

## SLANG USED BY GEN Z ON TIKTOK: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

Shofia Azzahro<sup>1</sup>, Muh Junaidi<sup>2</sup>, Lume<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan, Mataram, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan, Mataram, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan, Mataram, Indonesia

Corresponding Author(S): shofiaazzahro048@gmail.com

### Abstract:

This study examines the use of slang by Generation Z on the TikTok platform from a sociolinguistic perspective. The development of social media has encouraged the emergence of new language variations that reflect the creativity, identity, and interaction patterns of digital users. This study aims to identify the forms, meanings, and social functions of slang used by Generation Z in TikTok communication. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a sociolinguistic approach. The data were collected from TikTok content, including videos, captions, and comments containing slang expressions used by Generation Z users. The data were gathered through observation and documentation techniques and analyzed based on Allan and Burridge's theory of slang classification, Traugott and Dasher's theory of semantic change, and Tajfel's social identity theory. The findings revealed that slang used by Generation Z consisted of five types: clipping, imitative, fresh and creative, flippant, and acronym. Clipping appears as the most dominant type, indicating Generation Z's tendency to use concise and practical language in digital communication. Furthermore, several slang expressions experience meaning changes depending on their social context. This study highlights that slang functions not only as an informal communication style but also as a medium for identity construction, self-expression, and strengthening social relationships within digital communities.

### Keywords:

Slang, Generation Z, TikTok, sociolinguistics, language variation.



Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

## INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary means of communication used by individuals or groups to convey feelings and thoughts through speech. According to Syarif et al (2024a), language functions as a medium through which individuals express emotions and exchange ideas. As an essential and influential tool in daily life, language enables people to communicate and transfer knowledge, feelings, and concepts. Without language, humans cannot effectively convey ideas or build social interaction (Dewi, 2024a). The diverse social backgrounds and environments in which people use language give rise to various linguistic forms and expressions. This phenomenon is closely related to sociolinguistics, which examines the relationship between language and society. As explained by Isnaniah (2015), sociolinguistics focuses on language users as members of society and investigates how social factors influence language variation.

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed human communication patterns, particularly through social media platforms. These platforms enable faster and wider interaction, accelerating the spread and evolution of language. Recent studies indicate that slang has become increasingly common in online communication and forms an important part of everyday interaction among younger generations (Siagian et al., 2024a). Similarly, Syarif et al. (2024b) argue that social media has contributed to making language more dynamic, while Biagi and Suryadmaja (2025) emphasize that social media accelerates the dissemination and transformation of linguistic expressions, including slang.

Among various social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most popular platforms among Generation Z. Besides functioning as a medium for sharing short videos, TikTok plays an important role in shaping language trends and spreading new expressions among young people (Biagi & Suryadmaja, 2025). Dewi (2024b) further notes that TikTok is widely used not only for entertainment but also for information sharing, communication, and e-commerce activities. Consequently, language trends can emerge and spread rapidly on TikTok, demonstrating the highly dynamic nature of digital communication.

One linguistic phenomenon that has gained prominence on TikTok is the use of slang. Slang refers to highly informal words or expressions that are often associated with specific social groups and used to create familiarity among speakers. According to Syafa'ah and Haryanto (2023), slang functions as a marker that differentiates in-group members from outsiders while simultaneously strengthening group identity. Likewise, Siagian et al. (2024b) describe slang as a distinctive language variety that serves as an exclusive code for particular communities or generations. Recent research has shown that slang on TikTok is frequently formed through linguistic processes such as acronyms, word shortening, and semantic shifts (Islamiah, 2026). Furthermore, slang serves various social purposes, including self-expression, relationship building, and identity construction in digital communities (Azisah et al., 2026).

