

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is a dynamic phenomenon which continues to evolve, particularly in this age of speed and immediacy of social networking and digital communication. Twitter and similar social media platforms have speeded the process up by allowing users to write, edit, and reinterpret words by sculpting the ways individuals use and remake language. This results in the generation of new concepts and re-interpretation of old ones, something that innovates language at a rate many times faster than that seen in normal communication environments. Even very small groups, like those formed around video games on the internet, possess their own distinctive lexicon, characterized as rich with dynamic and often short-lived expressions. These phenomena offer the intriguing possibility of analyzing the way language develops through time and among communities.

One of the most prominent mechanisms in language evolution is semantic change, that is, the mechanism through which the meaning of a word is altered based on social, cultural, or technological factors. This happens when a word gains a new meaning, usually because it is used within a particular community or shifting environments. As observed by Bahri (2023), semantic change is the most prevalent type of linguistic change in social media, representing about 32% of all instances documented. For example, the term "GOAT," literally meaning horned animal, has thus

developed a new online meaning, "Greatest of All Time." employed to describe a person who excels at what they do, especially when employed to commend people like sports athletes, actors, or even characters in movies. This is an example of amelioration, one type of semantic change where a word develops a more favorable meaning than its original usage.

This study adheres to the semantic change theory of Luján (2010) that classifies meaning changes into five broad categories: Amelioration (when a word acquires a more positive meaning), Pejoration (when a word acquires a more negative meaning), Narrowing (when a word has a more specific meaning), Broadening (when a word has a more general meaning), and Metaphorical Extension (when a word acquires a figurative or symbolic meaning by resemblance). An understanding of how and why such semantic shifts occur in online communities provides a window into broader linguistic trends, especially in online communication spaces.

The other crucial element of language development online is the utilization of slang, or informal and non-standard words often created in specific social groups and shared among them. Slang is extremely context-sensitive, used by a specific social group, and is influenced by the current trends, memes, and in-group humor of the respective social group. Slang tends to shift meaning quickly as users repurpose it for new contexts or emotions. It often includes abbreviations, metaphorical terms, or creative wordplay, making it fertile ground for linguistic innovation.

The rise of neologisms, which is a newly invented or adapted words, is particularly common in digital slang. In online environments, especially

on platforms like Twitter, slang evolves in real-time, meaning it shifts almost instantly as it is used in conversation. The microblogging platform adopted by Twitter requires users to send short messages, thus encouraging the use of concise and impactful expressions. This restriction creates the development of a linguistic economy where users reduce or simplify language to occupy less space, often resulting in the creation of new linguistic items like acronyms (e.g., GG, AFK) or blends (e.g., smurfing, glitching) that effectively encode humor, irony, or cultural information. The word "tweet," which once referred to the noise birds make, has come to mean a message that is spread on Twitter. Similarly, the words "post," "follow," and "share" have taken on new meanings on each respective site. These real-time changes reveal how sites like Twitter can act as catalysts for semantic innovation.

Within Twitter's dynamic space, the gaming subculture is one of the most linguistically creative and active subcultures. Gamers often recycle common English terms. Slang words like "noob," "carry," "nerf," and "clutch" have meanings that are generally limited to gaming communities and would be unclear without that cultural context. These slang terms are often used in an informal and expressive way, reflecting the competitive, collaborative, and performative nature of gaming. These terms Moreover, due to the globalized and digitally immersive nature of the gaming community, English-based slang often blends with local expressions, resulting in a dynamic hybrid of global and regional linguistic traits, thus

forming a fertile ground for understanding the development of meaning within real-time contexts.

As Shcherbina (2022) notes, gaming slang is influenced heavily by neologisms, abbreviations, and linguistic economy. This is due to the fact that in the gaming context, particularly when in the middle of a competitive gameplay or gaming competition, players are forced to communicate in short messages due to the intense concentration the player is required in the middle of a match. They cannot be forced to break their focus to type in long messages while playing in a match, or they may have to risk losing the match to an enemy as they lose their guard. This creates the need for the community to communicate in short messages, yet be effective in delivering their messages to their teammates. Hence why slang plays heavily into the need of this community as it helps them deliver their messages across to their teammates in just a few words without having them break their focus to type in long messages.

Twitter's character limits match the needs of this community well, making the platform an ideal setting for compressed, creative slang. Acronyms such as ROFL ("Rolling on the Floor Laughing") or bot (a player seen as lacking feeling or playing poorly) appear as part of a linguistic approach that blends humor with evaluative critique. Not only do these terms do the job of communicating meaning effectively, but they also demonstrate a sense of belonging and cultural competence within the gaming subculture. Additionally, gaming slang frequently involves code-switching and cultural blending. As players from various countries and

linguistic backgrounds interact online, English-based slang becomes mixed with local expressions. This blending explains a set of semantic shifts, pointing to the fact that slang is socially constructed, context-dependent, and dynamic.

