

# Features of Youth language

---

Šapina, Magdalena

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2024

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:142:024140>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#) / [Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-18**



**FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET**  
SVEUČILIŠTE JOSIPA JURJA STROSSMAYERA U OSIJEKU

Repository / Repozitorij:

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i  
književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Magdalena Šapina

## **Osobine jezika mladih**

Završni rad

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Dubravka Vidaković Erdeljić

Sumentor: doc. dr. sc. Ana Werkmann Horvat

Osijek, 2024.

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i  
književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Magdalena Šapina

## **Osobine jezika mladih**

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Dubravka Vidaković Erdeljić

Sumentor: doc. dr. sc. Ana Werkmann Horvat

Osijek, 2024.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language  
and Literature and German Language and Literature

Magdalena Šapina

**Features of Youth Language**

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dubravka Vidaković Erdeljić, Ph.D. Associate Professor

Co-supervisor: Ana Werkmann Horvat, Ph.D. Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2024

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language  
and Literature and German Language and Literature

Magdalena Šapina

## **Features of Youth Language**

Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities

Scientific field: philology

Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Dubravka Vidaković Erdeljić, Ph.D. Associate Professor

Co-supervisor: Ana Werkmann Horvat, Ph.D. Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2024

## IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravio te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni.

Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasan da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

U Osijeku, datum

Magdalena Šapina 0122239377  
ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

Table of contents

- 1. Introduction..... 1
- 2. Theoretical background .....2
- 3. Research questions, hypotheses and methods .....4
- 4. Results .....5
- 5. Discussion..... 11
- 6. Conclusion ..... 16
- References ..... 18

**Abstract:** The focus of this research is on the morphological, semantic, and typographic features of youth language on social media. The goal is to explore new pragmatic uses of these features and determine how they differ from past practices. Understanding youth language on social media requires an understanding of the features of computer-mediated communication, which directly reflect the features of this type of youth language. The morphological features examined in this study are abbreviations and initialisms, which are primarily used for linguistic economy, however, initialisms also serve to express intensified emotions or to cover up expletives. A further analysis of semantic changes is conducted to determine the motivation behind the observed semantic extensions, and it was concluded that in the analyzed corpus the new meanings of words are used mostly to express strong emotions, attitudes, and reactions, both positive and negative, but also to create and maintain an in-group feeling. Young people get involved in language play with others because of the feeling of belonging to that group and the development of their own identity. Youth create innovative language as a result of feeling included in the community. The analysis has also revealed that emotionally laden language is pervasive on social media. Some of the ways young people express their attitudes and emotions are using different means of intensification, e.g., adverbial intensifiers, but also typographic features, such as caps lock, use of special characters, exclamation points, and letter repetitions.

**Keywords:** morphological, semantic, and typographic features, youth language, social media, emotions

**Sažetak:** Fokus ovog istraživanja je na morfološkim, semantičkim i tipografskim značajkama jezika mladih na društvenim mrežama. Cilj je istražiti nove pragmatične upotrebe ovih značajki i utvrditi kako se razlikuju od prošlih uporaba. Razumijevanje jezika mladih na društvenim mrežama zahtijeva razumijevanje značajki računalno posredovane komunikacije, koje izravno odražavaju značajke ove vrste jezika mladih. Morfološka obilježja koja se ispituju u ovom istraživanju su kratice i inicijalizmi, koji se prvenstveno koriste za jezičnu ekonomičnost, međutim, inicijalizmi služe i za izražavanje pojačanih osjećaja ili za prikriivanje psovki. Daljnjom analizom semantičkih promjena utvrđuje se motivacija uočenih semantičkih proširenja, te se zaključuje da se u analiziranom korpusu nova značenja riječi koriste uglavnom za izražavanje jakih osjećaja, stavova i reakcija, kako pozitivnih tako i negativnih, ali i za stvaranje i održavanje osjećaja pripadnosti grupi. Mladi se uključuju u jezičnu igru s drugima zbog osjećaja pripadnosti grupi i razvoja vlastitog identiteta. Mladi stvaraju inovativan jezik kao rezultat osjećaja



uključenosti u zajednicu. Analiza je također otkrila da je jezik koji služi emocionalnom izražavanju sveprisutan na društvenim mrežama. Neki od načina na koje mladi ljudi izražavaju svoje stavove i osjećaje je korištenje različitih sredstva intenzifikacije, npr. adverbijalne intenzifikatore, ali i tipografske značajke, kao što su caps lock, upotreba posebnih znakova, uskličnika i ponavljanja slova.

**Ključni pojmovi:** morfološke, semantičke i tipografske značajke, jezik mladih, društvene mreže, osjećaji

## 1. Introduction

The focus of this research will be on youth language used on social media, where young people seem to have been communicating with each other more often than in face-to-face conversation in recent years. Young people tend to embrace new communication styles that influence how language is used today and this in turn provides valuable insights into language change (Jonsson 2019). Youth language often features unique expressions as young people seek to distinguish themselves from older generations and establish their separate groups. Young people are seen as engineers who shape language in a unique way and are therefore anti-mainstream (Groff et al. 2022). Due to this feature, it is frequently discussed whether the language of young people can be classified as a separate language (Groff et al. 2022, Tagliamonte & Denis 2008). Also, some scholars defend the youth language saying that it is innovative, while others argue that it is just another non-standard version of the English language that is often mocked in public and education (Gates & Ilbury, 2019). Despite these different opinions and opposing views of youth language, scholars agree that it serves for global communication, connection, and shared social identity, which is “defined as the socially constructed membership in a social group or category” (Fuller, 2007: 106, as cited in Kroskrity 2000a).

