



MORPHOLOGICAL INNOVATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA SLANG ON TIKTOK AND X: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

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Abstract: *The rapid evolution of digital communication has accelerated linguistic change, particularly through morphological innovations in social media slang. While contemporary research has thoroughly documented the structural classifications and descriptive word-formation patterns of digital expressions, less attention has been paid to the interpersonal mechanics driving these forms in authentic online interactions. Adopting a qualitative content analysis research design informed by pragmatic theory, this study addresses this empirical gap by examining how morphological innovations operate as strategic communicative resources. The dataset consists of 200 purposively sampled public posts and comment threads drawn from three selected accounts of TikTok and X (formerly Twitter). The structural analysis identifies three predominant word-formation processes: acronyms (40%), clipping (32.5%), and blending (27.5%). Interpreted through the lens of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the qualitative findings reveal that these innovations function primarily as face-managing mechanisms. Specifically, they serve to foster in-group solidarity (positive politeness), optimize conversational efficiency without sacrificing rapport, and mitigate face-threatening acts (negative politeness) in interactionally risky environments. Rather than serving as mere linguistic shortcuts, these innovations operate as nuanced semiotic tools for stance-taking and relationship management. Finally, this study offers pedagogical implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, demonstrating how integrating authentic digital discourse into vocabulary curricula can foster learners' morphological awareness, pragmatic competence, and critical digital literacy.*

Keywords : *morphological innovation, social media slang, pragmatics, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), EFL vocabulary instruction.*

Abstrak: Pertumbuhan pesat media sosial telah mempercepat perubahan bahasa, khususnya melalui penggunaan bahasa gaul (slang) yang ditandai oleh inovasi morfologis. Platform seperti TikTok dan X (sebelumnya Twitter) menyediakan ruang yang dinamis bagi para pengguna, terutama Generasi Z, untuk memanipulasi bahasa secara kreatif dalam mengekspresikan identitas, sikap, dan emosi. Meskipun berbagai penelitian sebelumnya telah banyak membahas pola struktural pembentukan kata, perhatian terhadap fungsi pragmatis inovasi morfologis dalam interaksi daring yang autentik masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian kualitatif yang berlandaskan teori pragmatik ini bertujuan untuk mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis 200 unggahan yang dapat diakses secara publik dari TikTok dan X yang dipublikasikan dalam kurun waktu dua tahun terakhir. Data dianalisis melalui pengodean tematik untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis inovasi morfologis serta menafsirkan tujuan komunikatifnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga proses morfologis yang paling sering ditemukan, yaitu clipping, acronym, dan blending, yang secara pragmatis berfungsi untuk membangun humor, mengekspresikan evaluasi, menandai identitas kelompok, dan memperkuat dampak retorik dalam perdebatan daring. Alih-alih sekadar berfungsi sebagai bentuk pemendekan bahasa informal, inovasi-inovasi tersebut berperan sebagai sumber daya strategis dalam pembentukan makna dan keterlibatan audiens. Selain memberikan kontribusi terhadap kajian linguistik digital, penelitian ini juga menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi pengajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), karena penggunaan bahasa gaul autentik

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dari media sosial berpotensi membantu mengembangkan kesadaran morfologis, kompetensi pragmatik, dan literasi digital kritis peserta didik melalui pengintegrasian wacana digital informal ke dalam pembelajaran kosakata di kelas.

Kata kunci : inovasi morfologis, bahasa gaul media sosial, pragmatik, TikTok, X (sebelumnya Twitter), pembelajaran kosakata bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL)

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has profoundly altered the landscape of human communication, particularly regarding how linguistic forms are generated, negotiated, and disseminated in digital ecosystems. Platforms such as TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) provide highly interactive, fast-paced spaces where users creatively manipulate conventional morphology to navigate online social dynamics. This linguistic shift is driven predominantly by Generation Z (Gen Z), a demographic characterized by its ubiquitous immersion in digital environments. As Nurlaila et al. (2024) observe, the intensive daily engagement of Gen Z with social media accelerates the production and normalization of novel linguistic expressions, establishing digital slang as a primary modality of youth discourse. Understanding these dynamic adjustments requires a systematic look through the lens of morphology, which investigates the structural creation and modification of lexical units within discourse.

