

## Structural Types and Social Functions of English Slang in YouTube Vlogs

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i4.2809>

\*Siti Kholilah, Ruminda, Erfan Muhammad Fauzi<sup>abc</sup>

<sup>123</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: [sikhulbuldan@gmail.com](mailto:sikhulbuldan@gmail.com)

### A B S T R A C T

Language functions as a dynamic social practice through which individuals construct identities, negotiate relationships, and express group membership, with slang representing one of its most flexible linguistic forms. Although previous studies have extensively examined slang in written digital communication, comparative analyses of spoken slang used by urban and rural content creators remain limited. This study aims to investigate the structural types, distributional patterns, and social functions of English slang in urban and rural YouTube vlogs. A qualitative comparative approach was employed by analysing transcriptions from eight unscripted vlog videos. The data were examined using Allan and Burrige's (2006) structural classification of slang and Eble's (1996) functional framework. The findings demonstrate a clear structural distinction between the two groups. Urban creators predominantly employ structural reduction, including clipping and acronyms, together with fresh and creative slang expressions. In contrast, rural creators rely primarily on semantic innovation through fresh and creative expressions. Functionally, urban creators use slang to project identity and signal subcultural affiliation, whereas rural creators emphasize sociability and reduced formality to foster interpersonal closeness. These findings highlight the continuing influence of geographical and cultural backgrounds on informal language practices across contemporary digital media.

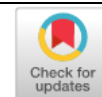
**Keywords:** *English Slang, Youtube Vlogs, Urban Language, Rural Language, Sociolinguistics*

#### Article History:

Received 06<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Accepted 29<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Published 02<sup>nd</sup> July 2026



## INTRODUCTION

Language is not only used for communication but also for expressing identity and building social relationships. According to Yule (2006), language is dynamic and continuously develops in response to changes in society. One form of this development is slang, which is commonly used in informal communication and often reflects the social characteristics of its users. The growth of digital media has made slang increasingly visible on social networking platforms, particularly YouTube, where content creators communicate through spontaneous and conversational vlogs (Alabdaly et al., 2022). Slang is defined as a form of linguistic innovation through which particular social groups express collective cultural identity while distinguishing themselves from more formal language use. In digital contexts, the spread of slang has accelerated considerably due to the increasing influence of online communication. Derioh et al. (2023) Note that exposure to social media platforms contributes significantly to the adoption and circulation of slang expressions. As a result, slang has become an important feature of digital communication and a valuable subject for sociolinguistic investigation.

Social and geographical factors influence language variation. Trudgill (2000) argues that speakers from different social environments may develop distinct linguistic patterns that reflect the characteristics of their communities. This perspective is particularly relevant to the study of slang, as its use may vary according to speakers' social backgrounds and everyday experiences. Therefore, examining slang used by urban and rural YouTube vloggers can provide a better understanding of how social and geographical contexts influence language use in digital communication.

This study adopts a structural framework of slang. They classify slang into five categories: Fresh and Creative, Imitative, Acronym, Clipping, and Flippant. Fresh and Creative slang refers to newly created expressions with distinctive meanings commonly used in informal settings. Imitative slang originates from existing words or expressions whose meanings remain closely related to their original forms. Acronym slang consists of abbreviations formed from initial letters. Clipping refers to shortened forms of existing words, and humorous or irreverent expressions characterize Flippant slang.

In addition to its structural characteristics, slang also serves various social functions. identifies four major functions of slang: Identity Projection, Sociability, Subcultural Coding, and Lowering Situational Formality. Through these functions, slang enables speakers to express group membership, establish social connections, and create a more informal communicative atmosphere. Such functions are particularly evident in digital communication, where language users frequently adapt expressions to suit the interactive nature of online platforms (Pilipei & Pylypenko, 2020).

Urban environments are often associated with rapid linguistic innovation and the emergence of trend-driven expressions shaped by modern lifestyles and digital networks (Hoogervorst, 2014). While rural communities tend to use informal language in ways that emphasize interpersonal closeness, local identity, and community solidarity (Belanche et al., 2021). Although digital platforms allow speakers from different geographical backgrounds to participate in shared online spaces, geographical context continues to influence linguistic behaviour. Consequently, urban and rural content creators may employ slang differently despite using the same communication platform.

