

From Social Slang to Standard Lexicon: A Corpus-Based Analysis of the Mainstream Adoption of New Verbs in English

Miloslav T. Novotný¹ & Zdeněk R. Dvořáček¹

¹ Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Correspondence: Zdeněk R. Dvořáček, Masaryk University, Czech Republic.

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Abstract

Language is a dynamic system that continuously evolves to reflect social, technological, and cultural changes. One of the most intriguing aspects of linguistic evolution is the transition of slang verbs into standard English, a process shaped by multiple factors, including digital media, cultural relevance, grammatical adaptability, and institutional validation. This study employs a corpus-based linguistic analysis to examine how verbs originating in informal speech and online discourse become widely accepted in mainstream language. Through a detailed analysis of selected case studies—including *to Google*, *to binge-watch*, *to ghost*, and *to unfriend*—this research explores the mechanisms by which new verbs gain traction, shift from niche to general usage, and ultimately achieve formal recognition in dictionaries and academic discourse. Findings indicate that digital communication platforms accelerate lexical diffusion, while words that describe emerging behaviors are more likely to endure and become embedded in everyday speech. The study also highlights the role of grammatical integration in determining the success of slang verbs, as well as the influence of institutional endorsement in legitimizing linguistic change. By mapping the trajectory of slang verbs from informal origins to standardized lexicon, this research contributes to the broader understanding of language evolution in the digital age and provides a framework for analyzing future trends in lexical innovation and standardization.

Keywords: lexical innovation, slang verbs, digital communication, grammatical adaptation, mainstream adoption

1. Introduction

Language is a constantly evolving system that mirrors the social, cultural, and technological shifts within a given society. Over time, new words and expressions emerge, often originating as informal slang used by specific social groups before gradually integrating into the standard lexicon. One of the most fascinating aspects of

linguistic change is the transformation of slang into widely accepted vocabulary, particularly in the case of verbs that describe new actions, behaviors, or cultural phenomena. From the advent of digital communication to shifts in social interaction, slang verbs have increasingly found their way into everyday discourse, academic writing, and even formalized

dictionary entries.

The process by which slang verbs transition into mainstream English is neither arbitrary nor instantaneous; rather, it follows a pattern influenced by multiple linguistic and sociocultural factors. The frequency of use, widespread societal adoption, media influence, and grammatical adaptability all play crucial roles in determining whether a verb originating in slang will persist and gain legitimacy in standard English. Some verbs—such as *to Google* or *to binge-watch*—have emerged in response to technological advancements, while others—such as *to ghost* or *to unfriend*—reflect evolving social behaviors, particularly in the digital era. These verbs, initially confined to niche communities or subcultures, have expanded their usage beyond their original contexts, becoming recognized and utilized across various linguistic domains.

The increasing digitization of communication has further accelerated this process. Social media platforms, digital forums, and online entertainment have created an environment where new words spread rapidly, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. Words that were once confined to specific demographics—such as internet users, gamers, or youth subcultures—now permeate mainstream discourse through digital content, mass media, and globalized interactions. The interplay between formal and informal registers has also blurred traditional distinctions between slang and standard lexicon, making it more common for words to move fluidly between colloquial and academic settings.

This study explores the phenomenon of verb adoption from social slang into standard English using a corpus-based linguistic approach. By analyzing large textual datasets, we can track the trajectory of emerging verbs, examining their frequency, semantic shifts, and syntactic integration over time. The corpus-based method allows us to observe patterns of usage across different registers, from informal social media posts to journalistic writing and scholarly discourse. Additionally, this study investigates the broader implications of lexical standardization, addressing questions such as: What factors contribute to the longevity and widespread acceptance of a slang verb? How do grammatical structures and linguistic norms shape the incorporation of new verbs into standard English? And to what extent does institutional validation, such as dictionary

inclusion, serve as the final marker of mainstream adoption?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between social slang and formal language evolution. As digital communication continues to drive linguistic change, studying the integration of slang verbs into mainstream English not only enhances our comprehension of contemporary language shifts but also offers insights into the future trajectory of English lexicon expansion.

