

Lexical and semantic patterns of English slang in Justin Bieber's Instagram comments

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Abstract

This study examines lexical formation and semantic meaning in the use of slang within Instagram comment discourse. The data consist of 89 slang items collected from comments on ten highly engaged posts from Justin Bieber's verified Instagram account. Using a qualitative approach supported by simple frequency analysis, the study investigates how slang expressions are linguistically formed and how meaning is constructed in online interaction. The findings reveal that acronyms and initialisms are the most prominent word-formation processes, reflecting a preference for brevity and efficiency in digital communication. Other processes, including conversion, clipping, blending, and word creation, demonstrate the creative adaptation of language in online discourse. Semantic analysis indicates that, although conceptual meaning is dominant, connotative, affective, social, and collocative meanings also play vital roles in expressing evaluation, emotion, and interpersonal stance. Overall, the findings suggest that slang in Instagram comments functions not only as a mechanism of linguistic economy but also as a resource for informal expression and interaction in digitally mediated communication. By linking lexical formation patterns with semantic functions, this study contributes to the understanding of slang use in contemporary social media discourse.

Keywords

slang, Instagram, sociolinguistics, word formation, semantic meaning

How to cite this article in APA format:

Mahayana, I. M. A., Jayanti, N. L. P. D., & Elele, E. C. (2026). Lexical and semantic patterns of English slang in Justin Bieber's Instagram comments. *Linguistics Initiative*, 6(2), 211-219.
<https://doi.org/10.53696/27753719.62442>

Introduction

Slang is more than just informal or playful talk. It is a dynamic language tool that people use to express their attitudes, emotions, and group connections in everyday communication (Eble, 1996; Damirjian, 2025). Early studies in language and society showed that how we speak is closely tied to social factors like age, class, and gender (Labov, 1972). However, slang was long seen as a minor, temporary, or incorrect form of speech used mostly by young people in casual settings. Newer research changes this view, showing that slang follows clear patterns and carries real meaning rather than being random or unimportant. Studies on language and identity also show that slang works as a way to express oneself. Through slang, speakers share their feelings, show what groups they belong to, and manage how they relate to others in different situations (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, 2010; Tagliamonte, 2016). Additionally, recent research highlights that slang helps people take a social stand, express emotions, and connect with their audience in digital spaces (Damirjian, 2025; Khairunissa & Budiwati, 2025; Paoleti & Mujahidah, 2025).

The growth of digital communication has changed how slang is made, spread, and understood. Social media platforms like Instagram give people highly interactive spaces where language is quickly shared, repeated, and changed through online talk (Androutsopoulos, 2021). Unlike face-to-face talking, online communication is shaped by features of the platform, such as how visible a post is, how fast people can reply, how short the text needs to be, and how many people it can reach. Because of this, online users often change language in creative ways to fit fast conversations and express themselves clearly. Research also shows that popular global slang is often rewritten or reshaped by users from different cultures online. This shows both a mix of global language trends and local creativity (Pahruraji, Mulyati, & Cahyani, 2025).

In online spaces, language rules often grow through repetition, sharing, and constant exposure rather than face-to-face talking (Varis & Wang, 2015). Instagram is a great place to study modern slang because its comment sections encourage short, expressive, and highly interactive communication. Public comment sections allow users to share opinions, reactions, humor, and feelings in ways that large audiences can see right away. The setup of Instagram comments also helps slang spread and be repeated quickly by different users in different situations. Because of this, Instagram comment sections provide useful data for looking at how new slang forms appear and how meanings work in online communication (Dyner, 2021; Zappavigna & Logi, 2025).

Despite growing research on digital slang, a few gaps remain. Many past studies focus mostly on finding and grouping slang forms without looking at how these words actually mean things in context. Other studies look closely at meaning and interpretation but do not explain well how the slang words are actually built. Because of this, word-making and meaning are often treated as separate things rather than as connected parts of online language. Also, not enough attention has been paid to slang use in high-visibility online spaces, where things like user interaction, audience size, and platform design shape how people talk. This leaves a gap in understanding how word forms and meanings work together in real online conversations.

