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## SLANG IN GENERATION ALPHA: A SOCIOLINGUISTICS STUDY OF SLANG USE ON TIKTOK

Tiarma Intan Marpaung<sup>1</sup>, Venyta Sinaga<sup>2</sup>, Syalaisha Syafira Irwansyah<sup>3</sup>, Viola Sasti  
Bizora L. Tobing<sup>4</sup>, Selina Grace Kaizura Simbolon<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar

*Korespondensi penulis: tiarma.marpaung@uhnp.ac.id*

### ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media has influenced how children communicate in everyday interactions. Among Generation Alpha, TikTok has become a common space where new slang expressions are encountered, repeated, and adapted into daily speech. This study examines the types of slang used by Generation Alpha on TikTok and explores their perceptions toward the use of slang on the platform. Using a qualitative sociolinguistic approach, this study involved four participants aged 7 to 11 years. The data were collected through interviews based on two TikTok videos uploaded by the same account, @kikisherly, which contain several Gen Alpha slang expressions. The interview data were analyzed through thematic coding and linguistic categorization to identify patterns of slang usage and perception. The findings show that Generation Alpha frequently uses internet-based slang such as sigma, mewing, and ayo bet, which are mainly acquired through imitation and informal language practices. The participants generally view slang as enjoyable and socially meaningful, although their understanding of the original meanings varies. These findings suggest that exposure to TikTok content shapes how slang is recognized and used by Generation Alpha in both online and offline contexts.

**Keywords:** Generation Alpha, slang, sociolinguistics, TikTok, social media



## INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media has changed how children communicate and express themselves. Platforms such as TikTok are no longer only used for entertainment, but also function as spaces where language is introduced, repeated, and reshaped through daily interaction. For Generation Alpha, who grow up surrounded by digital media, exposure to short-form videos often becomes their first contact with new words, expressions, and speaking styles. As a result, informal language varieties, particularly slang, appear more frequently in children's everyday conversations, both online and offline.

Language variation is closely related to social context, age, and patterns of interaction. In digital environments, slang tends to develop quickly because it is supported by repetition, trends, and peer imitation. On TikTok, slang expressions are often presented in humorous or relatable situations, making them easy to remember and reuse. Children may not always understand the original meaning of these expressions, yet they continue to adopt them as part of their social identity and peer interaction. This indicates that slang is not only a linguistic feature, but also part of how young users position themselves socially.

Several studies have discussed internet slang and language use on social media; however, most of them focus on adolescents or adult users. Studies that specifically examine Generation Alpha, particularly children at the elementary school level, remain limited. This age group is important to observe because their language development is still in progress and is highly influenced by digital exposure and peer interaction. Investigating how Generation Alpha engages with slang on TikTok may provide a clearer picture of early language socialization in online environments.

Based on this context, the present study focuses on slang usage among Generation Alpha on TikTok from a sociolinguistic perspective. The analysis is centered on selected TikTok videos and children's responses to the language used in those videos. Based on this context, the research questions guiding this study are: What types of slang are used by Generation Alpha on TikTok; and, how do generation alpha users perceive the use of slang on TikTok?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a sociolinguistic approach. A qualitative method was chosen because the study focuses on understanding language use, meaning, and perception rather than measuring frequency or numerical patterns. The analysis centers on how slang appears in social media content and how it is perceived by Generation Alpha users based on their personal experiences and social interactions. This design allows the researcher to explore language phenomena in a natural and contextual manner.



## Participants and Data Source

The participants of this study were four children categorized as Generation Alpha, aged between 7 and 11 years old. All participants were elementary school students from different grade levels. The participants were selected purposively, as they actively use or are familiar with TikTok content and represent the target age group relevant to this study.

The primary data source consisted of two TikTok videos uploaded by the same account, @kikisherly. The first video was uploaded on 20 October 2024 and contains slang expressions such as sigma and mewing. The second video was uploaded on 20 January 2026 and includes the slang expression ayo bet. These videos were selected because they represent popular Gen Alpha slang that frequently appears in TikTok content and is commonly encountered by children.

The secondary data were obtained from interview responses given by the participants after watching the selected videos. Each participant responded to a set of semi-structured interview questions designed to explore their understanding, usage, and perception of the slang expressions presented in the videos.

## Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through individual interviews conducted in an informal and child-friendly manner to ensure that participants felt comfortable expressing their thoughts. The interview questions focused on five main aspects: familiarity with the video, favorite parts of the content, personal use of slang, understanding of slang expressions, and imitation of speaking styles from TikTok. All responses were delivered in Indonesian to allow participants to express themselves naturally.

## Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis and linguistic categorization. First, the interview responses were transcribed and carefully reviewed. Next, slang expressions mentioned by the participants were identified and categorized based on their linguistic characteristics, such as imitation and clipping. The researcher then examined participants' perceptions toward slang usage by identifying recurring themes, including enjoyment, imitation, social influence, and partial understanding of meaning. Finally, the findings were interpreted within a sociolinguistic framework to explain how social media exposure influences slang usage among Generation Alpha.

## Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were applied throughout the research process. All participants participated voluntarily with permission from their parents or guardians. The identities of the participants were anonymized using initials to protect their privacy. The study ensured that the data were used solely for academic purposes and that participants experienced no harm during the research process.



## FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents and discusses the findings based on interview data from four Generation Alpha participants. The discussion is organized according to the five interview questions and is linked to the research objectives of identifying slang types and understanding participants' perceptions.

### 1. Familiarity with the TikTok Videos

The first question aimed to identify whether the participants had previously watched the selected TikTok videos.

Respondent ADAP (10 years old) stated that he had watched the video before. He responded, "pernah" (yes).

Respondent NKH (10 years old) stated, "belum pernah" (never).

Respondent ZS (7 years old) answered, "enggak pernah" (never).

Respondent SAQ (11 years old) also responded negatively, stating that he did not usually follow trends on TikTok.

These responses indicate that familiarity with the video varied among participants. However, even participants who had never watched the videos before were still able to recognize certain slang expressions used in the content. This suggests that slang exposure among Generation Alpha does not rely solely on one video, but on repeated encounters across social media and peer interaction.

### 2. Favorite Parts of the Video

The second question explored which part of the video attracted the participants' attention.

Respondent ADAP stated, "saya suka bagian tentang mewing, karena bagus, karena aku suka mewing di sekolah" (I like the part about mewing because it is good, and I like doing mewing at school).

Respondent NKH said, "saya suka sigma karena aku terlalu sigma" (I like sigma because I am very sigma).

Respondent ZS mentioned that he liked the part where the content creator laughed, while SAQ stated that he did not have a favorite part because he was not interested in following trends.

These responses show that participants were drawn to elements that felt familiar or entertaining. Slang expressions such as mewing and sigma became memorable not because of their linguistic meaning, but because they were associated with enjoyable moments in the



video. This supports the idea that slang on TikTok is often remembered through emotional or humorous appeal rather than semantic understanding.

### 3. Personal Use of Slang on Social Media and Daily Interaction

The third question focused on whether participants used the slang expressions in their own communication.

Respondent ADAP stated that he did not use slang on social media, but used it at school with friends.

Respondent NKH answered, “iya aku pakai slang gen alpha di sosial media dan di sekolah juga bareng temen-temen” (yes, I use Gen Alpha slang on social media and at school with friends).

Respondent ZS said that he did not use the slang, while SAQ mentioned using sigma boy.

These findings indicate that slang usage is more common in peer interaction than in online posting. TikTok functions as a source of exposure, while school and friendship circles become the main spaces where slang is practiced. This reflects how digital language moves from online platforms into offline communication among Generation Alpha.

### 4. Understanding of Slang Expressions

The fourth question examined participants’ understanding of the slang used in the videos.

Respondent ADAP stated, “saya mengerti semua, paling bahasa inggrisnya yang gak tau, tapi slangnya tau” (I understand everything, except the English, but I know the slang).

Respondent NKH similarly said that he did not understand the English meaning but understood the slang.

Respondent ZS identified ayo bet and English words as unfamiliar.

Respondent SAQ also mentioned ayo bet as a new expression.

These responses show that understanding of slang meaning is partial. Participants often recognized slang expressions as familiar terms without fully understanding their original meaning. This supports the sociolinguistic view that slang among young users functions more as a shared symbol than as a fully understood linguistic unit.

### 5. Imitation of Speaking Style from TikTok

The final question explored whether participants imitated language or speaking styles from TikTok.

Respondent ADAP provided a detailed response, explaining that he used the word fomo to tease friends who followed trends, and frequently mentioned skibidi toilet in school conversations.



Respondent NKH stated that imitation was common because new words on TikTok were “seru” (fun) and often followed due to fear of missing out.

Respondent ZS answered that he never imitated, while SAQ stated that he often imitated because it felt enjoyable.