2. Theoretical Framework

Language evolves through continuous interaction between social, cultural, and technological influences. One of the key drivers of linguistic change is lexical innovation, which occurs when new words or meanings are created to describe emerging concepts, behaviors, or phenomena. The process of lexical innovation is particularly evident in verbs, as new actions or digital behaviors necessitate the creation of words to describe them. Many of these innovations originate as slang, often confined to specific subcultures, age groups, or communities before gradually permeating mainstream discourse. Over time, some of these slang terms are standardized and become part of the formal lexicon, appearing in dictionaries and being used in professional, academic, and journalistic writing.

The transition from slang to standard lexicon is a complex process influenced by several linguistic, social, and institutional factors. This theoretical framework explores the mechanisms underlying lexical innovation and standardization, focusing on four key factors: frequency of use, media influence, grammatical adaptation, and institutional endorsement.

2.1 Lexical Innovation and the Role of Slang

Lexical innovation occurs in response to societal needs, technological advancements, and shifts in cultural behaviors. Slang, as a major source of lexical innovation, functions as a linguistic laboratory where new expressions are tested, modified, and either abandoned or adopted by wider audiences. Slang verbs often emerge in subcultural communities such as youth groups, online gaming networks, internet forums, and creative industries. These words tend to be informal, playful, and context-specific, often developing new meanings through metaphor, semantic shift, or abbreviation.

For instance, the verb *to ghost*—originally meaning to disappear suddenly—was repurposed in digital communication to describe the act of cutting off contact without explanation, particularly in dating and social interactions. Similarly, *to binge-watch* emerged in response to the rise of streaming platforms, describing a new form of media consumption. These innovations fill linguistic gaps by providing succinct terms for new social realities.

However, not all slang terms achieve long-term survival. Some remain niche expressions or fade into obscurity when their cultural relevance diminishes. The factors determining which words persist and which disappear are central to understanding lexical standardization.

2.2 Lexical Standardization and Its Key Influences

Lexical standardization refers to the process by which an initially informal or non-standard word becomes widely accepted in mainstream language. This process does not happen randomly but follows identifiable linguistic and social patterns.

(a) Frequency of Use

One of the most critical factors in lexical standardization is **usage frequency**. A word that appears frequently across different communicative contexts—informal speech, social media, journalistic writing, and academic discourse—has a higher chance of being recognized as part of the standard lexicon. Corpus studies have shown that when a slang verb crosses a certain threshold of usage, it is more likely to be accepted into formal language.

For example, *to Google* became a standard verb because of its overwhelming usage in everyday communication. Originally a brand name, the verb gained traction due to the widespread need to describe online searching. By analyzing corpora such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC), linguists can track the increasing frequency of a verb over time, identifying trends in its mainstream adoption.

(b) Media and Digital Communication Influence

The modern media landscape, particularly digital and social media platforms, plays a vital role in accelerating lexical adoption. Previously, new words spread through spoken language, print media, and literary works, often taking decades to gain recognition. Today, platforms

like Twitter, TikTok, Reddit, and Instagram serve as catalysts for rapid linguistic change.

When slang verbs are used by influential figures—such as celebrities, journalists, content creators, or politicians—they gain visibility and legitimacy. Memes, viral content, and hashtags further amplify word adoption. Consider how **to cancel** (in the sense of “cancel culture”) gained traction through social media discourse, demonstrating how digital platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination and normalization of new linguistic forms.

In addition to informal media, mainstream journalism and entertainment serve as bridges between slang and formal language. When words appear in reputable sources like *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, or academic journals, they gain credibility and move closer to standardization.

(c) Grammatical Adaptation and Syntactic Integration

For a slang verb to transition into standard usage, it must conform to existing grammatical structures within English. Verbs must follow regular morphological patterns, allowing for conjugation across tenses and agreement with subjects. A word that cannot easily integrate into the verb system is less likely to be widely adopted.

For example, *to binge-watch* successfully adapted to English grammar because it could be conjugated as a regular verb (*binge-watches*, *binge-watched*, *binge-watching*). Conversely, some slang verbs struggle with grammatical adaptation due to irregular formation or pronunciation constraints, limiting their integration into formal English.

Linguistic researchers use collocation analysis to examine how new verbs interact with other words in natural discourse. If a slang verb consistently appears in syntactic structures that align with existing English conventions, its likelihood of standardization increases.

