

# Influence of Social Media on the Development of the Modern English Language

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**Influence of social media on the development of the modern English language**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor: Dr. Branka Drljača Margić

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SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI  
FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA ANGLISTIKU

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**Influence of social media on the development of the modern English language**

**Završni rad**

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i njemačkog jezika i  
književnosti

Mentor: prof. dr. sc. Branka Drljača Margić

Rijeka, rujan 2023.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the influence that social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, have on the English language. These platforms present common ways of communication nowadays and they are responsible for a large number of new expressions used in the language, both online and offline.

Incorporating evidence from similar research papers, this thesis exemplifies expressions used on these social media platforms and analyses them on semantic, grammatical and orthographical levels. Processes which have quickened this change in the English language, such as those of digitalisation and globalisation, are also briefly discussed.

The thesis argues that these modern expressions are used in certain social settings, whereas some of them are confined strictly to online spheres. However, they are a common occurrence on these social media platforms.

*Keywords:* social media platforms, English language, digitalisation, globalisation, emoticons, slang, abbreviations, punctuation, capitalisation

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## 1. Introduction

With millions of people who use it on a daily basis, English is the most widespread language in the world. Like any other language, English too has developed and changed throughout the course of history. Not only is it a fundamental part of the modern world and communication, but so are social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok. These, as well as many others, have become a standard way of communication in most people's lives.

With these new ways of communication emerging, new questions regarding language and its use have also begun to emerge. It is quite well-known that we adapt our behaviour, as well as the way we express ourselves, depending on the situation we are in and the environment. However, the question is how drastically the language changes under the influence of the social media platforms. Even though it was invented several decades ago, the Internet has taken its toll on the English language in the 1990s (Al-Kadi & Ahmed, 2018).

With its beginnings set in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, English language has a long history, which can be traced through, for example, literature. There has been a great deal of changes and development in the language if we were to compare Old English work, such as *Beowulf*, and modern literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Northrup, 2013). However, this only gives us an insight from one perspective. In order to look at the language from a linguistic perspective, it would be far more convenient to take into consideration factors such as regional differences or class variations (Northrup, 2013).

In their work from 2006, *English – One Tongue, Many Voices*, Jan Svartvik and Geoffrey Leech highlight the fact that English is one of the few languages whose non-native speakers outnumber the native ones (Leech & Svartnik, 2006). This would mean that we could divide English speakers into two main categories. However, an Indian-American linguist Braj Kachru has gone as far as to represent the language through three “circles” - the Inner Circle, which includes L1 speakers from the UK, USA and Australia, the Outer Circle, that consists of speakers that use English as a second language and the Expanding Circle that encompasses all variations of English as foreign language (Kachru, 1985). Even though it does not have the highest number of speakers in the world, what makes English a phenomenon is the fact that it is used globally and it has become key component in international communication.

Leech and Svartnik have also referred to a Canadian writer Marshall McLuhan, who has made the prediction that modern electronic media will result in world becoming, as he called it, “a

global village”. Furthermore, they have concluded that the English language could be considered “a working tongue of that village” (Leech & Svartnik, 2006).

In the Internet world, it is no different – English is a leading language, which enables people all around the globe to communicate and give their input online. It has integrated itself into everyday lives of most people, allowing anyone to share their opinions, creative ideas and knowledge with others in an interactive manner. With first appearances of the blogs in the late 90s, the Internet as known today has truly begun to develop and, by early 2000s, over half a billion people worldwide were using it (Kleinrock, 2008). This evolution was then additionally sped up with the launching of smartphones that were developed a couple of years later, enabling access to an astonishing amount of information in only couple of clicks. Along with smartphones, various so-called mobile apps were developed and each of them had a different purpose – some were for listening music, other ones for editing photographs and some were nothing more than fun mobile games.

In this day and age, two of the leading mobile apps would be Instagram and TikTok. Both of them were developed with the aim to share photographs and videos with the rest of the world, and both have a wide range of topics and content which are shared there.

Founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, Instagram gained popularity almost instantly and has gained over one million downloads within its first two months of existence (Nelson, 2014). It was originally created as strictly a photo-sharing app, which allowed its users to share photographs from their camera roll with the rest of the people who have decided to follow them and their posts. However, with the rise of newer social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram has developed greatly in comparison to what it was when it was first founded. Aside from enabling its users to post photographs, Instagram has added things such as “reels” and “stories”, in order to keep up with the trends. Instagram’s reels have emerged once TikTok reached its peak and people showed interest in the short, attention-grabbing videos it offered.