In traditional linguistics, morphological processes denote the structural operations such as affixation, compounding, reduplication, acronymization, blending, and clipping through which the lexicon expands. In internet-mediated communication, these structural mechanisms are repurposed to meet the unique socio-pragmatic demands of digital interaction. The resulting social media slang functions as an adaptive socio-cultural tool. As Jose et al. (2025) note, slang acts as a vital bridge between individualized self-expression and shared cultural alignment. Recent scholarship by Jabeen and Nawaz (2025) and Khan et al. (2025) underscores that these word-formation processes are not random deviations; rather, they serve as crucial vehicles for identity construction, subcultural stance-taking, and community bonding in online networks.

Despite these foundational insights, a significant gap remains in the literature. The vast majority of existing studies approach digital slang from a purely descriptive or structural perspective, prioritizing the cataloging and taxonomy of word-formation patterns over their interactional utility. Consequently, there is a paucity of research exploring the pragmatic motivations that drive users to employ specific morphological innovations in real-time discourse. Most notably, the literature has overlooked how these abbreviated or modified structures function as strategic devices for face management and relational work in platform-specific environments characterized by heightened interactional visibility.

To address this gap, this study offers a qualitative exploration of morphological innovation in social media slang from a pragmatic perspective, specifically utilizing Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. Rather than viewing morphological innovation as mere structural short-cuts or indices of informal text, this study treats them as deliberate communicative strategies used to negotiate interpersonal relationships, project social

alignment, and manage interactional risks.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of morphological innovation are predominantly employed in social media slang on TikTok and X?
2. What pragmatic functions do these morphological innovations serve in digital interaction when interpreted through the framework of face and politeness strategies?

By addressing these questions, this investigation expands the boundaries of digital linguistics by connecting morphological structure with pragmatic function. Furthermore, the insights generated provide actionable pedagogical value for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and EFL contexts. By demonstrating how digital slang operates within systematic pragmatic rules, this paper explores how authentic social media texts can be harnessed to cultivate learners' morphological awareness and critical digital literacy, effectively bridging the divide between informal digital communication and formal classroom vocabulary instruction.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review first discusses morphological innovation in digital contexts, then examines social media as a space for slang circulation, and finally addresses the micro-interactional mechanics of online discourse in the pragmatic function of morphological innovation and politeness theory, introducing Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework to demonstrate how these abbreviated and blended structures serve as active strategies for face management and relational work. Taken together, these sections establish the theoretical foundation necessary to interpret the structural characteristics and pragmatic motivations driving contemporary digital slang.

Morphological Innovation in Digital Context

Morphological innovation involves the creative rearrangement, shortening, or merging of morphemes to yield novel lexical units that accommodate changing communicative contexts (Nurhayati, 2015). Within digital spaces, the pressures of textual brevity, typing speed, and immediate interaction prompt users to deviate from standard orthographic and grammatical conventions. Consequently, social media has transformed into a virtual laboratory for linguistic innovation.

Recent literature highlights the high productivity of these non-standard morphological variations. Situmorang et al. (2025) point out that these structural adjustments maximize communicative efficiency within rapid-fire text exchanges. Algorithmic platforms like TikTok accelerate the lexicalization of neologisms, enabling highly localized slang terms to transition rapidly into the broader public vocabulary. Clipping, acronymization, and blending are exceptionally productive in digital discourse, reflecting a systemic orientation toward lexical economy and playful language manipulation.

Crucially, these structural changes are deeply embedded in collective social practices. Khan et al. (2025) assert that the informal architecture of social media empowers users to experiment with morphology to project distinct tones, stances, and individual styles. Isnarini et al. (2025) add that these innovations depend heavily on

communal reinforcement; an individual variation only achieves the status of slang once it is collectively adopted, circulated, and stabilized within an online community. This community-driven evolution is heavily catalyzed by Gen Z, who represent the primary demographic on these platforms. Demographic data indicates that TikTok and X command millions of active young users globally, making these digital platforms highly fertile grounds for examining contemporary morphological shifts.