YouTube vlogs provide particularly valuable data for examining this phenomenon because they capture relatively natural and unscripted spoken interaction. However, most previous studies have focused on slang in written communication, such as song lyrics, online comments, and instant messaging (Hanifah & Anggraeni, 2024; Khotimah et al., 2024). Even studies examining spoken language, such as Mendrofa et al. (2025), primarily rely on scripted data rather than spontaneous speech. As a result, comparative studies of spoken slang used by urban and rural YouTube content creators remain limited.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining English slang in urban and rural YouTube vlogs. Drawing on Allan & Burridge, (2006) structural classification and Eble (1996) functional framework, the study investigates the structural types and social functions of slang used by content creators from different social and geographical backgrounds. Specifically, it addresses two research questions: (1) What types of English slang are used in urban and rural YouTube daily vlog and lifestyle content, and how does their distribution differ between urban and rural content creators? (2) What social functions does English slang serve in urban and rural YouTube content?

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach to examine the structural characteristics and social functions of English slang in YouTube vlog content across urban and rural contexts. Creswell (2014) argues that qualitative research is well-suited to exploring phenomena in their natural settings, with a focus on how individuals assign meaning to their communicative actions. Because this study aims to capture the nuances of spontaneous spoken language as it occurs in digital interaction and to draw meaningful comparisons between urban and rural creators, a qualitative comparative design provides an appropriate analytical foundation.

The primary data were drawn from linguistic transcriptions of eight YouTube vlog videos produced by four American content creators. To ensure a robust comparative analysis, this study employed purposive sampling at both the channel and video selection levels. Channel selection was guided by the principle of maximum variation, aiming to capture the sharpest possible contrast between metropolitan and agrarian lifestyles. The urban cohort comprises Kelsey Simone and Taylor Bell, independent creators who document fast-paced lifestyles and

career routines in New York City. Conversely, the rural cohort comprises *More Than Farmer* and *Our Small-Town Life*, creators engaged in homesteading, agriculture, and family-centred routines in Ohio and Alabama.

Video selection prioritized conversational richness and narrative flow over strict chronological completeness. To ensure clarity and traceability, the eight selected videos were coded based on their geographical context: U for Urban and R for Rural. The Urban cohort comprises two videos from Kelsey Simone titled *Day in my life - Coffee with my husband, Floral shops, and testing new makeup!* (U1, duration: 21:47) and *Day in my life - Morning routine, Styling for honeymoon, Book talk, & staying home!* (U2, duration: 21:39); and two videos from Taylor Bell titled *NYC VLOG: Spring Day in the Life Exploring the City* (U3, duration: 15:49) and *NYC VLOG: Winter Day in the Life Exploring the City + Achieving New Goals* (U4, duration: 14:48). Conversely, the Rural cohort consists of two videos from *More Than Farmer* titled *Day in the Life of a Small Homestead (Daily Spring Routine)* (R1, duration: 23:19) and *Day in the Life of a Small Homestead (early spring)* (R2, duration: 23:34); and two videos from *Our Small Town Life* titled *Life in the DEEP SOUTH... Old Fashioned Preserving, Sauerkraut, & Mishaps* (R3, duration: 23:47) and *Day in Rural Alabama | Alabama Strawberry Festival, Thrive Haul, Garden, Bees, and More* (R4, duration: 20:00). These specific videos were purposively chosen because they feature extended, natural monologues where the creators speak directly to the camera, share personal anecdotes, and express emotions. Furthermore, only videos uploaded between 2024 and 2025 were included to ensure the data reflects contemporary slang usage.

Audio tracks from the eight selected videos were manually transcribed following standard English orthographic conventions, with careful attention to preserving informal expressions, non-standard vocabulary, and contextual cues relevant to interpreting slang meaning.

## Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, all transcripts were read repeatedly to identify candidate slang expressions. Allan & Burrige (2006) Criteria guided this identification; candidate items had to demonstrate deliberate semantic innovation and social group specificity. Validated tokens were then classified according to Allan & Burrige (2006) five structural categories: Fresh and Creative, Imitative, Acronym, Clipping, and Flippant slang. Second, the classified tokens were tallied and compared across the two geographical cohorts to identify distributional patterns and morphological preferences specific to each group. Third, each token was examined within its immediate conversational context using Eble's framework to determine which of the four social functions, Identity Projection, Sociability, Subcultural Coding, or Lowering Situational Formality, the expression fulfilled. Where the communicative context supported more than one function, both were recorded.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Types of English Slang in Urban and Rural Vlogs

Applying Allan & Burrige (2006) criteria to the combined corpus yielded 17 authentic slang expressions: 12 from the urban dataset and 5 from the rural dataset. As shown in Table 1, four structural categories were identified, while Imitative slang was absent from both corpora.