Whereas Instagram users pick what they see by following certain accounts, TikTok operates a bit differently. What one would see if they were to open the app is something called “For You Page”. This would mean that TikTok tracks videos users engage with and provides them with similar ones in return. It is an algorithm, which is moulded for every user individually, in order to keep them entertained. The content itself comprises short, up to three-minute-long videos that usually contain some sort of background music and are quite hectic. Because of the various editing tools, the app offers to its users, videos are made to be catchy, short and interesting.



Since both of these apps, as well as many others, are highly interactive, there have been some changes in the usage of English on these platforms. The question is, to what extent these social media platforms have transformed the language and if these changes are only present in this cyberspace that they have stemmed from. It is well-known that languages change throughout time and this also reflects itself onto the society. This research paper aims to look into these changes that occurred and how they have affected the language as a whole. In order to do so, research papers dealing with similar topics will be presented, as well as methodology used to make conclusions that have been made. In addition, the results derived from observing these social media platforms and language used will be displayed, in order to gain better understanding of the influence that Instagram and TikTok have had on the English language in the past several years.

## 1.1. Research background

As previously mentioned, language constantly evolves and this new Internet age has also had its influence on its development. Aside from that, the social media is, for some, also a way to improve language skills. This connection between social media language use and learning English as a foreign language is exactly what Kurniati and Rusfandi (2020) focused on in their research paper.

Kurniati and Rusfandi (2020) conducted this research using a descriptive qualitative method. To be exact, they invited 20 students that regularly post on Instagram to join the research and their profiles were watched for the span of two months. In these two months, the data was collected and slang words used in these statuses were analysed. The authors also interviewed the students, in order to check whether they would say their English skills improved because of this.

In their presentation of the results, they used the slang type division formed by Allan and Burridge (2006), according to which slang can be divided into five big categories: Fresh and Creative, Flippant, Imitative, Acronym and Clipping. These two months of research and observation resulted in 55 slang words being collected and analysed. The results have shown that acronyms and imitatives were slang types most commonly used in students' Instagram statuses. The authors then went on to give examples of all five slang types and explain them thoroughly. Expressions such as YOLO (You only live once) and OMG (Oh my God) were given for acronyms, whereas imitative expressions included *whatcha* (What are you) and *wanna* (Want to).

Beside merely looking at the form and meaning of expressions students used, the authors also aimed to understand social functions of slang use. What they discovered was that students were usually motivated to use slang expressions in order to pursue their self-identity, thus following the lead of their peers. Other social function mentioned included students' need to express their emotions, hence the expressions such as "feeling blue".

Furthermore, the authors interviewed the students and discussed their usage of slang expressions. Most of the students thought that their usage of these expressions helped them improve their English language skills and that it was an educational experience, done in a relaxed atmosphere. Students claimed that this broadened their vocabulary and helped them

with their English spelling. The authors also presented several other research papers examining similar topics and compared the results with the ones they obtained.

What is seen quite frequently in communication via social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok are shortened forms of words or expressions. The communication on these platforms is usually short and exaggerated. Words can be abbreviated or clipped, in order to make a shorter, usually more memorable expression. This process of word shortening is exactly what López Rúa (2005) investigates. Although the author does not focus on social media, since the paper was written before their development, the way of communication was already quite similar to the one displayed today.

The author collected and analysed expressions from three different languages – English, Spanish and French – and compared the manner in which the words were altered. Various factors such as origins of the language, pronunciation, and spelling differences were taken into account, to conclude why certain languages gravitate towards using certain shortening techniques.

The author obtained these shortened expressions from English, Spanish and French from various dictionaries and glossaries and then proceeded to make a categorisation, depending on the shortening device used to form the given expression. As do the authors of the previously mentioned research paper, López Rúa (2005) also agrees that these expressions could fit into the category of slang, since they are highly colloquial terms, most commonly used among the young. Expressions were also briefly discussed on a semantic level, and it was concluded that topics these shortenings usually refer back to are the ones of love, studies, communication and sex.