Social Media as a Space for Slang Circulation

Historically marginalized in traditional educational paradigms as a corrupted or deficient form of standard language, slang is recognized in contemporary sociolinguistics as a highly structured, rule-governed linguistic variation that fulfills crucial interpersonal goals. Hutabarat et al. (2020) emphasize that slang has evolved past its historical function as an esoteric jargon used exclusively by insular subcultures; it has instead become a mainstream modality for digital interaction. Slang formation adheres to clear cognitive and structural principles, operating as a systematic linguistic adaptation to the realities of screen-mediated social environments.

The structural affordances of social media platforms such as character limits, comment threads, shares, and algorithmic recommendations greatly accelerate the viral spread of slang. Through rapid replication across captions, status updates, and replies, innovative lexical forms shift swiftly from idiosyncratic creative choices to conventionalized communal assets. While Yusuf et al. (2023) point out that these expressions frequently disrupt traditional grammatical, orthographic, and phonetic standards, this creative defiance highlights the agency of youth subcultures in redefining communicative norms.

Furthermore, slang acts as a vital nexus between personal alignment and shared cultural values. Alawiyah et al. (2021) maintain that slang carries significant interpersonal weight, operating similarly to formal honorifics or markers of deference by adjusting social distance and fostering intimacy among peers. Crucially, the deployment of slang is radically context-dependent. Its selection varies dynamically according to the perceived relationship between interlocutors, the nature of the platform, and the rhetorical goal of the post. This context-dependent variability underscores the necessity of moving beyond a purely formalist view of slang, shifting the focus toward a framework that evaluates how these morphological changes operate pragmatically during interaction.

The Pragmatic Function of Morphological Innovation and Politeness

Pragmatics offers an essential framework for analyzing how language conveys meaning far beyond its denotative or literal structure. To systematically unpack the relational work performed by morphological innovations, this study employs Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. This framework is built upon the universal construct of *face*, the public self-image that every social actor strives to claim and protect during interaction. The framework distinguishes between two complementary dimensions of face. The first one is *positive face* which is associated with the individual's desire to be appreciated, validated, approved of, and integrated into a valued social group. The second one is *negative face* which indicates the individual's desire to maintain autonomy, avoid imposition, and act freely without external constraint.

Because everyday communication routinely involves Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) such as requests, criticisms, disagreements, or admissions of ignorance, speakers must deploy linguistic strategies to mitigate these threats and avoid interactional friction. Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize these into four overarching strategies: *bald-on-record* (direct, unmitigated expressions prioritizing speed), *positive politeness* (strategies emphasizing solidarity, common ground, and shared identity), *negative politeness* (strategies emphasizing indirectness, deference, and hedging to minimize imposition), and *off-record* (allusive or ambiguous expressions relying heavily on hearer inference).

In digital interactions, morphological innovations often serve as the structural vehicles through which these politeness strategies are enacted. Far from being arbitrary abbreviations, forms like clippings, acronyms, and blends are strategically deployed to modulate the interpersonal tone of an utterance. For example, shortening a standard lexical item can reduce social distance (positive politeness) or soften the blow of an aggressive critique (negative politeness).

Despite the clear interface between word structure and interpersonal pragmatics, few studies have combined morphological analysis with a systematic politeness framework in digital spaces. Existing morphological research remains largely structural, while digital pragmatic studies often investigate broad discourse markers without examining how word-formation processes contribute to face-saving strategies. By integrating morphological analysis directly with Politeness Theory, this study addresses this empirical gap, illustrating how social media users use morphological creativity as a deliberate tool for face management and relational maintenance.

METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative research design informed by pragmatic theory to investigate the structural types and communicative functions of morphological innovations in digital slang. A qualitative design is uniquely suited for this inquiry because it allows for an in-depth, contextualized interpretation of linguistic phenomena within their natural digital environments, avoiding artificial quantification or experimental isolation. As Maxwell (2009) and Creswell and Poth (2018) note, qualitative inquiry empowers researchers to explore the intricate relationships between linguistic forms and the socio-cultural contexts in which they acquire meaning.

