



A Sociolinguistic Study of English Abbreviations Frequently Used by Gen Z on Tiktok

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Abstract. This study explores the sociolinguistic functions of English abbreviations frequently used by Generation Z on TikTok. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research identifies 30 commonly used abbreviations and categorizes them according to their linguistic functions. The analysis reveals that these abbreviations serve expressive, interpersonal, informative, and contextual purposes. Their frequent use on TikTok reflects Gen Z's unique digital identity and language practices shaped by social media culture. The study highlights the sociolinguistic significance of abbreviations as tools for identity performance, emotion expression, and community engagement in online communication.

Keywords: *Abbreviations, Digital Language, Gen Z, Sociolinguistic, TikTok*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji fungsi sosiolinguistik singkatan bahasa Inggris yang sering digunakan oleh Generasi Z di TikTok. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi 30 singkatan yang sering digunakan dan mengkategorikannya berdasarkan fungsi linguistiknya. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa singkatan-singkatan ini memiliki fungsi ekspresif, interpersonal, informatif, dan kontekstual. Penggunaan yang sering di TikTok mencerminkan identitas digital dan praktik bahasa unik Generasi Z yang terbentuk oleh budaya media sosial. Studi ini menyoroti signifikansi sosiolinguistik singkatan sebagai alat untuk penampilan identitas, ekspresi emosi, dan keterlibatan komunitas dalam komunikasi online.

Kata kunci: Singkatan, Bahasa Digital, Generasi Z, Sosiolinguistik, TikTok

1. INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital communication, social media platforms play a critical role in shaping how younger generations express themselves. TikTok, a video-sharing platform with over one billion active users worldwide, especially popular amongst Generation Z (aged approximately 16 to 24 years), serves as a vibrant space where language innovation flourishes. The use of English abbreviations and acronyms on TikTok is a salient feature reflective of this group's fast-paced, efficient, and identity-driven communication style.

Abbreviations in digital communication have a rich history rooted in the limitations of early text messaging systems such as SMS, where character limits necessitated brevity. However, these abbreviations have transcended mere convenience to become markers of in-group identity, cultural expression, and social interaction. Understanding how Generation Z deploys English abbreviations on TikTok offers insights into evolving linguistic trends and socio-cultural dynamics within digital communities.

In the digital era, language evolves rapidly under the influence of social media platforms that reshape how people communicate. Among these platforms, TikTok stands out as a unique

digital space where Generation Z (Gen Z) exhibits distinct linguistic patterns, especially in the use of English abbreviations. These abbreviations, such as *FR* (For Real), *IYKYK* (If You Know, You Know), and *SMH* (Shaking My Head), function beyond simplification—they are sociolinguistic tools used to express identity, shared knowledge, and group belonging (Crockett, 2022; Pramesti & Agustin, 2023).

TikTok's algorithm-driven, highly participatory nature encourages the frequent use of abbreviations in captions, comments, and on-screen text. Gen Z users often adopt such linguistic shortcuts to fit the platform's fast-paced, visually oriented, and context-heavy communication style (Nguyen, 2021). These abbreviations not only enhance efficiency but also carry social meaning, functioning as signals of inclusion within specific discourse communities.

According to Crystal (2008), digital language is not a degradation of formal language but a legitimate evolution where abbreviations play a central role. Similarly, Tagg (2015) argues that the use of informal digital expressions like abbreviations is not random, but structured around norms and expectations in digital discourse communities. Eble (2012) further explains that youth slang, including abbreviations, represents both innovation and in-group solidarity. These language practices are essential for identity performance, especially in platforms like TikTok where brevity, creativity, and trend alignment are key to participation.

This study investigates the sociolinguistic features of English abbreviations frequently used by Gen Z on TikTok. It aims to identify common forms, explore their meanings and functions, and analyze how they contribute to digital identity construction and social interaction within the platform.