(d) Institutional Endorsement and Dictionary Inclusion

The final stage of lexical standardization often involves institutional validation, particularly through dictionaries, style guides, and academic publications. Major dictionaries such as *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *Merriam-Webster*, and *Cambridge Dictionary* play a crucial role in determining whether a word has achieved full

linguistic acceptance.

Dictionary inclusion is typically based on:

- 1) Evidence from linguistic corpora showing widespread and sustained usage.
- 2) Diversity of use across different text types (spoken, written, formal, informal).
- 3) Semantic stability, meaning the word's meaning remains consistent over time.
- 4) Once a verb is listed in major dictionaries, it is considered part of standard English and is more likely to be used in formal writing, government documents, and educational materials.

Beyond dictionaries, academic publications and linguistic research further legitimize words by analyzing their development, defining their semantic properties, and incorporating them into discussions on language change.

3. Methodology

A corpus-based linguistic approach provides a systematic and empirical method for tracking the evolution of slang verbs into standard lexicon. Unlike anecdotal observations, corpus linguistics allows for large-scale analysis of linguistic data drawn from real-world texts, capturing patterns in word frequency, usage context, and syntactic integration over time. This methodology enables us to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the mainstream adoption of new verbs in English.

This study employs a multi-stage corpus-based approach to examine the trajectory of slang verbs, using a combination of diachronic, synchronic, and genre-specific corpora. The research follows three key analytical components: (1) tracking frequency changes over time, (2) examining contextual usage in formal and informal texts, and (3) analyzing grammatical adaptation and syntactic roles.

3.1 Selection of Corpora and Data Sources

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, this study utilizes multiple linguistic corpora, each serving a specific function in tracking language change:

Diachronic Corpora

Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): This corpus contains over one billion words from a variety of sources (spoken, fiction, newspapers, magazines, academic texts, blogs) from 1990 to the present, making it a valuable resource for tracking the evolution of new verbs.

- **British National Corpus (BNC):** A 100-million-word corpus covering British English from the late 20th century, useful for cross-comparing trends between American and British English.
- **Google Books Ngram Viewer:** A database of digitized books, allowing researchers to observe lexical frequency trends over several centuries.

Synchronic Corpora

The NOW Corpus (News on the Web Corpus): Contains billions of words from online news sources, updated monthly, providing insights into contemporary usage in formal journalistic writing.

- **Twitter Corpus (Twitter Decahose or Open Social Media Corpora):** Provides data on informal, user-generated language, capturing slang terms before they enter mainstream discourse.

Specialized Genre-Specific Corpora

- **Reddit and Social Media Archives:** Used to analyze slang verbs in their early stages before standardization.
- **Academic and Legal Corpora (e.g., the Corpus of Academic English, the Corpus of Legal English):** To determine the degree of acceptance of new verbs in formal discourse.

The integration of these diverse corpora enables a triangulated approach, ensuring that findings are not limited to a single linguistic register but reflect broader language usage across different communication domains.

3.2 Tracking Frequency Trends Over Time

One of the primary objectives of this study is to measure the **diachronic evolution** of slang verbs to determine their trajectory from informal use to mainstream adoption. This process involves:

- Extracting the yearly frequency counts of selected verbs (e.g., *to ghost*, *to binge-watch*, *to Google*, *to unfriend*) across diachronic corpora.
- Identifying inflectional variations (e.g., *ghosted*, *ghosting*) to analyze the grammatical flexibility of new verbs.
- Comparing frequency patterns across American and British English to assess regional adoption differences.
- Visualizing trends using word frequency

graphs, demonstrating the increasing (or declining) usage of selected verbs over time.

By identifying inflectional frequency ratios, this study determines whether new verbs follow standard verb conjugation patterns—a key indicator of mainstream linguistic adoption.

3.3 Examining Contextual Usage in Formal and Informal Texts

To understand how slang verbs transition from colloquial speech to standard lexicon, we analyze their contextual usage across different text genres. This involves:

- Extracting concordance lines from corpus data to examine how new verbs are used in sentences.
- Analyzing collocations (words that frequently appear alongside new verbs) to determine semantic stability. For example, the verb *to ghost* often collocates with “relationship,” “message,” and “dating apps,” indicating its specialized meaning.
- Comparing the use of slang verbs in informal vs. formal settings: Informal contexts: Social media posts, Reddit discussions, Twitter feeds, entertainment blogs. Formal contexts: News articles, academic papers, legal documents, business reports.

