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“YOU THE REAL MVP”
A Study on 10 English Slang Words and How They Are
Used to Describe People on Social Media

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences
Master's Thesis
April 2019

Tampereen Yliopisto
Informaatioteknologian ja viestinnän tiedekunta
Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriopinnot

VILJANEN, LAURA: *You the real MVP* : A Study on 10 English Slang Words and How They Are Used to Describe People on Social Media

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 89 sivua
Huhtikuu 2019

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee kymmentä englannin kielistä slangisanaa. Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten nämä uudet slangisanat ovat saaneet alkunsa, miten niitä käytetään sosiaalisessa mediassa, ja ovatko sanat levinneet myös laajempaan käyttöön. Tutkittaviin sanoihin kuuluu neljä positiivista slangisanaa (*bae*, *MVP*, *sassy*, *wifey*) ja kuusi negatiivista sanaa (*fuckboy*, *cray*, *sicko*, *stan*, *sus*, *thot*), mutta tätä luokittelua voidaan pitää suuntaa-antavana, sillä monia valituista sanoista voi slangille tyypillisesti käyttää sekä positiivisessa että negatiivisessa merkityksessä.

Tutkielman teoriatausta keskittyy slangin, sananmuodostuksen ja internetissä ja sosiaalisessa mediassa käytetyn kielen tarkasteluun. Slangi käsitteenä osoittautuu vaikeasti määriteltäväksi, mutta slangin käyttöön löytyy monia tärkeitä syitä, kuten yhteisöllisyys, itseilmaisus ja identiteetin rakentaminen. Teoriaosiossa pohditaan myös sitä, miten käsite *sana* voidaan määritellä, ja tutustutaan sananmuodostustekniikoihin, joiden avulla tutkittavat slangisanat on muodostettu. Lopuksi tutustutaan internetille tyypilliseen kielenkäyttöön, jolla on monia ainutlaatuisia piirteitä.

Tutkimus yhdistää sekä kvantitatiivisia että kvalitatiivisia tutkimusmenetelmiä. Slangisanojen käyttöä sosiaalisessa mediassa tutkitaan kvalitatiivisesti analysoimalla Twitteristä kerättyjä esimerkkejä. Sanojen levittäytyneisyyttä sosiaalisen median ulkopuolelle sen sijaan tutkitaan kvantitatiivisesti vertaamalla jokaisen sanan suosiota hashtagina Instagramissa kahdesta korpuksista (GloWbE ja COCA) löytyneiden relevanttien esimerkkien määrään.

Tutkimus osoitti, että uudet slangisanat on muodostettu viiden eri sananmuodostustekniikan avulla: *bae*, *MVP* ja *thot* ovat kirjainsanoja, *sassy*, *sicko* ja *wifey* johdannaisia, *sus* ja *cray* lyhennyksiä, *stan* on koostesana ja *fuckboy* yhdyssana. Slangisanoista suurin osa on saanut alkunsa hip hop tai rap-sanoituksissa, ja suosittuihin lähteisiin kuuluvat myös afrikkalaisamerikkalainen englantia sekä sanojen alkuperäinen merkitys. Popkulttuurilla on siis suuri vaikutus slangisanastoon, ja sosiaalisen median ansiosta slangisanat leviävät nopeasti myös eri etnisten ryhmien välillä.

Twitteristä kerättyjen esimerkkien analysointi osoitti, että slangisanoja käytetään sosiaalisessa mediassa tyypillisesti yhdessä muiden slangisanojen, kirosanojen ja afrikkalaisamerikkalaisen englannin piirteiden kanssa, huumorisesti tai ironisesti, tyypillisissä rakenteissa, epätavallisesti tavattuna ja typografisten tunteiden ilmaisujen kanssa. Instagramista ja korpuksista kerätyt numerot osoittautuivat vertailukelvottomiksi, sillä sanoja oli käytetty hashtagina Instagramissa miljoonia kertoja, kun taas korpuksista löytyi relevantteja esimerkkejä korkeintaan kaksituhatta. Ainoastaan sanat *sassy*, *wifey*, *sicko* ja *cray* vaikuttivat levinneen jo laajempaan käyttöön sosiaalisen median ulkopuolelle.