The three main processes used to form these shortened expressions, which author mentions and explains, are initialisation, clipping and abbreviation. Although all are different, there are sometimes difficulties with separating them, since abbreviations can be initialised or clipped as well. The author goes on to give examples of all three processes and further categorises expressions obtained with the usage of these processes in the already established and new ones. Established expressions would be the ones used in the colloquial language before the popularisation of texting, whereas new expressions are ones that have emerged along with it. López Rúa (2005) focuses on the phonetic components of these expressions as well, mentioning processes of phonetic respelling, as well as letter and number homophones.

The second part of the research investigated differences in orthography, phonetics and morphology in all three languages, in order to understand why certain shortening processes are favoured in certain languages. The author drew the conclusion that Spanish, which has longer words, but simpler syllabic structure, gravitated towards the process of abbreviation, whereas English tends to contain a lot of initialised terms. French, on the other hand, gravitates towards respelled forms of certain expressions.

As already portrayed in Kurniati and Rusfandi's (2020) research paper, English in the social media is not only used by native English speakers, but it is quite widespread worldwide as well. This is precisely what separates English from other languages, that there are more foreign speakers using it on a daily basis than native ones. In order to completely understand this phenomenon, the status of English as a world lingua franca should be taken into consideration. When a certain language is defined as a "lingua franca", this means that it is used as a way of communication between people or groups of people who speak different first languages. Given that social media platforms and the Internet in general connect users from the whole world, English is commonly used in this manner on these platforms.

Čičmir (2020) explores this connection between Instagram as a social media platform and English that is being used by Croatian users on this platform. After introducing the topic and defining the key terms needed to understand the paper, the author proceeds to detail the integration of English language into Croatian and the context in which it is most commonly used in. It is concluded that English is not only a part of the jargon or informal Croatian, but that it has also integrated itself into the public media sphere.

The author also briefly mentions the processes of globalisation and borrowing, which would account for the growing number of anglicisms in the Croatian language, as well as the sociocultural context in which English is already deeply engaged.

One social media platform that the author decided to focus on was Instagram, functions of which were disclosed in a separate chapter. The following chapters discussed means of online communication, singling out couple of things specific for this way of communicating, like capitalising of the letters to insinuate "shouting", abbreviated forms of words or letter spacing. Furthermore, acronyms were being noted and exemplified, as well as the emoticons and general lack on punctuation or capitalisation in sentences.

The author conducted the research by picking 20 public Instagram profiles and taking 25 posts from each one of them as a sample. This resulted in 500 Instagram posts analysed. It is also

important to note that the profiles used in order to conduct this research were the ones followed by somewhere between thousands to millions of people.

What was concluded from the research results was that from the 500 posts analysed, over half of them had some sort of grammatical or orthographic deviation. Over 170 posts from 270 deviated ones contained some type of grammatical error. The author additionally categorised these posts by the type of deviation and went on to give examples for each of them, along with a short description explaining the error. These errors included the wrong use of singular and plural forms, omitting of articles or wrong use of the same, incorrect use of tenses, errors regarding word order and other. Aside from grammatical deviations, orthographic ones were observed as well, taking into account capitalisation, punctuation and spelling. In conclusion, expressions which are colloquial and frequently used on these platforms were mostly correct, whereas errors occurred in cases where users tried to form their own sentences and express their thoughts. The author confirmed English to be the leading lingua franca since English was predominantly present on Croatia's most popular Instagram accounts. It also investigated the difference between standard English and its online-present form. It was concluded that expressions used online are mostly those of informal nature and that grammatical rules are oftentimes disregarded. For example, the phrase "stay tuned on my stories" includes an informal phrase, as well as the preposition "on", which is not usually used after the phrase "stay tuned".

Beside merely changing the form of already existing words and expressions or shortening it, the age of Internet has resulted in new words being formed. These new words are called neologisms.

