

## Word Formation on Slang Words in Boost's Instagram Captions and Posts Targeting Teenagers

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### ABSTRACT

The study analyzed captions and posts on Boost's Instagram that utilizes English slang to communicate to the target market. It used the theories of types of word formation processes by Yule (2006) and that by Minkova and Stockwell (2009). The findings found only the following types of word formation processes: coinage, compounding, blending, clipping, conversion, acronym, derivation, other sources, and multiple processes, with acronym as the most commonly used. Obviously, borrowing and backformation are the types of word formation processes that were not found in the data. It may also be concluded that the targeted reader may influence the use of a certain type of word formation process.

**Keywords:** Instagram; slang; Word formation

### INTRODUCTION

Language communicates thoughts, feelings, and signs. According to O'Grady and Archibald (2016), words are the smallest free form. Word formation involves creating new words and meanings; Plag (2002) suggests studying how complex words are formed from earlier words or morphemes.

Since product advertising is always everywhere, the researcher wants to study word formation processes. Since So et al. (2017) state that in recent years, companies have discovered that social media is a powerful tool for connecting with consumers, building brand loyalty, and generating more reasonable discussion between brands and their target audiences, this study analyzes word formation processes in social media marketing.

Instagram's extensive use in social media marketing is another crucial factor in this study's focus on the platform. According to Massing-Schaffer and Nesi (2020), Instagram is one of the most prominent social media platforms worldwide. According to Dean (2023), Instagram has more than 500 million daily active users (DAUs), making it the second-largest social network after Facebook in terms of daily logins. Numerous businesses use Instagram for marketing purposes due to its expanding popularity.

*Boost* employed informal spoken language to produce engaging *Instagram* photos and captions. This study speculates that the *Boost* content producer used slang to communicate better with teenagers. Today, some brands employ a few phrases in their posts to keep readers intrigued. Only people who are interested in the posts will read the captions. The researcher hypothesizes that the posts will feature more slang than captions since slang is a good technique to make things shorter and more entertaining for teenagers. The researcher noticed *Boost* uses slang in captions and posts to reach their target audience.

The researcher would examine the slang words from the posts and captions targeting teenagers. The researcher examined the word formation processes in the slang posts and captions posted from May 16, 2022, to February 27, 2023. The data collected within that timeframe provided sufficient data for the study.

The researcher analyzed the word formation processes using the combination of word formation processes theories proposed by Yule (2006) and Minkova and Stockwell (2009). In this study, the researcher separated the word formation processes into two categories: the words in the posts and the words in the captions. Furthermore, the researcher investigated the similarities and differences between the captions and posts on *Boost's Instagram*.

## METHOD

The researcher employed a qualitative approach with a qualitzing method by Dörnyei (2007). The data are the slang words in *Boost's Instagram* captions and posts. The data source is *Boost's* captions and posts were collected from March 2, 2022, to February 27, 2023.

The researcher gathered the information in several phases. The researcher examined all of *Boost's* Instagram captions and posts. Then, using Rader's Online Dictionary (n.d.), the researcher checked all captions and posts' sentences. The researcher retyped all the sentences with slang words. Then, the researcher analyzed and wrote down the types of word formation processes. The types of word formation processes include the theories by Yule (2006) and Minkova and Stockwell (2009) combined, such as coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, backformation, conversion, abbreviation, derivation, other sources, and multiple processes. The researcher then explained the word formation process of the slang terms in the next column. The researcher then explained the meaning and context of the slang phrases in the next column. The researcher explained the word's context while viewing the complete caption, as she could not utilize it as data. The study also determines which word formation processes occur most and least in posts and captions.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of this study regarding what types of word formation processes found in *Boost's Instagram* captions and posts and what differences and similarities are between the types of word formation processes found in the captions and posts.

