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Gen Z's Vocabulary Innovation on TikTok as a Reflection of Sociocultural Change and Its Implications for Education

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Abstract

Lexical innovation on TikTok connects Generation Z's linguistic creativity with digital interaction and sociocultural change, raising questions about its implications for Indonesian language use and education. This study identified forms of lexical innovation among Generation Z on TikTok, examined their relationship with sociocultural changes, and analysed their implications for Indonesian language education. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using TikTok videos, captions, and comments collected between July and October 2026. Data were gathered through documentation and note-taking and analysed according to linguistic form, origin, and contextual meaning. The findings identified six categories of lexical innovation shaped predominantly by English influence, exemplified by *vibesnya*, "flexing," "in this economy," "I wish," *orang have*, and *when ya*. These forms served to express identity, articulate economic anxieties, and reinforce group solidarity. The study highlights TikTok as an important site of linguistic variation and sociocultural expression among Generation Z. For Indonesian language education, these findings suggest that digital lexical practices can provide contextual learning material for examining loanwords, semantic shifts, and code-mixing while promoting awareness of language choices appropriate to different communicative contexts.

Keywords: Lexical Innovation; Generation Z; TikTok; Sociocultural Change; Indonesian Language Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought about changes in the way people communicate, including in their everyday language use. Technology serves not only as a means for conveying information but also as a medium for various groups to express their creativity (Asdah & Shafariana, 2026). The emergence of social media has provided a space for people to create, modify, and disseminate new vocabulary through digital interaction. Rahmah & Khasanah, (2023) argue that social media has become a new arena for language development that is more fluid and diverse. According to Novianti et al., (2026), this phenomenon is evident in the use of abbreviations, acronyms, shortened words, and the blending of multiple languages in daily communication. These shifts demonstrate that language is dynamic, constantly evolving to meet communication needs and the changing sociocultural landscape of society (Antika & Arsanti, 2025). One group actively involved in this evolution is Generation Z, who have integrated social media into their communication practices and self-expression.

Generation Z is known for actively utilizing social media to convey ideas, emotions, and social identities through various forms of creative and informal language (Huwaida et al., 2025). In practice, this group does not merely rely on existing vocabulary; they also coin new terms through processes such as shortening words, forming abbreviations and acronyms, and even shifting the meanings of words to suit specific communicative contexts (Hasjim et al., 2026). TikTok is one platform that plays a significant role in the spread of such linguistic innovations. Through short videos, comment sections, and user interactions, new terms can be introduced, adopted, and widely disseminated in a relatively short amount of time. According to Tampubolon et al., (2025), TikTok functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as an interactive space that enables users to actively engage in the creation and distribution of digital content. This situation demonstrates that TikTok plays a role in shaping communication habits while simultaneously fostering linguistic creativity among Generation Z. The phenomenon of vocabulary innovation on TikTok cannot be viewed merely as a change in linguistic form; it is also linked to the sociocultural dynamics of society (Ilbury & Walcott, 2026). Researchers suggest that the emergence of new terms among Generation Z represents an linguistic adaptation to the evolution of digital culture and a need for communication that is more practical, expressive, and easily understood within specific social groups. The use of slang, for instance, can serve as a means to build rapport between users, signal group identity, and establish communication characteristics

that distinguish Generation Z from other generational cohorts (Sari et al., 2025). This aligns with the perspective of Hidayati et al., (2026), who explain that slang not only shapes the communication patterns of the younger generation but also influences the formation of character and cultural values. Consequently, the vocabulary innovation flourishing on TikTok can be understood as a linguistic phenomenon closely intertwined with shifts in communication behavior, social identity, and the cultural development of digital society.

Several previous studies have addressed language development within digital communication. Dahniar & Sulistyawati, (2023) reveal that social media serves as a space for more fluid and diverse language development. In their research, Eti & Rosalinah, (2025) identified various forms of abbreviation including shortenings and acronyms employed in digital communication. Meanwhile, Dewi, (2024) explores the connection between slang and communication patterns, character formation, and the cultural values of the younger generation. Research by Safanasyah & Simatupang, (2025) further highlights the role of TikTok as a medium for interaction and the dissemination of digital content. Although these studies have provided insights into language evolution and the use of social media, there remains a need to examine how the vocabulary innovations used by Generation Z on TikTok relate to sociocultural shifts and their implications for education. Consequently, there is a need for research that not only identifies the linguistic forms that emerge but also explains the social significance behind their usage and their relevance to the study of the Indonesian language.