Table 1

Slang type	Urban	Rural	Total
Fresh and creative	8	4	12
Clipping	1	1	2
Acronym	1	0	1
Flippant	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>17</b>

## Fresh and Creative Slang

Fresh and Creative slang constitutes the largest structural group in both corpora, accounting for 12 of the 17 total tokens. This category as covering instances in which existing words acquire new semantic meanings or entirely new forms are coined to meet novel social needs.

In the urban corpus, eight tokens fall into this category: *girly*, *hot girl*, *depping*, *banger*, *get this bread*, *geek out*, *flex*, and *beast*. A prominent pattern here is semantic shift via zero-derivation, in which nouns are repurposed as verbs to describe modern digital behaviors.

"Literally half the mess in this closet is I'm depping so much stuff" (U2, 15:42).

The token *depping* transforms a proper noun (the resale app Depop) into a verb meaning to sell second-hand items online. The longer context reveals that the speaker is surrounded by clothes she wants to sell, justifying the morphological shift from noun to verb, which qualifies it as Fresh and Creative slang.

In the rural corpus, four tokens were identified: *bonkers*, *chickies*, *burp*, and *haul*. Unlike urban tokens, which draw on internet tropes, rural tokens heavily use personification and affectionate morphology to describe domestic and agricultural realities.

"Once a day, you open it and let the gas escape... One, to burp it and let the gas out." (R3, 09:00).

The speaker repurposes "*burp*," a term conventionally associated with human biology, to describe releasing gas from a fermenting jar. The context of jar maintenance contrasts sharply with the human body, making the deliberate personification obvious and qualifying it as Fresh and Creative slang.

## Clipping Slang

Clipping as the reduction of a multi-syllabic word to a more compact form while retaining the original meaning, appeared in both corpora but with distinct cultural motivations.

In the urban corpus, one token was identified: "*fits*" (from *outfits*). This reflects the linguistic brevity demanded by fast-paced digital platforms.

"it is actually really warm, so I don't need the scarf, but it is kind of like what made the fit, or was it cute without the scarf" (U1, 13:27).

The term *fits* short *outfits* to create a more casual register. The context of evaluating clothing aesthetics shows how the speaker compresses the word to match the conversational nature of internet fashion communities.

In the rural corpus, one token was also identified: *kraut* (from sauerkraut). Unlike the digital compression seen in urban data, *Kraut* reflects a traditional, oral abbreviation used in domestic cooking contexts.

"Y'all want to come hang out with me and make some kraut?" (R3, 02:16).

The inviting context suggests that this clipping is used to create a domestic, cozy atmosphere rather than to convey digital speed.

## Acronym Slang

Acronym slang involves abbreviations formed from the initial letters of words (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

In the urban corpus, one token was found: TBR (To Be Read).

"I have a lot on my TBR, but I would still love more book recommendations" (U2, 12:52).

TBR is strongly associated with the online literary community (BookTok). In digital spoken discourse, vloggers often internalize text-based internet culture into their spoken narratives. Here, the speaker uses the acronym as a quick, text-like abbreviation that signals her integration into digital subcultures.

In the rural corpus, no Acronym slang was identified (0 tokens). This absence highlights that rural creators are less influenced by the text-based, rapid-fire abbreviations of internet culture, favouring fuller word structures instead.

## Flippant Slang

Flippant slang is characterized as deliberately playful, irreverent, or humorous verbal expression.

In the urban corpus, two tokens were found: "*thick*" and "*turtle out*".

"*She's thick, which I did not know when I ordered her, but she's making my way slowly but surely*" (U4, 13:34).

Used by the creator to describe a 600-page book, *thick* is traditionally body-image slang. The pronoun "she" referring to an inanimate object (a book), combined with the word "thick", creates a deliberately comedic mismatch between human body expectations and a novel, fitting the category of Flippant slang perfectly.

In the rural corpus, no Flippant slang was identified (0 tokens). This suggests that rural creators prefer warmth and sociability over absurdity or irrelevance in their humor, avoiding slang that might be perceived as overly detached.

## Structural and Distributional Differences in Slang Use

Urban creators produced more than twice as many tokens as their rural counterparts (12 vs. 5), suggesting that informal, non-standard vocabulary plays a more prominent structural role in urban lifestyle vlogging, where fast-paced commentary on aesthetics and daily routines appears to invite greater linguistic experimentation. Rural creators, while not avoiding slang, deploy it more selectively.

