

MORPHO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE CENTENNIAL ROMANTIC TERMS ON TIKTOK

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ABSTRACT

The result of digital development has led to various changes, particularly in language, including ongoing shifts in definition. Thus, this corpus-based research highlights language's ever-changing nature as it adapts to the dynamic challenges of modern communication, demonstrating how it constantly evolves to meet the demands of contemporary communication. This study focuses on the 19 romantic terms found on TikTok, which provide insight into how recently learned definitions are frequently linked to social contexts or suggest a close linguistic relationship to the source. The results reveal that, out of 19 terms, 11 were compounding, 4 conversions, and 4 affixations in the morphological shift, suggesting that most GenZers are into combining words to form new meanings. On the other hand, nine metaphors, four narrowing, four widening, and two degenerations, are found in semantic shifts, implying that GenZers are used to representing things symbolically. Since younger generations tend to take a more flexible approach to relationships, they favor terms that allow for ambiguity. This research may serve as a springboard for investigating intergenerational influences, the evolution of language changes over longer periods, and the dissemination of language changes across age groups.

Keywords: Morphological shifts, Semantic shifts, TikTok, Romantic Terms, Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is a rapidly expanding social networking sector where people create content, share ideas, store content, and collaborate. According to Asur and Huberman (2010), social media's accessibility, ease of use, and efficiency are causing it to quickly influence public debate and generate developments and plans across a range of themes, from government and the environment to technology and entertainment. The development of social media has brought about tremendous changes in the online world during the last ten years. People of this

generation are increasingly exchanging thoughts, emotions, private information, images, and videos at an incredibly fast pace. Most American teenagers with internet access use social media platforms today (Owoso-Acheaw & Larson, 2015).

To be more precise, TikTok is the most popular social networking application. It has rapidly expanded since its launch and, as of September 2021, had over 1 billion monthly users globally. While providing users with an entertaining experience and a way to meet new people, TikTok's global expansion has raised concerns about the quality of the information in videos and the presence of sensitive content (Zenone et al., 2021). Also, most of the research mainly focused on addiction to TikTok. In turn, this study looked at how technology, specifically the user experience, affects users' development of addiction concerns. This research provides an essential framework for understanding how young people generate meaning through TikTok, the well-known short-video platform (Fan et al., 2023).

Given its recent remarkable growth, especially during the lockdown, TikTok appears to be here to stay. Still, the platform demands thorough investigation from the start because it reflects Generation Z. TikTok's terminology can often be unique, making it impossible for anyone outside the network to grasp what they intended. These terms are exclusive to Generation Z for reinventing the meaning and application of existing slang (Cervi, 2021).

According to Zimmerman (2008) in his Vocabulary Teacher's Handbook, students may encounter a word they think they know, only to find that it has a whole new meaning. Students must realize that a term in the text has a new meaning. Instead, they will just associate it with what they already know. Since both interpretations are so diverse that they should be viewed as distinct words, this tendency makes it difficult to comprehend the context of the target word itself (Parent, 2012).

In the workplace, employees perceived that business leaders, managers, and supervisors needed more information to communicate effectively with employees and peers across generations. Staff found communication unsuccessful and needed more interaction across generations, which led to conflicts. Positive social change includes the opportunity to bridge the gap between youth and older people and to minimize conflicts arising from different age groups. Intergenerational unity has become a growing priority in many nations as the implications of an aging population become apparent. According to scholars, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has led to an upsurge in intergenerational conflict and age discrimination, allowing us to see generations as intricate social groups rooted in social, cultural, and historical circumstances and connected by shared consciousness. According to the research, the hashtags #OkBoomer and #Boomer are highly nuanced, sometimes openly ageist, and occasionally reflective of a phenomenon far more sophisticated than ageism. It is vital to use social media as a platform to foster connections between older and younger people (Ng & Indran, 2022).

Moreover, the Theory of Semantic Change supports this study, highlighting the use of descriptive and empirical methods in language studies, in which semantic change involves modifications to word meanings that adhere to specific patterns and fall into several categories. These types include broadening, narrowing, ameliorating, shifting, pejoration, metaphor, and metonymy. Bloomfield's method provided a systematic approach to examining

and categorizing changes in word meanings over time, laying the foundation for later advances in semantic theory (Bloomfield, 1993).