The novelty of this research lies in its examination of Generation Z's vocabulary innovations on TikTok through three interconnected dimensions: the forms of linguistic innovation, their link to sociocultural change, and their implications for education specifically the learning of the Indonesian language. This study is grounded in the understanding that language is dynamic, subject to changes in both form and meaning as society evolves. From a linguistic perspective, vocabulary innovation can be observed through word-formation processes, such as the use of abbreviations (including shortenings and acronyms) and shifts in the meaning of terms. From a sociocultural perspective, the adoption of new vocabulary can be understood as a form of identity expression, social interaction, and adaptation to digital culture. Together, these perspectives underscore that the evolution of vocabulary on social media is not merely a matter of linguistic creativity; it also reflects broader changes in how society communicates and fosters social relationships. This phenomenon is also relevant to the field of education, particularly in the study of the Indonesian language. The use of

popular vocabulary on social media has the potential to influence students' language habits, including their word choices when writing formal texts or communicating within academic settings. However, such developments should not necessarily be viewed as negative; rather, they can be leveraged as a source for contextual learning. By observing the vocabulary evolving on platforms like TikTok, students can be introduced to linguistic variation, word-formation processes, semantic shifts, and the use of language tailored to specific communicative situations. Utilizing digital language phenomena in instruction can help students better understand the distinctions between informal and formal language registers. Furthermore, students can be encouraged to think critically about language evolution on social media, while still maintaining the use of proper and accurate Indonesian, in accordance with established linguistic rules and the appropriate context.

Given this, research into the vocabulary innovations of Generation Z on TikTok is significant, as the phenomenon intersects with language evolution, sociocultural change, and the requirements of language education in the digital age. This research focuses on identifying the forms of vocabulary innovation employed by Generation Z on TikTok, analyzing how these innovations relate to sociocultural shifts, and examining their implications for education specifically, the teaching and learning of the Indonesian language. The study aims to describe the forms of vocabulary innovation used by Generation Z on TikTok, explain their connection to sociocultural dynamics, and analyze their potential as a resource for Indonesian language instruction. The findings are expected to contribute to the study of language development in digital media, while also serving as a reference for educators to develop Indonesian language curricula that are contextual, critical, and relevant to the lives of students.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. This approach was selected because the research aims to identify, examine, and describe the phenomenon of lexical innovation emerging within the communication of Generation Z on the social media platform TikTok. This approach allows the researcher to understand language usage in its natural state, based on the context in which it appears including the form of the vocabulary, its linguistic origin, and any shifts in meaning. The study is not oriented toward hypothesis

testing or statistical calculation; rather, it focuses on providing an in-depth depiction of linguistic phenomena based on the data collected.

The research design is descriptive-qualitative, focusing on the phenomenon of neologisms specifically loanwords found in TikTok content from 2026. According to Putri & Sulistiyono, (2023), a research design serves as a framework that guides the execution of a study, ensuring a systematic research process. In this study, the object of inquiry consists of new vocabulary used by Generation Z in TikTok videos, captions, and comment sections. The data analyzed includes loanwords derived from both foreign languages and regional languages, which demonstrate lexical innovation within digital communication. The analysis examines the form of the words, their linguistic origins, and their meanings based on the context in which they are used.

The participants in this study are TikTok users specifically members of Generation Z who create or utilize innovative vocabulary within the content they publish. The data sources consist of TikTok content from 2026, including videos, captions, and user comments. Data selection was conducted using purposive sampling, a technique in which data sources are chosen based on criteria aligned with the research objectives. These criteria include content containing new vocabulary or loanwords, terms used within the context of Generation Z's communication, and vocabulary with identifiable meanings and usage contexts. Through this technique, the collected data is expected to be highly relevant to the study's focus on lexical innovation on social media.

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher, who is responsible for observing, identifying, recording, classifying, and analyzing linguistic data. To facilitate the data collection process, supporting instruments specifically documentation sheets and data-recording tables are used to capture vocabulary, content sources, linguistic origins, word forms, and meanings based on their context of use. Data collection is carried out through documentation and recording. The process begins with observing TikTok content, identifying vocabulary that exhibits linguistic innovation, documenting relevant content, and recording the identified vocabulary into the data collection tables. The study is conducted from July to October 2026, with the observation and data collection phase spanning approximately four months. Data collection is performed systematically and in stages to ensure that the gathered vocabulary aligns with the study's criteria.

