings reveal that students demonstrate sociolinguistic awareness, as they adjust their use of slang depending on the context. Most students reported that they use slang when talking to friends but avoid using it with lecturers. As one student stated, *“I use slang just with friends, not with our lecturer,”* indicating their ability to differentiate between informal and formal communication contexts.

Overall, the integration of observation and interview data confirms that semantic change in Instagram slang has a significant positive impact on students’ fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, while challenges remain in grammatical accuracy and pronunciation. Furthermore, Instagram plays a crucial role as a source of linguistic input that shapes students’ speaking behavior and enhances their informal communication skills.

4. Discussion

The findings of this Research demonstrate that semantic change in Instagram slang is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a socially and technologically driven process that significantly influences students’ informal spoken language in the classroom. The identification of broadening, narrowing, amelioration, and pejoration supports the concept of semantic change as a systematic process in which the meaning of lexical items evolves over time due to social and cultural influences Boukhaled et al., (2019). Among these types, pejoration appears to be the most dominant, indicating that many slang expressions tend to develop meanings associated with negative emotions such as annoyance, sarcasm, and criticism. This finding is consistent with the notion that meaning change is influenced by communicative needs and social interaction, particularly in dynamic environments such as social media.

The role of Instagram as a digital platform further strengthens this process. As stated by Novianita et al., (2023), social media facilitates rapid communication and interaction, allowing linguistic innovations to spread quickly among users. In line with this, Gonulal, (2019) highlights that Instagram can function as an effective medium for language exposure and development, particularly in informal contexts. The findings of this Research confirm that Instagram acts as a catalyst for semantic change, where meanings are continuously created, modified, and reinforced through repeated use in digital communication.

Furthermore, the presence of amelioration in words such as *slay* and *chill* reflects the function of slang as a tool for self-expression and identity construction. Slang, as argued by Lutfiah et al., (2024)), is an informal and innovative form of language that reflects social and cultural dynamics, particularly among younger generations. In this context, the reinterpretation of negative meanings into positive

ones suggests that language is used strategically to build social identity and express solidarity within peer groups. Additionally, the processes of broadening and narrowing demonstrate that semantic change often involves shifts from literal to metaphorical meanings or from general to context-specific usage, supporting the view that semantic change is influenced by cognitive and contextual factors.

In terms of classroom interaction, the findings indicate that students actively adopt Instagram slang in their informal spoken language. The use of slang contributes to fluency and expressiveness, as students are able to communicate ideas more naturally and spontaneously. This finding is in line with Brown (2004), who states that speaking is an interactive process that involves producing and processing meaning in real-time communication. However, despite their ability to use slang effectively, students still demonstrate limitations in grammatical accuracy. This suggests that exposure to informal language through social media enhances vocabulary acquisition more rapidly than grammatical competence.

Moreover, students show a clear awareness of context in their language use. They tend to use slang in peer interactions while avoiding it in formal communication with lecturers. This supports the concept of informal spoken language as a form of communication that reflects social relationships and group identity (Muhartoyo & Wijaya, 2014). The ability to adjust language use based on context indicates that students possess sociolinguistic competence, enabling them to navigate between informal and formal registers.

Most importantly, the findings reveal a strong relationship between semantic change in Instagram slang and its application in real-life communication. The transformed meanings of slang words are not only understood but also actively used by students in classroom interactions. This supports the perspective of computer-mediated communication, where language innovations emerging in digital environments are transferred into offline communication practices. As technological development continues to shape language use (Aladetan et al., 2023), platforms like Instagram play a crucial role in accelerating semantic change and influencing everyday communication.

Overall, this Research confirms that semantic change in Instagram slang has a significant impact on students' informal spoken language. The interaction between digital language and classroom communication highlights the dynamic nature of language evolution in the modern era, where social media serves as a bridge between online linguistic innovation and offline language practice.

5. Conclusion

This Research concludes that semantic change in Instagram slang represents a dynamic linguistic phenomenon shaped by social interaction, cultural context, and technological development. The findings reveal that slang words on Instagram undergo various types of semantic change, including broadening, narrowing, and pejoration, with pejoration emerging as the most dominant type. This indicates

that many slang expressions tend to develop meanings associated with negative emotions, reflecting the expressive and informal nature of digital communication.

Furthermore, the Research demonstrates that these semantically shifted slang words are not only recognized but also actively adopted by students in their informal spoken language in the classroom. The use of Instagram slang contributes to greater fluency and expressiveness in communication, although it is often accompanied by limitations in grammatical accuracy. Despite this, students show a clear awareness of context, as they tend to use slang appropriately in peer interactions while avoiding it in more formal situations.

Most importantly, this Research highlights a strong relationship between semantic change in digital environments and real-life language use. Instagram functions as a significant medium for linguistic innovation, where new meanings are created and rapidly disseminated before being integrated into everyday communication. The findings confirm that language change is no longer a slow, historical process but occurs dynamically through digital platforms and directly influences students' communicative practices.

In conclusion, this Research contributes to the field of semantics and sociolinguistics by demonstrating how social media, particularly Instagram, plays a crucial role in shaping contemporary language use. It also provides pedagogical implications, suggesting that educators should be aware of the influence of digital language on students' communication and guide them in balancing informal and formal language use in academic contexts.

6. References

- Aladetan, T. F., Yusuf, O., & Aliyu, A. (2023). Technological Advancements and Language Evolution: A Historical Approach. *The International Journal of Contemporary Research in Humanities (INJOCORH)*.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2015). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573>
- Boukhaled, M. A., Fagard, B., & Poibeau, T. (2019). The Dynamics of Semantic Change: A Corpus-Based Analysis. In J. Van Den Herik, A. P. Rocha, & L. Steels (Eds.), *Agents and Artificial Intelligence* (Vol. 11978, pp. 1–15). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37494-5_1
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (Fourth Indian edition). PHI Learning Private Limited.
- Gonulal, T. (2019). The Use of Instagram as a Mobile-Assisted Language Learning Tool. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 10(3), 309–323. <https://doi.org/10.30935/cet.590108>
- Lutfiah, Y., Septiani, E., & Putra, A. S. (2024). A STUDY OF SEMANTIC SHIFT (SLANG)

IN LANGUAGE ENGLISH. *VARIABLE RESEACH JOURNAL*, 01(02).

- Marpaung, T., & Damanik, B. A. R. (2025). SEMANTIC CHANGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA : A STUDY OF SLANG TERMS ON TIKTOK. *Pediaqu : Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Dan Humaniora*, 4.
- Masruddin, M., Amir, F., Langaji, A., & Rusdiansyah, R. (2023). Conceptualizing linguistic politeness in light of age. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 11(3), 41-55.
- Muhartoyo, M., & Wijaya, B. S. (2014). The Use of English Slang Words in Informal Communication Among 8th Semester Students of English Department in Binus University. *Humaniora*, 5(1), 197.
<https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v5i1.3009>
- Nasriandi, N., & Masruddin, M. (2021). The Use of British Parliamentary Debate Style in Teaching Speaking Skill. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 9(1).
- Novianita, R., Muhariani, W., & Yunita Pratiwi, C. (2023). Penggunaan Media Sosial Terutama Instagram Dalam Strategi Komunikasi Yang Efektif. *AL-MIKRAJ Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora (E-ISSN 2745-4584)*, 4(1), 389-396.
<https://doi.org/10.37680/almikraj.v4i1.3839>
- Rohbiah, T. S. (2020). An analysis of Semantic changes of English lexical borrowings in Indonesia Tourism field. *Loquen: English Studies Journal*, 13(1), 40.
<https://doi.org/10.32678/loquen.v13i1.2554>