### **Types of word formation on slang as found in *Boost's Instagram* captions targeting teenagers.**

This section covers the researcher's investigation of the types of word formation processes in slang as discovered in *Boost's Instagram* captions targeting teenagers. After analyzing, the researcher found 50 slangs in the captions.

#### **1. Coinage**

According to Yule (2006), coinage is the creation of a new word. This means that coinage is the word formation process in which a new word is created either

deliberately or accidentally without using the other word formation processes and often from seemingly nothing. The example of coinage can be seen in the example below:

- Data 1.2: Oh, a Mango Magic **meme** again?  
The slang word “meme” is coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. (Rader, n.d). According to Rader (n.d) in The Online Slang Dictionary, “meme” is something that spreads through the internet in the same way that a virus spreads between organisms. Teenagers frequently use the term "meme" to refer to a humorous image, video, text, etc. that has spread throughout the Internet.

## 2. Compounding

Yule (2006) defines compounding as combining words into one word. Here can be seen the example of compounding:

- Data 1.30: In need of a mid-week **pick-me-up**? We got you!  
The slang word “pick-me-up” is a compounding which is a combination of several words into one. Pick-me-up is a stimulant (Rader, n.d). It is defined as something that restores a person's energy, boosts their mood, or generally improves their mood. Pick-me-up can be a caffeinated beverage or a refreshment. For instance, the use of the term "pick-me-up" can be interpreted as follows: typically, people need a "pick-me-up" in the morning, so they consume coffee.

## 3. Blending

Blending, as defined by Yule (2006) and Minkova and Stockwell (2009), includes bringing together parts of two words, most commonly the beginning and end of one word. An example that follow provide an illustration of the blending process:

- Data 1.29: WIN a free icy tang for you and your bestie (or **frenemy**??)  
The slang word “frenemy” has gone through the blending process from the words “friend” and “enemy”. This term can be used when referring to someone that is both a friend and an enemy (Rader, n.d). So, essentially the term “frenemy” is used to describe a person who is or pretends to be a friend but who is also in some ways an enemy or rival.

## 4. Clipping

Yule (2006) says that clipping is when a word with several syllables, like facsimile, is shortened to fax. Clipping usually occurs in an everyday informal language. The following examples illustrate the concept of clipping

- Data 1.20: Get **‘em** today only \$6  
The slang word “em” from the data above is a slang word that refers to “them” (Rader, n.d.). It becomes a slang word because it is clipped from its original word. The word “em” is shortened from the word “them”.

## 5. Conversion

According to Yule (2006), conversion is when the use of a term in a different context results in a change in the word's meaning. It takes place when a noun is used in the place of a verb without any reduction taking place. Whereas, Minkova and Stockwell (2009) classified conversion as derivation without affixation, which means the same word appearing in different functions. Below are some examples of conversion:

- Data 1.11: Eggplant is a berry... **cap** or no **cap**?  
The word “cap” originally refers to a hat. However, the word “cap” in this sentence has converted meaning into a verb for falsehood or lies (Rader, n.d.). To assert that something is a “cap” is to assert that it is a falsehood, whereas to assert that something is “no cap” is to assert that it is the truth. The history of the slang word “cap” can be seen in Green’s Dictionary of Slang (2010); in the 1940s, to cap is evidenced as slang meaning “to surpass,” connected to the ritualized insults of capping (1960s). These terms appear to be rooted in the sense of cap as “top” or “upper.”

## 6. Acronym

Yule (2006) states the first letters of a series of previously used words are combined to form new words. The examples of acronyms are presented below:

- Data 1.13: who’s thirsty **lol**. six bucks today  
The acronym “lol” refers to “Laughing Out Loud” or “Laugh Out Loud” (Rader, n.d.). In this procedure, the word “lol” is formed without any special adjustment. It only shortens the base words “Laugh or Laughing Out Loud” by using the first letters 'L', 'O', and 'L' and eliminating the remaining letters. The term “lol” is usually used in text-based communication to express amusement (Rader, n.d.).