The collected data are then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis model, which consists of three stages. The first stage is data reduction, involving the selection and categorization of vocabulary relevant to the study's focus, while excluding data that do not meet the established criteria. At this stage, the vocabulary is classified based on the form of innovation, linguistic origin, and meaning. The second stage is data presentation, which involves organizing the classified results into tables and descriptive accounts to make the patterns of vocabulary innovation easier to understand. The third stage is drawing conclusions and verification, which entails interpreting the analysis results to gain insight into forms of neologisms such as loanwords their connection to sociocultural changes, and their implications for Indonesian language instruction. To ensure the validity of the findings, this study employs theoretical triangulation by comparing the data and interpretations against relevant linguistic theories. Through these stages, the study aims to provide a systematic overview of the vocabulary innovations introduced by Generation Z on TikTok.

RESULTS

1. Forms of Vocabulary Innovation by Generation Z on TikTok

Based on observations of TikTok videos, captions, and comment sections during the period from July to October 2026, six forms of vocabulary usage were identified that demonstrate linguistic innovation among Generation Z. These terms include *vibes, flexing, in this economy, orang have, when ya,* and *I wish*. The findings indicate that these lexical innovations are dominated by English elements integrated into Indonesian-language communication. The patterns of usage include English words combined with Indonesian affixes, the adoption of specific English terms, and the blending of English and Indonesian elements into phrases.

Table 1. Forms of Vocabulary Innovation by Generation Z on TikTok, July–October 2026

No.	Vocabulary/ Phrase	Language of Origin	Usage Form	Meaning in Context
1	Vibes	English	Word + suffix "-nya"	The atmosphere or impression of a place
2	Flexing	English	English term	Showing off possessions or achievements
3	In this economy	English	Phrase	A remark (often sarcastic) regarding the economic situation
4	Orang have	English and Indonesian	Mixed-language term	A well-off or affluent person

5	When ya	English and Indonesian	Mixed-language phrase	An expression of hope or a question about when something will happen
6	I wish	English	Phrase	An expression of a desire or hope

Source: Data from observations of TikTok content, July–October 2026.

As shown in Table 1, the vocabulary innovations used by Generation Z on TikTok take various forms. Some terms are adopted directly from English, while others are adapted or combined with elements of the Indonesian language. This is evident in the word *vibes*, which has been modified with the Indonesian suffix *-nya* to become *vibesnya*. Meanwhile, the phrases *orang have* and when ya demonstrate a blend of English and Indonesian components. Other terms, such as *flexing*, *in this economy*, and *I wish*, are used as English expressions within digital communication. To further clarify these forms of vocabulary usage, the following section presents documentation of the TikTok content and comments that serve as the data source for this research.

a. The Use of the Word *Vibes*

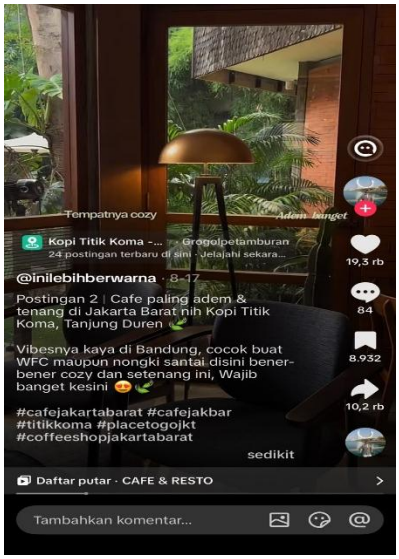


Figure 1. Screenshot Of Tiktok Content Regarding The Use Of The Word Vibes

Based on the data in Figure 1, the word *vibes* is used in captions or spoken content on TikTok to describe the atmosphere or impression of a place or situation. In its usage, the term can take the Indonesian suffix *-nya*, resulting in the form *vibesnya*. This form demonstrates an adaptation of an English lexical item to the word-formation patterns of the Indonesian language. Thus, the innovation in this data is evidenced by the addition of an Indonesian affix to a word derived from English.

b. Use of the Term *Flexing*



Figure 2. Screenshot of TikTok Content Regarding the Use of the Term Flexing

Based on the data in Figure 2, the term *flexing* is used to refer to the act of showing off one's wealth, achievements, or lifestyle to others. It is an English term adopted directly into Indonesian discourse. The innovation in this instance is evident in the use of a foreign term without translation, where its meaning is instead understood through the context of digital communication.

