

FROM COMPLIMENT TO INSULT: THE MISUSE OF 'SLAY' IN THE INDONESIAN TIKTOK COMMUNITY TO DERIDE FEMININE BOYS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 12-07-2025 Revised: 15-08-2025 Accepted: 28-08-2025 Published: 09-09-2025 Volume: 9 Issue: 3 DOI: https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.502	This study investigates the slang terminologies use, especially 'slay', in the Western and Indonesian TikTok spheres in relation to socio-pragmatic analysis. The objective of the study is to focus on the pathways in which English words undergo changes with the passage of time and how English slang words and phrases are interpreted in the context of contemporary language, the evolution of slang terms such as 'slay' and its differing meanings between Western and Indonesian TikTok users. The study is based on socio-pragmatic theory and semantic change theory to examine how slang is used in contemporary discourse in relation to time and space, multicultural contexts, and adaptation. A qualitative approach, with particular emphasis on content analysis, is employed to identify these aspects. The TikTok creators' posts were the source of the comments and captions used for data collection. The methodology for data analysis applied to TikTok data was systematic including the identification of slang words and explaining them. TikTok users from the West and Indonesia diverge sharply in their understanding of 'slay'. In Western TikTok, 'slay' is a compliment and a form of admiration, whereas in Indonesian TikTok, 'slay' is mostly used derisively to mock guys for being feminized and for being gay. This study showcases the extent to which English slang words can create a misunderstanding and misused across the world and with different languages.
KEYWORDS <i>Slang, Slay, TikTok, Social-Media, Feminine, Gender Stereotype</i>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Slang is considered a familiar variety because the style of speech is characterized by using language codes that are personal and relatively fixed in groups. (Yuniar A.N., Suwandi et al., 2023). In recent years, research regarding the variation of a language, especially TikTok slang one of them is "slay" has been done by several researchers, to mention but a few (Sulistiyaningsih & Muttaqiyah, 2022; Syafaah & Haryanto, 2023). The term "slay" has been transformed significantly, especially in the context of social media platforms like TikTok. Originated from the Old English word meaning "to kill", it has evolved into a popular slang term in Western culture, often used to praise someone's confidence, style or appearance. Through TikTok, slang has transcended its traditional role of fostering ingroup identity and has become a global phenomenon, shaping how users communicate and connect in the digital age. (Hasanen, A. 2024). Generation Z (defined as people born between 1997 and 2012) are the main generation that frequently use slang



in their vocabulary either in online or offline communities. “slay” has been the most popular and most used slang in the TikTok community since the slang itself blew up and became a trend in 2021. The analysis revealed that “Slay” and “Yas” emerged as the most prevalent slang terms, achieving a degree centrality score of 6, which suggests that these terms were used extensively and co-occurred with 10 a significant number of other slang terms within the social media posts (Fernandez et al., 2024). In Western TikTok, “slay” is a marker of admiration and empowerment, celebrating creativity and individuality. Slay, meaning “to do something spectacularly well, especially when it comes to fashion, artistic performance, or self-confidence” (“What Does Slay Mean,” 2019). The use of the term ‘slay’ is a reflection that society has some treasured principles such as creativity, diligence, and persistence (Harris, 2021). Compared with, in the Indonesian TikTok community, the term has more complex and often has problematic connotations. Moreover, Indonesian netizens, especially in TikTok often interpret English slang based on their own interpretation. They tend to make a new meaning based on what they know or see established on the internet and this is what happens to the slang. Indonesian netizens again rarely do research regarding the information that they get even if it was from the tiniest things, in this context slang words and it leads to the misuse and misinterpretation of slang. Consequently, it became a severe problem because they tend to mock boys that show a feminine trait and this interpretation is way far misused from the origin meaning or context from western TikTok community, namely, to compliment someone. Here, “slay” is often used to describe boys who exhibit feminine traits or behaviors. An interpretation that reflects societal stigmas around masculinity and femininity in Indonesia. As a result, instead of being an empowering compliment, the term can be a means to strengthen stereotypes and marginalize certain identities which the case here is feminine boys.