Asiasanat: slang, korpus, sosiaalinen media, internet, sanastontutkimus

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1. Introduction

Today, approximately 14,7 new words are introduced to the English language daily (The Global Language Monitor). While the grammatical features of a language usually stay intact, the vocabulary is everchanging, evolving and adapting to the needs of its users. English is currently used as a lingua franca, “a world language”, that is learned and spoken all over the world. It was also the founding language of the Web, and still continues to be commonly used as the universal language of the Internet – most terminology relating to the Internet is in English, and, according to Internet World Stats (internetworldstats.com), English continues to be the most used language on the Web; it is used by 25,4% of all Internet users. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that many new English words and expressions are created or start to spread through the Internet, and, in particular, through social media. While many new words that are considered “Internet slang” are first met with negativity and resistance, some of them have already started to spread to wider usage and gain more acceptance. In this study, I will have a look at 10 current English slang words, and examine how they are used on social media, where they come from, and whether they have started to spread to usage outside of social media as well.

The present study, thus, belongs to the field of vocabulary studies. While most studies done on Internet language concentrate on e.g. acronyms and abbreviations that are only used on the Internet, the words in this study can essentially be used anywhere, and their meaning does not depend on whether they are used on the Internet and social media or in face-to-face communication. Since the slang words chosen for this study have not really been examined before, this study adds something completely new to the field of vocabulary studies.

The 10 slang words chosen for this study were all discovered on the Internet, either from articles that discuss new slang terms, or from lists of new slang words presented in online slang dictionaries. The criteria for choosing the words was that all of them must be words that can be used to describe

people, either positively or negatively, and they all must belong to the groups of nouns or adjectives.

The words chosen for this study are:

Positive words: *bae, mvp, sassy, wifey*

Negative words: *fuckboy, cray, sicko, stan, sus, thot*

The chosen words were common to be included in articles about slang, which made them appropriate and relevant choices for the study. While there are a few more negative words than positive, such categorization with slang words is always somewhat context-dependent and vague, since the same term may simultaneously be used as both a positive and a negative term.

The purpose of this study is to find out how these slang words have been created, how they are typically used on social media and how common their usage actually is. These goals have been formed into the following research questions:

1. Where do these new slang words come from? How were they created?
2. How are these words used on social media?
3. Are these words used on a larger scale?

In order to answer these questions, online dictionaries, social networking sites (Twitter and Instagram) and two corpora (*the Corpus of Global Web-Based English* and *the Corpus of Contemporary American English*) are used. The theoretical framework for the study consists of background on slang, relevant word-formation techniques and Internet language.

Hopefully, the results of this study can help people understand how languages evolve, where new words come from and which kinds of words may become part of the everyday vocabulary of English. The overall goal of this study is to find out how new slang words spread in this electronic

era, and how the English language, and in particular, its vocabulary, is changing and developing on the Internet and social media.

In the next section (Chapter 2), the concept of slang is looked at from various points of view. In Chapter 3, words and word formation are discussed, after which some typical features of language on the Internet and social media are presented in Chapter 4. After that, the material and methods used in this study are introduced in Chapter 5. The results of the current study are presented and discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, and all of the findings are summarized in Chapter 8.

2. Slang

It is too late to be studying Hebrew; it is more important to understand even the slang of today.

-Henry David Thoreau (brainyquote.com)

As Henry David Thoreau states above, slang is a relevant topic for current language studies. In the following sections, I will be having a close look at what slang is, where it comes from, who uses it, what kind of attitudes people have towards it, and how it is created and used on the Internet. As Adams says (2009, viii) “slang is always with us, reinvented by each new generation”. The types of slang we encounter today are completely different from what was considered slang even a few decades ago, and new slang terms are created all the time. Some slang words can be very short-lived and fall out of use rather quickly, whereas others become so common and widely used that after a while, they become part of the standard language and are no longer considered to be slang.

2.1 Defining slang

Different dictionaries, books and websites offer distinctly different descriptions of what slang is. Slang has always been a difficult concept to define and explain, and for this reason, many lexicographers have either not wanted to define it at all or have given quite imprecise definitions of what slang is. Slang is most often described as nonstandard and informal spoken language that is used

by a certain group of people. Some dictionaries state that slang is typically used by younger speakers (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*), or that slang is considered to be socially lower than the standard language (*The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (OCEL)). According to *Dictionary.com*, slang is “more metaphorical, playful, elliptical, vivid, and ephemeral than ordinary language”, and it “is characterized by the use of vulgar and socially taboo vocabulary and expressions”.

Slang is typically contrasted with “standard” language. But what exactly is meant by “standard”? *The Barnhart Dictionary Companion* defines standard as “part of the English language as currently used by educated people in polite conversation and writing” (Adams 2009, 3). Thus, standard English is not the language that people use in everyday conversation, for example with their friends and family (Coleman 2012, 12). Instead, it is a very formal and polite version of English, only used in certain situations. Thus, it is obvious that slang differs drastically from standard language and comparing the two is not very useful.