As the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital era, Generation Z demonstrates distinctive communication patterns characterized by informality, creativity, and linguistic flexibility. Nashrudin et al. (2025) explain that Generation Z acquires slang naturally through frequent interaction on social media and in everyday life rather than through formal learning. This finding supports the argument of Wati et al. (2025), who found that Generation Z plays a significant role in creating and disseminating slang through social media platforms, particularly TikTok. The fact that Generation Z uses slang on TikTok is an important subject of research because it shows how language in the digital society continues to evolve. From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang is considered not only as a form of informal language but also as an illustration of how social factors, technological advancements, and cultural changes influence the evolution of language. The rapid spread of slang on the TikTok platform creates new communication patterns where the form, meaning, and function of language continuously change with the social interactions of its users. Therefore, it is very important to conduct research on Gen Z slang because it will help us understand how the digital environment contributes to language innovation and

changes in meaning in communication. Practically, this research helps us understand how the younger generation uses language in digital communities to express feelings, build identity, and form social relationships. Slang can also help educators and language researchers observe the development of modern language among the digital generation.

Several previous studies have examined slang usage in social media contexts. These studies generally conclude that slang is a rapidly evolving language variety that facilitates self-expression and social interaction in digital environments. Research by Dewi (2024c), for example, primarily focuses on identifying the types of slang used on TikTok. Other studies have explored either the forms or meanings of slang in online communication.

However, existing research remains limited because most studies investigate linguistic aspects separately, focusing either on form or meaning without examining their broader social functions. Consequently, there is still a lack of studies that integrate the analysis of slang forms, meanings, and social functions within a comprehensive sociolinguistic framework. Latifah and Hendar (2024) also highlight the importance of examining these three dimensions simultaneously to better understand language phenomena in social media. Furthermore, studies specifically investigating Generation Z's use of slang on TikTok through the combined analysis of linguistic forms, semantic changes, and social functions remain relatively scarce.

Although the theoretical frameworks proposed by Allan & Burridge (2006), Traugott & Dasher (2002), and Tajfel (1978) were developed before the last decade, they remain foundational references in sociolinguistic research. Recent studies on slang in digital communication continue to employ these frameworks because they effectively explain slang classification, semantic change, and social identity in online interactions. Therefore, this study combines these established theories with recent empirical studies published between 2016 and 2026 to provide a contemporary analysis of Generation Z's slang use on TikTok.

Therefore, this study focuses on the use of slang by Generation Z on TikTok by examining its forms, meanings, and social functions simultaneously from a sociolinguistic perspective. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how slang reflects language variation, identity construction, and social interaction in digital spaces.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to identify and analyze the forms, meanings, and social functions of slang used by Generation Z on TikTok. The findings are expected to contribute to sociolinguistic research, particularly in understanding language dynamics in digital communication and the role of slang in identity formation among young people. To achieve these objectives, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What types of slang are used by Generation Z on TikTok? (2) What meanings are conveyed through the slang used by Generation Z in TikTok communication? and (3) What social functions does slang serve in Generation Z's interactions on TikTok?

## METHOD

To analyze the forms, meanings, and social functions of slang used by Generation Z on TikTok, this study used a qualitative descriptive method with a sociolinguistic approach. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allowed the researchers to examine slang expressions in their natural context and interpret their linguistic and social meanings in digital communication. The methods of note-taking and observation were used to get the information. The researchers watched the chosen TikTok videos, recognized slang terms, noted each one together with its context, and methodically collected the information. The analysis includes only slang terms pertinent to the study's goals.

The data were collected from TikTok videos, captions, and comments containing slang expressions produced by Generation Z users. Data collection was conducted over a one-month period, from May 4 to June 4, 2026. A total of 50 TikTok videos and 50 user comments were selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria were as follows: (1) the videos were created by or featured Generation Z users, (2) the content contained slang expressions in spoken language, captions, or comments, and (3) the videos generated active user interaction. From the collected data, 45 slang expressions that met the research criteria were selected for analysis.

The data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the identified slang expressions were classified according to Allan & Burridge's (2006) classification of slang, which includes clipping, imitative, fresh and creative, flippant, and acronym. Although this framework was developed earlier, it remains widely adopted in recent studies on digital slang because it provides comprehensive categories for analyzing slang used in online communication. Second, the meanings of the slang expressions were analyzed using Traugott & Dasher's (2002) theory of semantic change by comparing their literal meanings with their contextual meanings on TikTok. This theory remains relevant for explaining how word meanings evolve in response to social and cultural changes, particularly in digital communication. Third, the social functions of the slang expressions were interpreted using Tajfel's (1978) Social Identity Theory to explain how slang contributes to identity construction, group solidarity, and social interaction among Generation Z users. Although originally developed to explain social identity in broader social contexts, this theory continues to be widely applied in recent studies examining identity construction and group interaction in online communities.