Crucially, this study is framed as a pragmatically informed qualitative content analysis, rather than a mixed-methods or quantitative investigation. Frequency counts and percentages are used strictly as descriptive tools to provide an overview of the structural distribution of the dataset, serving as a prelude to the core qualitative analysis. The primary analytical focus is interpretive, mapping linguistic structures to their underlying interpersonal and pragmatic motivations within the specific sequential contexts of social media discourse.

Data Source and Corpus Selection

The corpus for this study comprises 200 instances of morphological innovations collected from publicly accessible interactions on TikTok (n = 100) and X (n = 100). These platforms were selected due to their status as primary digital venues for youth subcultures and their high productivity in generating contemporary internet

slang. To ensure the data reflected natural, unforced language use, instances were extracted across a broad array of everyday topics, including lifestyle, entertainment, beauty, cultural trends, education, and public debates, rather than restricting the search to a single thematic community.

Data collection adhered to strict criteria to maximize relevance and ensure ethical compliance:

1. Data were extracted from public accounts boasting a minimum of 500,000 followers to guarantee that the slang analyzed was representative of widely circulated public discourse.
2. Selected posts demonstrated high user engagement, averaging over 1,000 comments, which provided rich contextual threads for pragmatic tracking.
3. The timeframe was restricted to the last two years to capture contemporary linguistic practices active in current internet culture.
4. To ensure user privacy, all personal identifiers, account handles, and usernames were thoroughly anonymized, with each extracted item assigned a specific Token ID (e.g., TT-01, X-01).

The final unit of analysis was the individual morphologically innovated word token embedded within its immediate textual environment (the comment, caption, or reply chain), allowing the researcher to evaluate how the surrounding discourse influenced its pragmatic function.

Analytical Procedures

The collected data were subjected to qualitative content analysis, following the systematic frameworks outlined by Krippendorff (2018) and Neuendorf (2017). The analytical pipeline proceeded through three distinct stages:

Stage 1: Preliminary Screening and Structural Classification: The 200 collected tokens were screened to exclude any ambiguous abbreviations, non-lexical items (such as pure emoji chains), or duplicated automated spam. The remaining valid tokens were then classified into three primary morphological categories based on their structural formation: *acronymization* (words formed from the initial letters of a phrase), *clipping* (words formed by shortening an existing word), and *blending* (words formed by fusing parts of two discrete words).

Stage 2: Contextual Pragmatic Coding: Using a pragmatic coding matrix, each token was analyzed alongside its immediate discursive environment (captions, surrounding replies, and hashtags). The tokens were coded based on their primary communicative functions: expressing humor, conveying evaluation, signaling group identity, or strengthening rhetorical impact.

Stage 3: Politeness Framework Mapping: Finally, each instance was evaluated through Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. The researcher mapped the instances to determine whether the structural modifications were designed to claim solidarity (Positive Politeness Strategies) or hedge statements, protect autonomy, and soften interactional friction (Negative Politeness Strategies). This stage formed the interpretive core of the study, linking structural morphology with active interpersonal relationship management.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings and discussion based on the qualitative analysis of 200 instances

of morphological innovation collected from publicly accessible content on TikTok and X (formerly Twitter). The qualitative dataset comprises 100 instances from TikTok and 100 instances from X, selected through purposive sampling from public accounts characterized by high levels of user interaction and the frequent deployment of contemporary social media slang. The analysis addresses the study's two central research questions: first, by identifying and classifying the specific types of morphological innovation employed in contemporary social media discourse, and second, by examining their contextual pragmatic functions within digitally mediated communication through the theoretical lens of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

To facilitate a systematic and coherent presentation, this section is organized into two integrated components. First, it addresses the structural typology and distribution of the identified morphological innovations which answers the first research question. Second, it provides a comprehensive, qualitative analysis of how these structural innovations are strategically deployed as positive and negative politeness resources during online interactions to address the second research question 2.

Structural Typology and Distribution of Morphological Innovations

The qualitative content analysis identified three major types of morphological innovation actively utilized across both platforms: clipping, acronyms, and blending. Before presenting the detailed qualitative analysis of each category, Table 4.1 provides a descriptive overview of the distribution of these innovations across the two platforms.