While it is advisable to speak carefully and politely in very formal situations, a more relaxed style of speaking makes a better impression in informal, everyday situations. Normal speech is colloquial (from Latin *col-* “together” and *loqui* “to speak”), and by using colloquial English, we show that we are warm, polite and approachable people, and that we want to connect with others on a personal level. Slang can be understood as ‘highly colloquial’ in the sense that it resembles Standard English even less than colloquial language does. It is not as widely accepted and used as colloquial English. (Coleman 2012, 13.)

Slang is often seen to include or be the same as *jargon*, *argot*, *colloquialism*, *dialect* or *vulgarity*. However, slang is not synonymous with any of these concepts, and it is thus important to define these terms in order to avoid confusion. *Jargon* refers to the specialized language of e.g. a trade or a profession (e.g. scientific jargon), and it is often incomprehensible to people who do not belong to the professional or occupational group in question (OCEL). It is often quite formal, with

plenty of technological and professional terminology, which separates it from slang. *Argot*, on the other hand, refers to the secret, idiomatic vocabulary of a social group, used for private communication and identification (*Dictionary.com*). *Colloquialism* refers to informal language and expressions in general, and it can thus be said that slang does include many colloquial words and expressions. *Dialect* is a form of language that is spoken in a particular region or social group, whereas slang is less reliant on regional and social boundaries. *Vulgarity* (tasteless, rude or coarse language) is also often seen as synonymous with slang, but all slang words are not vulgar. Thus, as we can see, even though slang has many features in common with these concepts, they are all different and hence cannot be used interchangeably.

One of the most common characteristics given for slang is the fact that it is spoken, rather than written, language. However, this view on slang is quite outdated, since these days the same two people can communicate with each other in so many different ways; they can talk in person, on the phone, by using text messages, instant messaging or email, on blogs, or via webcams (Coleman 2012, 267). Slang is very common on the Internet, where it is easy to communicate with people from all around the world and from all different social groups. The English used on social media and on the Internet could almost be considered a different kind of language altogether, and this is discussed further in Chapter 4. Slang words and expressions spread incredibly fast on the Internet, and while some of them may only be used by small groups of people for a short period of time, some words acquire more popularity and become more widely used all over the Internet and even outside of it.

2.2 History of slang

Since slang has traditionally belonged in speech, not writing, it is impossible to know exactly when slang was first used. According to *The Online Etymology Dictionary*, the term *slang* was used in 1801 to refer to the “jargon of a particular profession”, whereas lexicographer Eric Partridge states that the term *slang* has most likely been in use since around 1870 or 1860 (Coleman 2012, 28). *The Oxford*

English Dictionary (OED) states that the earliest attested use of the word *slang* was in 1756, when it referred to the vocabulary of “low or disreputable” people. The origin of the term *slang* is unknown, but some scholars suspect that it might be of Scandinavian origin, possibly based on the Norwegian words *slengnamn* “nickname”, *slengja kjeften* “to abuse with words” or literally “to sling the jaw”, connected to the Old Norse word *slyngva* “to sling” (*The Online Etymology Dictionary*). However, this connection is disregarded by the OED based on “date and early associations” (*Dictionary.com*), and the origin remains a subject of speculation.

In any case, the phenomenon of slang has existed long before the term itself, probably for as long as speech in general. In Old English, slang was labelled “flash language” which included both cant and slang. Slang was coarser back then and depended more on vulgarity than our modern slang. It was only in the 16th or 17th century when the meaning that slang has today started to develop. Slang is considered to stem from English Criminal Cant, a new kind of speech that criminals used with each other in gambling houses, saloons, etc. In the 18th century, slang was considered as improper usage of English and it was thus forbidden. As America had become more multicultural by the 1700’s, the English-speaking population started to be influenced by cultural differences and slang began to spread and expand. These days, slang is not considered criminal, and as a result of technology and cultural diversity, we have countless different varieties of slang. (Fasola 2011)

2.3 Typical users of slang

As social beings, humans have an inherent need to belong to a group. We identify with a certain group and its speech and, in turn, are identified by that speech (Adams 2009, 59). As mentioned before, slang is the language used by a particular, usually very close-knit group of people. Slang is typical for people who spend a lot of time together and, as a result, end up forming their own vocabulary. Typical groups associated with slang are adolescents and college students, who are transitioning into adulthood and thus negotiating new social roles and identities (Battistella 2005, 86). Prisoners,

teenagers and coworkers often also create their own slang that only they can fully understand and use. However, slang can be used by virtually anyone, and many people might use slang words and expressions just to be witty or clever.