This study aims to explore morphological, semantic, and typographic characteristics of the youth language and how their use carries new pragmatic meaning. Pragmatics is “the study of language in relation to the users of language” (Stalnaker, 1970: 272). This means that the meaning of a word changes depending on the user of the language and the context in which the word is used. For example, the word *mother* prototypically denotes a woman who has a child, while the same word used on social networks is praise for a female person. The morphological aspects I will delve into are abbreviations and initialisms. Additionally, I will explore the semantic features of words and emojis that have changed their original meaning. I will also examine how intensifiers affect a word's meaning. Moreover, the typographical features I will explore are caps lock words, the use of special characters, exclamation points, and letter repetition.

The paper is organized as follows: in the section on the theoretical background, I will compare previous research and inspect whether the phenomena mentioned above have already appeared before and how the use of these phenomena is different today. I will also explain the terms CMC, polysemy, intensification, initialism, and language play. Then I will present my research question, hypothesis and explain how I collected the corpus on social media comments. In the results section, I will present the most frequently used expressions, focusing on their morphological, semantic, and typographic features, as well as their pragmatic roles. Furthermore, I will provide a detailed

explanation of the pragmatic role of these expressions and their connection to the identity of young people. Due to rapid changes in the language over the past few years, it is important to explore this topic. The number of new terms coming in and out of style is increasing rapidly, making it difficult to stay current. This research will provide insight into new linguistic expressions that have not been explored so far.

## **2. Theoretical background**

Over the years, youth language has been researched from different perspectives. One of the perspectives is how youth language is used face-to-face, among peers, and how this affects the shaping of their identity (Fuller 2007, Eckert 2003). Another perspective is the study of urban youth styles and multilingualism among young people (Jonsson 2019). A further perspective is the use of youth language in computer-mediated communication (CMC), which is any “communication by email, instant messaging, social media sites, etc.” (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). CMC is written communication, but with the characteristics of spoken communication. Squires (2010: 462) stated that young people “seek to exchange messages quickly to approximate real-time, face-to-face conversation”. Because of this characteristic of CMC, it is common that CMC “displays informal and speech-like features, including abbreviations, short turn-taking, and omission of auxiliary verbs and pronouns” (Tagliamonte, S. A. 2008: 7). Research on CMC has different points of focus. Some researchers have focused on the use of youth language on the Internet (Squires 2010), namely *Netspeak* which is defined as “a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet, and encountered in all of the above [internet-based] situations, arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global and interactive” (Squires, 2010: 463, as cited in Crystal 2006). Other researchers have focused on youth language use in chats and Instant Messaging (IM) (Squires 2010, Tagliamonte 2008, Thurlow 2003), which is “a one-to-one synchronous medium of computer-mediated communication” (Tagliamonte, 2008: 3, as cited in Baron 2004). Squires (2010), Tagliamonte (2008), and Thurlow (2003) discovered that a common feature of *Netspeak*, chats, and IM is that young people shorten words and use incorrect spellings, which is the result of imitating spoken language.

In their respective studies, Tagliamonte (2016) and Groff et al. (2022), who have worked extensively on the youth language, presented some differences and similarities in their CMC research. In her work Tagliamonte (2016) studied the corpus of Internet language collected between 2009-2010 in which she focuses on various features of youth language, such as abbreviations, initialisms, short forms, and intensifiers, which she states are not innovative. Tagliamonte (2016: 3) stated that “specific forms common to CMC existed for centuries, the use

of acronyms, nonstandard spellings, initialisms, and other short forms have longitudinal precedence as well”. According to Tagliamonte (2016) and Groff et al. (2022), abbreviations are one of the most frequently used features of youth language in CMC. Abbreviations are used to express agreement, disagreement, praise, surprise, and also for linguistic economy (Groff et al. 2022). Nowadays, young people on social media often use abbreviations, mostly because of the linguistic economy. What was not mentioned in their works is that today words, that previously were not abbreviated, are now being shortened. Young people try to shorten all the words they can so that they can type faster and save time. Another variant of abbreviations commonly used by young people is initialism where the “initial letters of words are used as an abbreviation for a name or an expression, usually pronounced separately” (Groff et al., 2022: 69, as cited in Hamawand 2011). Initialism is used in place of words that would otherwise sound harsh, and as a result, it is often referred to as euphemistic initialism. (Groff et al., 2022). One feature that has remained popular is intensifiers, which are “adverbs that maximize or boost meaning” (Tagliamonte, 2008: 17). Groff et al. (2022: 94) state that the intensifier *so* is “the most common adjective intensifier”. The intensifier *so* was also common a few years ago, especially among young people and even more often among women (Tagliamonte 2016). Although the use of *so* increased in frequency during Tagliamonte's (2016) study, the intensifiers *very*, *really*, and *pretty* remained commonly used at that time.