According to Bloomfield, meaning is the actor's response to stimuli, and the association examines communication and learning outcomes. In a linguistic investigation detailing how people are trained in society to produce certain noises in specific contexts and to respond appropriately to them, Bloomfield sees meaning as an inescapably connected component of language education. The meaning and context of semantic, behaviorist words, and ambiguous notions of meaning are considered weak spots in language research. Because people speak and pronounce words, they acquire numerous connotations and develop weaknesses in language study (1993).

Bloomfield specifies nine semantic change types: narrowing, widening, exaggeration, litotes, degeneration, elevation, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. Bloomfield identifies six subcategories that entail shifts from one end of a spectrum to the other. These include narrowing and widening, hyperbole, and litotes, which can have stronger or weaker meanings, while degeneration and elevation can have more positive or negative connotations. These shifts are applied to the corporate sector presented in this study (1993).

On the one hand, Krishnamurthy's Neologism Model also supports this study as it discusses the cognitive and linguistic processes involved in the formation and acceptance of new terms (2010). It suggests that cultural changes, technological advancements, and societal demands give rise to neologisms. Accordingly, the changing world motivates people to create neologisms, such as naming new ideas, things, or phenomena. It also highlights language's creative and innovative function, emphasizing how individuals and groups contribute to language evolution by creating new terminology. To help neologisms become accepted and integrated into a common language, the model also considers word formation processes, including blending, borrowing, and compounding, and how these processes interact with social and psychological factors (2010).

Neologisms are categorized by the model according to their origin and purpose, such as technical advancements or products of cultural occurrences. Additionally, it acknowledges the creativity and playfulness of language, since speakers may coin new terms to identify their identities or express themselves, influenced by such media, social media platforms, and community interrelationships. In addition, the model delves into the neologism life cycle, tracing its origins, dissemination, and eventual demise. Not all neologisms catch on or endure; some may disappear from usage as soon as they appear, while others establish themselves as part of the language over time. This paradigm emphasizes that language is fluid and that vocabulary evolves through the dynamic interaction between linguistic innovation and societal change, offering insights into how language changes to reflect the dynamic nature of communication and human experience.

Accordingly, numerous studies have been conducted on romantic terms on TikTok. Plenty of these studies focus on how romantic terms on TikTok influence language use in daily conversations. Some research also examines the number of generations that engage with and use romantic terms on TikTok. However, in the Philippines, various publications address the difficulties posed by TikTok's romantic terminology and its effects on communication in formal settings such as schools and workplaces. The study on the original meaning of the term and

romantic terms on TikTok, and why they cause intergenerational conflict, has yet to identify any studies that analyze how a particular term evolves and is used. As a result, this study will fill gaps by exploring and analyzing love-related phrases on TikTok.

This study analyzed the romantic terms of TikTok and intergenerational conflict. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the prevalent romantic terms mentioned on TikTok videos that show linguistic shifts?

2. How do morphological and semantic shifts among TikTok romantic terms occur?

Understanding how romantic phrases on TikTok are interpreted and used by people of all generations is critical for comprehending why the evolving nature of digital interaction primarily affects Gen Z users (Jaffar et al., 2019).

It is necessary to understand the evolving social dynamics and cultural trends to address age gaps in communication, particularly regarding the romantic language used on TikTok. It encourages inclusivity and enables people to bridge generational communication gaps. Furthermore, studying romantic vocabulary on social media platforms such as TikTok reflects changing relationship standards and urges modern society to accept a range of expressions of love and intimacy.

Today, the world relies heavily on the internet for communication, making it critical to recognize generational gaps. Thus, the study can provide valuable insights for educational institutions, parents, and different generations by delving deeper into the meanings of love phrases on TikTok, thereby bridging the gap between conventional thinking and current understandings of romantic phrases, promoting digital literacy, and fostering better intergenerational interaction.