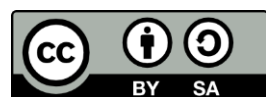
As has been stated before, previous research has explored so many things about the complexities of slang especially in digital spaces such as TikTok, highlighting how language use on platforms like TikTok reflects broader cultural values and social dynamics. First, Kundi et al. (2014) avouch that internet slang uses loan words, digital resources, images, symbols and icons; and in addition, regularly incorporates the usage of rewording, words with similar sounds, calquing, repetition, and other semiotic resources. Meanwhile, Liu et al. (2019) affirm that internet slang is a novel language form with unique linguistic features, and its usage can be seen as a way of innovative advertising. Apart from slang, other forms of informal varieties are jargon, argot, and Cant. Each slang has its own history, and reason for acceptance; slang can also change as time progresses. People often use language in different ways to achieve socialization, for language “...is a means by which humans carry out activities, exchange shared beliefs and thoughts and as well ponder on their individual and collective experiences” (Etuk and Urudzian, 2024 p.187). TikTok slang is not only marked as a social identity but also provides solidarity between its users because they can get into a communication that is only understood by the TikTok community users and it strengthens their social bonding. Despite having their origins in particular subcultures, these expressions become widely known because of TikTok's algorithms and worldwide audience. Slang spreads widely and changes quickly because of the platform's fast-paced nature, which reflects the fleeting yet significant aspect of digital communication. Slang's traditional function of promoting ingroup identity has been superseded by TikTok, which has made it a worldwide phenomenon that influences how people connect and communicate in the digital age. Pop references, youth culture, and meme culture are often associated with slang, creating dynamic, transient linguistic phrases.



For example, research has shown that the platform's viral challenges and trends create shared linguistic experiences that shape digital identity (Tomenchuk, M., & Tiushka, T. 2024). Among those aforementioned previous studies (Putra, A. S., Bahar, A. A., & Fauzi, U. A. 2024) emphasizes how language trends on TikTok are shaped by global influences but recontextualized within local cultural frameworks. The study notes that Indonesian netizens often adopt English slang without fully understanding its original meaning or context, leading to misinterpretations that can perpetuate stereotypes or create entirely new layers of meaning. This phenomenon serves to underscore the need to examine how globalized slang terms such as “slay” are localized and reinterpreted in ways that may differ significantly from their original meaning.

However, regardless of how many previous studies have addressed the issue regarding slang words, particularly in how slang language is perceived in Indonesia with regard from social media platforms there is still a little space unattended mainly on how Indonesian netizens interpret and reuse English slang terms. In the same way, those previous studies mostly focus on the variety of English slang words itself but haven't deeply discussed how slang terms such as “slay” can relate to gender discrimination in global context due to the misinterpretation of slang words that came from Indonesian netizens. By contrast, this gap is particularly concerning given the negative impact such misinterpretations can have on marginalized groups-especially boys who are perceived as feminine. In Indonesia, where traditional gender norms are still deeply rooted, the misuse of the word “slay” often carries a disrespectful meaning. Instead of celebrating appearance or confidence in a person, the term is used to devalue boys who don't conform to the traditional concept of masculinity. This reflects a broader pattern where Indonesian netizens adopt global slang without critical engagement or research into its meaning, relying instead on subjective interpretations that can reinforce harmful stereotypes.

This research attempts to fill the void by focusing more on analyzing and examining the socio-pragmatic use of “slay” within the TikTok community in Indonesia. Specifically, it seeks to uncover how the term is used to construct social identities and power dynamics in digital interactions. By analyzing the interaction between global slang and local cultural contexts, this research will promote greater linguistic literacy among Indonesian netizens and also might be beneficial both in theoretical and practical ways. Theoretically, this research will be beneficial in contributing to the insights of socio-pragmatic theory on how slang language as a part of a variety of language can uniquely give colour the language use in society especially in many social media platforms. Practically, this research also builds connections that today's language is extremely dynamic particularly on the use of slang words used by teenagers in social media so that people will be absolutely aware that particular kinds of language exist in the society which is used for different purposes and different contexts. Therefore, encouraging users to critically understand the meaning of English slang terms before adopting them can help reduce misunderstandings and encourage a more inclusive online environment especially in social media platforms such as TikTok. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how language develops in digital spaces and how it shapes - and is shaped by - social attitudes and cultural norms. This research intends to investigate the ways the word “slay” is used in the context of TikTok in Indonesia with regard to the perceptions of masculinity and femininity and how its misuse impacts the social identities and perceptions of self-expressive boys. It is assumed that unlike the West, where the word ‘slay’ is used to show admiration, in Indonesia, the term is used to affirm negative



stereotypes and marginalize feminine boys. The misuse is assumed to stem from low levels of digital literacy and lack of cultural understanding, deepening the negative social stigmas associated with the online world.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used a content analysis qualitative method. In particular, the Indonesian TikTok community, forms, and the meanings of "slay" as perceived and employed by TikTok users and Indonesian netizens are examined in the analysis of the slang word's usage in the TikTok application. Particularly in TikTok applications, people in the same market will get along well when they use slang like "slay" in their online conversation or interactions, such in a TikTok video's comments section. There, it describes the adoption of slang terms by internet users worldwide, particularly in the Indonesian TikTok community, with the general goal of promoting online interactions over the internet.