Furthermore, the semantic change of words from negative to positive and vice versa is explained in Groff et al. (2022). The process by which this semantic change occurs is called polysemy, which is “usually characterised as the phenomenon whereby a single word form is associated with two or several related senses” (Falkum & Vicente, 2015: 1). An example of polysemy can be the word *mouse*, which represents an animal, but at the same time, it can represent a computer mouse. This linguistic phenomenon persists in language, but with different words. For example, once words with negative meanings such as *wicked*, *sick*, and *insane* are used in a positive sense. Today, for instance, the word *lol* is used in a sarcastic sense, *slay*, and 😊 in a positive sense. When words that have undergone a semantic change are used, they express a high intensity of positive or negative emotions. For example, when the word *slay* is used in comments on social networks, it expresses a high intensity of positive feeling of the user who wrote that comment. Certain words undergo semantic changes in order to convey such intense emotions.

Another term that is important for this research is language play, which is defined as “the manipulation of elements and components of language in relation to one another, in relation to the social and cultural contexts of language use...” (Djenar et al., 2018: 193, as cited in Sherzer 2002).

Language play is a common element of youth language that is used for entertaining conversations and creating a sense of community, therefore people must understand the essence of the language play for it to be successful (Djenar et al., 2018). Because of the language play, it could be said that young people are linguistically creative, yet “teenage language has a bad reputation for many aspects of behavior, but most especially the breakdown and degradation of language” (Tagliamonte, 2016: 6). The results of research presented in this paper indicate that language play is still common in youth language. Based on this, it can be concluded that some linguistic phenomena have remained the same over the years, as Tagliamonte (2016) has mentioned in her work, but the expressions used by young people have changed. Also, the use of emojis has not been explained so far, and this is the issue that will be addressed in this research. The research explores which new pragmatic meanings have emerged in recent times, and which have not been tackled in earlier research.

### **3. Research questions, hypotheses and methods**

The research question addressed in this study is:

What are the morphological, semantic, and typographical characteristics of the youth language on social media today?

The research focuses on these particular features since they have undergone the most dramatic change in a short period of time. Morphological and semantic features have already been investigated by Groff et al. (2022). Still, comparing his research with the research presented in this paper, it can be concluded that youth language changes very rapidly and it is necessary to investigate it more often. Additionally, the youth language on Instagram and TikTok is unexplored because these are new types of social media. The hypothesis that arises from this research question and the previous literature is that some expressions acquire a new pragmatic meaning when they are used on social media and that a certain word formation gives a different or more emphasized meaning.

To conduct this research, I looked at the comments of young people on social media, specifically Instagram and TikTok. The comments that are analyzed are the comments below the posts of celebrities whose audience is mostly young people. I chose Olivia Rodrigo, Jojo Siwa and Zendaya. I collected the corpus by copying user comments and making tables. I made separate tables for each celebrity I chose to research and looked at about 5 posts from each person depending on how many unusual and recurrent morphological, semantic and typographic features I was able to find under the posts. I had two tables for Olivia Rodrigo and Jojo Siwa because they

have profiles on both Instagram and TikTok. I only had one table for Zendaya because she only has an Instagram account. The corpus consists of a total of 161 comments that display morphological, semantic, and typographic features. I found 115 expressions on Instagram and 46 on TikTok. The expressions used on these two social networks do not differ, young people have quite similar interactions on Instagram and TikTok. The only difference I found is that the comments on some celebrities' posts are more positive, while others are more negative, depending on how controversial they are. Jojo Siwa received mostly negative comments because in this period she is quite controversial due to her singing career and new songs. In contrast to her, Olivia Rodrigo and Zendaya received predominantly positive comments due to their widespread support and lack of controversy, especially Zendaya, whom people adore because she behaves kindly in her interviews and career.

The strategy was to systematically review the comments and identify recurrent morphological, semantic, and typographic features. After that, the analysis of those expressions followed, in order to determine what morphological, semantic, and typographical features they include, as I explained in the introduction. Analyzing these features provides a better insight into why young people communicate in a certain way and what they are trying to achieve by using certain expressions. This type of research has already been conducted in *Global Perspectives on Youth Language Practices* (Groff, C. et al. 2022) and the results were revealing because it was proven that young people use innovative language and engage in language play. The study also highlighted various features they use such as abbreviations, intensification, clippings, negations, and others.

Possible issues with the research presented in this paper include the anonymity of individuals on social media platforms due to which it is very difficult to determine with certainty whether someone is a young person or not in the comments on Instagram or TikTok. For this reason, I analyzed only comments below the posts of celebrities whose audience consists mostly of young people to make the results as credible as possible.

#### **4. Results**

In this section, I will present the research results summarized in three tables containing morphological, semantic, and typographic features of youth language on social media. Each table contains a column with the comment, highlighted expression, and pragmatic usage. The table with morphological features has an additional column in which the full meaning of the abbreviation or initialism is written. I selected the expressions in the tables by scrolling through the comments on Instagram and TikTok, noting the most frequent phenomena. The examples in the tables are just

some of the examples I found from Instagram or TikTok to highlight what expressions young people use.

