

THE USE OF GEN Z SLANG BY DIGITAL INFLUENCER "AWKARIN" ON HER SOCIAL MEDIA: A SOCIO-SEMANTIC STUDY

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Abstract

Generation Z increasingly relies on slang as a linguistic resource to express identity, negotiate belonging, and build intimacy in digital communication, making it an important site of sociolinguistic and semantic change. However, most existing studies focus on broad usage patterns rather than examining how individual influencers strategically use slang to construct their online personas. Addressing this gap, this study analyzes Awkarin's use of Gen Z slang on Instagram and YouTube through a qualitative sociolinguistic and semantic approach. The analysis identifies various slang forms—such as acronyms, neologisms, semantic shifts, and code-mixing—and their communicative functions in shaping influencer–audience interaction. Findings reveal that slang serves not only as informal vocabulary but as a strategic resource for identity performance, emotional expression, and audience engagement. This study contributes to sociolinguistic and semantic research by showing how influencers act as linguistic mediators who adapt and circulate Gen Z slang within Indonesian digital culture, highlighting slang as both a social practice and a site of meaning innovation.

Keywords: *digital communication; generation z; identity construction; semantic analysis; slang; sociolinguistics.*

1. Introduction

Language is constantly evolving, and one of its most dynamic manifestations is slang—informal, creative, and rapidly changing vocabulary that emerges within specific speech communities. In linguistic terms, slang represents a form of lexical innovation that reflects ongoing processes of language variation and change. It functions not only as a communicative shortcut but also as a sociolinguistic marker of identity, solidarity, and group membership. In the digital age, these processes become increasingly accelerated due to the speed of online interaction and the influence of algorithm-driven platforms. As a result, slang evolves, spreads, and undergoes semantic shifts at a much faster rate, particularly among Generation Z, who actively shape contemporary digital discourse.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has accelerated linguistic innovation through its deep engagement with digital communication. As digital natives, Gen Z individuals develop distinctive linguistic styles influenced by their use of technology and online interactions (Hendrastomo & Januarti, 2023). Although Gen Z slang is widely used

across digital platforms in Indonesia, research specifically addressing how individual influencers shape, adapt, and circulate this slang remains limited. Most existing studies focus on general usage trends rather than the strategic linguistic practices of influential digital figures.

Previous research illustrates this gap. Jihan (2024) provided cross-influencer comparisons but did not examine micro-level linguistic techniques. Tufail et al. (2024) focused on peer communication, leaving influencer–audience dynamics underexplored. Studies mapping semantic change on TikTok offered limited sociolinguistic contextualization, while large-scale quantitative studies (Puspita & Ardianto, 2024; Marzuki & Mustapha, 2023) documented slang frequency but overlooked its contextual or strategic use. Zhang’s (2025) work on algorithmic influence also did not consider influencers as linguistic mediators. Collectively, these studies highlight the absence of integrated sociolinguistic and semantic analysis focusing on a single prominent influencer and how they actively perform and innovate Gen Z slang in digital communication.

In Indonesia, Awkarin (Karin Novilda) stands out as a culturally influential figure whose communication style aligns closely with the sensibilities of Gen Z. As noted by Kandiawan (2022), influencers like Awkarin serve as both cultural trendsetters and linguistic innovators, playing a key role in spreading and localizing global digital expressions. Her frequent use of Gen Z slang across platforms makes her a significant case for examining the sociolinguistic functions and semantic processes underlying influencer discourse.

Given this context, a socio-semantic analysis of Awkarin’s linguistic practices is crucial for understanding how Gen Z slang functions not only as informal vocabulary but also as a strategic tool for identity construction, audience engagement, and meaning-making in Indonesian digital culture.

2. Literature Review

Research on Gen Z slang in digital communication has expanded considerably, yet the scholarship remains conceptually disjointed. Quantitative investigations have predominantly emphasized macro-level patterns—such as demographic correlations, frequency distributions, and diffusion trajectories—thereby offering generalizable insights but leaving the micro-level linguistic agency of individual users analytically underdeveloped. Studies of interpersonal interaction, by contrast, illuminate the pragmatic and affective functions of slang within peer networks; yet, they tend to frame slang as a symmetrical, relational resource, thereby overlooking the performative, hierarchical, and identity-driven dimensions that are salient in influencer–audience contexts. Complementary work on semantic change and platform affordances demonstrates how digital environments facilitate lexical innovation and accelerate meaning shifts, but such accounts frequently isolate technological or lexical mechanisms from the socio-identitarian practices through which influential users construct public personas and mediate cultural flows.