Oliinyk et al. (2022) focus on neologisms formed under the direct influence of digitalisation, meaning those that are directly connected to the Internet and social media, such as hashtag, avatar and similar. The authors divide these neologisms into three main categories – those that have been present enough for them to be fully integrated into the language, new expressions that are present for the last decade and are connected to the new cyber concepts such as social media platforms, and outdated expressions, which are connected to the technological terms no longer in use. They give examples of these neologisms which have taken over social media platforms. The first are memes, which are essentially pictures (usually taken from movies, TV shows, video games and similar), with descriptions that come along. These descriptions are of humoristic nature and they often have an ironic component. Another component which is very prominent in this sort of communication, and has been mentioned in research papers discussed previously as well, is the use of abbreviations. They emerged with texting, since texting is

usually done in a rush and texts also have a limitation when it comes to the number of symbols that can be used in one message. Thirdly, emoticons are used to shorten message replies and they are also quite common in cyber communication.

The authors conclude that these new expressions that were created have emerged because of the new technologies and ideas, which subsequently created a need for new terms. Furthermore, the Internet has made it easier to communicate globally, severely quickening the processes of globalisation and internationalisation. Lastly, these linguistic phenomena connected to the digital communication have left their mark on communication in general, both online and offline.

Oliinyk et al. (2022) in fact aimed to investigate from which process these slang expressions stem, societal attitude towards these language changes, demographic factor and how important it is in terms of expression usage, and in what way general knowledge of English language affects understanding of slang expressions. In order to answer these questions, the authors conducted an online survey, which was targeted towards people aged from 30 to 50, although anyone from the age of 18 and up could participate. These participants were asked 12 questions regarding their language fluency, tendency to use social media and slang expressions, and they were also given several words and needed to answer whether they were familiar with them and their meaning. Most of the participants (64,3%) were in the age range 30-50 and most of them (over 85%) stated that they use social media to communicate on a regular basis. Most of the participants stated that they learned slang expressions throughout everyday communication, primarily with their children. Also, it is important to note that the majority of participants stated that they believed these new expressions had a positive effect, whereas 22% of them did not agree with this. Some opted to stay neutral. When questioned about specific expressions regarding slang and digital communication, the results showed that most of the adult participants understood business speech used online, some were also familiar with digital terminology, whereas younger participants were mostly familiar with slang expressions. The authors note that social status or age do not necessarily define who uses slang words and who does not, but the online environment of the user does. In conclusion, the authors agreed that both digitalisation and globalisation have influenced not only the English language, but other ones as well.

## 2. Methodology

In order to understand English language used today, it is important to take some factors into consideration. Language in general constantly evolves and this process was additionally sped up today with emerging of the Internet. Given that English has the leading position as lingua franca of today's world, it comes as no surprise that there is a vast number of new expressions continuously emerging from the language.

In this research paper, all of this will be taken into consideration in order to analyse in which ways the English language has changed since the emerging of social media. There are a lot of expressions which stem from the Internet and social media platforms that have managed to integrate themselves into live communication, although a number of them are confined to online spheres.

The aim of this thesis is to explain the meaning of these expressions that are commonly seen on two social media platforms – Instagram and TikTok. These meanings often stray from standard meanings of the same forms and are only comprehensible in certain contexts. Furthermore, the form of these expressions will be analysed as well, meaning that expressions will be categorised depending on the way that they have been formed. Another component that will be taken into consideration will be whether these expressions are grammatically correct and, if not, to which degree they stray from the standard language. Once these goals are completed, contexts and topics in which these expressions are most commonly used will be briefly analysed, to understand when they are most commonly used and for what reason. Lastly, the results of the research will be compared to those of the studies mentioned in the previous chapters, testing whether they are similar, perhaps even identical in some cases, or they differ.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

What are the most common slang expressions used on modern social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok?

Are these slang expressions in sync with grammatical rules of the English language?

In what ways are these type of expressions in English language most commonly formed?

Does the meaning of these expressions online differ from that in the standard English language?

Since they are among the biggest social media platforms in the world currently, Instagram and TikTok were used to conduct this research.

Although these platforms share some common properties, they also differ. While TikTok's main feature is something called "For You Page", which is an endless string of videos chosen for each user separately, depending on the videos they watch, like and comment, Instagram users usually observe profiles of people that they follow.

Taking this into account, data for this research was collected in two different ways on these two platforms. Regarding Instagram, 10 popular accounts with a massive following were taken and 10 of their latest posts were analysed. These profiles that were picked to be able to conduct this research are all public profiles and number of their followers ranges from 1,5 to 419 million. Another detail that is important to mention is that all of the users come from an English-speaking environment, meaning that English is their native tongue. Information obtained from these Instagram posts were expressions used, emoticons and the level of adherence to the rules of standard English language.