This study fills this gap by examining slang used in Instagram comment sections from the verified Instagram account of Justin Bieber. The account represents a high-visibility online space with massive interaction and active audience participation, making it suitable for observing how slang forms emerge, circulate, and function in online communication. The study focuses specifically on two interrelated aspects of slang use: lexical formation and semantic meaning.

To analyze lexical formation, this study applies Mattiello's (2008) framework, which includes processes such as acronyms and initialisms, clipping, blending, compounding, conversion, and word creation. These categories help explain how users creatively modify language in digital interaction. To examine semantic meaning, the study applies Leech's (1981) semantic

framework, including conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, and collocative meanings. This framework allows the study to analyze how slang expressions operate contextually within real Instagram comment sections.

This study aims to examine lexical and semantic patterns of slang in Instagram comments by analyzing how slang expressions are formed and how meaning is constructed in online interaction. By combining lexical formation and semantic analysis within a single study, this research provides a more integrated understanding of how slang functions in digitally mediated communication. In addition, the study contributes to research on online discourse by identifying relationships between slang formation types and semantic meaning categories within Instagram comment interaction, using data from a high-visibility celebrity social media account.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach supported by simple frequency analysis to examine lexical and semantic patterns of slang in Instagram comment discourse. The qualitative approach allows detailed analysis of how slang expressions are linguistically formed and how meanings are constructed within online interaction, while frequency counts are used to identify recurring patterns in the data rather than to produce statistical generalizations (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Ferré Pavia & Bajouk, 2025). Because the study focuses on descriptive lexical and semantic classification, the analysis prioritizes contextual interpretation and categorical pattern identification rather than inferential statistical analysis.

The data were collected from comments on Justin Bieber's verified Instagram account, which is a high-visibility online space with massive audience interaction and active public engagement. Ten Instagram posts were chosen on purpose based on three rules: high engagement levels (more than 1,000 comments), a short publication time frame to keep the context consistent, and content that encouraged open audience interaction and informal talk. These rules were used to make sure that the selected comments reflected active and naturally occurring online conversations.

Approximately 5,000 comments were screened manually to identify slang expressions. In this study, slang refers to non-standard lexical items commonly used in informal or digitally mediated communication (Dynel, 2021; Zappavigna & Logi, 2025; Utami & Suryadi, 2025). Comments consisting only of emojis, spam, duplicated content, or unclear linguistic forms were excluded from the analysis. From the screened data, 89 distinct slang items were selected for analysis. Repeated expressions were treated as single lexical items, while each slang expression was examined within its immediate comment context to support contextual interpretation.

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the slang expressions were classified according to their lexical formation using Mattiello's (2008) framework, including acronyms and initialisms, clipping, blending, compounding, conversion, and word creation. Each slang item was categorized based on its dominant lexical formation process. Second, the semantic meanings of the slang expressions were analyzed using Leech's (1981) semantic framework, including conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, and collocative meanings. The semantic analysis focused on how each expression functioned within its contextual usage in Instagram comments.

To improve analytical consistency, all slang items were repeatedly reviewed within their original comment context before final categorization. Ambiguous expressions were interpreted according to their dominant lexical and semantic function in the surrounding discourse. After the

classification process, simple frequency counts were used to show the distribution of lexical and semantic categories across the dataset.

All data used in this study were publicly available on Instagram. Usernames and identifiable user information were anonymized, and the study followed ethical guidelines for the use of publicly accessible online data.

Results

The results are presented in three parts: (1) the distribution of slang formation types, (2) the distribution of semantic meaning types, and (3) the relationship between lexical formation and semantic meaning.

Distribution of Slang Formation Types

Based on Mattiello's (2008) framework, the 89 slang items identified in the dataset were classified into nine lexical formation categories. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of each category.