Participants in the observation were TikTok users who employ specific slang terms in their video descriptions, thumbnails, subtitles, and captions. Through the comments section, the researchers examined their participants to gain insight about events and how TikTok slang language, particularly "slay," is interpreted and employed. Therefore, The data source was the TikTok app itself, particularly in the video content and comment sections, and the data consisted of utterances made by TikTok users that indicated slang phrases. Since this is a qualitative study, the researchers are the primary human instrument responsible for gathering and evaluating the data. The TikTok app serves as the research's data source.

The researchers in this study took certain actions to gather data. The researchers began by watching the TikTok app and its videos as part of a documentation procedure. Following that, the data was converted from video to text format using transcription. It seeks to ease the researchers' comprehension of the video's content. The data sampling method was purposive and inclusive in nature. It captured the entire TikTok ecosystem, and all users who used the word "slay" in comments or in the captions of their videos were included. There were no other demographic, geographic, or engagement criteria aside from using the term "slay" in their content. Data were collected through methodical observation of TikTok videos, during which the individual videos were transcribed to enable analysis. Additionally, it aims to identify the slang terms that are used on TikTok.

In this research, researchers went through a few steps to examine the data. The researchers employed the content analysis approach and manually coded the themes. As stated by (Rosengren, 1981) content analysis describes a variety of analytic approaches in a range from impressionistic and intuitive analyses to the side of a very strict and systematic text analyses. Also, (Weber, 1990) stated that this variety has made content analysis useful in several different research fields, where suitable type of content analysis approach to use depends on the actual problem that is studied, and the specific research purpose. Moreover, Qualitative content analysis is a multifaceted or flexible methodology for analyzing linguistic and visual content across many social science research frameworks (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; White and Marsh, 2006). Qualitative content analysis has been designed as a 'research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns' (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1278). The analytical framework was constructed using two main theories:



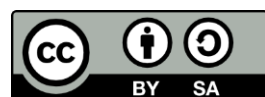
Chaika's (1982) slang categorization theory which was applied to “slay” as (1) the creation of new words and (2) pre-existing words whose meanings have changed and (2) Allan and Burridge (2006) functional hypothesis which was applied through coding to determine whether instances of “slay” serve as compliments (Western usage) or mockery/insult (Indonesian usage). In the words of Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the systematic approach was conducted through manual thematic coding “slay” usage patterns where researchers analyzed social contextual clues, relevant emojis, and the broader discourse to determine the function of “slay” across cultures and its Western and Indonesian TikTok social group differences. First of all, the researchers examine the frequency used of the slang words especially “slay” in Indonesian TikTok community, The researchers first categorize the slang forms the researchers employ (Halligan, n.d.), and this classification is backed by theory (Chaika, 1982), which elevates slang in two ways: First, it takes the shape of brand-new words. Second, the current form of the words that the layman is familiar with is displayed on the file. In addition, the researchers addressed the problem of slang function by using Allan and Burridge's (2006) hypothesis. The researchers use human reason to observe these real things. For instance, in Western TikTok community “slay” is meant to compliment someone that is good looking in terms of fashion style or desire and many more aspects especially in terms of the appearance of someone. such as ‘you slay that outfit’. Meaning that person has a great sense of style in fashion. Whereas in the Indonesian TikTok community the meaning has shifted beyond its original meaning such as ‘ih aura slaynya kuat banget’ representing that “slay” has the interconnection with being ‘feminine’ or ‘gay’. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding, the researchers also use dictionaries and perform internet searches.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the content analysis of the video description or caption and TikTok comments section, the results were presented. In this chapter, the researchers outline their findings and explore the slang terms particularly "slay" that TikTokers use when making videos, as well as the comments or responses left by TikTok audiences. The first section of this chapter is a collection of slay words that are used by TikTokers and its users in both Indonesian and Western audiences. The second section discusses the meaning of "slay" in TikTok videos in both the Indonesian and Western communities. And this data were breakdown into several categories such as *Feminization, Empowerment, Sarcasm, and Homophobia*.