On the other hand, observing TikTok captions and descriptions was a different process. Instead of taking several profiles and analysing them, all of the videos that have been randomly generated in the period of two months were observed and analysed in the same way as Instagram posts.

The data that were collected were initially analysed on a semantic level, to understand whether the expression has the same meaning in digital communication as it does in real life. Also, grammatical and orthographical components were taken into account in this analysis. Furthermore, if the expression happened to be an abbreviated form of some kind, this was also noted and then categorised further.

Also, another detail that should be considered is that Instagram profiles included in this study are highly followed profiles of famous people, whereas on TikTok a lot more profiles were included, most of them being profiles of publicly unfamiliar figures, that have gained certain level of popularity. This would mean that the results derived from analysing TikTok videos may be more suited to draw conclusions regarding communication in day-to-day life.



### 3. The analysis of results

#### 3.1. Instagram posts

As already mentioned, Instagram posts used in this study were taken from 10 profiles and their 10 latest posts were observed, meaning that 100 posts in total were a part of the study. In some cases, where a photograph was posted without a caption next to it, another post was taken to analyse.

Generally speaking, there were several things that have continuously appeared throughout these posts and those are emoticons and changes in standard capitalisation. These were peculiarities that were seen most frequently, followed by the wrong or exaggerated use of punctuation marks. Furthermore, several posts included some abbreviated forms or slang words of some sort.

##### 3.1.1. Emoticons

By definition, emoticons are "...visual cues formed from ordinary typographical symbols that, when read sideways, represent feeling or emotion" (Rezanek & Cochenour, 1998, p. 201). However, this definition could be seen as a bit outdated since emoticons, or so-called "emojis", have evolved from being merely punctuation signs put together to represent a sad or a happy face. Today's smartphones use a wide range of these emoticons and they are seen as colourful, little images on a screen, varying from different types of smiley faces, hearts, to the most random things such as fruit, tools and similar.

From 100 Instagram posts analysed in this study, almost half of them used some sort of emoticons, either within themselves or as an addition to the caption. To be exact, 45 of 100 used them and they varied from heart emojis to flowers, depending on the photograph. Most of them were directly connected to the photograph they described, but for some the purpose was not easy to understand. As mentioned in definition above, these are imagined to be used as a way of exaggerating emotions, but in the posts observed, some emoticons used were not connected to any type of emotion at all. Examples of these emoticons found in the analysed posts would be those of Greek flag, tulip, fairy, glass of wine, etc.

### 3.1.2. Capitalisation

Capitalisation rules are an important component of the standard English language, but on social media platforms these rules are not always followed completely. It would be correct to capitalise the first word in a sentence, as well as all proper nouns. None of these rules were obliged in some of these captions.

Specifically, there were 42 instances of incorrect capitalisation found in these examples. Some used lowercase letters for the whole caption, whereas in other cases all letters were capitalised.

Although some of these captions were not always full sentences, but descriptions containing several key words, some formed a whole sentence without capitalisation of either first word or proper nouns.

Some examples of captions that did not adhere to the rules of capitalisation in the English language are:

- *lots going on at the moment...*
- *this is going to be interesting*
- *it's time to say goodbye...*
- *happy mother's day*

In the last example, apart from first word not being capitalised, neither is Mother's Day, as it should usually be.

Apart from captions not being capitalised at all, there are instances where they are completely capitalised, either fully or just some specific words or expressions. The following examples illustrate this:

- *I just wanted to say THANK YOU.*

Here the first part of the sentence is written properly, but last two words are capitalised with the intention of highlighting them.

- *Atlanta owes me NOTHING !*

This is another example of capitalising completely only one word, in order to make it more noticeable.

- *MEET THE 10 @PAINTED.CO ARTISTS!*

In this case, the whole caption is capitalised and the author of the post opted to use an exclamation point to additionally emphasise it.

### 3.1.3. Punctuation

Another relevant feature noted in the analysed captions is the use of punctuation marks. In some instances, they were not used at all, whereas in some they were used, but inappropriately. There is also a third instance where punctuation marks were used excessively.