Table 1. Distribution of Slang Formation Types in Instagram Feed Comments

Type of Slang Formation	Frequency	Percentage
Acronym & Initialism	28	31.46%
Conversion	14	15.73%
Word Manufacture & Fanciful Formation	14	15.73%
Clipping	10	11.24%
Compounding	9	10.11%
Variation	7	7.87%
Blending	5	5.62%
Final Combining Form	1	1.12%
Reduplicatives	1	1.12%
Total	89	100%

As shown in Table 1, acronyms and initialisms appear most frequently in the dataset, accounting for 28 items (31.46%). Common examples include *LOL*, *TBH*, *IDK*, *ASAP*, and *DGAF*. These expressions simplify communication through shortened forms that are widely recognized in Instagram interaction.

Conversion and word creation each account for 14 items (15.73%). Examples of conversion include *flex*, *chill*, and *ship*, while word-created forms include *gucci*, *lit*, and *noob*. These forms illustrate how users modify or develop language creatively in digital discourse.

Clipping appears 10 times (11.24%), including forms such as *fave*, *lil*, and *kinda*. Compounding accounts for 9 items (10.11%), with examples including *spill the tea*, *bad bitch*, and *holy shit*. Variation and blending occur less frequently, while final combining forms and reduplicatives each appear once.

Overall, shortened and simplified forms dominate the dataset, although several creative and expressive formations are also present across the comments analyzed.

Figure 1 presents the distribution of slang formation types identified in the dataset (N = 89).

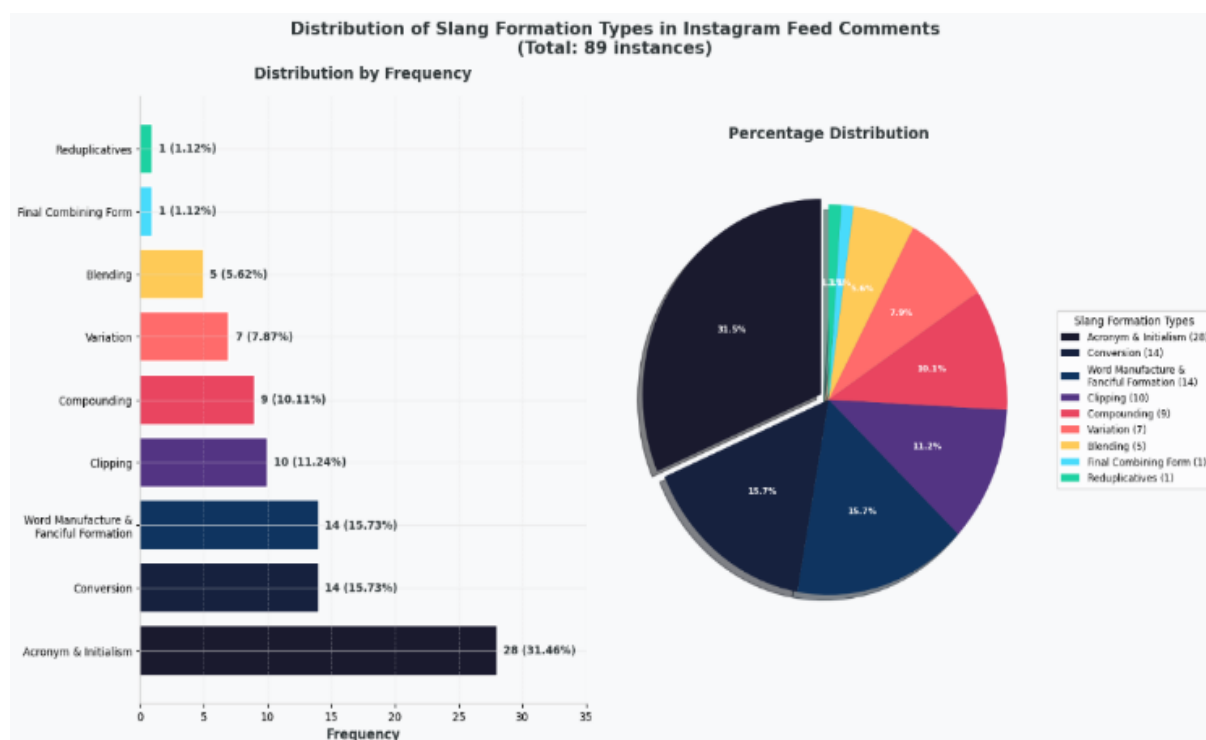


Figure 1. Distribution of Slang Formation Types (N = 89)

Distribution of Semantic Meaning Types

The slang expressions were also analyzed using Leech's (1981) classification of meaning. Six semantic categories were identified: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflective, and collocative meaning. Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of each category.