Table 1. – Morphological features

In this table, I will present the morphological features. Different uses of abbreviations and initialisms are shown in the pragmatic use column.

Comment	Expression	Full expression	Pragmatic use
so american and stranger are SO good <i>omfg</i>	omfg	oh my fucking god	Initialism used for emphasizing a positive feeling
<i>omg</i> one direction 🥰🥰	omg	oh my god	Initialism used for emphasizing a positive feeling
<i>Yu w</i> bangs >>	yu w	you, with	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy
<i>ily</i>	ily	I love you	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy
So American <i>fs</i> , like it gives “London boy” vibes <i>iykyk</i>	Fs, iykyk	for sure, if you know you know	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy
guts tour fits <i>r</i> gonna be next level 🔥	r	are	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy
hopefully <i>u</i> and pinkpantheress in <i>sf!</i> still gotta find a ticket	u, sf	you, San Francisco	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy
Hot girls <i>fav</i> song is actually making the bed	fav	favorite	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy
ahhhhh <i>fckin</i> gorgeousssssss 😊❤️	fckin, gorgeousssssss	fuckin	Abbreviation used to make the word less offensive
i’m OBSESSED with <i>ur</i> active tiktok era	ur	your	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy

<i>Omg</i> the memes are going to be funny <i>af</i> when this drops 😊	omg, af	oh my god, as fuck	Initialism <i>omg</i> used for mocking, initialism <i>af</i> used to make the word less offensive
is the bad girl in the room with us <i>rn</i>	rn	right now	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy
this song is gonna flop <i>lmaooo</i>	lmaooo	laughing my ass off	Initialism used for mocking
<i>gtfo nb</i> care 😊	gtfo nb	get the fuck out, nobody	Initialism <i>gtfo</i> used to make the word less offensive, abbreviation <i>nb</i> used for linguistic economy
I'd f*ck <i>u</i>	u	you	Abbreviation <i>u</i> used for linguistic economy
<i>HNY MY LOVE CHEERS WTF!!!!</i>	hny, wtf	Honey, what the fuck	Abbreviation <i>hny</i> used for linguistic economy, initialism <i>wtf</i> used to make the word less offensive
Where the <i>tts</i> at 😊	tts	tities	Abbreviation used to make the word less offensive
I love you <i>sm</i> @oliviarodrigo	sm	so much	Abbreviation used for linguistic economy

Table 2. – Semantic features

In this table I will present the semantic changes and the new meaning of the terms.

Comment	Expression	Pragmatic use
Yu w bangs >>	>>	Used to express that one favors something
olivia rodrigo <i>queen</i> of everything	queen	Used for praising a woman
CANT WAIT <i>QUEENIE</i>	queenie	Used for praising a woman



I love her active <i>TikTok era</i> 😊	TikTok era, 😊	<i>Era</i> is used to specify what a person is doing in a certain period, 😊 represents tears of joy
<i>SLAY! COME TO NEW ZEALAND</i> 😊❤️	slay, 😊	<i>Slay</i> used to praise a person, 😊 represents sadness
Olivia always <i>EATSSS</i>	eats	Used to praise a person
<i>YAS QUEEN ATE AND LEFT NO CRUMBS</i>	queen ate and left no crumbs	Used to praise a person, in this case, a woman which is shown by the word queen
This girl was literally selling bows as a child the fuck does she mean “wild child” 🤪	🤪	Used to emphasize that something is embarrassing or cringe
Dislike button—————>	—————>	Used to ask other people to agree with you in the comments
It’s so bad that this is <i>my Roman Empire</i> rn	my Roman Empire	Referring to something one thinks about very often
Wild child?? Jojo you were on dance moms 😊😊😊	😊😊😊	Used to emphasize that something is embarrassing or cringe
<i>MOTHER IS MOTHERING</i>	mother is mothering	Used for praising a woman
<i>Mood</i>	mood	To relate to someone or something what a person has done
<i>big slay</i>	big slay	Used to praise a person, big is intensifying the meaning
so American its <i>CRAZY</i> giirl omg i love this song	crazy	Used to intensify the positive meaning
<i>how am i this early</i>	how am i this early	Represents a contest between fans who will comment first
It’s giving Morticia 😊	it is giving	Resembles something or someone, gives a certain vibe

Table 3. – Typographic features

In this table, I will present the typographic features that are divided into words written in caps lock, the use of special characters, exclamation points, and letter repetition.