METHOD

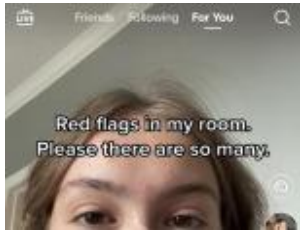
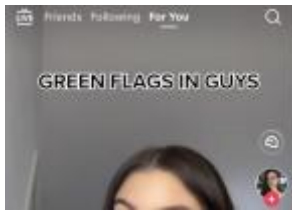
This research used a corpus of nineteen (19) romantic terms on TikTok, sourced with denotative meanings from the 1300s to the early 2000s and connotative meanings from 2019 to the present. Fugard and Potts have stated that a range of 10 to 100 is suggested for a corpus, provided it has sufficient data to identify trends without overwhelming the capacity to handle the information (2015).

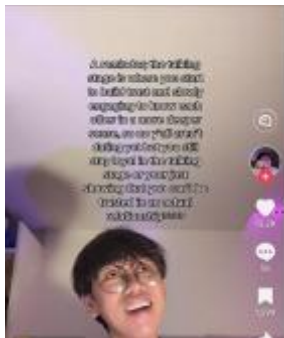
The researchers thoroughly gathered data from existing studies on TikTok romantic terms, collected data from the TikTok application, and listed and defined the romantic terms based on their old and newly generated meanings.

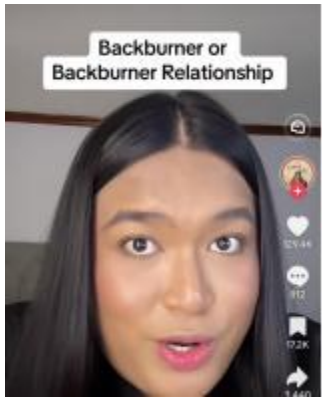
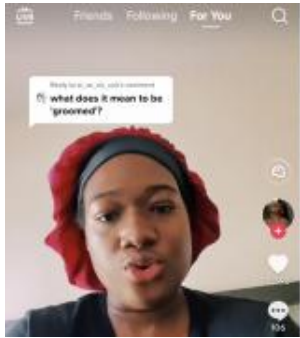
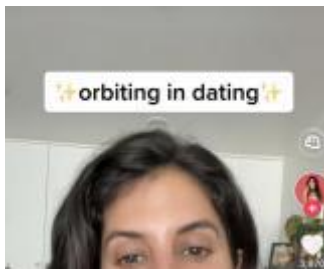
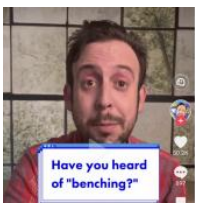
The analysis included the identification and classification of linguistic and semantic shifts, based on the theories of Bloomfield and Krishnamurthy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Prevalent Romantic Terms Used on TikTok videos that show linguistic shifts

TikTok Romantic Terms	Corpora	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
Red Flag		Red flags are frequently used as warning symbols because they indicate danger (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	A red flag refers to alarming behavior in a relationship. It relates to unhealthy relationships and many types of abuse (Veronico, 2021).
Green flag		A sign that it is safe to proceed (Collins Dictionary, 2024)	The green flag highlights a person's admirable behaviors or qualities in a relationship (Taylor, 2023).
Beige Flag		Something that is neither pleasant nor awful, but when you notice it, it causes you to stop for a moment before you go on (Urban Dictionary, 2024)	A personality feature or attribute that is neither great nor negative may cause the other person in the relationship some minor annoyance (Elizabeth, 2023).
Safe Place		A place where an individual or group of individuals can be guaranteed they won't experience harassment, discrimination, criticism, or any other form of emotional or physical harm (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	The feeling of being able to be who you are, express your emotions, and feel comfortable without worrying about criticism, rejection, or adverse outcomes (Taugan, 2022).
Ghosting		It indicates the soul of someone who died or a spirit that has left the body (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	It is used to describe quickly breaking up a connection with someone without giving them a reason or explanation (Sahar, 2021).