The distribution of Clipping and Acronyms marks the sharpest contrast between the two groups. Urban creators readily adopt abbreviated forms such as *fits* and *TBR*, consistent with the linguistic brevity that characterizes text-based internet subcultures and platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. This pattern aligns with Mendrofa et al. (2025) finding that modern digital subcultures exhibit a significantly greater variety of slang predominantly characterized by structural reduction, and is further reinforced by Sabbila & Mansyur (2021), who identify smartphone penetration and internet-driven trends as primary catalysts for urban youth to replicate and compress linguistic forms rapidly.

The complete absence of Acronyms in the rural data points toward a different communicative preference. Rather than compressing existing words, rural creators extend and repurpose them a tendency that reflects the different media cultures surrounding each lifestyle context. This pattern corroborates Gordon (2019) assertion that rural communities exhibit a distinct linguistic resilience, maintaining fuller word structures to preserve communal intimacy, a finding also consistent with Afni (2022) sociolinguistic study of youth communication in remote village settings.

Even within the shared category of Fresh and Creative slang, the lexical sources diverge along environmental lines. Urban tokens tend toward the abstract, psychological, or aesthetic (*hot girl*, *flex*, *geek out*), drawing on vocabulary from virtual social spaces and youth media discourse. Rural tokens, by contrast, are anchored in concrete physical experience: *bonkers* describes unruly plant growth, and *chickees* affectionately infantilize livestock. Both groups engage in genuine linguistic innovation; the difference lies in the experiential roots of that creativity.

## Social Functions of Slang

Analyzing the data through (Eble, 1996) framework reveals that slang consistently creates informality in both contexts, though the specific interpersonal goals it serves differ considerably across the two groups.

Table 2

Social Function	Urban	Rural
Identity Projection	5 tokens	1 token
Sociability	3 tokens	2 tokens
Subcultural Coding	2 tokens	0 tokens
Lowering Situational Formality	2 tokens	2 tokens

### Identity Projection

Eble notes that slang offers an efficient means for speakers to construct and display a particular social identity.

In the urban corpus, this function is heavily dominant, represented by five tokens: *girly*, *hot girl*, *get this bread*, *flex*, and *beast*. These expressions allow urban creators to position themselves within contemporary metropolitan and internet culture.

"It has been a lot harder to get out of bed when it's this cold, but we Prevail, let's get this bread." (U4, 00:05).

Rather than literally seeking food, the phrase *gets this bread* follows the word "Prevail" in the context of waking up to work in the cold. This communicates a lifestyle centered on ambition and pushing through hardship, projecting a recognizable identity associated with urban hustle culture.

In the rural corpus, only one token serves this function: *haul*.

"I have a Thrive Market haul that came in. I'm going to share that with you." (R4, 01:07).

Used to describe a package of items shown on camera, *haul* allows the rural creator to project a temporary identity as a YouTube creator. However, unlike urban slang that focuses on self-branding, this phrase is immediately followed by sharing it with the audience, keeping the focus on community.

### Sociability

The function of Sociability where slang is used to validate interlocutors, foster warmth, and build solidarity) is the most dominant in the rural corpus, and is also present in the urban corpus.

In the urban corpus, three tokens serve this function: *banger*, *geek out*, and *fits*. These expressions build a casual, relatable connection with the audience.

"I'm definitely not a tech channel but I will say through having this job I've definitely become more technical like I geek out on laptop specs." (U3, 11:03).

By using "geek out," the creator shares a personal enthusiasm for something technical. This vulnerable admission invites the audience to share in her excitement, building a friendly rapport and fulfilling the function of Sociability (Eble, 1996).

In the rural corpus, two tokens serve this function: "*chickies*" and "*kraut*". These tokens foster a strong sense of community warmth and validate the viewer's presence.

"Here we go, chickies, it's really awesome how this Grass Works after the broilers is on it." (R1, 02:23)

By using the diminutive *chickies* instead of "chickens" right before explaining agricultural processes, the speaker creates a sense of closeness and affection. Such language strengthens interpersonal relationships and group solidarity, fulfilling the function of Sociability (Eble, 1996).

### Subcultural Coding

Subcultural Coding as slang that serves as a symbolic boundary marker for in-group members and remains less accessible to outsiders.(Eble, 1996)

In the urban corpus, two tokens serve this function: *TBR* and *dipping*.

"I have a lot on my TBR, but I would still love more book recommendations." (U2, 12:52).

While immediately recognizable to the online book community, *TBR* is opaque to outsiders. It functions as Subcultural Coding, signalling shared cultural knowledge and establishing a boundary between the in-group and out-group.