A gradual shift in context distribution (from social media to journalism, and eventually to academic/legal discourse) signals the increasing formalization of a verb.

Sentiment analysis is applied to determine whether slang verbs carry neutral, positive, or negative connotations in different contexts. This is crucial since verbs with strong social or emotional connotations (e.g., *to ghost* or *to cancel*) may experience semantic drift as they enter formal language.

3.4 Analyzing Grammatical Adaptation and Syntactic Integration

For a slang verb to gain widespread acceptance, it must conform to standard grammatical structures and be able to integrate into various syntactic constructions. This study assesses grammatical adaptation through:

- Morphological Analysis: Examining whether new verbs follow regular verb inflection patterns (e.g., -ed for past tense, -ing for gerunds).

- Syntactic Patterning: Identifying common grammatical constructions (e.g., transitive vs. intransitive usage). Some verbs transition from intransitive to transitive (e.g., “*He ghosted.*” → “*He ghosted his friend.*”), indicating linguistic expansion.
- Lexical Productivity: Evaluating whether slang verbs generate derivational forms (e.g., “*binge-watch*” → “*binge-watcher*” (noun), “*ghost*” → “*ghosting*” (noun)), signifying deeper integration into English morphology.
- Comparison with Older Verbs: Comparing new slang verbs to historically adopted slang verbs (e.g., *to text*, *to surf (the internet)*) to establish similarities in linguistic standardization.

By applying these grammatical and syntactic analyses, this study identifies **which features** facilitate or hinder the standardization of a slang verb.

3.5 Validation Through Dictionary and Institutional Recognition

To determine the final stage of mainstream adoption, we assess whether a verb has been institutionally validated by examining:

- Inclusion in major dictionaries (OED, Merriam-Webster, Cambridge).
- Citation frequency in academic literature.
- Usage in government or corporate language guidelines.
- Adoption in educational settings (e.g., English language teaching materials).

Words that meet corpus-based frequency thresholds and appear in dictionaries can be considered fully standardized.

This corpus-based methodology offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the transition of slang verbs into standard English. By tracking frequency trends, contextual shifts, grammatical integration, and institutional recognition, this study provides empirical evidence of how new verbs evolve over time. The insights derived from this analysis contribute to a broader understanding of language change mechanisms, demonstrating how social, digital, and institutional forces shape the English lexicon.

This study establishes a replicable model for future research on language standardization, allowing linguists to monitor emerging slang

and predict which new words are likely to achieve mainstream acceptance. As digital communication continues to drive rapid linguistic innovation, corpus-based analysis remains an essential tool for documenting and understanding the evolution of modern English.

4. The Evolution of Selected Verbs

To illustrate the process of lexical standardization, this section presents four case studies of verbs that originated as slang but have since become widely accepted in mainstream English: *to Google*, *to binge-watch*, *to ghost*, and *to unfriend*. These verbs demonstrate different pathways through which slang words transition into the standard lexicon, influenced by technological advancements, social behaviors, and media usage. By examining their origins, frequency patterns, grammatical adaptation, and institutional recognition, we can better understand the mechanisms that drive the adoption of new verbs in English.

4.1 *To Google: The Branding of a Common Action*

Origin and Early Usage

The verb *to Google* originated from the company name Google Inc., which was founded in 1998. Initially, “Google” was exclusively a proper noun referring to the brand and its search engine. However, as Google’s search engine became the dominant means of retrieving online information, users began using “Google” informally as a verb to mean “searching for information online.”

The first recorded instances of *to Google* as a verb appeared in tech forums and blogs around 1999-2000. By the early 2000s, the phrase “just Google it” was commonly used in casual conversation, reflecting the word’s increasing frequency.

Transition to Standard English

- In 2006, the verb *to Google* was officially added to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Merriam-Webster Dictionary, marking its formal recognition.
- Google Inc. initially opposed the verb’s use, fearing genericization (where a brand name becomes a common noun or verb, potentially weakening trademark protection). However, the ubiquity of the term made it impossible to control.
- Corpus data from COCA and the BNC show a steep increase in frequency of *to*

Google in news, academic texts, and general writing between 2000 and 2010.