Comment	Expression	Pragmatic use
<i>OBSESSED</i> with obsessed and so american 🍷🍷🍷	OBSESSED	Caps lock word emphasizes the positive meaning
so American its <i>CRAZY</i> giiirl omg i love this song	CRAZY	Caps lock word emphasizes the positive meaning
yes yes yes <i>YESSS</i>	YESSS, caps lock	Caps lock word and letter repetition emphasizes the positive meaning
OLIVIA ATE SO ICONICLY	caps lock	Caps lock words emphasize the positive meaning
<i>Yasssssss</i> I can't wait!!!	Yasssssss, !!!	Exclamation points and letter repetition emphasize the excitement
OMG GUTS SPILLED IS AN ABSOLUTE MASTERPIECE	caps lock	Caps lock words emphasize the positive meaning
OMGGGGG	caps lock	Caps lock word and letter repetition emphasizes the positive meaning
SEE U SO SO SOONNN	caps lock	Caps lock words and letter repetition emphasize the positive meaning
the crazy eyes r <i>SO GOOD</i>	SO GOOD	Caps lock word emphasizes the positive meaning
<i>I AM SO EXCITED!!!!</i> 🍷🍷🍷 you inspire me so much ❤️	I AM SO EXCITED!!!!	Caps lock word emphasizes the positive meaning, exclamation points emphasize the excitement
<i>I NEED UR MUSIC BACKKK</i> 🤔🤔	caps lock	Caps lock words emphasize the positive meaning
<i>YESSSS JOJO!!!!</i> ❤️	YESSSS JOJO!!!!	Caps lock words emphasize the positive meaning, exclamation

		points and letter repetition emphasize the excitement
“I was a bad girl” <i>YOU HAVE A KIDS CHOICE AWARD!!</i> 😊	YOU HAVE A KIDS CHOICE AWARD!!	Caps lock words represent shouting
<i>WHAT BAD THINGS HAVE YOU DONE JOJO</i> 🤩	WHAT BAD THINGS HAVE YOU DONE JOJO	Caps lock words represent shouting
<i>YAAAASSSSSSS!!!!</i> So proud of you queen!!!! 🌟👑🌟	<i>YAAAASSSSSSS!!!!</i>	Caps lock word emphasizes the positive meaning, exclamation points and letter repetition emphasize the excitement
OMG OMG JOJOOO IM LIKE UR BIGGEST FAM GIRL AND I LOVVVVVEEEE YOUR SONG PLEASE REPLY IT WOULD MEAN THE WORLD TO ME	caps lock	Caps lock words emphasize the positive meaning and shouting
I'd <i>f*ck</i> u	f*ck	Special character * used to make the word less offensive
This shi <i>a\$\$</i>	a\$\$	Special character * used to make the word less offensive
so American its <i>CRAZY giirl</i> omg i love this song	giirl	Letter repetition are used to emphasize a positive feeling

After analyzing the morphological features (Table 1), it is evident that the most common change involves the transformation of words into abbreviations. When I analyzed the frequency of investigated features in social network comments, abbreviations were the most common. The entire corpus contains 43 abbreviations, while the number of initialisms is 25, which is almost half as many as the abbreviations. The abbreviations used had a positive, negative, and neutral meaning. Initialisms were used in a positive or negative context. It is visible that young people do not abbreviate all words in a sentence, but only certain ones.

Expressions (Table 2) that have acquired new semantic meanings now carry mostly positive connotations. Changes in meaning occurred most often with words, not with signs or phrases. Intensifiers are also used to emphasize the positive meanings of words. In the majority of cases,

the meanings of emojis did not change. However, there were a few exceptions, such as 🤡 and 😬. The meaning of the 🤡 is usually associated with the meaning of death, but on social media it is used to express something embarrassing. 😬 typically denotes sadness, however when used in comments, it indicates embarrassment or that something is wholesome. Emojis sometimes have the same purpose as intensifiers because they emphasize the positive or negative emotion of the entire comment

In Table 3, it is noticeable that the most frequently used typographical feature is writing words with caps lock, such as *YESSS*. The second place is occupied by the repetition of letters, for instance, *giiirl*, followed by the use of exclamation points in third place, as *Yasssssss I can't wait!!!*. The least used are special characters instead of letters as in the taboo word *f\*ck*. In the entire corpus, 50 comments contained words written in caps lock. The repetition of letters appeared 27 times in the corpus, exclamation points 11 times, and special characters only 2 times.

## 5. Discussion

The present study contributes to the understanding of morphological, semantic, and typographic features of the youth language on social media and their new pragmatic uses. There is a lot of research on the topic of youth language because expressions quickly acquire new meanings. The main problem with this is that not everyone can understand the use of these terms if the terms do not have their usual meaning. For example, an older person who is not up to date with the language change could understand an expression used by young people in a completely different way and the word could get an inadequate meaning. The word must therefore be analyzed in the context in which it was used.

When it comes to the morphological aspect, young people use abbreviations and initialisms. Tagliamonte (2016) and Groff et al. (2022) both argue that abbreviations are one of the most frequently used features of youth language in CMC, which my research on Instagram and TikTok has also shown. Abbreviations are predominantly employed for linguistic economy, but not only for that reason. Another reason is to cover up obscene words to make them less offensive. The use of abbreviations for linguistic economy is influenced by the fact that today's world is getting faster, so people try to save time on typing. A further reason why abbreviations are used is because linguistic economy is needed to achieve the speed of spoken communication. As I mentioned in the theoretical background, this is one of the features of CMC. Moreover, initialisms are used to emphasize a positive feeling, such as the first two examples in Table 1 (*omfg*, *omg*). Conversely,

they are also used to mock someone or something. To illustrate: this song is gonna flop *lmaoooo*. Initialisms, like abbreviations, are often employed to cover up expletives.