The findings are presented descriptively and interpreted within a sociolinguistic framework to explain how slang reflects language variation, semantic change, and social identity in digital communication.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that the slang used by Gen Z on TikTok shows a dynamic relationship between language, social interaction, and digital culture. Slang represents the creativity, identity, and social interaction of digital users, in addition to serving as an informal communication style. This study examines three main components of slang: type, meaning, and function. The theory of Allan and Burridge (2006) provides the foundation for classifying slang into its types. This theory explains how creativity, abbreviation,

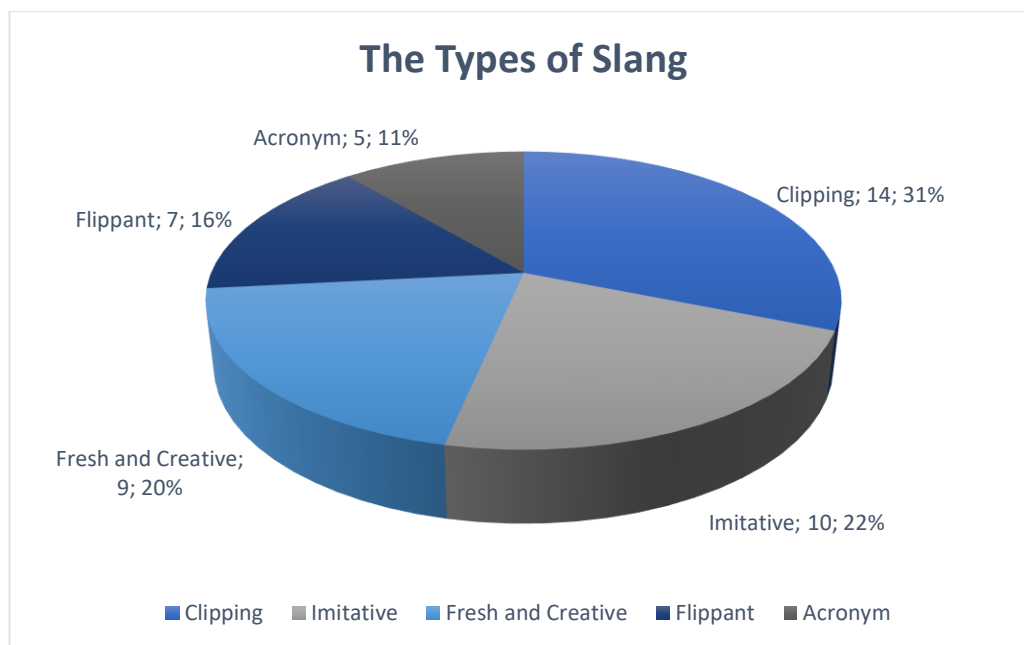
borrowing, meaning change, and acronyms are part of slang formation. Functional analysis examines how slang is used by Generation Z to express emotions, build solidarity, and show their identity in digital communication, while meaning analysis focuses on how slang expressions evolve according to social and cultural contexts.

### The Types of Slang

The research results show that the slang used by Generation Z on TikTok is one type of language variation that is developing in online communication. In this study, based on the classification by Allan & Burridge (2006), the slang data found is divided into five types: clipping, imitative, fresh and creative, flippant, and acronym. These five types indicate that Generation Z does not use slang randomly; they shape and modify their language according to their needs for communication, interaction with others, and the development of digital culture.

The analysis results show that the most commonly used type of slang is clipping; the next types are imitative, fresh and creative, flippant, and acronym. Generation Z tends to use a more concise style of language to communicate more quickly and practically, especially in digital interactions such as comments, captions, and conversations on TikTok. This aligns with Labov's (1972) view that language variation is influenced by social factors such as age, social group, and communication situation.

Figure 1.