c. Use of the Phrase *In This Economy*



Figure 3. Screenshot of TikTok Content Using The Phrase In This Economy

Based on the data in Figure 3, the phrase *in this economy* is used to convey a comment or a sardonic remark regarding economic conditions and financial constraints. This English phrase is embedded within an Indonesian-language utterance, becoming part of the user's digital expression. The form of innovation in this data is evident in the use of an entire foreign phrase to articulate meanings related to everyday social experiences.

d. Use of the Phrase *Orang Have*



Figure 4. Screenshot of TikTok Comment Using the Phrase Orang Have

Based on the data in Figure 4, the phrase *orang have* demonstrates a combination of elements from both Indonesian and English. The term *orang* originates from Indonesian, while *have* comes from English. In this context, the phrase refers to an individual who is well-off or possesses economic means. This form of innovation is characterized by the blending of two linguistic elements into a single phrase, allowing for the concise expression of meaning within digital interactions.

e. Use of the Phrase *When Ya*



Figure 5. Screenshot of TikTok Comment Using the Phrase When Ya

Based on the data in Figure 5, the phrase *when ya* is a combination of elements from both English and Indonesian. The word *when* means *kapan* (when), while *ya* serves as an emphatic particle within the expression. In the context of digital communication, this phrase is used to pose a question or to express a desire or hope that a particular situation might be experienced by the speaker. This form of innovation is evident in the blending of two linguistic elements into a single, concise expression.

f. Use of the Phrase *I Wish*



Figure 6. Screenshot of TikTok Content Regarding the Use of the Phrase I Wish

Based on the data in Figure 6, the phrase *I wish* is used to express a hope or desire regarding a particular situation. This phrase originates from English and is employed within Indonesian-language discourse. The innovation here is characterized by the use of an English expression as an introductory element, followed by Indonesian components that articulate the speaker's wishes.

Overall, the six data points demonstrate that lexical innovation among Generation Z on TikTok is dominated by the integration of English elements into Indonesian-language communication. The forms of innovation observed include the attachment of Indonesian affixes to foreign words, the direct use of English terms, and the blending of English and Indonesian elements into phrases. The contexts in which these terms are used indicate that they serve to describe atmospheres, behaviors, and economic conditions, as well as to convey hopes and desires. These findings suggest that lexical innovation in digital communication reflects the creativity of Generation Z in selecting and combining linguistic elements to suit the specific context of their communication.

2. The Link Between Lexical Innovation and the Sociocultural Dynamics of Society

Observations indicate that the use of new vocabulary on TikTok serves not merely as a means of communication, but is also deeply intertwined with the experiences, identities, and sociocultural conditions of society. Each term identified carries a distinct context of use, illustrating how Generation Z expresses its social life through digital language.

The term *vibes*, for instance, is used to describe the atmosphere or impression of a particular place. Its usage reflects a tendency among Generation Z to employ popular

vocabulary to concisely convey personal experiences and assessments. Meanwhile, the term *flexing* is used to describe the act of showing off possessions, achievements, or one's lifestyle a practice linked to the projection of identity and social status within digital interactions.

Furthermore, the phrase *in this economy* is used to offer a sardonic commentary on economic conditions, specifically regarding financial constraints and the rising cost of living. The expression *to have* (or the desire *to have*) reflects an individual's aspiration for a more affluent or secure life. Similarly, expressions like *when...* and *I wish* are used to articulate hopes, desires, and visions of an idealized life. These terms demonstrate that language on social media serves as a vehicle for Generation Z to express their concerns, experiences, and aspirations regarding their daily lives.

Ultimately, the six terms identified reveal a connection between linguistic innovation and sociocultural dynamics. The use of popular terminology, code-mixing, and expressions related to economic conditions and social life underscores that the evolution of vocabulary on TikTok is inseparable from the shifting communication patterns and digital culture of Generation Z.

3. Potential for Utilizing Vocabulary Innovations as a Resource for Learning Indonesian

The research findings indicate that the vocabulary innovations introduced by Generation Z on TikTok have the potential to serve as a resource for learning the Indonesian language specifically regarding topics such as loanwords, word formation, semantics, and code-mixing. The vocabulary identified can function as concrete examples to help students understand how language evolves in everyday life.

For instance, the term *vibes* (with the Indonesian suffix *-nya* attached) can be used to illustrate how foreign linguistic elements are adapted to the structure of the Indonesian language. The term *flexing* can serve as an example for introducing the use of foreign terminology in daily communication. Meanwhile, phrases such as *in this economy*, *orang have*, *when ya*, and *I wish* can be used to examine the blending of linguistic elements and the interpretation of expressions based on their specific contexts of use.