Grammatical Adaptation

- *To Google* follows standard English verb conjugation rules: Google – Googled – Googling.
- The verb can be used transitively (*I Googled the answer*) and intransitively (*I spent the afternoon Googling*).
- It has generated derivative forms, such as:
Googleable (adjective, meaning “searchable on Google”).
Googling (gerund, widely used in professional and casual contexts).

The case of *to Google* exemplifies how a brand name can become a verb through widespread public usage, high-frequency adoption, and formal dictionary recognition. Its acceptance was driven by technological necessity, as the verb provided a succinct way to describe online searching.

4.2 *To Binge-Watch: The Impact of Digital Media on Language*

Origin and Early Usage

The term *binge* has long been used to describe excessive consumption, particularly in relation to eating (*binge-eating*) and drinking (*binge-drinking*). The verb *to binge-watch* emerged in the late 2000s and early 2010s, coinciding with the rise of streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu.

Initially, *binge-watch* was used informally on social media platforms and entertainment blogs to describe the habit of watching multiple episodes of a TV series in one sitting.

Transition to Standard English

- 2013-2015: Major publications (The New York Times, BBC, The Guardian) began using *binge-watch* in articles discussing TV consumption trends.
- 2015: The word was added to the Collins English Dictionary and Oxford Dictionaries Online.
- 2018: Netflix publicly embraced the term, further solidifying its mainstream status.

Corpus data analysis shows a sharp increase in usage frequency from 2010 to 2017, reflecting the global shift in media consumption habits.

Grammatical Adaptation

The verb follows regular English verb conjugation patterns:

Binge-watch – binge-watched – binge-watching.

It is predominantly transitive (*I binge-watched an entire season*).

It has led to new lexical formations:

Binge-worthy (adjective, meaning “a show worth binge-watching”).

Binge-watcher (noun, referring to a person who binge-watches).

The rise of *binge-watch* illustrates how technological and cultural changes drive linguistic evolution. The increasing use of on-demand streaming services created a new behavior that required a new verb, demonstrating the influence of digital media on English vocabulary.

4.3 To Ghost: Digital Communication and Social Relationships

Origin and Early Usage

The verb *to ghost* originated in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), where it originally meant “to leave suddenly.” The term gained a new meaning in the 2010s with the rise of online dating and instant messaging, referring to the practice of abruptly cutting off communication without warning.

Early usage of *to ghost* in this sense appeared in dating blogs, Reddit discussions, and social media posts around 2012-2014. The term quickly gained traction due to its relevance in digital communication.

Transition to Standard English

- 2015: Mainstream news outlets such as The Washington Post and Time Magazine published articles discussing the phenomenon of ghosting.
- 2017: *Ghosting* was added to Merriam-Webster Dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary.
- 2020s: The word extended beyond dating and is now used in professional settings (e.g., “*The candidate ghosted the recruiter.*”).

Corpus-based studies indicate that *to ghost* underwent semantic broadening, now applying to friendships, workplace interactions, and customer service scenarios.

Grammatical Adaptation

The verb follows standard inflectional rules:

Ghost – ghosted – ghosting.

It can function as both transitive (*He ghosted his friend*) and intransitive (*He ghosted after our last conversation*).

The noun *ghosting* is widely used (“Ghosting is a common online dating issue.”).

The evolution of *to ghost* highlights how **new** social behaviors in digital communication create linguistic needs. The rapid spread of online dating and messaging apps facilitated the verb’s mainstream acceptance.

4.4 To Unfriend: Social Media and Lexical Creation

Origin and Early Usage

The verb *to unfriend* predates social media, with early uses recorded as far back as **1659**, meaning “to remove from a circle of friends.” However, it fell out of common usage until Facebook reintroduced the term in the 2000s.

By 2005, *to unfriend* was widely used within Facebook’s interface, referring to removing someone from a contact list.

Transition to Standard English

- 2009: The verb *to unfriend* was named Oxford English Dictionary’s “Word of the Year”, recognizing its widespread digital use.
- 2010s: Major newspapers and academic discussions on social media psychology frequently included *unfriend*.
- Present day: The term is commonly used beyond Facebook (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram).

Grammatical Adaptation

- The verb follows standard conjugation: Unfriend – unfriended – unfriending.
- It is exclusively transitive (*She unfriended me*).
- Related forms include:
Unfriending (noun, meaning “the act of removing a friend”).
Unfrienable (adjective, though less common).