This study is informed by Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), which highlights how language functions as social action, with abbreviations performing acts such as expressing attitude or managing interaction. The concept of Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) also explains how language reflects belonging and shared practices in digital communities like TikTok.

Since TikTok combines visual and textual modes, abbreviations gain additional meaning through their interaction with video and sound, as discussed in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Abbreviations enable Gen Z to assert identity, express emotions, and align with peer groups within the digital sociocultural landscape.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory posits that language functions not merely as a conduit of information but as a medium through which actions are performed. On TikTok, English abbreviations act as performative elements. For instance, abbreviations like LOL (Laugh Out Loud) or FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) serve pragmatic purposes beyond literal meaning, conveying emotions, attitudes, or social positioning efficiently within limited screen space.

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (CoP) theory underlines how groups coalesce through shared practices, language being a core element. Gen Z TikTok users form dynamic CoPs where specific sets of abbreviations signify membership and cultural affinity. The shared understanding of these abbreviations fosters belonging and social cohesion.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Abbreviations on TikTok are seldom isolated linguistic items; they operate within multimodal contexts where video, audio, text overlays, and visual effects interact. A term like stan, connoting a fervent fan, is often accompanied by visuals and music that amplify its emotional and cultural weight. Multimodal discourse analysis helps us appreciate the layered meanings constructed through these integrated semiotic modes.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the use of English abbreviations by Generation Z on TikTok. The primary data source was a video uploaded by TikTok user @_nensitr in August 2024, which presented a curated list of English abbreviations commonly used by Gen Z in digital interaction. Rather than collecting data through broad observation, this study used purposive sampling by selecting this single, representative content.

Thirty abbreviations listed in the video were transcribed and analyzed for their form, full form (English), and general usage. The analysis employed a sociolinguistic lens and categorized the abbreviations into four main functional types: expressive, interpersonal, informative, and contextual. The study also draws on theories of digital discourse and youth language variation.

The approach provides focused insights but limits generalizability; future studies could expand data sources to include multiple videos, comments, or cross-platform comparisons.

The qualitative analysis was complemented by triangulation through review of existing literature on youth slang, digital communication, and sociolinguistic frameworks.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 30 abbreviations extracted from the TikTok video were categorized and analyzed as follows:

Expressive Abbreviations

Used to express strong emotion, attitude, or reaction:

- IDC (I don't care): Shows indifference.
- IDGAF (I don't give a fuck): Strong, vulgar indifference.
- BM (Bad mood): Indicates emotional instability.
- NGL (Not gonna lie): Introduces an honest opinion.
- IMAO (Laughing my ass off): Shows extreme amusement.
- STFU (Shut the fuck up): Expresses shock or disbelief harshly.

Interpersonal Abbreviations

Used to interact or manage communication:

- WDYT (What do you think): Asks for opinion.
- WDYM (What do you mean): Seeks clarification.
- HMU (Hit me up): Invitation to connect.
- IKR (I know right): Shows agreement.
- BRB (Be right back): Signals a brief absence.
- IMK (Let me know): Requests follow-up info.

Informative Abbreviations

Used to state facts or opinions:

- IMO (In my opinion): Expresses a viewpoint.
- FYI (For your information): Shares extra info.
- CMIIW (Correct me if I'm wrong): Requests polite correction.
- TBH (To be honest): Prefaces truth-telling.
- ASAP (As soon as possible): Urgency marker.
- OFC (Of course): Agreement or affirmation.

Contextual/Structural Markers

Used to organize or contextualize content:

- AKA (Also known as): Adds alternate name.

- DIY (Do it yourself): Self-made initiative.
- OOT (Out of topic): Indicates a topic shift.
- RN (Right now): Current time reference.
- ALR (Alright): Acceptance or transition.
- ATP (At this point): Expresses condition.
- ICYMI (In case you missed it): Adds recap or highlight.
- DAM (Don't ask me): Avoids explanation.