Table 1. Distribution of Morphological Innovations on TikTok and X

Morphological Innovation	TikTok	X	Total	Percentage	Sample Identified Items
Acronym	42	38	80	40.0%	IKTR, Lmfao, CMIW, AFK, Fomo
Clipping	30	35	65	32.5%	Lil, Sis, Collab
Blending	28	27	55	27.5%	Chillax, staycation, Cosplay
Total	100	100	200	100%	

As illustrated in Table 1, the distribution of these categories remains remarkably balanced between TikTok and X. This structural equilibrium indicates that these word-formation processes are not idiosyncratic to a single platform but represent broader, systemic linguistic practices within contemporary digital discourse.

1. The Predominance of Clipping

Among the identified processes, clipping emerged as the most frequently occurring morphological innovation, accounting for 40.0% ($n = 80$) of the total dataset. This predominance is consistent across both platforms, representing 42% of the innovations on TikTok and 38% on X. The high frequency of clipping may suggest a strong preference among social media users for truncated lexical forms. Truncation serves to streamline the physical effort of typing while retaining the core semantic value of the original word. By shedding non-essential syllables, clipped slang facilitates rapid, informal, and highly efficient communication. This structural adaptation directly reflects the material and interactional characteristics of modern digital platforms, where brevity, immediacy, and a fast conversational pace are highly valued. Crucially, the widespread adoption of these

clipped forms demonstrates that users successfully prioritize linguistic economy without sacrificing mutual understanding or mutual intelligibility within their digital peer networks.

2. The Strategic Use of Acronyms

Acronymization represents the second most prevalent morphological innovation, comprising 32.5% (n = 65) of the collected tokens. Interestingly, X exhibited a slightly higher concentration of acronyms (35%) compared to TikTok (30%). This distribution is structurally logical; while TikTok is driven heavily by audio-visual content with supporting text, X remains fundamentally rooted in text-based microblogging, where character limits and rapid-fire replies incentivize extreme textual compression. Rather than merely acting as mechanical abbreviations, these acronyms represent highly coded linguistic units. They require a shared cultural and digital literacy to be successfully decoded, serving as a rapid shorthand that maintains high conversational velocity while signalling alignment with contemporary digital culture.

3. The Creative Playfulness of Blending

Blending constitutes 27.5% (n = 55) of the dataset, showing an almost identical distribution on TikTok (28%) and X (27%). Linguistically, blending is the most structurally complex of the three categories, requiring the cognitive fusion of two or more distinct words (e.g., merging their forms and meanings into a singular, novel lexical item). The deliberate use of blending highlights the playful, highly creative agency of social media users. Rather than relying on standard vocabulary, users actively synthesize new terms to capture highly specific cultural phenomena, emotional states, or social archetypes. The structural properties of blending allow users to pack dense, multi-layered social commentary into a single, compact word, making it an incredibly powerful tool for expressive and rhetorical impact.

Pragmatic Functions and Politeness Strategies of Morphological Innovation

While the structural classification presented in Table 1 provides a necessary taxonomic foundation, a purely structural analysis fails to explain *why* these specific forms are selected and *how* they operate during actual online exchanges. The structural characteristics of clipping, acronymization, and blending do not exist in a vacuum; instead, they serve as the linguistic vehicles for complex interpersonal work. To understand how these morphological innovations function as strategic communicative resources, this section provides a detailed pragmatic informed-thematic analysis of the corpus, as detailed in Table 2, to address the second research question.

Table 2. Pragmatic Coding Matrix for Morphological Innovations

Thematic Finding	Representative Data Codes	Associated Morphological Innovations	Primary Pragmatic Function	Politeness Orientation
Fostering In-Group Solidarity and Shared Identity	TT-01, TT-02, TT-03, TT-11, X-06, X-13, X-15	<i>sis, lil, IKTR, knetz, netizen, nder, IYKYK</i>	Building interpersonal closeness, establishing shared identity, expressing agreement, signaling community membership, reinforcing insider knowledge	Positive Politeness
Maximizing Conversational Efficiency while Maintaining Rapport	TT-04, TT-05, TT-06, TT-09, TT-10, X-02, X-05, X-09, X-11, X-14	<i>PD, LMFAO, OTW, app, collab, mager, IJBOL, ASAP, bfr, delulu</i>	Increasing communicative efficiency, maintaining conversational flow, expressing humor, simplifying interaction, sustaining informal and engaging communication	Predominantly Positive Politeness
Mitigating Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Managing Interactional Risk	TT-07, TT-08, X-01, X-04, X-07, X-08, X-10, X-12	<i>CMIIW, AFK, jir, mager, chillax, WTFDYM, FOMO, ASAP</i>	Softening disagreement, hedging assertions, reducing emotional intensity, managing interpersonal boundaries, minimizing conversational imposition	Predominantly Negative Politeness