4.1 Table. Slay found in *TikTok* and its meaning

Original Meaning (based on dictionary) Indonesia	Slay Use in Western	Slay Use In
“Slay” meant to kill in a violent way who Or to murder someone feminine traits	To give a compliment to someone based on their	To mock boys exhibit



	appearance.	or linked to being gay.
broo	Big SLAY!! for you,	Tetaplah slay
cowo 🧑🏻 🖐️	those dresses fit you	walaupun
	perfectly 🥰	
tuh slay ya?	You're a slaying	Kamu
	queen!	
	AS YOU SHOULD	
TAPI AURA SLAY	QUEEN !!! SLAYYYYYY 🖐️🖐️🖐️🖐️ 😭😭😭😭	SLAY NYA MASI KELIATAN DIKIT
vibe	BRO ITS SLAY 🔥	dia lebih slay
		dari mrka berdua anjr
terus jadi	NOW THATS THE BIGGEST SLAY I'VE	gak se slay itu. skrg dia muncul
	EVER SEEN	slay gw agak kaget
	Its giving feminine and slayyyyyyyyyy queens	Ini beneran abib slay juga 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰
tapi	They are slaying 😊 🖐️	Mereka slay
		masih suka cewek kok. Ga kaya sebelah plis
semua	AHHHH SLAY	Padahal slay



	QUEEN 🔥 🔥 🔥	👏 🤔
slay woi	can i like ... slay	emg farhan
	like that?	🤔 ?
	Body tea slayy queennn 🤔	sekarang arti slay berubah jdi gemulai
	who are these diva??? slayy	Farhan emg udah nunjukin dia slay

The Form of Slay used by *Western Tiktokers*

An evaluation of comments on TikTok, especially from Western users, shows the word “slay” is often used to compliment content creators. Western audiences are willing to give compliments, even during the 15 to 30 second snippets of content that are often random in nature. The general compliments seem to play a motivational role by boosting the confidence of creators and lowering their fears of sharing personal content on their accounts.

Feminization

1. Big SLAY!! for you, those dresses fit you perfectly 🤔
 This one is a kind of slang. The form of this slang is a phrase.
Original Version: /Big **SLAY**!! for you, those dresses fit you perfectly 🤔/
 Indonesian translated version: *Cakep banget deh kamu, gaunnya cocok banget di kamu*
 English explained version: “Big SLAY” is an emphatic way to say someone looks amazing or is doing exceptionally well, especially in terms of fashion or appearance.
2. You’re a slaying queen!
 This one is a kind of slang. The form of this slang is a phrase.
Original Version: /You’re a **slaying** queen!/
 Indonesian translated version: *Kamu cantik banget layaknya seorang ratu*
 English explained version: “Slaying queen” is a playful and empowering phrase someone (usually a woman) who looks amazing, exudes confidence, or excels at something.
3. AS YOU SHOULD QUEEN !!! SLAYYYYY 🤔 🤔 🤔 🤔
 This one is a kind of slang and emphatic expression. The form of this slang is a phrase combined with internet/texting style capitalization and repeated letters for emphasis.
Original Version: /AS YOU SHOULD QUEEN !!! **SLAYYYYY** 🤔 🤔 🤔 🤔/
 Indonesian translated version: *Emang seharusnya begitu kok, kamu keren*
 English explained version: “AS YOU SHOULD QUEEN” affirms that the person is absolutely right to shine or act confidently like a “queen”



(a term of admiration for a strong, confident person).

4. Its giving feminine and slayyyyyyyyyy queens
 This one is a kind of slang phrase commonly used in social media language.
Original Version: /Its giving feminine and **slayyyyyyyyyy** queens/
 Indonesian translated version: *Ini menunjukkan kesan feminin yang menyeruak, kamu cakep banget seperti ratu*
 English explained version: Its giving feminine and slayyyyyyyyyy queens
it means that the subject strongly projects or embodies "feminine" qualities and "slay queens."
5. AHHHH SLAY QUEEN 💧💧💧
 This one is a kind of slang and emphatic expression. The form of this slang is an exclamatory phrase combined with repeated letters, capitalization, and emojis to convey excitement.
Original Version: /AHHHH **SLAY** QUEEN 🔥🔥🔥/
 Indonesian translated version: *Ahh, kalian keren banget deh*
 English explained version: AHHHH SLAY QUEEN 🔥🔥🔥
meaning to amaze or stun by excellence, often used to praise women who look fabulous, confident, or powerful.
6. Body tea slayy queennn 🍷
 This one is a kind of slang phrase combining compliment and internet culture expressions.
Original Version: /Body tea **slayy** queennn 🍷/
 Indonesian translated version: *Badan kamu benar benar keren dan terlihat sangat cantik*
 English explained version: Body tea slayy queennn 🍷
meaning someone has a hot, attractive, or "killer" body.
7. who are these diva??? slayy
 This one is a kind of slang phrase commonly used in social media, especially TikTok and Gen Z culture.
Original Version: /who are these diva??? **slayy** /
 Indonesian translated version: *Siapa para diva ini, mereka keren banget*
 English explained version: who are these diva??? slayy
It is a positive compliment meaning someone who exudes bold confidence, self-love, and high standards.