Sociocultural Implications

Usage patterns reveal that abbreviations serve not only communicative efficiency but also functions of social inclusion and identity signaling. Mastery of these abbreviations connotes insider knowledge and group belonging while serving as linguistic shortcuts to shared experiences and values. Conversely, unfamiliar abbreviations may mark users as outsiders.

Moreover, the dialect of abbreviations evolves rapidly, mirroring Gen Z's fluid cultural landscape. The consumption and production of such language reflect values of immediacy, authenticity, and creativity central to contemporary youth culture.

These findings are supported by Rizki (2023), who found that abbreviations in TikTok comment sections serve emotional and interactive functions. Ananda & Lestari (2022) note that Gen Z users on Instagram similarly rely on abbreviations to project identity and build rapport. Additionally, Danet & Herring (2007) view such digital codes as part of a multilingual and multimodal internet language system, essential for community participation.

Kusyairi et al. (2024) highlight that Gen Z prefers abbreviations for their practicality, memorability, and group identity role. These findings echo earlier arguments by Anggraini & Hidayat (2024) and Crockett (2022), that abbreviations help express social alignment and manage interaction in youth-driven digital communities.

Abbreviations as speech acts perform social functions such as face-saving, politeness, or attention-getting, underlining their pragmatic role in online communication. The community of practice model reveals that consistent abbreviation use reinforces group norms and identity amongst Gen Z TikTok participants. Because TikTok videos combine audio, visual, and textual modes, abbreviations contribute to a multimodal communicative strategy enhancing meaning layering and emotional effect.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study illustrates that English abbreviations used by Gen Z on TikTok represent a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon combining efficiency, identity, and cultural capital. They are integral to the redefinition of language in digital spheres and essential to understanding contemporary youth communication practices. Digital abbreviations function beyond simple shorthand—they embody community, creativity, and social dynamics that shape modern interaction. As digital communication continues to surge, chronicling and analyzing these linguistic trends remains vital for linguists, educators, and social scientists alike.

The findings demonstrate that English abbreviations are not merely linguistic shortcuts but meaningful expressions of identity, solidarity, and efficiency among Gen Z TikTok users. Their use is closely tied to sociolinguistic functions including expressiveness, interactivity, informativeness, and contextual clarity. TikTok encourages these language behaviors through its short-form, highly visual, and community-oriented format.

Language educators should integrate digital literacy related to abbreviation use and internet slang into ESL and communication curricula to better prepare young learners for authentic digital interaction. Encouraging creative language use similar to TikTok abbreviations in education can foster engagement and personal expression aligned with contemporary digital culture.

This study's reliance on a single TikTok video limits the breadth of data; subsequent research should gather larger, cross-platform, and cross-cultural datasets to deepen understanding. Longitudinal studies would help capture changes in abbreviation usage and meanings as digital trends evolve over time.

Exploration of gender, regional, and subcultural variation may reveal nuanced patterns in abbreviation adoption and function. Encouraging creative language use similar to TikTok abbreviations in education can foster engagement and personal expression aligned with contemporary digital culture.

This study contributes to understanding digital language as a site of linguistic innovation. Future research may explore how these abbreviations evolve or differ across regions, genders, and other platforms like Instagram, YouTube Shorts, or X (formerly Twitter).

Given the prevalence and communicative power of digital abbreviations, educators should consider incorporating digital literacy into English language instruction. By acknowledging and integrating contemporary linguistic phenomena such as TikTok abbreviations, educators can enhance engagement, bridge generational gaps, and bolster students' pragmatic competence in digital communication environments. Teaching students

about the origins, meanings, and social functions of these abbreviations encourages critical awareness and more nuanced use of language across contexts.

Furthermore, future studies could adopt longitudinal designs to observe how abbreviations evolve or fall out of use over time within the TikTok community and broader social media landscape. Research may also explore regional, gender, and subcultural variations in abbreviation usage, expanding to platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or Discord to generate comparative insights across digital milieus.

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