As demonstrated in Table 2, the qualitative coding matrix outlines the relationship between thematic findings, representative data tokens, their structural word-formation variants, primary pragmatic functions, and their ultimate alignment with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness orientations. The following is further elaboration on the three thematic findings of pragmatic functions of the identified morphological innovation.

1. Fostering In-Group Solidarity and Shared Identity (Positive Politeness)

The qualitative analysis demonstrates that social media users frequently deploy morphological innovations as resources for positive politeness. These forms explicitly appeal to the hearer's positive face—their desire to be validated, approved of, and accepted as an active member of a mutual social community.

Truncated and clipped address terms play an immediate role in building interpersonal closeness. In token TT-01, shortening *sister* to "sis" removes the emotional detachment common in formal public writing, establishing a friendly peer-to-peer dynamic. Similarly, the token X-13 features the clipping "nder" (derived from *sender*) within a highly active discussion space. By replacing an individual name or a generic username with this community-wide vocative, the speaker instantly builds rapport with a stranger, framing the exchange as an intimate, collaborative encounter. This structural minimization of social distance is further reinforced by the clipping "lil" (TT-02), which frames descriptions in a playful tone that indexes contemporary internet youth subcultures.

Acronyms in this theme rely on shared background knowledge to establish instant consensus and agreement. The token "IKTR" (*I Know That's Right*, TT-03) allows a user to validate an original post decisively, expressing emphatic agreement without requiring an extended explanation. This operation shifts to the reinforcement of exclusive insider knowledge in token X-15 ("IYKYK" - *If You Know, You Know*). By hiding the full meaning of an utterance behind this acronymic gate, the speaker creates an unspoken bond with those who possess the cultural context to decode it, effectively strengthening collective identity while outlining the borders of the subgroup.

Blended and community-centric words explicitly signal group membership. The portmanteau "knetz" Morphological Innovation in Social....

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(*Korean + netizens*, TT-11) and the classic internet blend "netizen" (X-06) function as collective social categorizations. By grouping digital participants under these specialized terms, posters emphasize shared community roles, ensuring that subsequent debates or assertions are processed through a framework of shared digital citizenship.

2. Maximizing Conversational Efficiency while Maintaining Rapport (Predominantly Positive Politeness)

The fast-paced nature of digital platforms like TikTok and X requires users to communicate quickly due to typing constraints and character caps. However, the data proves that maximizing structural efficiency does not come at the expense of interpersonal connection. Instead, users utilize morphological shortcuts to optimize conversational flow while keeping their texts highly informal and socially engaging.

Acronyms within this theme simplify daily interaction while maintaining a warm, supportive register. The acronym "PD" (*Percaya Diri*, TT-04) offers direct encouragement using a concise term that avoids sounding clinical or overly advisory. Similarly, the token "OTW" (*On the Way*, TT-06) communicates status updates quickly, keeping the conversation fluid and dynamic. When urgent action or focus is required, tokens like "ASAP" (X-12) communicate high priority cleanly, matching the rapid-fire behavioral expectations of digital environments without introducing defensive friction. Furthermore, contemporary corrective acronyms like "bfr" (*be for real*) function as efficient interactional wake-up calls, steering conversational flow away from misinterpretations in a highly direct yet peer-accepted manner.

Shortened text tokens also help maintain rapport by packing distinct emotional evaluations and humor into minimal characters. The acronyms "LMFAO" (TT-05) and "IJBOL" (*I Just Burst Out Laughing*, X-05) communicate intense amusement. Using these conventional expressions signals strong interactional engagement, assuring the other person that their post had a real, humorous impact.