Mixed Signals		Any message that could be taken in multiple different directions is known as a mixed signal (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	Individuals who offer mixed signals may claim that you hold importance for them, but their actions don't reflect this. For example, they may express their desire for a relationship but fail to commit to it (Ortiz, 2019).
Talking Stage		The act of conversing, speaking, or engaging in discourse with another individual (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	It is when two people in a relationship share a love interest and are eager to delve deeper into one another's lives through simple conversation (Dee, 2022).
Soft Launch		An instance in which a business, service, or product is initially offered or opened to a select group of people (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	Soft launching a relationship indicates on social media that you're dating someone without revealing their identity (Dear Media, 2023).
Hard Launch		To release a new good or service in a way that aims to garner a lot of attention from the public rather than simply a select group of individuals (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	Disclosing your partner's identity and the depth of your bond. In this case, you may include their name or relationship status in your bio, take pictures with them, or include their photo in your profile (Baracena, 2023).
Rent-Free		Renting something without payment (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	In a relationship, it means someone practically exists in another person's mind. It is rent-free since they think about it frequently (Gabby, 2023).

Backburner		A controlled fire is started as a safety precaution in firefighting to clear vegetation and build a barrier to stop a more significant fire from spreading (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	A state in which one romantic partner actively pursues or maintains a primary relationship with someone else while keeping another person in their life as a backup or reserve option (Taugan, 2024).
Grooming		The things that people do to maintain their hygiene (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	This means that when someone establishes a relationship with a minor to take advantage, manipulate, and abuse them (Daisyiona, 2024).
Orbiting		Following a curved path around a planet or star (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	When someone breaks up with you or stops texting you but keeps engaging with your posts on social media (Zohar, 2023).
Relapse		Getting back to a bad condition or worse after improving (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	Usually describes a setback or a reversion to previously felt emotions believed to have been overcome. It emphasizes how difficult it is to fully move on without relapsing (Jugs, 2023).
Benching		A variety of collections of benches (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	You are dating someone with potential, but you're not fully into them. Instead, they serve as your backup (Therapyjeff, 2023).

Gaslighting		Forcing someone to doubt their understanding of reality (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	Making someone question what is real or not, or strategies used to inflict emotional abuse on an intimate partner, like denial, lying, and manipulation (Joelle, 2024).
Roaching		To bind or cut a horse's mane near the neck so the hair rises on end (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	You can covertly date more than one person without telling your new partner about it (Howtotalkdating, 2023).
Lowkey		Dark and subdued colors and tones are frequently used in art and photography (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	The partners in a relationship choose to maintain their ties discreetly, quietly, and modestly, and to show them only to close friends and family (Ratao, 2024).
Breadcrumbing		To cover a piece of food with breadcrumbs, often after first coating it with flour and then liquid-whipped eggs (Oxford Dictionary, 2024)	A type of manipulation, intentional or not, involves a person pretending to have an interest and acting as though they truly are invested in a relationship with another individual. However, they are not (Lucas, 2022).

The occurrence of Semantic and Morphological shifts among TikTok Romantic Terms

The researchers used Leonard Bloomfield's theory to evaluate semantic shifts in TikTok's romantic terms, yielding valuable insights into language development and adaptation to the digital context. In addition, they also used the study based on Krishnamurthy's Model of Neologism, a linguistic theory. It stated that neologisms include word formation processes, borrowing, and linguistic variation. These theories reflect the dynamic nature of communication in the Internet age.