There have been some large-scale studies on semantic change in slang. Lutfiah et al. (2024) point out the creation of slang by mechanisms such as shashification, distributional modeling, and social media. The reasons for semantic change in English slang are discussed in Lutfiah's article, which categorizes them as social interaction, media exposure, and technological development. It employs jargon like shashification (blending and shortening) and slangvolution to denote how slang rapidly develops in a virtual environment. While comprehensive, this study takes a generalized approach to social media slang across platforms and does not cover slang in niches communities like gaming. This niche space is a fertile ground for real-time linguistic creativity, where slang and neologisms are rapidly absorbed and recontextualized.

Similarly, Jahan and Irfan (2021) discuss the development and evolution of neologisms, focusing on the mechanisms by which such new words are formed and evolved because of accelerated communication and the introduction of technology, as seen through the likes of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. In this paper, they explore neologisms and semantic changes that occur in computer-mediated communication (CMC). It includes instances of language triggered by social media like "wall," "tweet," and "post," which acquire expanded meanings in the digital age.

While the paper is highly valuable, with rich tools to deal with platform-level semantic changes, the essay lacks a community-specific perspective, notably in gaming contexts.

Rafikovna (2023) goes a step further, with a morpho-semantic analysis of Twitter lingo by mechanisms of narrowing, broadening, and metaphor. It is noteworthy that Rafikovna's work combines morphological and semantic analysis, which is also used in this thesis. It characterizes these with four basic ones: narrowing, broadening, metaphorical extensions, and pejoration, and supports the claims with Twitter data. However, this study is broad in scope and does not investigate how specific online subcultures (such as gaming) employ slang as a sign of identity or community norms.

While these studies provide useful insights into broad slang phenomena, they fail to consider how specific online subcultures, particularly the gaming community, originate, adapt, and repurpose slang in unique ways. This thesis bridged this gap by investigating the semantic shift characteristics of English Twitter slang in the gaming community with Luján's (2010) method. It examines the most frequent categories of semantic change, word-formation tendencies, and how these changes reflect the identity and values of the gaming community in online language.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What pattern of semantic change is mostly found in the gaming community?

2. How does the use of slang reflect the gaming community's image in wider social media contexts?

1.3. Objective of the study.

The objective of this research is to analyze the mechanisms through which semantic change is affected in the English slang words of Twitter's gaming community. It tries to determine and categorize the most dominant patterns of semantic change with reference to Luján's (2010) theoretical model, which includes narrowing, broadening, amelioration, pejoration, and metaphorical extension. By examining how these changes are formed and used in actual tweets, this study aims to reveal the extent to which these new meanings reflect the culture, values, and identity that are present in the gaming culture.

1.4. Significance of the study

This study is essential not only in the field of linguistic study but also culturally, as it helps to understand how online communities impact language. The research shows how, by concentrating on the gaming community that formed on Twitter, we understand the role that social media platforms play in the progressive acceleration of the semantic evolution of slang. This adds to a growing body of literature within the field of sociolinguistics, which identifies semantic evolution occurring in a new, more rapidly changing context of communications and the use of language in a digital community, namely over digital mediums as opposed to physical

communications. The results also inform how a subset of a niche community (gamers) is affecting the adoption and change of language in larger spaces of social media. For linguists, lexicographers, and digital media researchers interested in modern language evolution, and most particularly informal communication, this study may be quite valuable. It can also bring benefits for content creators, social media managers, and brands interacting with online communities, allowing them to stay up to date on changes in the language and shifts in meaning.

1.5 Scope of Study

This study is limited to analyzing English-language slang terms used by the gaming community on Twitter. The primary aim is to identify and explain slang words that have experienced semantic change, with emphasis on general patterns of semantic change devised by Luján (2010). The data comprises tweets gathered through random sampling, subsequently filtered for their applicability to gaming contexts. The research deliberately omits slang terms used by other subcultures or in online communities (e.g., TikTok, Reddit, Discord) to allow for an in-depth exploration of the unique linguistic routines of the Twitter game community. The research is also qualitative and does not seek to make statistical generalizations beyond the sampled data. Its focus is restricted to the examination of the meaning changes and their cultural effects and implications, rather than treating their phonological, syntactic, or pragmatic shapes in any depth.

Furthermore, this research does not concentrate on grammatical or phonetic changes in gaming lingo, but rather on semantic shifts and their implications for meaning creation. By defining this scope, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how semantic change operates in gaming slang on Twitter, which contributes to the portrayal of the Gaming Communities in digital communities.