This blend of efficiency and informal evaluation is also apparent in blended items like "mager" (*malas gerak*, X-04) and "delulu" (derived from *delusional*, X-14). In X-04, compressing a complex state of physical inertia into a single blend frames personal laziness as a relatable, humorous trait rather than a character flaw. Similarly, the popular duplication blend "delulu" turns a harsh psychiatric critique (*delusional*) into a playful, stylized label for over-enthusiastic fans, allowing users to evaluate behavior lightly without causing offense. Finally, structural clippings like "app" (TT-09), "collab" (TT-10), and "celeb" (X-09) clip unnecessary syllables to keep reading pace high, providing a speech-like speed that reflects the values of online youth culture.

3. Mitigating Face-Threatening Acts and Managing Interactional Risk (Predominantly Negative Politeness)

Beyond building solidarity and efficiency, the qualitative findings show that morphological innovations serve as vital face-saving devices. When digital talk becomes critical, corrective, or potentially confrontational, users use customized word structures to soften their delivery. This satisfies the hearer's negative face by avoiding direct imposition and protecting the speaker from interactional pushback.

Epistemic hedges created through acronymization allow users to soften disagreements or factual claims. The conventionalized token "CMIIW" (*Correct Me If I'm Wrong*, TT-07) softens an assertion by inviting open correction. This reduces the speaker's authoritative stance, making room for alternative views and preventing a thread from turning into a direct confrontation. Similarly, using "AFK" (TT-08) details a sudden drop in conversational presence. Rather than leaving a thread in silence—which could be taken as an impolite snub—the user uses this tech acronym to justify their absence, safely protecting the relational bond.

Morphological adjustments also help manage face by filtering intense emotions, frustration, or directives. In token X-01, the user uses the clipped form "jir" instead of the full taboo word *anjir*. Truncating the word allows the speaker to express authentic surprise or frustration while lowering the risk of causing offense.

This structural buffering is also seen in how users express skepticism or manage personal space. The long acronym "WTFDYM" (*What The F*ck Do You Mean*, X-08) compresses severe disbelief into a closed typographical block. This allows the user to vent frustration within a conventionalized internet framework rather than writing a personalized, aggressive text.

Relational risk management is also evident in social trend acronyms like "FOMO" (*Fear of Missing Out*, X-10) and blended items like "mager" (X-04) and "chillax" (X-07). Labeling an anxiety as "FOMO" shifts a personal vulnerability into a shared, institutionalized digital concept, protecting the speaker's vulnerabilities. When giving advice, blending *chill* and *relax* into "chillax" (X-07) softens a direct command. The playful structural mashup tones down the imperative, transforming a potentially bossy directive into a light, friendly suggestion, thereby keeping the interaction smooth and balanced.

In conclusion, the qualitative interpretation of these 200 tokens demonstrates that morphological innovations are not merely informal linguistic shortcuts or peripheral structural deviations; rather, they serve as core strategic vehicles for pragmatic negotiation in digital space. By synthesizing the structural typology of digital slang with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, this study directly fills the identified empirical gap in digital linguistics, moving beyond a descriptive cataloguing of word formation to demonstrate how contemporary slang functions as a sophisticated resource for managing interpersonal face-work, cultivating ingroup solidarity, and mitigating interactional risks on TikTok and X.

Furthermore, these findings yield vital practical implications for English Language Teaching (ELT) and vocabulary instruction. Because modern communication is increasingly computer-mediated, relying solely on static, conventional vocabulary models leave EFL learners ill-equipped for real-world digital interactions. By understanding how clipping, acronyms, and blending function as active positive and negative politeness strategies, EFL educators can leverage authentic social media slang to develop learners' morphological awareness and critical pragmatic competence. Integrating these living linguistic forms into the classroom bridges the divide between informal digital discourse and formal instruction, ultimately preparing students to navigate the nuanced social dynamics, identities, and rapport-management strategies required in the modern globalized world.