Empowerment

1. BRO ITS SLAY 💧
 This one is a kind of slang. The form of this slang is a short phrase combined with informal addresses and emoji.
Original Version: /BRO ITS **SLAY** 🔥/
 Indonesian translated version: *Gila, ini keren banget*
 English explained version: "BRO ITS SLAY" is an enthusiastic, informal way to say that something is extremely impressive or excellent.
2. NOW THATS THE BIGGEST SLAY I'VE EVER SEEN



This one is a kind of slang and emphatic expression. The form of this slang is a full sentence written in uppercase to indicate strong emotion.

Original Version: /NOW THATS THE BIGGEST SLAY I'VE EVER SEEN/

Indonesian translated version: *Nah, ini benar benar penampilan terkeren yang pernah ada*

English explained version: NOW THATS THE BIGGEST SLAY I'VE EVER SEEN
expresses very strong admiration and amazement.

3. They are slaying 😊👏

This one is a kind of slang phrase commonly used in social media and informal communication.

Original Version: /They are **slaying** 😊👏/

Indonesian translated version: *Mereka terlihat sangat keren dan juga percaya diri*

English explained version: They are slaying 😊👏 *meaning someone is excelling, performing exceptionally well, or looking very stylish and confident.*

Sarcasm

1. can i like ... slay like that?

This one is a kind of slang and informal question. The form of this slang is a casual, conversational sentence with filler words.

Original Version: /can i like ... **slay** like that?/

Indonesian translated version: *Aku juga pengen tampil keren seperti kamu, bisa gak ya*

English explained version: can i like ... slay like that?
expresses admiration and a desire to emulate the impressive style or confidence being observed.

The Form of Slay used by Indonesian Tiktokers

From the collected data, it appears that the word “slay” is more of an insult in the Indonesian TikTok community while in the Western TikTok community it serves as a compliment. Looking at the broader picture, within Indonesian TikTok circles, “slay” is frequently utilized to mock someone feminine or someone who lacks any hint of macho traits even if the so-called masculine figure happens to be a boy. In Indonesia, a boy exhibiting any form of slight affection is bombarded with harsh insults and labels which have misogynistic stereotypes because fundamentally gender roles are still very traditional in Indonesia. There are a considerable number of comments where “slay” is used mockingly, and that is worrying as it shows that language is evolving to lose its meaning. This, in turn, has fostered a lack of self-confidence and an overwhelming fear of judgement among content creators in the Indonesian side of social media.

Sarcasm

1. Tetaplah slay broo walaupun cowo 🤔👏

This one is a kind of slang. The form of this slang is a phrase combined with informal language and emojis.

Original Version: /Tetaplah **slay** broo walaupun cowo 🤔👏/

English translated version: *Keep slaying, bro, even though you're a guy 🤔👏*

English explained version: Tetaplah slay broo walaupun cowo 🤔👏



This phrase carries a negative undertone by implying that “slaying” or exhibiting traits associated with confidence and style is unusual or inappropriate for men.

2. Mereka slay tapi masih suka cewek kok. Ga kaya sebelah plis
This one is a kind of slang phrase combining informal language with an implicit comparison.
Original Version: /Mereka **slay** tapi masih suka cewek kok. Ga kaya sebelah plis/
English translated version: *They’re slaying but still like girls, unlike those others, please*
English explained version: Mereka slay tapi masih suka cewek kok. Ga kaya sebelah plis
This phrase carries a judgmental and somewhat divisive tone.
3. sekarang arti slay berubah jdi gemulai
This one is a kind of slang phrase expressing a critical observation.
Original Version: /sekarang arti **slay** berubah jdi gemulai/
English translated version: *Now the meaning of slay has changed to effeminate*
English explained version: sekarang arti slay berubah jdi gemulai
This statement reflects a negative and critical perspective on the evolving meaning of “slay”.

Homophobia

1. Kamu tuh slay ya?
This one is a kind of slang. The form of this slang is an informal question.
Original Version: /Kamu tuh **slay** ya?/
English translated version: *So, you’re gay, huh?*
English explained version: Kamu tuh slay ya?
This phrase is often used sarcastically or mockingly rather than as a genuine compliment.
2. TAPI AURA SLAY SLAY NYA MASI KELIATAN DIKIT 🙄🙄🙄🙄
This one is a kind of slang phrase combined with informal language and emojis to express mixed feelings.
Original Version: /TAPI AURA **SLAY SLAY** NYA MASI KELIATAN DIKIT/
English translated version: *BUT THE SLAY VIBE IS STILL A LITTLE VISIBLE*
English explained version: TAPI AURA SLAY SLAY NYA MASI KELIATAN DIKIT
This expression can imply criticism or doubt about the person’s level of success.
3. dia lebih slay vibe dari mrka berdua anjr
This one is a kind of slang phrase commonly used in informal digital communication.
Original Version: /dia lebih **slay** vibe dari mrka berdua anjr/
English translated version: *He has more slay vibe than those two, damn*
English explained version: dia lebih slay vibe dari mrka berdua anjr
In this context, the phrase is used mockingly to highlight and ridicule someone’s exaggerated or overly feminine behavior or style.
4. gak se slay itu. skrg dia muncul terus jadi slay gw agak kaget
This one is a kind of slang phrase expressing surprise and skepticism.