### Clipping

The first type discovered is clipping, which is slang created by shortening an existing word or phrase without losing its main meaning. According to Allan & Burridge (2006), clipping occurs when someone reduces a word or phrase to make it simpler and easier to use in communication. *Lebay, komuk, gaje, halu, sus, kalcer, gamon, gabut, sokab, sasimo, asbun,*

*gercep*, *salfok*, *caper*, and *cogan* fall into this category. Due to the fact that they originate from longer words or phrases, these terms fall under the category of clipping.

For example, “*kamu lebay banget sih*” the word “*lebay*” is a clipping of the word “*berlebihan*” and is used to describe someone's actions or expressions that are considered too dramatic. The word “*komuk*” comes from the word “*kondisi muka*” that shows someone's facial expression. The sentence “*apasih lu gaje banget*”, the word “*Gaje*” also comes from the phrase “*gak jelas*”, “*gamon*” from “*gagal move on*”, “*gercep*” from “*gerak cepat*”, and “*salfok*” from “*salah fokus*”. The use of clipping slang shows Generation Z's tendency to communicate quickly, concisely, and in a way that is easily understood by their social group. TikTok frequently uses this form because digital communication requires messages that are brief yet carry a shared understanding.

### **Imitative**

The second type is imitative, which means slang that originates from imitation or borrowing from other languages, especially English. According to Allan & Burridge (2006), this occurs when a group uses a type of language derived from other sources and adapts it to their social environment. Data included in this category are *greenflag*, *redflag*, *burn out*, *pick me*, *roasting*, *bowtie*, and *gimmick*. These terms are heavily influenced by the use of English in global social media.

For example, “*duh, pengen deh punya cowo se-greenflag itu*”, the word “*greenflag*” and “*redflag*” originate from English terms that are generally used to describe signs indicating positive and negative values. The term is used in Generation Z communication to assess someone's character or the quality of a relationship. Someone who tries to get attention or recognition from others is called a “*pick me*”, the example's sentence is “*liat deh si pick me dateng*”. Additionally, *roasting* is a term used to refer to the act of mocking someone in a joking manner. The use of imitative slang shows that the development of technology and social media causes language variation. Generation Z not only learns foreign languages, but they also change the way they communicate with others based on their own culture and social context.

### **Fresh and Creative**

According to (Allan & Burridge (2006), the third category describes language innovations that originate from the creativity of specific groups. This category includes slang that emerges as a result of speakers' creativity in creating new forms of language. *Cegil*, *alay*, *bucin*, *jujurly*, *plenger*, *anjir*, *agit*, *aud*, and *utas* are all data that fall into this category. Language play, sound changes, and the formation of new terms are all processes that produce these terms.

For example in sentence “*stop deh lu jadi cegil*”, the word “*cegil*” is a combination of the words “*cewek gila*” and “*cewek gila*” used to describe a woman with behavior considered excessive or unique. The word “*bucin*” comes from the phrase “*budak cinta*,” which is used to describe someone who is overly devoted to their partner. However, “*jujurly*” is a type of linguistic creativity that uses the word “*jujur*” and the suffix “*-ly*” in English. Additionally, students use “*agit*,” “*aud*,” and “*utas*” as pun terms to refer to grade levels.

Slang can serve as a symbol of creativity and the identity of certain groups, as demonstrated by this form. Therefore, the use of new and innovative slang shows that Generation Z has the ability to create a new language that reflects humor, social closeness, and group identity.

### **Flippant**

Flippant slang is the fourth type, where its meaning changes depending on where it is used. According to Allan & Burridge (2006), this type often occurs when the meaning of a word changes in everyday use. *Flexing*, *salty*, *chill*, *slay*, *toxic*, and *healing* are data that fall into this category. The influence of digital culture that changes the meaning of those words.

For example, *flexing*, which previously referred to the activity of flexing muscles, now refers to the act of showcasing something like items, achievements, or lifestyle. Someone who feels annoyed or offended is now referred to as *salty*, which literally means “*asin*”. Similarly, *toxic*, which originally meant poisonous, is used in digital communication to describe relationships or behaviors that have a negative effect. In addition, the meaning of *healing* has shifted from the process of recovery to activities for relaxation, such as vacationing or doing enjoyable things. This change in meaning shows that the use of language on social media continues to evolve to meet the social needs of its users.