To unfriend illustrates how platform-specific terminology can enter mainstream language. Social media has significantly influenced digital-age vocabulary, demonstrating that verbs coined for online actions can evolve into common linguistic expressions.

These case studies illustrate the different

pathways by which slang verbs enter standard English. Key factors influencing lexical standardization include:

Technological advancement (*to Google, to binge-watch*).

Digital communication norms (*to ghost, to unfriend*).

Widespread media adoption and dictionary inclusion.

The study of these verbs provides a framework for predicting future lexical trends, particularly as digital culture continues to shape the English language.

5. Factors Driving Mainstream Adoption of Slang Verbs in English

The transition of slang verbs into standard English is a complex linguistic process influenced by multiple social, technological, and institutional factors. While some slang words remain confined to subcultures, others achieve mainstream status and gain recognition in dictionaries, journalism, and academic discourse. This section explores the key drivers behind the mainstream adoption of new verbs, including the role of digital communication, cultural relevance, grammatical adaptability, and institutional validation.

5.1 Digital and Social Media Influence: The Accelerator of Linguistic Change

The rise of digital communication has significantly accelerated the spread of new words. Unlike earlier linguistic changes, which often took decades to become widely accepted, the internet has drastically shortened the adoption cycle of slang verbs. Social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and Reddit have become powerful incubators for lexical innovation, providing a space where new words are coined, popularized, and disseminated at an unprecedented rate. Social networking algorithms favor trending words and expressions, pushing them into mainstream discourse faster than traditional print or spoken media ever could.

Online discourse plays a crucial role in making slang verbs more visible to the general public. Memes, hashtags, and viral trends allow words to gain traction within specific online communities before expanding to broader audiences. For example, the verb *to ghost* gained prominence through dating apps and online forums, where users needed a term to describe

the modern phenomenon of abruptly cutting off communication. The popularity of the term on platforms such as Reddit and Twitter led to its adoption by mainstream media, accelerating its transition into everyday speech. Similarly, *to binge-watch* became a widely recognized verb due to the rise of streaming services, with discussions about excessive TV consumption fueling its rapid spread.

Social media influencers, celebrities, and public figures further contribute to the adoption of new verbs. When high-profile individuals use a slang word in interviews, tweets, or digital content, it gains legitimacy and exposure to millions of followers. A prime example is the verb *to cancel*, which originated from internet activism and social justice movements but quickly became a commonly used term across mainstream media, business, and politics. The interaction between digital communities and mass media creates a feedback loop, reinforcing the prominence of slang verbs and embedding them into the cultural lexicon.

5.2 Cultural Relevance: The Need for New Words to Describe Emerging Behaviors

Slang verbs that successfully transition into mainstream English often do so because they fill a linguistic gap, providing a precise term for a new or evolving social behavior. Words that capture contemporary experiences, particularly those shaped by technological, cultural, or economic changes, are more likely to be adopted widely. This linguistic necessity is evident in the emergence of verbs such as *to Google, to binge-watch, to ghost, and to unfriend*, all of which describe behaviors that did not exist in the same form prior to the digital age.

The rapid expansion of the internet and social media has transformed human interaction, necessitating new vocabulary to describe these changes. Before the internet, searching for information involved consulting books, encyclopedias, or asking experts, but the dominance of online search engines created the need for a verb that specifically describes looking up information online. *To Google* became the default verb for this action, quickly surpassing other search-related expressions. Likewise, *to binge-watch* emerged as television consumption habits changed, with streaming services allowing users to watch multiple episodes in one sitting—a behavior that traditional TV viewing patterns did not

previously accommodate.

Beyond technology, broader societal shifts also contribute to lexical innovation. The increasing reliance on digital communication has transformed interpersonal relationships, leading to behaviors that lacked specific terminology in the past. The verb *to ghost* reflects a cultural change in dating and social interactions, where digital communication allows individuals to disappear from conversations without explanation. The rise of *to cancel* as a verb, meaning to publicly reject or withdraw support from someone, mirrors shifting attitudes toward accountability, justice, and collective social action in the internet era.

Cultural relevance ensures that a slang verb resonates with a large audience, making it more likely to spread beyond niche communities. When a term accurately captures a widespread phenomenon, it becomes an essential linguistic tool, increasing its chances of becoming part of the standard lexicon.