Table 2. How Morphological and Semantic Shifts Among TikTok Romantic Terms Occur

Terms	Morpho-logical	Semantic	Explanation
Red flag	Compounding	Metaphor	The terms red and flag retain their distinct meanings within the compound. A flag is a symbol or indicator, whereas red implies caution or danger. When combined, the term red flag conveys a metaphorical sense of a problem or risk. The semantic change with this term is metaphorical, as TikTok users use it in a relationship context, which also means it serves as a warning about unhealthy or manipulative behavior by one partner toward another.
Green flag	Compounding	Metaphor	Like the red flag, the green flag also maintains its distinct meaning inside the compound. Green symbolizes positivity, growth, goals, and values. Combined with the flag symbol in the first column, the term 'green flag' conveys a metaphor for the ideal qualities you want in a relationship. It is used as a signal to begin a race and is still retained in some situations, but it has also taken on a symbolic use, primarily in relationship contexts. In today's terms, a green flag could refer to positive traits that an individual possesses that could lead to a successful relationship.
Beige flag	Compounding	Narrowing	Beige, as a color, is neutral, while a flag is an indicator or symbol. Before, these words had their own meanings, but now they have been combined into an open compound, with TikTok users narrowing their definition to a personality trait or quality that is neither good nor bad but could irritate the other partner in a relationship.
Safe place	Compounding	Metaphor	The morphological compound words safe and place have metaphorically broadened their meaning to a relationship context. It is generally understood as a sense of security and is contextually applied to a person. You feel safe expressing yourself. In a relationship context, it's used as a metaphor for your partner knowing who you are and you expressing your feelings with them. You feel safe without fear of criticism, rejection, or undesirable consequences.
Ghosting	Conversion	Metaphor	From the root word noun ghost, which means the ghost of a deceased person, aided by a suffix -ing, the verb phrase originally referred to a deceased person's soul or a spirit that has departed the body, which is believed to appear in the living. Furthermore, TikTok users applied this term in a romantic context, where this feeling of ghosting may have its roots in the expression 'get ghosted,' which means to leave someone immediately or disappear without giving them a reason.
Mix Signals	Compounding	Narrowing	The open compound word "mixed signals" involves a semantic shift, redefining it as a more specific concept in romantic relationships that refers to conflicting messages conveyed by a person's words, actions, or behavior, rather than a general phenomenon in interactions across friendships, professional settings, or broader societal contexts.

Talking Stage	Compounding	Narrowing	This open compound term's meaning is limited to a general or a specific context. From its original meaning of literally talking or discoursing to an individual, it has evolved into a romantic context that signifies getting introduced to someone, and it can involve talking or texting for days or months but has yet to officially date.
Soft Launch	Compounding	Widening	The open compound term has expanded beyond its original usage in business or product development to encompass the gradual, casual introduction of a romantic partner to one's family or social group.
Hard Launch	Compounding	Widening	This open compound word, such as 'soft launch,' has been broadened beyond the business domain to include relationships. Previously, it was limited to introducing new products to individuals, but now, TikTok users can introduce their partners to their relatives or friends.
Rent-free	Compounding	Metaphor	The hyphenated compound rent-free was initially used to describe living in a home or property without paying rent, usually implying a privileged or advantageous situation. However, in modern usage, particularly in internet culture and social media, the term has acquired a metaphorical meaning, referring to something or someone occupying or affecting someone's mind or thoughts without payment or explanation.
Backburner	Compounding	Degeneration	The compound word backburner has lost some of its original meaning as a firefighting tactic. It is often used negatively in interpersonal contexts to denote someone or something that has been put on the back burner or kept in reserve just in case the circumstances change.
Grooming	Conversion	Degeneration	Without altering its form, conversion is the use of a term belonging to one grammatical category in another. In this example, the verb grooming was derived from the noun groom, which usually describes someone preparing for a big event, such as a wedding. The term has undergone a semantic shift, moving from its primary meaning of maintaining one's appearance and personal hygiene to a more concerning and specific context of aggressive behavior intended to take advantage of weak people, especially children and teenagers.
Orbiting	Affixation	Metaphor	From the root word orbit, which means a consistent, recurring route for one object in space follows to avoid another, added by a suffix -ing, the term has now gone through a semantic shift, moving from referring to the actual motion of celestial bodies to describing a pattern behavior in online relationships where an individual hovers around the edges of another person's digital sphere without actively interacting with them.
Relapse	Affixation	Widening	Its root word is "lapse," which refers to people who experience temporary setbacks as they overcome barriers on their path to recovery. Added by the prefix re-, the word now means the recurrence of symptoms or behaviors in a health context for extended periods. Its meaning has widened in the context of relationships. TikTok defined it as a situation in which a