### **Acronym**

Acronyms, or slang consisting of abbreviations of several words, are the last type. According to Allan & Burridge (2006), acronyms are used for more concise and effective communication. Data that falls into this category includes *BTW*, *PW*, *BM*, *FOMO*, and *OVT*. These terms are used in digital communication. For example, *BTW* comes from “*by the way*”, *FOMO* comes from “*Fear of Missing Out*”, and *OVT* comes from “*Overthinking*”. Generation Z can convey messages quickly without having to write in full form. In digital communication, users tend to use more practical language, especially in brief discourse on social media, as evidenced by the use of slang.

### **The Meaning of Slang**

The analysis results show that the slang used by Generation Z on TikTok indicates that it is not just a variation of informal language, but also reflects the development of meaning in the digital social context. Some slang terms retain their original meanings, while others undergo changes in meaning due to their use in different social environments. Flippant categories, such as *flexing*, *toxic*, *salty*, *slay*, and *healing*, most often undergo changes in meaning. According to the theory of semantic change developed by Traugott & Dasher (2002), social changes and the context of word usage can influence its meaning. For example, “*healing*,” which previously referred to the process of recovery, now refers to relaxation activities, while “*toxic*” refers to someone or a situation that has a negative impact. Additionally, the meaning of slang is influenced by digital culture and the social experiences of Generation Z. Terms like *bucin*, *cegil*, and *pick me* represent how Generation Z views relationships, social behavior, and character. Therefore, the meaning of slang in communication on TikTok continues to change according to the needs of communication, trends, and social interactions of users.

## The Function of Slang

Generation Z uses slang on TikTok to communicate and build social relationships. Tajfel's (1978) Social Identity Theory states that language can function as a symbol of group membership and help people express their social identity. Slang functions as a marker of group identity. Terms like *bucin*, *cegil*, *kalcer*, and *cogan* indicate that users understand the same digital culture. Generation Z also shows that they are becoming part of certain social groups by using that slang. Slang also serves as a way to express personal feelings and experiences. More simply, terms like *gamon*, *OVT*, *burn out*, and *healing* are used to describe conditions of feelings, pressure, and individual experiences to make them easier to understand. Slang is also useful for entertaining and creating social bonds. Words like *roasting*, *lebay*, and *sokab* are often used in casual conversations to make people more familiar and closer. Slang, on the other hand, is used to provide a social judgment of someone's behavior. Terms like *toxic*, *red flag*, *green flag*, and *pick me* are used to describe certain traits or behaviors. Therefore, the language style used on TikTok shows that language is not only used to convey messages but also helps Generation Z build identity, communicate, establish social relationships, and demonstrate their engagement in digital culture.

Furthermore, the research findings support the idea that social context and technological advancements significantly influence the language variations present in digital communication. The language used by Generation Z on TikTok shows that language is continuously adapted to the way users communicate. Language variation is closely related to social identity, community membership, and communication context (Holmes, 2013).

Users tend to create new expressions that reflect their social experiences and group identities in the digital environment. Furthermore, according to Crystal (2010), internet interaction encourages linguistic creativity as users find new ways to communicate effectively online. The use of abbreviations, word modifications, and creative slang found in interactions on TikTok are examples of this condition.

The findings regarding changes in slang meaning are also in line with Yule's (2020) opinion, which explains that the meaning of language can change due to the influence of social and cultural factors. Words that initially have a certain meaning can develop into a new meaning when used by specific social groups. This shows that slang on TikTok is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a reflection of cultural change and social interaction among Generation Z. Additionally, Wardhaugh & Fuller (2021) explain that a person's language choices can indicate social relationships and group identity. Therefore, the use of slang has become one of the ways Generation Z builds closeness, shows solidarity, and strengthens identity within the digital community.

The findings indicate that digital communication plays a crucial role in accelerating language change among Generation Z. TikTok provides an interactive environment where new slang expressions are quickly created, modified, and disseminated through captions, comments, and short videos. As a result, slang evolves more dynamically compared to conventional face-to-face communication. This phenomenon shows that

social media is not just a means of communication, but also a space where linguistic innovation and semantic change continuously occur.