## 7. Other Sources

According to Minkova and Stockwell (2009), many people believe that many words came from imitations of their original sounds, some of these words are referred to as echoic or onomatopoeic words.

- Data 1.35: We’re not here to **yuck** your yum.  
The slang word “yuck” is an onomatopoeic word which falls under the category of other sources. “yuck” is an onomatopoeia, which is an imitation of the sound one makes when vomiting. According to Rader (n.d.) in The Online Slang Dictionary, “yuck” is an interjection meaning an exclamation of disgust. The phrase “yuck someone’s yum” can be understood as not saying that someone’s food tastes bad.

## 8. Multiple Processes

According to Yule (2006), the formation of a singular word can result from a variety of processes. Here can be seen the formation of a singular word that is a result of more than one types of word formation processes:

- Data 1.18: Drop da **mf** hundy percent  
The word “mf” here, is classified into multiple processes of word-formation. First, it is compounding from the word “motherfucker”. Then the second process is an acronym from the word “motherfucker”. The word “motherfucker” here is taken only from the first letter which are ‘M’ and ‘F’. However, in this case, *Boost* can intend to say another insult, such as “mother flipping” or “mother freaking” or something similar. The sentence before was saying “who doesn’t like *Boost*?” and continued by “drop da mf hundy percent”. This means *Boost* is making a strong insult to the people who don’t like *Boost* in a funny and non-offensive way. In this sentence, the word “motherfucker” or “mother flipping” or “mother freaking” means an extremely strong general insult (Rader, n.d.)

### **Types of word formation on slang as found in *Boost's Instagram* posts targeting teenagers.**

This section covers the researcher’s investigation of the types of word formation processes in slang as discovered in *Boost's Instagram* posts targeting teenagers. After analyzing, the researcher found 26 slangs in the posts.

#### **1. Coinage**

According to Yule (2006), coinage is the creation of a new word. This means that coinage is the word formation process in which a new word is created either deliberately or accidentally without using the other word formation processes and often from seemingly nothing. The example of coinage can be seen in the example below

- Data 2.1: Me watching people argue in the comments after I post a controversial fruit **meme**:  
The slang word “meme” is coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. (Rader, n.d). According to Rader (n.d) in The Online Slang Dictionary, “meme” is something that spreads through the internet in the same way that a virus spreads between organisms. Teenagers frequently use the term "meme" to refer to a humorous image, video, text, etc that has spread throughout the Internet.

#### **2. Compounding**

Yule (2006) defines compounding as combining words into one word. The example of compounding is:

- Data 2.19: Weed out **red flags**.  
The slang word “red-flag” is a compounding which is a combination of several words into one. “red-flag” is a warning or a cause of concern (Rader, n.d.). On social media, the term “red-flag” is frequently used in the context of dating and relationships to refer to a sign that a person will become (or already is) a bad or problematic partner.

#### **3. Blending**

Blending, as defined by Yule (2006) and Minkova and Stockwell (2009), includes bringing together parts of two words, most commonly the beginning and end of one

word. The examples that follow provide an illustration of the blending process:

- Data 2.13: Just overall **kinda** boring  
The slang word “kinda” stands for the word “kind of” (Rader, n.d.), which is the blending of two words “kind” and “of”, which changes from the word “to” to the word “na”. Then, the words blend and create the word “kinda”.

#### 4. Clipping

Yule (2006) says that clipping is when a word with several syllables, like facsimile, is shortened to fax. Clipping usually occurs in an everyday informal language. The following examples illustrate the concept of clipping.

- Data 2.4: **BRO!** Talk to me about  
The slang word “bro” from the data above is a slang word that refers to “brother” (Rader, n.d.). It becomes a slang word because it is clipped from its original word. The word “bro” is shortened from the word “brother”. The term “bro” is like calling someone your close friend.