5.3 Grammatical Flexibility: The Ease of Integration into English Syntax

For a slang verb to achieve mainstream adoption, it must conform to English grammatical norms and be easily integrated into everyday speech and writing. Words that follow standard conjugation and sentence structures are more likely to be accepted, while those with irregular forms or syntactic constraints often remain confined to slang usage.

Most successful slang verbs follow regular English verb inflection patterns, making them easy to incorporate into different grammatical contexts. *To Google*, *to binge-watch*, and *to ghost* all follow the standard **-ed** past tense formation (*Googled*, *binge-watched*, *ghosted*), allowing them to be used naturally in past, present, and future tenses. The ease of conjugation ensures that these verbs can be flexibly used in various sentence structures, making them more adaptable to different registers of communication.

The ability of a verb to function both transitively and intransitively also enhances its usability. A verb like *to ghost* can be used in different ways—both intransitively (*He ghosted after our last conversation*) and transitively (*She ghosted her friend*). Similarly, *to binge-watch* can appear in different syntactic constructions (*I spent the weekend binge-watching* vs. *I binge-watched an entire season*), increasing its versatility and

likelihood of widespread adoption.

Another key factor in grammatical integration is lexical productivity. Successful slang verbs often give rise to derivative forms, further embedding them into everyday language. The noun *ghosting* evolved from *to ghost*, while *binge-worthy* emerged as an adjective related to *binge-watching*. These extended usages signal deeper integration into the lexicon, as they allow for greater semantic flexibility across different contexts.

Verbs that struggle to fit into standard grammatical patterns are less likely to transition into formal English. Some internet slang terms, such as *yeet* or *finna*, face challenges due to their inconsistent inflectional patterns and limited syntactic flexibility, making them more resistant to mainstream adoption. The grammatical adaptability of a verb is therefore a crucial determinant of its ability to transition from slang to standard usage.

5.4 Media and Institutional Recognition: The Role of Dictionaries and Academic Endorsement

The final stage of mainstream adoption often involves institutional validation, particularly through media recognition, literary inclusion, and dictionary entries. While social media accelerates the spread of slang verbs, their ultimate legitimacy is solidified when they appear in reputable news sources, books, and academic discussions.

Major news organizations such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and *BBC* play a crucial role in legitimizing new words. When a slang verb is used in professional journalism, it gains credibility and exposure beyond its original user base. For example, *to ghost* transitioned from internet slang to standard language after being widely discussed in articles about dating and social behavior. Similarly, *to binge-watch* became a household term after being featured in entertainment journalism and academic discussions on digital media consumption.

The inclusion of a verb in dictionaries marks its full acceptance into standard English. Lexicographers monitor word frequency, usage patterns, and longevity to determine when a term meets the criteria for dictionary inclusion. *To Google* was officially added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster* in 2006, signaling its complete integration into formal language. *To binge-watch* followed a similar path, being recognized in major dictionaries by the

mid-2010s. Words that pass this final institutional threshold become embedded in the lexicon, used in formal writing, education, and even legal contexts.

The mainstream adoption of slang verbs is driven by a combination of digital acceleration, cultural necessity, grammatical flexibility, and institutional recognition. Words that describe new behaviors, conform to linguistic norms, and gain validation from media and dictionaries are more likely to transition from slang to standard English. As digital communication continues to reshape linguistic trends, the process of lexical adoption is becoming increasingly rapid. The interaction between social media, journalism, and formal linguistic institutions ensures that new verbs will continue to emerge, evolve, and establish themselves in the English lexicon.

6. Conclusion

The transformation of slang verbs into standard English is a complex yet structured process shaped by various linguistic, social, and cultural forces. This study has shown that the mainstream adoption of new verbs is not an arbitrary development but follows identifiable patterns that involve their proliferation in informal settings, their increasing frequency in wider discourse, their grammatical adaptability, and their eventual recognition by linguistic institutions. The evolution of language is inherently linked to changes in technology, social behaviors, and communication methods, and in the digital age, this process has become more rapid than ever. While in previous centuries lexical innovation was a gradual development, requiring decades for new words to gain widespread recognition, the rise of social media and online communication has significantly shortened the timeline for slang verbs to transition from niche expressions to standard vocabulary.