Original Version: /gak se **slay** itu. skrg dia muncul terus jadi **slay** gw agak kaget/

English translated version: *They were not that slay before, Now they keep showing up acting slay, I'm kind of shocked.*

English explained version: gak se slay itu. skrg dia muncul terus jadi slay gw agak kaget
This phrase conveys a dismissive and somewhat mocking attitude toward someone's attempt to "slay" or appear confident and stylish.

5. Ini beneran abib slay juga 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄

This one is a kind of slang phrase combined with informal language and multiple crying emojis.

Original Version: /Ini beneran abib **slay** juga 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄/

English translated version: *Is it true that abib were also gay*

English explained version: Ini beneran abib slay juga 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄
the excessive use of crying emojis suggests a tone of disbelief, sarcasm, or even mockery rather than genuine admiration.

6. Padahal slay semua 🙄🙄

This one is a kind of slang phrase combined with informal language and emojis expressing mixed emotions.

Original Version: /Padahal **slay** semua 🙄🙄/

English translated version: *They were all gay, isn't it obvious*

English explained version: Padahal slay semua 🙄🙄
In this context, "slay" is used negatively to objectify and label individuals implying that they are gay.

7. emg farhan slay woi 🙄?

This one is a kind of slang phrase used as a rhetorical or sarcastic question.

Original Version: /emg farhan **slay** woi 🙄?/

English translated version: *Dude, is farhan gay*

English explained version: emg farhan slay woi 🙄?
This phrase is used in a mocking and disbelieving manner, presenting in a way associated with being gay or feminine.

8. Farhan emg udah nunjukin dia slay

This one is a kind of slang phrase used to highlight or call out someone's behavior or style that is stereotypically associated with being gay or effeminate.

Original Version: /Farhan emg udah nunjukin dia **slay**/

English translated version: *Farhan really has already shown that he's gay*

English explained version: Farhan emg udah nunjukin dia slay
This phrase is used sarcastically or critically to highlight Farhan overt display of "slay" or linked to being gay.



Discussion

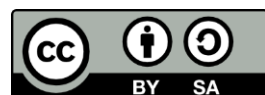
The study focuses on the slang term “slay” used by TikTok users in captions and comments during the short video creation process. As for the meaning and the form of the slang, the researchers try to understand its different aspects. Based on the data the researcher found in the comments and captions, most TikTok users from Indonesia and the West employed the term *slay* either as a compliment or an insult in spoken or written discourse. It's just one of the many phrases within this variable form of English. Every region or culture has a specific slang that simplifies phrases and makes them more enjoyable among members of the group. Those who do not spend endless hours on TikTok, however, would find it very difficult to comprehend such vocabulary.

This study shows that there is a noticeable semantic shift in the slang term “slay” between the Indonesian and Western TikTok communities. *Slay's* positive, powerful connotations of embracing self-expression, style, and confidence are still present in Western contexts. On the other hand, Indonesian users frequently reinterpret “slay” as a disparaging or mocking term, especially directed at boys who exhibit what are thought to be feminine characteristics. This change is an obvious example of semantic pejoration, which is influenced by poor digital literacy and dominant gender norms (Savitri & Dewi, 2023).

Furthermore, the researchers found a total of 22 *slay's* used by TikTok users from the western part and Indonesian users in the platform TikTok. Some examples include: *You're a slaying queen!*, *They are slaying* 🤩👉, *AHHHH SLAY QUEEN* 🤩🤩🤩, *Kamu tuh slay ya?*, *Ini beneran abib slay juga*, *Padahal slay semua* 🤩👉. In addition, the researchers noted that the majority of the *slay* were geared towards the English speaking or Western TikTok community as opposed to the Indonesian, although there is still a fair proportion of Indonesian users who often use *slay*. A word or phrase may be replaced by *slay*, for example “*They are slaying*” can be taken to mean the act of giving praise to someone. The second example of “*slay*” from “*Padahal slay semua* 🤩👉” means to insult and serve as a judgement towards someone's behavior which is being effeminate, especially when it comes from men and also display anti queer attitude.” The researchers conclude from the sample data that *slay* is used differently in Western and Indonesian Tiktok communities. Therefore, these words and phrases are seldom encountered in daily conversations away from the community.

