

Teen Speak: A Morphology & Semantics Exploration

A linguistic observation of adolescent vocabulary in context

Introduction

- This presentation explores the unique vocabulary used by teenagers, based on a casual observation in a natural setting. Each slide includes slang terms, the context in which they were used, their meanings, and visual representations.

Bet

- ****Sentence Heard:**** Bet, I'll be there at 7.
- ****Definition:**** Agreement or confirmation
- ****Your Sentence:**** She said 'bet' when I asked her to join the group project.

Cap

- ****Sentence Heard:**** No cap, I really got an A!
- ****Definition:**** Slang for 'no lie'
- ****Your Sentence:**** He's always talking, but this time I think it's no cap.

Rizz

- ****Sentence Heard:**** He's got mad rizz.
- ****Definition:**** Charisma or flirting skill
- ****Your Sentence:**** She said he had 'rizz' because he was smooth with compliments.

Slaps

- **Sentence Heard:** This song slaps.
- **Definition:** High-quality or enjoyable
- **Your Sentence:** That new album really slaps.

Ghosted

- ****Sentence Heard:**** She ghosted me after two dates.
- ****Definition:**** Cut off communication
- ****Your Sentence:**** He thought things were going well until he got ghosted.

Vibe

- ****Sentence Heard:**** She's such a chill vibe.
- ****Definition:**** Mood or atmosphere
- ****Your Sentence:**** The coffee shop had a really relaxing vibe.

Drip

- ****Sentence Heard:**** His drip is on point.
- ****Definition:**** Fashion/style
- ****Your Sentence:**** She complimented his drip at the dance.

Sus

- ****Sentence Heard:**** That's sus.
- ****Definition:**** Suspicious
- ****Your Sentence:**** He was acting super sus when he came in late.

Yeet

- ****Sentence Heard:**** He yeeted the ball across the field.
- ****Definition:**** To throw forcefully
- ****Your Sentence:**** She yeeted her phone onto the couch.

Flex

- ****Sentence Heard:**** He's flexing his new shoes.
- ****Definition:**** Show off
- ****Your Sentence:**** No need to flex, we all know you're good at it.

Reflection Part 1

- What struck me most was the creativity and expressiveness in teen language. I expected to hear some slang, but I was surprised at how rapidly meanings shift.
- Teens use unique vocabulary to form identity and connect with peers. This reflects their developmental stage—seeking autonomy and peer acceptance, as suggested by Erikson's psychosocial theory.

Reflection Part 2

- When I was a teen, we also used slang, like 'cool,' 'burn,' or 'word.' Just like today's teens, we created language to express ourselves uniquely.
- Morphologically, many teen words are clipped, blended, or affixed in creative ways. Semantically, meanings shift rapidly.
- This observation supports linguistic theories that language evolves in social contexts (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011).

Conclusion & Application

- Language is dynamic and reflects identity, culture, and community. In the classroom, being aware of student language helps foster connection, respect, and relevance.
- Understanding teen slang through the lens of morphology and semantics enriches our approach to teaching language and communication.

Reflection

Reflective Discussion: Teen Language Observation

What struck me most about the language used by the teenagers I observed was the creativity and fluidity with which they communicated. Many of the words, like “rizz,” “drip,” and “cap,” carried meanings that were completely different from their traditional definitions or were entirely new coinages. Their use of slang not only served as a mode of communication but also as a form of identity expression and in-group belonging.

Going into this observation, I expected to hear some slang and perhaps a few phrases I wasn’t familiar with. However, I underestimated the extent to which language has evolved among teens—even simple words I thought I knew were being used in radically different ways. My expectations were surpassed in both the diversity and originality of the language I heard.

Teenagers often develop their own vocabulary as a means of establishing identity and navigating the complexities of social dynamics. According to Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development, adolescence is a period marked by the quest for identity. Creating and using a unique language helps teens differentiate themselves from adults while fostering peer-group solidarity. This shared language supports both intrapersonal identity formation and interpersonal relationships.

Reflecting on my own adolescent years, I recognize similar trends in language use. We coined phrases, adapted pop culture references, and used inside jokes that only made sense within our peer groups. The drive to create a linguistic identity was very much the same, even though the specific vocabulary has changed.

This activity strongly connects to theoretical perspectives in morphology and semantics. Many words observed were formed through clipping, compounding, or semantic shift—common processes in morphological change (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011). For example, “flex” has shifted from describing physical movement to signaling boastfulness.

Language changes dynamically in real time, adapting to cultural trends, media, and social environments. Observing this phenomenon firsthand underscores how vital it is for educators to remain linguistically aware and open-minded. In my future classroom, I will use this understanding to foster connection and engagement, recognizing students’ language as a valid form of self-expression and learning. This experience reminds me to approach student communication not as “wrong” or “slang,” but as a living example of linguistic growth and identity development.

Reference:

Aronoff, M., & Fudeman, K. (2011). *What is Morphology?* Wiley-Blackwell.