One of the most significant drivers of this acceleration is the role of digital platforms in amplifying linguistic change. The internet has created a new space for lexical innovation, where slang verbs emerge, spread, and evolve at a pace unmatched by traditional modes of linguistic transmission. Social media, online forums, and digital news outlets provide an environment where words can rapidly gain traction, particularly when they describe emerging behaviors that reflect contemporary lifestyles. Viral trends, hashtags, memes, and

influencer culture contribute to the mainstreaming of these words, making them more visible and accessible to a wider audience. The digital landscape has also made language more democratic; whereas in the past, linguistic standardization was heavily influenced by elite institutions such as academia and literature, today's language change is largely driven by everyday users, whose collective influence on digital platforms determines which words survive and which fade into obscurity.

Beyond digital amplification, cultural necessity plays a fundamental role in the success of slang verbs. Words that fill a lexical gap, capturing a new or evolving behavior for which no precise term previously existed, are more likely to endure. The verbs examined in this study—*to Google*, *to binge-watch*, *to ghost*, and *to unfriend*—each reflect a modern phenomenon that required linguistic expression. The advent of search engines, the rise of on-demand media consumption, the changing nature of interpersonal relationships in the digital era, and the restructuring of social interactions through social media all contributed to the emergence of new verbs that succinctly describe these experiences. Language evolves as a reflection of human needs, and the widespread adoption of these verbs demonstrates that linguistic innovation is often a response to social and technological transformation.

A critical factor in the standardization of new verbs is their ability to conform to English grammar and syntactic structures. Words that can be seamlessly integrated into existing linguistic frameworks are more likely to gain widespread acceptance. Slang verbs that follow regular verb conjugation patterns, such as *Google* → *Googled* → *Googling* and *ghost* → *ghosted* → *ghosting*, are easier to use in both spoken and written language, increasing their chances of survival. Additionally, verbs that demonstrate syntactic flexibility—allowing both transitive and intransitive usage—become more versatile, expanding their applicability across different registers of communication. The development of derivative forms further reinforces the integration of new verbs into the language. Nouns such as *ghosting* and adjectives such as *binge-worthy* extend the usability of these verbs beyond their original forms, solidifying their presence in the lexicon. Conversely, slang terms that resist grammatical adaptation or fail to fit into common syntactic patterns often struggle to

transition into standard usage.

Institutional recognition serves as the final stage in the journey from slang to standard lexicon. While social media and digital discourse play a crucial role in popularizing new verbs, their full legitimacy is often cemented by their appearance in major newspapers, academic publications, and linguistic authorities such as dictionaries. Once a verb is used in professional journalism, scholarly writing, and government or corporate communication, it gains credibility and is perceived as a formal component of the language. The inclusion of a word in dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster* signifies its full integration into standard English, providing it with an official status that extends its longevity. While dictionary editors rely on linguistic corpora and usage data to determine which words to include, their decisions reflect broader social trends and the evolving nature of communication. As seen in the case of *to Google* and *to binge-watch*, words that consistently appear in multiple linguistic domains, from casual conversation to academic discussion, are the most likely to be recognized and preserved in the long term.

As the process of lexical standardization continues to evolve, the speed at which slang verbs become mainstream will likely increase even further. With the expansion of artificial intelligence, algorithm-driven content distribution, and globalization, language change is no longer confined to specific geographic or cultural boundaries. Future linguistic studies will need to examine how digital ecosystems influence the spread of new words and whether institutional authorities, such as dictionaries and academic institutions, will maintain their traditional role in legitimizing language or whether real-time digital usage will become the primary determinant of linguistic standardization. The boundary between formal and informal language is increasingly fluid, and the acceptance of new verbs is no longer dictated solely by established linguistic norms but by the collective habits of language users.

The evolution of slang verbs into standard English is a testament to the adaptability of language and its responsiveness to human experience. The words we use today reflect the technological, social, and cultural realities of our time, just as previous linguistic changes mirrored the transformations of earlier eras. By studying how new verbs emerge and become

standardized, we gain deeper insights into the mechanisms of linguistic evolution and the ways in which language continues to shape and be shaped by society. In an era of rapid technological progress and global connectivity, the process of lexical innovation and standardization will remain an ongoing and dynamic feature of the English language, ensuring that it continues to evolve in step with the changing world.

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