Table 2. Distribution of Semantic Meaning Types in Instagram Comments

Type of Meaning	Frequency	Percentage
Conceptual Meaning	38	42.70%
Connotative Meaning	21	23.60%
Social Meaning	10	11.24%
Affective Meaning	7	7.87%
Reflective Meaning	7	7.87%
Collocative Meaning	6	6.74%
Total	89	100%

Conceptual meaning emerges as the dominant semantic category, representing 38 items (42.70%). Expressions such as *LOL*, *TBH*, *IDK*, *ASAP*, and *OMW* are generally used with direct and commonly understood meanings in online communication.

Connotative meaning accounts for 21 items (23.60%). Examples include *lit*, *gucci*, *bad bitch*, *WTF*, and *YOLO*, where meanings extend beyond literal interpretation. Social meaning appears in 10 items (11.24%), including *bruh*, *bestie*, *y'all*, and *SWAG*, which are associated with informal interaction and familiarity.

Affective meaning occurs in 7 items (7.87%), particularly in expressions such as *ILY*, *DGAF*, *STFU*, and *LMAO*, which communicate emotional responses. Reflective meaning also appears in 7 items (7.87%), while collocative meaning accounts for 6 items (6.74%), including expressions such as *spill the tea* and *badmouthing*.

The distribution indicates that slang in Instagram comments is used not only for informal expression but also for different communicative and semantic purposes within online discourse.

Relationship Between Lexical Formation and Semantic Meaning

The analysis also reveals patterns in the relationship between lexical formation and semantic meaning. Acronyms, initialisms, and clipping forms are most commonly associated with conceptual meaning. Expressions such as *LOL*, *TBH*, *IDK*, and *ASAP* are primarily used to communicate information quickly and directly.

By contrast, compounds and word-created forms more frequently carry connotative and social meanings. Expressions such as *lit*, *gucci*, *spill the tea*, and *bad bitch* often express evaluation, familiarity, or socially recognizable meanings within Instagram interaction.

Several slang expressions are also associated with affective meaning. Forms such as *DGAF*, *STFU*, and *LMAO* commonly communicate emotional reactions including humor, frustration, or excitement.

Overall, the results suggest that lexical formation and semantic meaning are closely connected in Instagram comment discourse. Different slang forms appear to serve different communicative functions within online interaction.

Discussion

This study examined lexical formation patterns and semantic meanings of slang in Instagram comment discourse through the analysis of 89 slang expressions collected from highly engaged posts on Justin Bieber's verified Instagram account. The findings indicate that slang usage in Instagram comments follows recognizable lexical and semantic patterns shaped by the communicative features of online interaction.

Types of Slang Formation in Instagram Comments

The first research aim focused on the types of slang formation identified in the dataset. Acronyms and initialisms emerged as the dominant category, accounting for 31.46% of all identified items. Expressions such as *LOL*, *TBH*, *IDK*, and *ASAP* illustrate the preference for shortened forms in Instagram interaction. This pattern supports previous studies suggesting that digital communication encourages brief and efficient forms of expression because interaction on social media platforms is rapid and highly interactive (Androutsopoulos, 2021; Zappavigna & Logi, 2025).

Conversion and word-created forms also appeared frequently in the dataset. Expressions such as *flex*, *chill*, *gucci*, and *lit* demonstrate how users adapt and reshape language within online discourse. These patterns support usage-based perspectives suggesting that repeated use in specific contexts contributes to semantic extension and language change over time (Bybee, 2015). The findings also align with studies showing that digital environments support the circulation of emerging linguistic forms through repeated public interaction (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014; Androutsopoulos, 2021).