			couple experiences a recurrence of problems or disagreements after a period of healing or resolution.
Benching	Conversion	Metaphor	From the root noun bench, meaning a long seat for several people, and the present-tense suffix -ing, the word has become a verb used in the context of team sports; benching originally referred to keeping a player on the bench rather than playing. On TikTok, it is now often understood to mean keeping someone else on the bench as a fallback, without making a complete commitment or investment in the relationship.
Gaslighting	Affixation	Narrowing	The word is frequently used as a general term for manipulation, derived from the verb 'gaslight' with a present-tense suffix -ing. People utilize it to persuade others to doubt their beliefs or reality. Nowadays, TikTok users promote the term to new members as a form of manipulation in which one partner lies, misdirects, and convinces the other that they are wrong in a relationship.
Roaching	Conversion	Metaphor	This usage of roaching takes the noun roach, which usually refers to a particular kind of insect, and turns it into the verb roaching, meaning dating more than one person covertly without telling your new partner. This morphological shift is conversion, as its form remains unchanged and is used in a different grammatical category. Semantic shift, on the other hand, describes a pattern of behavior in which an individual pursues or maintains a romantic relationship with one person while hiding their pursuit of other love partners.
Lowkey	Compounding	Widening	The compound word lowkey widened its meaning beyond its initial use as something kept at a low level of visibility or intensity. This concept has undergone semantic change, now representing a particular kind of relationship marked by privacy.
Breadcrum bing	Affixation	Metaphor	From the root word breadcrumb, which means crushed or ground dried bread used for cooking, and the present-tense suffix -ing, the term becomes a verb that initially meant leaving a breadcrumb trail to help one's return. Nowadays, it symbolizes giving a person just enough attention to keep them intrigued or hooked into the relationship, without any intention of genuinely committing, like leaving a breadcrumb trail to keep going back to someone.

The nineteen (19) prevalent terms on TikTok that show linguistic shifts demonstrate how fast the technology is developing and how individuals respond by combining and inventing new words to connect. They evolved through clipping, blending, compounding, affixation, and conversion. They also generate new meanings such as narrowing, widening, metaphor, and degeneration. Since language is a component of society, it is subject to change. Šetka-Čilić and Ilić-Plauc (2021) discussed that a completely new range of words and concepts has emerged due to this new kind of communication. Even though many of them aren't formally recognized in dictionaries, speakers regularly use them and integrate them into conversations. In online communication, neologisms are useful because they allow speakers to convey many ideas in a short time. Neologisms are widely and instantly accepted in SNSs due to their prevalence,

which improves speaker-to-speaker communication, fosters relationships, and opens economic opportunities globally. On a regular basis, new words are invented in response to the inescapable necessity for immediate interaction (Šetka-Čilić & Ilić-Plauc, 2021). This study is notable because we examined possible distinctions between words that retained their original meanings and terms whose meanings were altered by the TikTok app.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS

The way people communicate and use language has changed significantly as the internet has grown in popularity. As a result, new terms have entered the English language and society. The primary objectives of this thesis are to analyze and discuss English terms from social media sites like TikTok and how these semantic changes impacted and implicated generations such as Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z.

The researchers found that metaphor is the most common factor contributing to semantic shifts among TikTok romantic terms. Younger generations prefer terms that allow for ambiguity and fluidity, reflecting their more flexible approach to relationships. Moreover, compounding is the most common factor contributing to morphological shifts among TikTok romantic terms. It enables the creation of new terms that succinctly encapsulate complex ideas, facilitating more efficient communication.

Furthermore, this study confronted limitations. The researchers could only show the semantic shifts proposed by Bloomfield, even though many other proponents submitted various shifts under this category. Also, the researchers used only five of the nine morphological types because the vocabulary was limited to romantic terms. It is recommended that further studies consider a broader range of semantic alterations than those suggested by Bloomfield. They can accomplish this by using a more comprehensive range of linguistic changes than just romantic terminology. Future researchers might consider incorporating more people from different generations to improve the morpho-semantic analysis. It will facilitate the investigation of intergenerational influences, the evolution of language over extended periods, and the dissemination of language changes across age groups.

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