Here are several examples where no fitting punctuation mark was put or where it was used but incorrectly:

- *Paris, friends, food and @rarebeauty , oh what a dream!*

Author of this post put a comma after “@rarebeauty”, but there is a space before it, which is most likely an accidental mistake. Furthermore, a full stop would be more fitting in this example. Also, there is one comma missing after “oh”, which is an interjection that should be divided from the rest of the sentence.

- *“SERVING, SERVING, SERVING” whoever you are, thank you...you made my night lol*

This caption includes several mistakes with punctuation. Firstly, there should be a comma after the quote, in order to separate the embedded sentence “whoever you are”. Furthermore, the author of the caption did not separate the end of one sentence from the beginning of another one, nor did they use a full stop at the end of the second sentence.

- *Got attacked by a swarm of flies mosquitoes shortly after these were taken*

In this example, the end of the sentence is not marked with any punctuation mark.

- *We finally made it!!! Vegas nights are sometimes good for the soul!!!!*

On the other hand, this is one of the examples where there is an excessive use of punctuation signs, in this case exclamation marks.

- *Last night was the first night of my very first arena tour ever ..*

Instead of using three dots for the ellipsis mark, the author just used two and separated them from the rest of the sentence.

### 3.1.4. Abbreviated and Slang Expressions

Lastly, what also stuck out in these Instagram captions was the use of abbreviated word forms and slang expressions. They were not as common as the features mentioned earlier. McArthur described abbreviation as “the shortening of words and phrases and a result of such shortening” (McArthur, 1992, p. 2). The author also mentioned the two main types of this process – initialism and acronym – and mentioned other shortening methods such as clipping and blending, which can be used to form abbreviations.

Of all 100 captions that were observed, there were five instances of abbreviated expressions of some sort, and only three instances where slang expressions were used. This would mean that these occurrences were found in less than 10% captions.

These are abbreviated expressions which were noted:

- *TBT to blonde sel.*

This expression is an initialism, which means that the first letters were used to form a shortened form. “TBT” stands for “throwback to” and people use it when they post an old picture which has a sentimental value for them. This user posted an old photo when they had differently coloured hair.

- *#ad*

This type of abbreviated word is considered a shortening and it is used as a word itself nowadays. It stems from the word “advertisement” and was created by removing the rest of the letters after the second one.

- *Lol*
- *...you made my night, lol*

LOL is very commonly used expression, which originated even before social media platforms, when text messages became popular. This is also an initialism which stands for “laughing out loud”. Today, it is used both ironically and unironically.

- *'chella dump*

“Chella” is an abbreviated name for the famous American music festival Coachella. The process used to achieve this is shortening, also known as clipping.

Apart from abbreviated expressions, slang ones are also used by online community:

- *“SERVING, SERVING, SERVING” whoever you are, thank you...*

This is an example that has already been mentioned and it comes from an expression “to serve”. One could say that somebody is “serving a look”, for example, and it would mean that they look absolutely stunning in their outfit or make-up. In this instance, the author of the Instagram caption was complimented when someone said “SERVING, SERVING, SERVING”.

- *Looking bro’d out*

Another example of a slang is “to be bro’d out”. This expression stems from the expression “bro”, which comes from “brother”. To describe someone as “bro’d out” - means that they have dressed to look quite tough and intimidating.

- *‘Chella dump*

As previously explained, “Chella” is a name for music festival Coachella, whereas “dump” marks a so-called “photo dump”, which is an assembly of pictures that was put together and posted on social media platforms.

### 3.2. TikTok Captions

The second part of this analysis comprises TikTok captions that have been analysed in the period of two months. Although some findings are similar to those found on Instagram, there are several key differences. As on Instagram, examples found on TikTok also share peculiarities regarding punctuation, capitalisation, usage of emoticons and abbreviated forms. However, one component that was found on TikTok, and is not as common on Instagram, is the usage of fixed phrases and collocations specific for that social network. This component will be the main focus of this chapter.

#### 3.2.1. Emoticons

As seen beforehand on the example of Instagram, emoticons are something commonly used in communication on social media. Not only do the creators of digital content use them in their

videos and captions, but so do commenters who engage with this content. Here, situation was similar to that of Instagram, meaning that various emoticons were used in order to either symbolise an emotion or exaggerate a point.

Here are a several examples of emoticons which are commonly used on this social media platform:

- Sparkles emoticon

This emoticon is used to put an emphasis on something in a joking manner. On TikTok, people use it to express sarcasm and mockery, by putting a word or part of the sentence they want to emphasise in-between these sparkles ( ✨ ). It can be used to generally just put an emphasis on something.