Groff et al. (2022) also found that semantic change, whether negative or positive, is a common phenomenon. My research revealed that semantic changes in words are most often positive, usually serving to praise someone. Such words can generally be applied regardless of whether the person in question is male or female, as with the word *slay*. With the word *slay* or *crazy*, a change from a negative to a positive meaning took place. This process is called amelioration, “i.e., the speaker’s evaluation of something as being good” (Finkbeiner et al., 2016). Opposite to this process is pejoration, “the speaker’s evaluation of something as being bad” (Finkbeiner et al., 2016). There are words such as *queen* or *mother* that can be specifically used when praising a female person. The words *mother* and *queen* are intensified when used online because their primary meanings are associated with powerful female figures. The queen is the most powerful woman in the kingdom, and the mother is the source of life. The inclusion of the verb *eat* alongside the word *queen* further emphasizes the notion that a female person excels or performs exceptionally well, however, the verb *eat* can also stand alone and retain its meaning that someone performs exceptionally well. The expanded meaning of the verb *eat* comes from the idea of someone being so superior that they can conquer someone or something effortlessly like a meal. These mentioned words took on a new meaning because it is a trait of intensifiers to lose their impact over time and use, leading to a renewal process (Bordet 2015). In this case, polysemy is used as a means of intensification. Other intensifiers, for example, adverbial intensifiers, can go along with these words that have a positive meaning, which further enhances that meaning. One of the more common intensifiers is *so*, which appeared in the early 1900s and 2000s (Tagliamonte 2016). In the corpus of this research, *so* appeared 30 times, which is more often than other adverbial intensifiers. In addition to words, some signs denote a positive meaning, but they are used less frequently. For instance, the > sign, which normally represents a “greater than” sign in a mathematical context, signifies that one thing is preferred over another or suggests superiority.

Apart from this, some phrases, as *my Roman Empire* and *how am I this early*, have acquired a completely different meaning on social media. These phrases have a neutral or positive meaning. The term *my Roman Empire* is used when thinking about something often. The phrase originated from a TikTok trend where girls asked their boyfriends how often they thought about the Roman Empire, and it turned out that they thought about it quite often. That is how the term became established in the comments on social media. The phrase *how am I this early* appears in comments

made within seconds or minutes of a celebrity post's publication. The expression implies a sort of competition between fans.

Furthermore, there are expressions whose meaning can be positive or negative, such as *era*, *mood*, *it is giving*. Anything can be added to these expressions, depending on what is being said, as can be seen in Table 2. Young people can be quite creative in using these expressions, therefore a person must recognize the tone of the statement for the statement to make sense. For example, young people use *mood* even in the most trivial situations. Someone falls down the stairs and a young person says *mood*, which means *I am in the mood to fall down the stairs*, indicating a feeling of being down. Furthermore, *it is giving* is used to indicate resemblance between two things or people, which is used in both negative and positive contexts. Looking at the example from the table, *It's giving Morticia 😊*, it is evident that someone is compared to Morticia from the movie *The Addams Family*, i.e. signifying that someone is as unique as Morticia. On the other hand, when the expression is used in this context *The music is giving 🌟5 min crafts🌟*, it indicates that the music is of poor quality as 5 min crafts. The word *era* is used on the same principle, it is preceded by an additional expression that determines whether *era* will have a positive or negative connotation.

In contrast to these positive meanings, some expressions carry a negative meaning. It can be signs like  $\text{---}\rightarrow$ , which is usually preceded by a negative word like the example in Table 2 (*Dislike button* $\text{---}\rightarrow$ ), and people are asked to agree that something is negative. The arrow sign is typically used for direction or pointing.

Moreover, emojis can have a negative meaning. When emojis 🤡 and 😬 are used, it indicates that a person's action or something similar is extremely negative. Although the emoji 😬 can also indicate when something is wholesome. 🤡 primarily represented something bad, something related to death, or something spooky. That emoji has retained its negative meaning, but not in such an intense form. 😬 primarily means something sad and can be used in a negative or positive sense. When it is used to indicate that something is embarrassing, then it contains a negative meaning, and when it is used for something wholesome, the emoji changes its meaning from negative to positive. From all of the attached examples, it can be concluded that young people often assign new meanings to existing expressions. These semantic changes can vary from words, signs, phrases, and also whether their meaning is positive, negative or neutral.

The analysis of typographic features suggests that they are mostly used to further enhance positive feelings. This can be achieved simply by using caps lock. When writing with caps lock, one can write a whole sentence in caps lock or just one specific word. In this way, young people express how positively they feel about something or someone. To show how excited they are about something or someone, young people put several exclamation points in a row at the end of a sentence or use letter repetition. Conversely, caps lock can be used to give the impression that someone is yelling at someone in the comments, leaving a negative impression. Typographic features serve to achieve the effect of spoken communication. An emphasis expressed in speech with pitch or tone of voice is expressed in written communication with caps lock, exclamation points, or letter repetition. The only typographic feature that differs from the others is the use of special characters. Special characters, for instance, \* or \$, are used instead of certain letters to make swear words less offensive. Typographic features are commonly employed, though they do not offer as much diversity as semantic features.