Other formation types, including clipping, compounding, variation, and blending, appeared less frequently but still contributed to the diversity of slang forms identified in the comments. Several categories proposed by Mattiello (2008), such as prefixation, suffixation, infixation, and reversed forms, were absent from the dataset. This pattern suggests that Instagram comment discourse favors shorter and more direct lexical formations over more complex morphological structures.

Overall, these findings extend previous studies of slang usage in informal communication by providing quantitative data on lexical formation patterns in Instagram comment discourse (Rochmah & Susanti, 2023).

Kinds of Meaning in Instagram Comments

The second research aim examined the kinds of meaning expressed through slang in Instagram comments. Conceptual meaning emerged as the dominant semantic category, accounting for 42.70% of the dataset. Expressions such as *LOL*, *TBH*, *IDK*, and *ASAP* are generally used with direct and widely understood meanings, indicating that slang in Instagram comments often functions as an efficient communicative tool rather than exclusively as figurative or highly connotative language.

Connotative, social, affective, reflective, and collocative meanings were also identified across the dataset. Expressions such as *lit*, *gucci*, and *bad bitch* carry evaluative or socially recognizable meanings, while forms such as *DGAF*, *STFU*, and *LMAO* communicate emotional reactions including humor, admiration, and frustration. Informal expressions such as *bruh* and *bestie* further show how slang contributes to familiarity and casual interaction within Instagram comment discourse.

These findings support Leech's (1981) view that meaning operates across multiple semantic dimensions. The results also align with studies suggesting that digital discourse relies heavily on short and expressive forms to communicate interpersonal meaning in online interaction (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021; Dynel, 2021).

Co-occurrence of Form and Meaning

The analysis further indicates a relationship between lexical formation and semantic meaning. Acronyms, initialisms, and clipping forms are more frequently associated with conceptual meaning, whereas compounds and word-created forms more commonly carry connotative and social meanings. This pattern suggests that different lexical formations may serve different interactional purposes in Instagram comment discourse.

Shortened forms mainly support efficient communication, while more expressive formations tend to communicate evaluation, emotion, and socially recognizable meanings. The relationship between form and meaning therefore appears closely connected to the interactional features of social media discourse.

Contribution to Knowledge

Overall, the study contributes to research on digital slang by combining lexical formation analysis and semantic meaning analysis within a single investigation of Instagram comment discourse. The findings demonstrate that slang in social media comments reflects both linguistic adaptation and the communicative demands of digitally mediated interaction. The study further highlights relationships between lexical formation patterns and semantic meaning categories

within Instagram comment discourse, while also showing that Mattiello's (2008) and Leech's (1981) frameworks can be applied effectively to the analysis of slang in online communication.

Conclusion

This study examined lexical and semantic patterns of slang in Instagram comment discourse using 89 slang expressions collected from comments on Justin Bieber's verified Instagram account. The findings show that slang use in Instagram comments is systematic and shaped by the communicative features of online interaction. The analysis identified nine types of slang formation, with acronyms and initialisms appearing most frequently, indicating that Instagram comment discourse favors short and efficient forms of communication. Other formations, including conversion, clipping, compounding, and word creation, further demonstrate how users creatively adapt language within digital interaction.

The semantic analysis identified six types of meaning, with conceptual meaning appearing most frequently in the dataset. However, connotative, social, affective, reflective, and collocative meanings also appeared across the data, showing that slang in Instagram comments functions not only as informal vocabulary but also as a context-dependent communicative resource. The findings also show that different lexical formations are associated with different communicative functions in online discourse, particularly between shortened forms used for efficient communication and more expressive forms used to convey evaluation and emotion.

Overall, this study contributes to research on digital slang by combining lexical formation analysis and semantic meaning analysis within a single study of Instagram comment discourse. Despite these contributions, the study is limited to a relatively small dataset collected from a single Instagram account and focuses only on textual expressions. Future research may expand this analysis by examining larger datasets, comparing multiple social media platforms, and exploring multimodal aspects of digital communication such as emojis, images, and visual interaction.

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