These results corroborate previous studies on the adaption of cross-cultural slang (Putra et al., 2024; Tomenchuk & Tiushka, 2024), but they also draw attention to a less studied consequence: imported slang that feeds into local biases. In Indonesia, *slay's* connotation of femininity and queerness is a reflection of toxic masculinity and ingrained femmephobia (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Taywaditep, 2002). This discrepancy is explained by the functional hypothesis of Allan and Burridge (2006), which states that while *slay* is frequently used as a societal censure against nonconformity in Indonesia, it acts as praise in the West

Both of the Western and Indonesian TikTokers have different interpretations regarding the meaning of the slang word “slay”. The use of slang changes the meaning of a word from its original meaning (Nashrudina et al. 2025). The researchers discovered that the slang employed by TikTok users in Western and Indonesian plays a crucial role in shaping their own community especially when it comes to the use of language as a tool to communicate through online platforms. Slang terms are used in the Gen Z environment not because they learn them, but because they understand the terms because of the intimacy of communication between them both on social



media and in the real world (Marzuki & Mustapha, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2023; Rahmah & Khasanah, 2023). Aside from that, the use of “slay” is to make communication much easier for one another to grasp, by implementing only one word to describe the meaning of the longer version of sentence and it can invite other social media users to use “slay” apart from TikTok. The easiness of translating preexisting mappings among expression and meaning into such a similar realm of interaction may also contribute to this phenomenon (Popovych & Márk, 2023). Generally, slang words are not easily understood by ordinary people outside of the community itself because they are rarely used apart from the TikTok community. The use of slang serves as a tool to represent people’s identity and shows that a certain community has its own traits. People use slang as a means of asserting their individual identities and as a verbal expression of the exuberant social emancipation that it represents (Popovych & Márk, 2023). Slang itself can have features such as it creates new terms and generally can be understood by people who are “in the group”. Because certain organizations or professions want to show who they are, slang was created.

The reason behind Indonesian TikTokers having a different interpretation and meaning with Western TikTokers and leading into misconception and misuse can be seen by the lack of “research” in Indonesian people regarding the English words that they see and use from the internet, especially slang. The lack of digital literacy in Indonesia can be a barrier for people to understand widespread information on the internet, making them vulnerable to the spread of fake news and hoaxes (Priwati and Helmi 2021). Because of this problem, Indonesian TikTokers have made their own interpretation on the slang word especially “slay”. Whereas the meaning and use of the term “slay” has shapeshifted into degrading and mocking someone, in this case a boy who exudes feminine traits and indirectly calls and insults them as a gay person. The ultimate fear is ‘that boys won’t become men if they are “overly” exposed to “non”- masculinizing influences’ (Dworkin & Wachs 2009, p.97). This case has become a problem that needs to be addressed, not only Indonesian TikTok users have made their own interpretations they also had the audacity to deform the slang word “slay” into a mockery and degrading word toward someone else. Indonesian TikTok users often don’t understand how their word can impact other people’s mental health and overall well-being with the tiniest word that they say on the internet whether to the creators or someone. Due to this problem, Indonesian TikTokers and overall society need to be more careful with the English words that they see and use on the internet, especially TikTok. The importance of not having your own and self-interpretation of the word that already has its own meaning, mainly slang words need to be applied towards Indonesian TikTok users and society. Moreover, because digital literacy can significantly impact how we perceive social media and technology, its value cannot be overstated. The inability to critique information received digitally can lead to misperceptions or blind faith in emerging issues (Candra et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the use of slang words especially “slay” on social media scope specifically in the TikTok app is supposed to be as a form of expression of admiration, praise, and compliment not as an insult, mockery, or degrade towards femininity particularly towards boys or men who often being the victim in this case. “Slay” which has become the insult word used by Indonesian TikTok users has shown hatred not only to boys who have feminine traits but also homophobia towards queer people or LGBTQIA+ community. This obscuration is problematic as queer men who are perceived as feminine experience a significant amount of prejudice from both heterosexual and queermen (Iacoviello et al., 2020; Kiebel et al., 2020; Taywaditep, 2002).