An example of this is:

- *Millennials using iced coffee and throwback jams to speed up the **anxiety**.*

By putting the word “anxiety” between the sparkle emoticons, the creator of this video emphasised it, mocking themselves and a whole generation.

- Skull emoticon

Another commonly used emoticon in TikTok community is that of a skeleton skull ( 💀 ). It tends to be used in two ways – to either emphasise how humorous something is (“Dying of laughter”) or to emphasise how stupid someone finds something to be. Therefore, this emoticon is also used in a joking manner. TikTok users commonly leave a comment of a skull emoticon under videos that they find extremely funny.

- Clown emoticon

This is another instance where an emoticon is used for mockery. The clown emoticon ( 🤡 ) is used in situations when somebody wants to insult someone by calling them unintelligent or selfish.

- Upside-down smiley face emoticon

This emoticon ( 😏 ) is used to express dissatisfaction with something and it could be perceived as passive-aggressive. If someone was to describe the story of failing a test, getting cheated on, or anything unpleasant, they could use this emoticon along with it.

### 3.2.2. Capitalisation and punctuation

As it was the case with Instagram, TikTok users do not always follow the rules of capitalisation and punctuation when creating their videos or commenting on them. Most of the video descriptions are written without any capitalised words, whereas the caption on the video itself does sometimes have the first word capitalised, but it is often not the case. It is the same case with punctuation, which is commonly left out, and rarely used incorrectly.

Here are several examples of this:

- *what doesn't kill me makes me funnier*
- *when you accidentally match with all of your besties...*

In the first example, the creator of the video left out both capitalisation and punctuation for their video caption. In the example below, there is an ellipsis symbol, but it is not used in a correct manner, since it should be put at the end of a sentence, which this is not. Capitalization rules are also neglected.

- *Therapy isn't enough. I need to fight the doctor who put me on the pill at THIRTEEN bc I was "moody"*

In this example, only one word is fully capitalised, in order to emphasise it, whereas other ones are not. Furthermore, there is a full stop missing at the end on the second sentence.

### 3.2.3. Abbreviations

Although abbreviations are common both on Instagram and TikTok, they seem to occur more frequently on TikTok. More specifically, initialisms are quite a common occurrence. Here is a table of examples, which includes initialisms commonly found on this platform, what they stand for and what they usually mean:

<b>INITIALISM</b>	<b>FULL FORM</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
- TBH	- To be honest	- Used to give honest opinion on something
- SMH	- Shaking my head	- Expresses disapproval of something
- RN	- Right now	- Emphasises urgency or time
- LMAO	- Laughing my ass off	- expresses either someone finding something funny or it is used sarcastically
- ATM	- At the moment	- Another time-marking initialism
- NGL	- Not gonna lie	- Being truthful about something
- IMO	- In my opinion	- Signifies someone is stating their personal opinion

Initialisms are confined to online spheres and are rarely heard in live communications. They serve a purpose of shortening text messages and comments and enabling quick-paced online communication.

#### 3.2.4. Phrases and collocations

Phrases and collocations are perhaps the most notable thing about TikTok communication. These are essentially expressions which are usually fixed and are impossible to understand without surrounding context. They are quite favoured among TikTok users and can be found in both videos and comments on the platform.

Several examples of these expressions are:

- It's about to get lit/this is lit



- *This party on Friday is going to be lit.*

This is a phrase which is used to describe something, most commonly an event of some sorts, which is very fun.

- To body something

- *You have bodied this dance.*

It is a phrase used to compliment someone, telling them how they have done a great job with something.

- To be deceased

- *I'm deceased!*

It goes hand-in-hand with the previously discussed skull emoji and signifies somebody being quite shocked, both positively and negatively.

- To eat and leave no crumbs

- *You ate this dance and left no crumbs.*

The meaning is the same as with the second example. It compliments somebody for doing something perfectly.

- To keep the receipts

- *I have kept the receipts of him cheating.*

To keep the receipts means to have proof of something happening.

- To live your best life

- *He is living his best life in Ibiza.*

It signifies somebody having great time at this point of their life.