After analysis, it is evident that morphological, semantic, and typographic features are connected with diagrammatic and metaphoric iconicity. Diagrammatic iconicity is “about how the systematic arrangement of different forms somehow mirrors the relationship between the things they reference” (Hodge & Ferrara, 2022: 4). Metaphoric iconicity “represents ‘a parallelism in something else’ and instantiates a triadic relationship between a sign, an object, and that ‘something else’” (Hodge & Ferrara, 2022: 4, as cited in Hiraga, 1994). Diagrammatic iconicity is associated with morphological and typographic features, while metaphoric iconicity is associated with semantic changes. Morphological features such as abbreviations and initialisms create a strong link between the word formation and its meaning. When used online, an abbreviated form of a word represents the full word as well as an emphasized emotion in a given context. In addition, young people, using such abbreviated forms, try to reach the speed of spoken communication. Typographic features such as caps lock, exclamation marks, and repetition of letters also intensify certain emotions with their form, which, as with morphological features, is an attempt to emphasize words as in spoken communication. Furthermore, the semantic changes that occur in words and emojis are associated with metaphors and images that are created in the minds of young people. With the words *mother* and *queen*, an image of a strong woman appears in the mind, or young people can imagine a certain famous person to whom they would attribute the word. It is common for young people to have a favorite female celebrity whom they call *mother* or *queen*. Phrases such as, for example, *my Roman Empire* also create an image in the minds of young people, because the word is used in a figurative sense. Young people will first imagine the

Roman Empire in their minds and then connect it with additional context. This also applies to the phrases *it is giving*, *mood*, and *era*, where it is specific that young people can be creative and connect it to various contexts, as explained above. Emojis are a special category because they are already symbols, not words. Although the appearance of the emoji shows which emotion a person is expressing, young people add secondary meanings to the primary meanings of emojis and then associate new emotions with these emojis, as described with 🤔 and 😊. Along with emojis, the signs > and —> form a special category. When young people use them in comments, they metaphorically associate the > sign with preference, while —> is associated with group opinion.

As I stated above in the theoretical background, Tagliamonte (2016) mentioned that certain phenomena have been in CMC use for a long time. Features such as abbreviations, intensification, semantic changes, and misspellings have been mentioned by some authors (Squires 2010, Tagliamonte 2008, Thurlow 2003, Tagliamonte 2016, Groff et al. 2022) before. In the past, abbreviations were used even before they were used online, “teens of earlier generations passed notes 'encrypted' in special alphabets or writing permutations” (Tagliamonte, 2016: 3, as cited in Herring 2004). My results showed that these processes are still used among young people. Although these processes are not new, they are being applied innovatively. Young people's vocabulary has changed over the years, but they continue to use the same processes to alter expressions. Despite this Eckert (2003: 115) declares that “it would be a mistake to think of adolescents as simply inventing new ways of saying the same things; by virtue of their transitional place in the life course, adolescents are in a particularly strong position to respond to change in the conditions of life, and in so doing bring about lasting social change”.

Given how specifically these expressions are used, such as the phrase *my Roman Empire* or *how am I this early*, it is important to investigate how language affects the formation of group feelings. For certain expressions to be understood, people need to be part of a group of young people. Young people create a new vocabulary that is only used for online interaction and using this new language gives them access to the group (Squires 2010). Belonging to a group can have a strong influence on the development of a person's identity. Groff et al. (2022: 6) stated that “youth use language to start accepting and shaping their identities; i.e., they become more aware of who they are”. Young people unconsciously start using certain expressions to fit in with their group because, during the phase of youth, there is a notable focus on peer interactions and the formation of both individual and collective identities (Groff et al., 2022). By using similar linguistic practices, people can establish a stronger connection and thus have similar experiences. This is a form of technological determinism, a view that “holds that technology inherently and autonomously influences society”



(Squires, 2010: 461). Their language also reflects the trends that are happening on social media. Some words can be of short-term existence, they exist during the trend, then they disappear and new words are created. Another important factor is that young people as a group can have a great impact on whether positive or negative feelings are expressed towards something or someone because they use certain expressions. Such “playfulness provides a non-threatening and lively way for expressing critique and therefore promotes sociability...” (Djenar et al., 2018: 197).

By using such expressions, young people achieve different goals, for instance, activities like categorizing group membership, confirming personal identity, making fun of someone, or persuading someone to take action (Djenar et al., 2018). For some specific actions mentioned here, such as convincing someone of a certain attitude, intensification is used to further emphasize emotions.