## CONCLUSION

This study found 45 slang expressions used by Generation Z on TikTok, which were classified into five types based on Allan & Burridge's (2006) framework: clipping, imitative, fresh and creative, flippant, and acronym. Clipping emerged as the most frequently used type, indicating Generation Z's preference for concise and efficient communication in digital environments. The findings also revealed that the meanings of slang expressions have undergone semantic changes influenced by the context of online communication. Furthermore, slang serves important social functions, including expressing identity, strengthening group solidarity, and facilitating interaction among Generation Z users.

The findings have important implications for sociolinguistic studies by demonstrating that social media platforms such as TikTok have become dynamic spaces for language variation, semantic innovation, and identity construction. They also contribute to digital communication studies by showing how online interaction accelerates the creation, dissemination, and evolution of slang expressions among young people.

Theoretically, this study confirms that the frameworks proposed by Allan & Burridge (2006), Traugott & Dasher (2002), and Tajfel (1978) remain relevant for explaining contemporary slang use in digital communication. By integrating these established theories with recent studies on digital language, this research extends their application to the context of Generation Z's communication on TikTok and provides a foundation for future studies on language change and online interaction.

## REFERENCE

- Allan, Keith, & Burridge, Kate. (2006). *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge University Press - Forbidden Words
- Azisah, Siti, Tanasy, Novalia, & Fachrunnisa, Nurul. (2026). *The use of english slang on tiktok and its impact on vocabulary*. 11. <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v11i01.43171>
- Biagi, I. W., & Suryadmaja, G. (2025). *Tren Penggunaan Slang Di Kalangan Remaja Di Platform Tiktok: Analisis Makna Dan Penyebarannya*.
- Crystal, D. (2010). *Language and the Internet* (2. ed., 5. print). Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Dewi, N. P. (2024a). *Penggunaan variasi bahasa "slang language" pada platform tiktok untuk generasi Z: kajian sosiolinguistik*. 2. <https://doi.org/10.31959/js.v2i1.2352>
- Holmes, J. (2013). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (4. ed). Routledge.
- Islamiah, Iin. (2026). *Analisis pembentukan dan perubahan makna dalam bahasa gaul remaja di media sosial Tiktok*. 4. <https://doi.org/10.61132/jmpai.v4i3.1919>
- Isnaniah, S. (2015). *Kajian sosiolinguistik terhadap bahasa dakwah aktivis dakwah kampus (adk) Surakarta*.
- Labov, William. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press - Sociolinguistic Patterns

- Latifah, Fifih. (2024). *Exploring heritage: sociolinguistics analysis on slang word in african american English (AAE) in tiktok's comments*. 10. <https://doi.org/10.23969/sampurasun.v10i2.14949>
- Nashrudina, Pinasti, Fajriyah, Ana, & Dewi, Tri. (2025). *The Role of tiktok in shaping generation Z's slang: semantic change and language use in digital communication*. 2. <https://doi.org/10.59066/cn.v2i3.1005>
- Siagian, Amelian, Sinaga, Nenni, & Lestari, Febrika. (2024a). *An analysis of using slang language of gen Z based on Tiktok videos: sociolinguistics approach*. 6. <https://doi.org/10.61672/jsi.v6i1.2745>
- Syafa'ah, Lathifah, & Haryanto, Sigit. (2023). *Slang semantic analysis on TikTok social media generation Z*.
- Syarif, Sri, Hasanuddin, Jamila, Widya, Widya, Alamsyah, Nur, & Wahid, Abdul. (2024a). *BAHASA SLANG PADA SOSIAL MEDIA TIKTOK*.
- Tajfel, Henri. (1978). *Differentiation between social groups*.
- Traugott, Elizabeth, & Dasher, Richard. (2002). *Regularity in sbemantic change*.
- Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2021). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (8th edition). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wati, Hera, Hermansyah, Sam, L, Sahrir, & Sadapotto, Andi. (2025). *The use of English slang in learning English by generation Z ttudent in Tiktok social media: Sociolinguistic Approach*. 2.
- Yule, G. (2020). *The study of language* (Seventh edition). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108582889>