Pedagogical Implications For Efl Vocabulary Instruction

The findings of this study offer direct applications for English language teaching, particularly within English Morphological Innovation in Social....
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as a Foreign Language (EFL) and TESOL frameworks. Traditional EFL curricula often focus heavily on formal register choices, leaving learners unprepared for the informal, highly productive morphological variations they encounter in daily digital interactions. Incorporating authentic social media slang into vocabulary lessons can bridge this gap while strengthening learners' language skills in three key areas: (1) morphological awareness of acronymization, clipping or truncation, and blending; (2) pragmatic competent for face management, solidarity building, and strategic hedging; (3) critical literacy regarding register suitability, contextual analysis, and socio-cultural nuance.

1. Enhancing Morphological Awareness

Rather than treating digital slang as grammatical errors, instructors can use these tokens as engaging real-world examples to teach core word-formation principles. Analyzing how internet expressions are built through clipping ("sis", "nder"), acronymization ("IKTR", "CMIW"), and blending ("chillax") helps students see morphology as a live, adaptive system. Classroom activities can challenge students to trace shortened digital words back to their root forms, helping them understand morphemic boundaries, structural economy, and the dynamic ways a language generates new vocabulary.

2. Developing Digital Pragmatic Competence

Teaching vocabulary effectively requires helping students understand not just what a word means, but how it works interpersonally within a conversation. By introducing learners to frameworks like Politeness Theory through digital texts, teachers can demonstrate how choice of word form alters the tone and social alignment of an interaction. For instance, students can analyze how using "CMIW" works to hedge a statement or how clipped terms build peer solidarity. This training helps non-native speakers recognize the social impact of their word choices, teaching them to select the right linguistic register for different online and offline settings.

3. Fostering Critical Digital Literacy

Integrating authentic internet discourse into the classroom helps students evaluate text critically by forcing them to look closely at context, target audience, and communicative intent. By studying the shifts in digital slang, EFL learners develop an eye for stylistic nuances and subcultural stances online. This prepares students to navigate contemporary digital media safely and effectively, transforming them from passive consumers into culturally aware, active participants in global digital spaces.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated morphological innovation in social media slang on TikTok and X by examining how innovative lexical forms function dynamically within authentic digital communication. The structural analysis identified acronyms (40.0%), clipping (32.5%), and blending (27.5%) as the primary mechanisms driving lexical adaptation in these digital spaces. Rather than serving merely as informal linguistic shortcuts, these innovated forms function as redressive tools through which speakers strengthen in-group solidarity, express a shared digital identity, mitigate potentially face-threatening acts (FTAs), and maintain harmonious interactions within online communities. These insights demonstrate that morphological innovation must be understood as a

highly adaptive linguistic phenomenon in which structural creativity and socio-pragmatic purposes are inextricably linked.

By bridging formal structure with interactive utility, this study successfully addresses a significant gap in digital linguistics scholarship. While earlier research has heavily privileged the identification and classification of descriptive word-formation patterns, comparatively little attention has been directed toward how these innovative structures operate within naturally occurring online interactions. By analyzing both their structural properties and their contextual pragmatic functions through the lens of politeness theory, this study provides a more comprehensive, qualitative understanding of how morphological innovation contributes to meaning-making, face-work, and relational management in contemporary digital environments.

Despite these contributions, several empirical limitations must be acknowledged. The analytical scope was confined to three specific types of morphological innovation, clipping, acronyms, and blending, and focused exclusively on a dataset drawn from public TikTok and X accounts over a recent two-year period. Furthermore, because the dataset was interpreted through qualitative content analysis, the findings rely inherently on contextual, interpretive depth. Future research is encouraged to investigate additional, emergent types of word formation, expand data collection to a wider array of evolving social media platforms, or employ other theoretical or analytical frameworks to further enhance qualitative dependability. Comparative investigations across diverse languages, cultural contexts, and distinct online subcultures would also provide broader sociolinguistic insights into the relationship between structural innovation and digital pragmatics.

Finally, this study emphasizes the value of using authentic digital texts in language education. Bringing real-world internet language into the EFL classroom allows teachers to design active learning experiences that build students' morphological awareness, pragmatic skills, and critical digital literacy. Ultimately, showing students how digital vocabulary operates within systematic social rules prepares them to communicate confidently, appropriately, and effectively in today's interconnected digital world.

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