Many linguistic activities of young people on social media can be summarized as language play. Djenar’s et. al. (2018: 193) study defines language play as “the creative manipulation of language that brings entertainment value to its users and, at the same time, enables users to accomplish interactional goals”. The research confirmed the hypothesis that some expressions acquire a new pragmatic meaning when they are used on social media and that a certain word formation gives a different or more emphasized meaning. My results align with earlier studies on this topic (Groff et al., 2022, Tagliamonte 2016). Young people use language play to twist words for special meanings, often through abbreviations, euphemistic expressions, semantic changes, and pragmatic markers.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the topic of youth language on social media is relevant to the field of linguistics. By exploring comments on Instagram and TikTok, this research aims to gather evidence on the morphological, semantic, and typographic features of youth language on social media and their new pragmatic uses. By researching these features, the structure of words and the meaning of words in context are analyzed, which is important because expressions used by young people can often take on a meaning different than the prototypical one. The morphological features that stand out are abbreviation and initialisms. Both abbreviations and initialisms serve to cover up expletives. Additionally, initialisms are used to emphasize a positive feeling or to mock someone or something. Despite these functions, abbreviations are mostly used for linguistic economy, aiming to reach the speed of spoken communication. Further, the semantic changes that occur are divided into those that occur in words, phrases, and signs. Semantic changes that occur in words

are primarily positive and serve to praise someone. However, there are words that can acquire both positive and negative meanings, such as *era* and *mood*. Phrases that change their meaning can take on both positive and negative meanings depending on the context in which they are used. The exception is the phrase *how am I this early*, which expresses who is a bigger fan of the celebrity. Consequently, this phrase has a role of building an in-group feeling.

The signs predominantly consist of emojis and these 🤩 , 😏 are especially common in the comments. Both emojis are used in a negative context when someone does something cringe, however 😏 is also used in a positive context.

The typographic features used are words written in caps lock, the use of special characters, exclamation points, and repetition of letters. Words written in caps lock, exclamation points, and repetition of letters serve to emphasize a certain emotion and thereby obtain the effect of spoken communication. Special characters are used instead of certain letters to make taboo words less offensive, but this feature appears rarely in comments.

The analysis has indicated that morphological and typographic features are related to diagrammatic iconicity, and semantic features are related to metaphorical iconicity. A further observation is that these processes have already been observed by other scholars, but their application is innovative, indicating that young people are rapidly reshaping language.

Young people have a strong group feeling, and the use of a specific language helps them build their identity. They use language to create language play that they use for the purpose of making jokes, mocking other people, and confirming their identity. With this manipulation of language, they create entertainment for themselves, and in doing so they unconsciously create the exclusivity of the group (Djenar et al., 2018, Groff et al., 2022, Squires 2010).

Social networks have become a significant platform for communication in recent years, making this a relevant research topic. This research provides insights into the evolution of new linguistic practices in these environments. Communication between young people and other age groups can be improved by gaining knowledge of youth language.

## References

- Bordet, Lucile. (2015). The renewal of intensifiers and variations in language registers: a case-study of very, really, so and totally. *Intensity, intensification and intensifying modification across languages*. <https://hal.science/hal-01874168>
- Djenar, D. N., Ewing, M. C., & Manns, H. (2018). Youth and language play. In *Style and Intersubjectivity in Youth Interaction* (1st ed., pp. 193–230). De Gruyter. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbkk0b0.14>
- Eckert, Penelope. (2003). Language And Adolescent Peer Groups. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 22(1):112-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X02250063>
- Falkum, I. L., & Vicente, A. (2015). Polysemy: Current perspectives and approaches. *Lingua*, 157, 1-16.
- Finkbeiner, R., Meibauer, J., & Wiese, H. (2016). *Pejoration*. (Linguistik Aktuell / Linguistics Today 228). Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins. vii, 357 S.
- Fuller, J. M. (2007). Language Choice as a Means of Shaping Identity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 17(1), 105–129. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43104134>
- Gates, S. M., & Ilbury, C. (2019). Standard Language Ideology and the Non-Standard Adolescent Speaker. In C. Wright, L. Harvey, & J. Simpson (Eds.), *Voices and Practices in Applied Linguistics: Diversifying a Discipline* (pp. 109–126). White Rose University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvs09r4p.9>
- Groff, C., Hollington, A., Hurst-Harosh, E., Nassenstein, N., Nortier, J., Pasch, H. & Yannuar, N. (2022). *Global Perspectives on Youth Language Practices*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501514685>
- Hodge, G., & Ferrara, L. (2022). Iconicity as Multimodal, Polysemiotic, and Plurifunctional. *Front. Psychol.* <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.808896>
- Jonsson, R., Årman H., Milani T. M. (2019). Youth language. In *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Ethnography*, ed. by Karin Tusting, 259–272. Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315675824-19/youth-language-rickard-jonsson-henning-%C3%A5rman-tommaso-milani>
- Stalnaker, R. C. (1970). Pragmatics. *Synthese*, 22(1/2), 272–289. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20114754>

- SQUIRES, L. (2010). Enregistering internet language. *Language in Society*, 39(4), 457–492.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40925792>
- TAGLIAMONTE, S. A. (2016). So sick or so cool? The language of youth on the internet. *Language in Society*, 45(1), 1–32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43904632>
- Tagliamonte, Sali A., & Denis, Derek (2008). Linguistic ruin? LOL! Instant messaging and teen language. *American Speech* 83:3-34.
- Thurlow, Crispin. (2003) “Generation Txt? The Sociolinguistics of Young People’s Text-Messaging.” *Discourse Analysis Online*  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259258527\\_Generation\\_Txt\\_The\\_sociolinguistics\\_of\\_young\\_people's\\_text-messaging](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259258527_Generation_Txt_The_sociolinguistics_of_young_people's_text-messaging)