These findings clearly show imitation as a dominant process in slang adoption. Slang expressions such as sigma, fomo, and skibidi toilet are repeated not because of linguistic awareness, but because of social enjoyment and peer acceptance. This imitation-based usage reflects how TikTok influences language behavior among Generation Alpha through trends and repetition.

## Discussions of Slang Types

### 1. “Sigma”

The slang word sigma appeared in the first TikTok video and was explicitly mentioned by two participants. Linguistically, sigma is an example of borrowing from English, originally derived from the term sigma male, which circulates widely in internet culture.

Among Generation Alpha, however, the meaning of sigma has shifted. Based on the participants’ responses, sigma is not understood as a psychological or social concept. Instead, it is used to describe someone who is “cool,” “confident,” or “strong” in a playful manner. For example, Respondent NKH stated that he liked the word sigma because he felt “terlalu sigma,” indicating self-identification rather than literal meaning.

This finding shows that sigma functions as internet slang through imitation, where meaning is simplified and adapted to fit peer interaction. The word is used more as a label for identity than as a semantic term.

### 2. “Mewing”

Mewing is another slang expression borrowed from English and appeared in the first TikTok video. Originally, mewing refers to a facial posture technique discussed in online health and lifestyle communities.

In this study, Respondent ADAP stated that he liked the mewing part of the video and mentioned practicing it at school. This suggests that mewing is not only recognized as a word but also associated with a physical action. However, the participant did not explain the technical meaning of the term, indicating partial understanding.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, mewing represents borrowing combined with imitation, where a term is adopted because it is trendy and visually demonstrated on TikTok. The meaning becomes practical and surface-level rather than conceptual.



### 3. “Ayo Bet”

The expression *ayo bet* appeared in the second TikTok video and was identified as unfamiliar or new by several participants. Linguistically, *ayo bet* is an example of clipping and hybrid slang, derived from the English word *bet*, which is commonly used in informal conversation to mean agreement or readiness.

When combined with the Indonesian word *ayo* (let's go), the expression becomes localized and easier to adopt by Indonesian-speaking children. Participants recognized *ayo bet* as a slang expression even when they did not fully understand its English origin.

This shows that *ayo bet* is formed through language mixing and simplification, allowing foreign slang to become accessible to Generation Alpha without requiring full bilingual competence.

### 4. “FOMO”

The slang *fomo* (fear of missing out) was mentioned by Respondent ADAP when describing imitation behavior at school. Linguistically, *fomo* is an acronym borrowed from English internet culture.

In the participants' context, *fomo* is used to describe someone who follows trends or copies others. The respondent used it teasingly toward friends who imitated popular items or behaviors. This indicates that *fomo* has been semantically reduced and adapted into everyday peer language.

From a sociolinguistic view, *fomo* functions as borrowed slang with contextual meaning, where children use the term appropriately in social interaction even without understanding its full original definition.

### 5. “Skibidi Toilet”

*Skibidi toilet* is a slang expression originating from viral animated content widely circulated on TikTok and YouTube. Respondent ADAP mentioned frequently using the term at school, describing it as “*kepala yang muncul di toilet*” (a head appearing in a toilet).

This expression does not function as slang in a traditional linguistic sense, but rather as meme-based slang, where meaning is derived from shared visual knowledge. Its usage is heavily based on imitation and humor rather than language structure.

In this study, *skibidi toilet* represents internet-born slang, where repetition and shared cultural reference are more important than linguistic form.



## CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of slang among Generation Alpha on TikTok by focusing on the types of slang identified in selected videos and children's perceptions toward their use. The findings show that five slang expressions: sigma, mewing, ayo bet, fomo, and skibidi toilet, were recognized and used by the participants. These expressions were formed through several processes, including borrowing from English, clipping, imitation, and meme-based language practices. The meanings of the slang were often simplified and adapted to fit children's social interactions, rather than reflecting their original definitions.

The study also found that Generation Alpha generally perceives slang on TikTok as enjoyable and socially engaging. Slang expressions were commonly used in peer interaction, especially in school settings, rather than in online posting. Imitation emerged as a key factor influencing slang adoption, driven by trends and shared experiences rather than linguistic understanding. Overall, the findings suggest that TikTok functions as a space where slang is introduced and normalized, while children's social environments shape how the language is practiced and interpreted. Future studies may explore a larger group of participants or examine the long-term influence of social media on language development among Generation Alpha.

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