#### 5. Acronym

Yule (2006) states the first letters of a series of previously used words are combined to form new words. An example of acronym is presented below:

- Data 2.8: A **tbh**... It’s cheaper  
The acronym “tbh” refers to “To Be Honest” (Rader, n.d.). In this procedure, the word “tbh” is formed without any special adjustment. It only shortens the base words “To Be Honest” by using the first letters 'T', 'B', and 'H' and eliminating the remaining letters. The term “tbh” can be used in various contexts, including to admit something, convey an opinion, or comment.

#### 6. Derivation

According to Yule (2006), derivation is a process of forming a word by adding a certain word call affixes (such as un-, mis-, -ish, -ism, and so on). It could be at the beginning or the middle or the last words. While Minkova and Stockwell (2009) define derivation through affixation as producing new lexical terms by adding affixes. Listed below are examples of words that have undergone the derivation process:

- Data 2.21: Gym **Junkie**  
The slang word “junkie” has gone through adding an affix (-ie). The original word is “junk”. This word not only has a change in writing but also meaning. The two words also change the clause of the word from noun to adjective. The word “junk” refers to old or discarded articles that are considered useless or of little value (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.), whereas the word “junkie” refers to a tremendous enjoyer of something (Rader, n.d.). The meaning of the word “junkie” can be seen in the data as a tremendous enjoyer of the gym.

### **Similarities and differences between the word formation as found on slangs in *Boost's Instagram* captions and posts.**

The underlying theory by the researcher is that posts would contain more slang words than captions since posts are meant to have very few efficient words. However, the study found that captions have more slang than posts. Since the caption serves as the explanation of a post, they would contain more words, and therefore have more slang words.

As seen from the findings, the most frequent type of word formation process is acronym, with a total number of 24 slang words for both the captions and posts. Clipping is the second most frequently used type of word formation process, with a total number of 21 slang words for both the captions and posts. Both captions and posts on *Instagram* should be short yet still informative and interactive so as not to be boring for the readers. So this is the reason why clipping and acronyms are the most frequently used types of word formation processes in this regard.

As seen from the findings, there are no data regarding borrowing types of word formation processes in both the captions and the posts. The researcher is of the opinion that this is due to the fact that Instagram is an international account for global readers. It is for that reason that borrowing language from another country, if found, could result in confusion and misunderstanding for some group of people. The findings also show that there are no data on backformation. The researcher assumed that since forming words through backformation removes affixes and creates a simpler word, it is not used when making slang. Slangs are usually more complicated and can only be understood by a certain group of people; that is why the formation of slang through backformation is very unlikely.

### **CONCLUSION**

The analysis results revealed that there are 67 slang words: 41 slang words in the captions and 26 in the posts. The 41 slang words in the captions have the following types of word formation processes, such as coinage, compounding, blending, clipping, conversion, acronym, other sources, and multiple processes. In contrast, the 26 slang words in the posts have the following types of word formation processes: coinage, compounding, blending, clipping, conversion, acronym, and derivation.

The data revealed that more slang words are found in the caption than in the post, which is an unexpected result, according to the researcher. Both the captions and posts share the following types in common: coinage, compounding, blending, clipping, acronym, and derivation. The most frequent type of word formation processes used is acronym in both the captions and posts. The researcher is of the opinion that this is due to the fact that the captions and posts are to be kept short and yet still interesting. Furthermore, both captions and posts do not have any data regarding borrowing and backformation. However, the captions and posts do not have other sources and multiple word formation processes. The reason for the differences and similarities is the intended audience and how to optimize Instagram.

Due to the limitations of the present study, the researcher suggested that further studies using wider or different data sources be done, for instance, the study of types of word formation processes in other brands or even personal artist Instagram accounts. The study of word

formation processes is also recommended for analyzing English slang occurring on other popular marketing platforms, such as Facebook or TikTok. Last but not least, the researcher hopes that the findings found in this research may contribute to further studies.

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