Furthermore, this vocabulary can be integrated into learning activities through the analysis of TikTok captions, videos, or comments. Students could be tasked with identifying the linguistic origins of these terms, explaining their meanings, observing how they are used, and distinguishing between formal and informal language. Through such activities, students not only gain an understanding of how vocabulary evolves within digital media but also

develop a greater awareness of how to use the Indonesian language appropriately according to the communicative situation.

Ultimately, the vocabulary innovations of Generation Z on TikTok offer the potential to become a contextual learning resource that resonates with students' own lives. Utilizing these innovations can help teachers bridge the gap between linguistic subject matter and digital communication phenomena, while simultaneously enhancing students' ability to grasp language variation and employ the Indonesian language accurately within the appropriate context.

DISCUSSION

The research results indicate that the vocabulary innovation of Generation Z on TikTok is dominated by the use of English elements, such as vibes, flexing, in this economy, orang have, when ya, and I wish. The use of these terms demonstrates that Generation Z leverages foreign language elements to convey feelings, opinions, and aspirations, as well as to respond to social phenomena. In terms of form, there is evidence of the adaptation of foreign elements into the Indonesian language such as the addition of the suffix *-nya* to *vibes* (*vibesnya*) as well as the use of code-mixing in phrases like in this economy and I wish. This suggests that the linguistic creativity of Generation Z not only generates new vocabulary but also creates variations in communication that align with the habits of a digital society.

Furthermore, these terms carry meanings closely linked to social life. The term flexing describes the act of showing off, while in this economy is used to offer a satirical commentary on economic conditions. Meanwhile, orang have, when ya, and I wish serve as expressions of desires and hopes. Thus, the vocabulary evolving on TikTok functions not merely as a tool for communication, but also as a means for Generation Z to express their identity and social experiences.

These findings align with the work of Syafa'ah & Haryanto, (2023), who noted that code-mixing in the TikTok comments of Generation Z is dominated by English. Research by Atuzzahro et al., (2025) also highlights the creativity of social media users in forming vocabulary through abbreviations and acronyms. Additionally, Anggraeni et al., (2023) explain that slang is connected to communication patterns and the formation of cultural values among the younger generation. This study complements previous research by

illustrating the use of English elements across various communication contexts on TikTok, while linking them to the sociocultural phenomena of Generation Z.

The findings of this research have implications for the study of the Indonesian language, particularly regarding loanwords, word formation, semantics, and code-mixing. Vocabulary found on TikTok can be utilized as material for contextual learning, helping students better understand language evolution in everyday life. However, the excessive use of slang may also affect students' ability to use standard language (Mumtaz et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers need to guide students in distinguishing between formal and informal language use, depending on the communication context (Mutmainah et al., 2025). In this way, the evolution of digital language can serve as both a learning resource and a means to enhance language awareness.

This study is limited by the fact that its data source is confined to the TikTok platform, with an observation period spanning from July to October 2026. The scope of the data analyzed limited to six specific terms or phrases does not fully capture the breadth of linguistic innovation among Generation Z. Furthermore, the research relies solely on observation and content documentation, without direct interviews with users. Some findings also indicate instances of code-mixing that differ from standard loanwords. Consequently, future research should aim to incorporate a broader range of data sources, expand the number of identified terms, and conduct a more in-depth examination of the processes behind the formation and meaning-making of such vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the vocabulary innovation of Generation Z on TikTok is dominated by the use of English elements in various forms, including loanwords, the addition of Indonesian affixes, code-mixing, and hybrid expressions. Terms such as *vibes, flexing, in this economy, orang have, when ya*, and *I wish* serve not only as tools for communication but also reflect the sociocultural shifts within Generation Z particularly in terms of identity construction, the articulation of economic anxieties, and the expression of aspirations. In an educational context, this phenomenon can be leveraged as a resource for contextual learning, introducing concepts such as loanwords, semantic shifts, and code-mixing, while simultaneously enhancing students' understanding of the distinction between standard and non-standard language usage.

This study contributes to the field of sociolinguistics, specifically regarding vocabulary development and linguistic creativity within digital culture. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms TikTok in particular serve as spaces for the emergence of language variations shaped by social interactions and the broader social conditions of the community. For future research, it is recommended to examine a more diverse range of social media platforms, utilize larger datasets, and incorporate interviews with users to gain a deeper understanding of how new vocabulary is formed, disseminated, and interpreted among Generation Z.

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