In the rural corpus, no tokens served this function (0 tokens). The complete absence of Subcultural Coding in the rural data suggests that rural creators prioritize inclusive, accessible communication over exclusive boundary-marking, aligning with the community-centric values of rural life.

### Lowering Situational Formality

The function of Lowering Situational Formality is well represented in both corpora, where slang is used to soften situations and make them feel more approachable. (Eble, 1996)

In the urban corpus, two tokens serve this function: "*thick*" and "*turtle out*". These expressions reduce the register of everyday commentary and make content feel more approachable.

"Till next time, *turtle out* all right, let's put these back." (U3, 14:40).

Used as a sign-off at the very end of the video, this absurd expression removes the formality of a standard goodbye, replacing it with playful informality.

In the rural corpus, two tokens serve this function: *bonkers* and *burp*. These expressions soften potentially stressful agricultural or domestic tasks.

"My seedlings have been going *bonkers*. I don't feel like they're as green and lush as I would like them to be." (R2, 17:11).

Rather than seriously complaining about unruly plant growth, the speaker uses *bonkers* to lower the register humorously. This softens the situation, fulfilling the function of Lowering Situational Formality Eble (1996) making agricultural struggles feel approachable rather than daunting.

### Discussion

The findings confirm that digital platforms do not erase underlying sociolinguistic variation. Structural preferences and functional orientations both remain closely tied to the speaker's physical environment, daily rhythms, and cultural values. The high proportion of Fresh and Creative slang across both groups points to linguistic modification as a defining feature of the vlog genre, regardless of geography. The source material for that creativity, however, follows a clear environmental divide: urban creators draw on social media algorithms and metropolitan youth scenes, while rural creators draw on agricultural and domestic experience. This pattern supports Derioh et al. (2023) who argue that physical and regional background continues to shape linguistic variation even within highly globalized digital channels.

The structural contrast regarding Clipping and Acronyms reinforces this argument. Allan & Burrige (2006) identify clipping as a productive mechanism in contemporary slang, driven by the demand for verbal economy in fast-paced communication. Urban speakers' adoption of *fits* and *TBR* reflects this orientation in speech, echoing the compressed, text-like register of platform interaction. The rural absence of these forms is not incidental; it reflects a communicative environment less governed by the logic of digital brevity.

The absence of Imitative slang across both corpora warrants further reflection. Imitative slang, which relies on phonetic or semantic resemblance to existing words, tends to emerge most visibly in densely networked speech communities where speakers share a rich common reference pool (Allan & Burrige, 2006). The unscripted, monologic nature of vlog content may limit the conditions under which such forms naturally arise. Similarly, Acronym slang is more strongly associated with written digital communication text messages, comment sections, and captions where visual abbreviation carries practical value. Its presence only in the urban data is consistent with the genre's oral character blending with text-based internet culture. In contrast, its absence from rural spoken vlog discourse reflects a more traditional oral character.

Overall, the divergence mirrors the distinct relational goals of each cohort. Urban creators employ slang as a resource for self-branding, identity construction, and subcultural boundary-marking, consistent with Eble (1996) account of social positioning. Rural creators use slang as a tool for solidarity and accessibility, aligning with Afni (2022) observation that informal language in rural communities primarily serves to sustain egalitarian bonds. The findings indicate that content creators continue to reflect their local backgrounds through language use, even when communicating on the same digital platform. This suggests that geographical and cultural influences remain relevant in shaping linguistic variation in digital communication.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the structural types, distribution, and social functions of English slang in urban and rural YouTube vlogs using Allan and Burrige's typological framework and Eble's functional model. Four slang types were identified: Fresh and Creative, Clipping, Acronym, and Flippant, with Fresh and Creative expressions dominating both datasets. Urban creators produced more slang tokens and uniquely employed Acronym and Flippant slang, reflecting the influence of digital youth culture. In contrast, rural creators favored semantic innovation rooted in agricultural and domestic experiences, using slang primarily to foster sociability and reduce formality. The findings demonstrate that geographical background and cultural context continue to shape linguistic behavior despite shared digital platforms. This study contributes to sociolinguistic and digital discourse research by highlighting regional variation in online slang use and its social functions. However, the findings are limited by the small corpus, the inclusion of only four creators, and potential age-related influences. Future research should examine larger, more balanced datasets across multiple social media platforms while considering variables such as age, gender, and ethnicity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to ... for the invaluable guidance and feedback provided throughout this research, and to.

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