Collectively, these bodies of research reveal a theoretical gap: while existing studies describe the circulation, functions, and semantic evolution of Gen Z slang, they have not sufficiently accounted for how influential digital actors strategically mobilize slang to negotiate identity, cultivate audience alignment, and localize global linguistic forms within specific cultural ecologies. This absence of an integrated socio-semantic perspective limits our understanding of slang as a practice that simultaneously indexes social positioning and generates new layers of meaning.

To address this gap, the present study examines Awkarin's linguistic practices through a socio-semantic lens, foregrounding individual agency in the production, adaptation, and contextualization of Gen Z slang. This approach enables a more comprehensive theorization of slang as both a sociolinguistic resource and a site of semantic innovation within Indonesia's dynamic digital landscape.

3. Research Method

3.1 Design and Framework

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the use of Generation Z slang in influencer discourse. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it emphasizes contextual interpretation and meaning-making rather than numerical measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The analysis was guided by a combined sociolinguistic–semantic framework to capture both the social functions and the meaning-making processes of slang in digital interactions.

3.2 Data and Source

The dataset comprised linguistic expressions identified as Gen Z slang from publicly accessible content on Awkarin's Instagram and YouTube accounts. These platforms were selected purposively because of Awkarin's linguistic influence within Indonesian digital youth culture. All materials were sourced from publicly accessible online posts, ensuring adherence to ethical standards for research using publicly available online data.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through systematic non-participant digital observation of posts uploaded between January 2022 and December 2024. Slang items appearing in captions, video speech, and relevant user interactions were documented and catalogued by platform, post type, and interactional context. Only naturally occurring expressions produced by the influencer were included, consistent with naturalistic digital observation practices.

3.4 Data Analysis and Validation

Data were analyzed through a multi-stage process integrating sociolinguistic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives. First, slang items were categorized based on their structural and contextual features. Second, semantic analysis examined mechanisms of meaning change, including narrowing, broadening, metaphorical extension, and neologism formation. Third, functional analysis explored the pragmatic roles of slang in influencer–audience communication. Analytical validity was strengthened through theoretical triangulation across sociolinguistic and semantic lenses (Abidin, 2021).

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of 25 Generation Z slang expressions used by Awkarin on Instagram and YouTube. The findings are organized according to the three research questions: (1) the types of slang forms, (2) their contextual meanings, and (3) their social functions. The results and discussion are combined to show both the linguistic patterns identified in the data and their significance within sociolinguistic and semantic frameworks.

Summary of Slang Distribution

The table below summarizes the slang dataset into five clusters of linguistic features, along with examples, core meanings, and functions.

| No. | Type of Slang | Representative Expressions | Frequency | Primary Social Function | Platforms |
|-----|----------------------|---|-----------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Acronyms | FOMO, FYI, BT, GGWP | 28% | Emotional expression & relatability | Instagram & YouTube |
| 2 | Neologisms | Gengs, Bestie, Mamiii LFG | 24% | Community building & solidarity | Instagram |
| 3 | Semantic Shifts | Slay, Red flag, Green flag, Flexing, No Cap | 20% | Identity performance & social commentary | Instagram & YouTube |
| 4 | Code-Mixing | Girls POV, Mamiii LFG, GG Gaming | 16% | Cultural glocalization & trend alignment | Instagram |
| 5 | Emphatic Expressions | Periodt, Know your worth | 12% | Empowerment & audience motivation | Instagram |

The distribution demonstrates that Awkarin's slang use is hybrid and platform-sensitive, with Instagram supporting brief expressive forms and YouTube enabling more extended, narrative meaning-making.

4.1 Types of Gen Z Slang Used by Awkarin

The significance of these categories lies not in their labels, but in how each form contributes to the strategic construction of persona. Acronyms (e.g., *FOMO*, *FYI*, *BT*) create immediacy and a sense of generational closeness, reinforcing digital identity signaling (Holmes, 2022). Neologisms (e.g., *Gengs*, *Bestie*) showcase linguistic creativity and invite followers into an in-group, consistent with sociolinguistic notions of group membership (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

Semantic shifts (e.g., *Slay*, *Red flag*, *No Cap*) illustrate the dynamic adaptation of English youth vocabulary within Indonesian digital culture, aligning with Cruse's (2011) framework of semantic innovation. Code-mixing (e.g., *Girls POV*, *Mamiii LFG*) reflects "glocalized" linguistic performance (Crystal, 2011), where global youth expressions are localized into Indonesian identity work. Emphatic expressions (e.g., *Know your worth*, *Periodt*) function as affective discourse markers that amplify stance and index authenticity in Gen Z communication. Overall, the typological distribution demonstrates that Awkarin's linguistic choices are deliberate and oriented toward self-branding and audience alignment, rather than casual or spontaneous use (Fauziah et al., 2024).