This case reflects the worrying habit of Indonesian netizens who multiculturalize slang from different parts of the world without trying to find what it means in its original language. And this is one of the pejoration or degeneration of meaning in a word. Pejoration or Degeneration of meaning is a shift in meaning towards a negative one from the pre-existing meaning (Savitri & Dewi, 2023). Henry (1989:90) states that a word experiences a pejoration if its meaning becomes worse or lower 'status' than the previous meaning. Rather than seeking the true intention of the saying, Indonesian social media users tend to give their own, often meaning completely different interpretations. They found that the ability of digital media literacy among the university students was at the basic level, since they had a relatively good ability to access digital media, but lacked abilities to analyze, evaluate, and produce media content (Kurniawati & Baroroh, 2016). There is a trend of critical detachment and lack of conscious intellectual effort regarding the borrowing of slang. For instance, the use of the term "slay" has become utterly divorced from its original powerful connotations and is now a vessel of mockery and linguistic contempt. Such critical detachment reinforces a stereotype in circulation, which is that casual internet slang that is derogatory and discriminatory is accepted without question. "It is discriminating to make fun of someone's SOGIE like gender expressions (such as behavior and appearances like clothing or fashion styles, and label them derogatory terms like jejemon, ugaling iskwat, and pokpok; and Sexual orientations like being gay and lesbian should not be normalized used as an insult (Guerrero et al., 2022). The gap in research regarding the cultural impact social media has, combined with the sheer ignorance of Indonesian netizens contributes to their acceptance of the constructed ideology which perpetuates violence and contempt toward gender nonconformist and queer identities. Indonesia is a country where various religions discourage LGBT practices and consider them to be inconsistent with cultural norms (Praptiningsih et al., 2024). This simply means social media is a fertile ground for rumor, gossip, and flawed cultural narratives because users are too eager to sound cool to really care about what they are saying. While Internet platforms have constructed a network public discourse space for netizens, they have also been used by people with an ulterior motive and have become a "hotbed" for fabricating and spreading rumors (Liu, 2024).

In relation to the aforementioned research studies, the result of this present study conforms finding of previous research by (Yuniar et al., 2023; Sulistiyarningsih & Muttaqiyah, 2022; Syafaah & Haryanto, 2023; Hasanen, 2024; Tomenchuk & Tiushka, 2024) talk about the usage of slang on social media, pointing out that each community has its own language that is used specifically for that community and that it may be used to convey emotion with a single word. Moreover, it can be seen how digital communities can shape and re-shape an imported lexicon with local cultural ambience. The semantic drift of the term "slay" on Indonesian TikTok shows how globalized slang can be used as a tool for cross-culturally control and enforce femme-phobia or misogyny. It proves the argument made before regarding platform-specific terminology. As observed, the term "slay" used to describe "empowerment" in Western TikTok is re-encoded as a marker of "excessive" femininity reserved towards Indonesian boys. This not only strengthens homophobia, but also stereotyping people through casual interaction on the Internet, especially TikTok.

A larger problem of uncritical content consumption in Indonesian digital culture is shown in the propensity to embrace global lingo without critical engagement (Priwati & Helmi, 2021; Bulya & Izzati, 2024). According to Guerrero et al. (2022), slang can be used to normalise



discriminatory attitudes when it is not well understood in context. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that, depending on the cultural perspective used, globalised slang can serve as a tool of exclusion as well as a symbol of togetherness. In order to stop stolen expressions from spreading stigma and to encourage inclusive communication in online spaces, it is imperative to increase digital literacy, especially critical awareness of language origins and meanings. This case highlights the importance of digital literacy where critical thinking is absent, borrowed slang becomes a tool for stigma instead of alliance. It adds to the scholarship of semantic degradation alongside toxic masculinity where the researchers argue. Unfortunately, it also shows a pressing need for context-sensitive literacy programs especially for Indonesian netizens which empower users to question the linguistic trends and do research imposed on them instead of blindly following them easily based on what they see and hear.

5. CONCLUSION

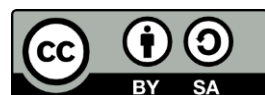
Based on the earlier analysis of study results, the researchers concluded that the English slang term "slay," which in Western TikTok contexts indicates confidence and admiration, experiences a meaning shift and misuse in the Indonesian TikTok community. In this instance, the word is misused to denigrate femininity and to reinforce harmful and homophobic preconceptions about boys and men who exhibit feminine characteristics. To avoid misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and misuse of English slang terms, TikTok users in Indonesia should work with advocates for digital literacy and LGBTQ+ rights to create brief campaigns and instructional videos that explain the empowering meaning of the term "slay." They should also avoid making snap judgements about anything they see online without conducting adequate research. Also, it can be a notable consideration for the Ministry of Education in the future to be able add a lesson on how Indonesian netizen needs to be more careful with the English words that they clearly have no idea what it meant and provide media literacy mainly for Social Media usage, and curriculum taught in schools to enhance the students' ability to think critically with expressions taken from other cultures. Longitudinal studies should also be conducted to analyze the semantic shift of "slay" or other English Slang words and its impact on the mental health of gender-nonconforming youth and the usage of Slang words so that this case will not happen again in the future. Hopefully, these actions will contribute to the creation of a safe online environment where language is used to spread positiveness or simply promote inclusive digital environments and resist the normalization of discriminatory language practices.

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