- Hot girl summer

- *I am ready to have my hot girl summer.*

This describes a phase, a summer, filled with fun and adventures, meant to boost one's confidence.

- Beige/red/green flags

- *His green flag is that he always buys me flowers.*

Green flags represent positive characteristics of someone, most commonly a love interest, whereas red represent negative. If one talks about a beige flag, it is a trait they have mixed feelings about.

- That-/Pick me-/Girls' girl

- *Marie is such a girls' girl.*

These are also meant to describe someone's traits. If one is "that girl", it is just a new expression for "it girl" or a trendsetter. On the other hand, a "pick me girl" is someone who craves attention and validation in an irritating manner. Lastly, a "girls' girl" is a name for a girl that acts well towards other women and does not put them down.

- To throw shade

- *I don't wanna throw shade, but that dress is ugly.*

This means to comment on someone in a mocking or embarrassing manner.

- To spill tea/Piping hot tea

- *I have some tea to spill/some piping hot tea.*

These are quite similar and they signify gossip. To spill tea means to spread juicy gossip around, whereas piping hot tea is that gossip per se.

- To fire shots

- *He fired shots at me with those comments.*

The meaning is similar to those of throwing shade. It means that somebody is making unpleasant comments.

- To do something for the plot

- *I didn't really want to go to the camp, but I did it for the plot.*

This expression means that someone is doing something merely to get a good story out of it, mostly because they feel bored.

These phrases and collocations emerged with the popularisation of social media platforms and are, therefore, bound to those platforms in terms of their semantic. These are not phrases that can be found in most English language dictionaries.

## 4. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate how social media platforms, which are highly popular today, affect the English. With this goal in mind, 100 posts from Instagram were collected, as well as numerous videos from TikTok, in a span of two months, in order to analyse their characteristics.

Although profiles taken from Instagram are those of people from English-speaking countries, the results are in accordance with the ones from Čičmir (2020). A number of peculiarities was found in these short descriptions, especially regarding punctuation and capitalisation, while grammatical errors were rare. Taking this into account, it could be concluded that a lot of these mistakes were made because of the casual environment that these platforms offer and because users often post in a rush, using their smartphones.

Furthermore, the usage of emoticons was popular on both platforms, which may lead to the conclusion that people feel the need to express their emotions through these, as well as add a certain visual aspect to their comment. Rusfandi and Kurniati (2020) note that students really feel the need to express their emotions, in various ways. Dimson (2015) points out, that nearly half of the comments and captions on Instagram contain some type of emoticon. The results of this research are in line with that, given that 45% of the analysed Instagram captions contained an emoticon, or several of them.

Beside emoticons, social media users are prone to using abbreviated forms of words, mostly initialisms. This was also discussed in López Rúa (2005), who stated that, because of its construction, English favours initialisation as the main abbreviation technique. It may be concluded that they serve the purpose of practicality as well, since they are quicker to type and quite memorable. Furthermore, López Rúa (2005) mentions that the main topics these expressions are used for are those of life, love, communication and sex, which are common topics behind most of abbreviations found on TikTok.

The factors which may have influenced the results of this research are that Instagram profiles taken into account were those of high-profile celebrities or influencers, who usually have a whole team behind them, hired to control the things they share on their accounts. However, given that most of the captions were written quite informally, they seemed like a proper fit.

Also, since TikTok's algorithm generates different videos for each user, depending on a number of factors, not everyone will encounter the same phrases and expressions as mentioned in this study.

Nevertheless, this research does offer a perspective on communication prevalent on these platforms and the degree to which it differs from day-to-day language. What could also be observed, regarding this topic, is how much demographics have to do with the expressions used on social media, as well as interests and occupations of users present there.

## 5. Conclusion

English is a leading lingua franca of today's world, and as such is the most prevalent language on social media platforms. Just like all the other languages, it continues to evolve greatly, especially under the influences of digitalisation. Along with this, comes a vast number of new expressions which emerge on social media such as Instagram or TikTok. These expressions do not reflect standard English language, since they do stray from it in many aspects, both semantical and orthographical.

On these platforms, users usually opt for expressions which are shortened and connected with every-day topics of love, communication and similar. They tend to be less cautious of the way they express themselves because of the quick-paced nature of these networks. Although these expressions do, for the most part, stay in the sphere of Internet, their influence on English language as a whole is undeniable.

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