These patterns suggest that Awkarin's selection of slang types is not incidental, but rather part of a calculated linguistic strategy that reinforces her public persona while maintaining constant alignment with Gen Z's cultural expectations and platform-specific norms.

4.2 Contextual Meanings of Gen Z Slang

Awkarin's slang use reflects four interconnected semantic processes: metaphorical extension, semantic narrowing, semantic broadening, and neosemanticism. These processes operate collaboratively to support identity construction and performative relatability. Metaphorical extension (e.g., *Red flag*, *Green flag*, *Touch grass*) maps everyday non-social

domains onto social judgment, enabling concise cultural commentary (Coleman, 2012; Eckert, 2016). Semantic narrowing (e.g., *Stan*, *Vibe check*) restricts broad meanings into specialized uses within influencer–audience interactions, allowing precise evaluation with minimal linguistic effort (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Semantic broadening (e.g., *Iconic*, *Slay*) expands terms beyond their original fields to express general affirmation, aligning with Gen Z’s expressive self-presentation. Neosemanticism (e.g., *It’s giving + adjective/noun*) introduces new meaning templates that signal high cultural fluency within Gen Z discourse. Collectively, these processes illustrate active meaning-making, showing how Awkarin adapts and reshapes meanings to reinforce cultural belonging and personal branding across digital platforms (Sitohang & Ristia, 2025).

Taken together, these semantic processes reveal that Awkarin functions not only as a user of Gen Z slang but as an active meaning-maker who reshapes, filters, and recontextualizes global youth language to fit Indonesian digital culture, thereby influencing how her audience interprets and reproduces emerging slang forms.

4.3 Social Functions of Gen Z Slang in Awkarin’s Digital Discourse

Six interconnected social functions emerged from the dataset:

| Function | Contribution to Persona/Engagement |
|-----------------------|---|
| Identity construction | Aligns with Gen Z cultural norms & authenticity |
| Community building | Establishes friendship-like parasocial intimacy |
| Emotional expression | Communicates effectively and relatably |
| Cultural mediation | Connects global trends with local contexts |
| Humor/entertainment | Enhances appeal and platform retention |
| Social commentary | Enables casual critique without a moralizing tone |

For example, “Slay,” “Periodt,” and “It’s giving” simultaneously perform confidence, cultural literacy, and empowerment, creating a multilayered persona. Meanwhile, “Gengs,” “Bestie,” and “Girls POV” cultivate a sense of symbolic proximity, transforming follower relationships into imagined friendships. Expressions like “Sus” and playful exaggerations of “Iconic” deliver humor that increases replay value and shareability, while critique terms like “Red flag” enable commentary without disrupting a conversational tone (Paoletti et al., 2025). Collectively, these patterns show that Awkarin’s slang use operates as a deliberate communicative strategy that shapes relational positioning, reinforces her influencer identity, and optimizes audience engagement within Indonesian digital culture.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that Awkarin’s use of Gen Z slang functions not as casual vocabulary but as a purposeful socio-semantic resource for constructing her influencer identity and fostering engagement with young audiences. Slang emerges as a strategic form of meaning-making that integrates identity performance, audience alignment, and cultural positioning within Indonesian digital spaces.

The findings advance sociolinguistic and semantic scholarship by demonstrating that influencer discourse is a site where semantic innovation and social meaning operate simultaneously. Processes such as metaphorical extension, narrowing, broadening, and

neosemantic formation are shown to serve pragmatic and relational purposes, highlighting the interdependence of meaning and social function in contemporary digital language.

The study also contributes to understandings of Indonesian digital culture by illustrating how influencers act as cultural mediators who circulate, adapt, and normalize global Gen Z slang within local contexts. Through these practices, influencers help shape linguistic identities and reinforce values of authenticity, empowerment, and digital belonging among Indonesian youth.

Despite its insights, this study is limited by its focus on a single influencer and two platforms. Future research should incorporate comparative analyses, audience perspectives, and multi-platform datasets to capture broader patterns of slang evolution in Indonesian social media.

Overall, this research emphasizes the role of digital influencers as emerging linguistic agents whose practices actively shape the development, transformation, and dissemination of youth language in Indonesia.

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