According to Coleman (2012, 8), “[s]lang has long inhabited the area of friction between generations, nations, and social classes, but now it’s particularly associated with ethnicity”. Many current American slang words originate in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which is also known as Ebonics, Black English Vernacular (BEV), and Black Vernacular English (BVE). AAVE differs from standard American English phonologically, grammatically and with vocabulary. Some typical features of AAVE include absence of copula/auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tenses and actions (e.g. “She mad”), use of invariant *be* for future and habitual aspects (e.g. “He be here tomorrow”), use of *BIN* to mark that an action began a long time ago (e.g. “She BIN married”), absence of verb-subject agreement (e.g. “They has a big house”), use of *ain’t* as a negator and multiple negation (“He don’ do nothin’), to name a few (Rickford 1999). A very recognizable element of AAVE is also its accent, and vocabulary filled with slang words.

Today, many white people recognize and may try to adopt the slang typically used by speakers of AAVE. There are many possible reasons for this, which are presented in the next section. According to Adams (2009, 58), “[a]ppropriation of African American slang by mainstream culture has gone on since the early years of African American slang; it is still going on”. Many of the slang words in this study originate in AAVE and have spread to wider usage via hip hop music, popular TV shows and the Internet, but in many cases, the words’ origins are still visible in their use.

2.4 Reasons for using slang

Instead of being a means to merely exchange information, slang is mostly used for social purposes (OCEL). According to Coleman (2012, 94), slang normally arises from willing identification with a social subgroup. Most of us pick up slang in everyday communication, and some people use it more

than others (2012, 94). It is embedded within the standard or colloquial language that we use as an optional extra; it is completely possible to communicate in an effective and clear way without it (2012, 94). As Adams puts it (2009, 57) “slang is all about fitting in”. It is often used to establish or reinforce social identity and cohesiveness, to show that you belong to the same group (OCEL). Crystal describes the purpose of slang in the form of a jingle: “The chief use of slang is to show that you’re one of the gang”. Most slang words could be replaced by Standard English words, but by choosing to use the slang alternative, we add a new level of meaning to the conversation; most slang words express shared attitudes, assumptions and values, and codes and hierarchies (Coleman 2012, 97-99). For example, students often use slang to distinguish student values from the values of the authority, e.g. professors or teachers, and in that way, establish group identity (Battistella 2005, 86).

Slang can also be used to exclude others (Coleman 2012, 3), since the slang used in a certain group can be completely incomprehensible to people outside of that group. We can easily leave someone outside of our conversation by code-switching to slang. Parents sometimes try to adopt slang expressions to feel closer to their children, but often end up either using out-of-date slang, or misusing current slang, which only highlights the distance between them (2012, 103). As Battistella (2005, 86) says, “part of the pleasure of slang for its users is belonging to an in-group that excludes the conventional mainstream”. Thus, for many people, slang is enjoyable because it makes them feel like they are part of a special group of people with a shared language only understood by the members of the group. It is also common to use slang to oppose authority, or to change the level of discourse to a more informal direction, for example after a very official meeting or other formal situation (OCEL).

The media may also use slang to caricature groups of speakers (Coleman 2012, 6), which is particularly typical for comic strips. Slang can also be used in advertising; by using slang to address teenagers (and, increasingly, also adults), advertisers can make their products seem newer and more appealing (Coleman 2012, 51), which can help sell them to the target group in question. An advert may use the type of language and slang expressions that are typical for a certain ethnic group, and in

that way market the product to that particular group of people. In books, movies and TV shows, slang is also often used to make the characters more personal and to show which social group they belong to. Thus, the media often uses slang in order to characterize or stereotype people, and to get the viewer or consumer to identify themselves with a character they find familiar or relatable.

People can also use slang just because it is fun; its novelty and freshness are a big part of its appeal (OCEL). A lot of people enjoy using new words and, in that way, expressing their individuality. By using slang, people can express themselves and their emotions more vividly than with Standard English, and it is also easier to create humor, or to shock, offend or rebel (Coleman 2012, 108). Adams (2009, 113) talks about the aesthetic of slang, and how the abundant use of metaphors is a good example of the proximity of slang and poetry. Thus, using slang can often be just a more fun, playful and aesthetic way of saying something, and many people enjoy using metaphors and rhymes as a part of their everyday speech.

Slang is an important part of forming and expressing our identity. Slang can be a way to set oneself apart from conventional values of society through a style of toughness and ironic detachment (Battistella 2005, 86). In the same way we choose our clothes, we express our identity by choosing certain words when we speak, which help us to identify ourselves as a part of a certain group or a trend in the society. For most people, the language they use is a very important part of their identity and personality, and different kinds of slang allow people of all ages, genders, religions and ethnicities to express their own, individual identities and to connect with other people who share similar attitudes and values.

2.5 Attitudes to slang

Slang is a controversial topic, and some people have very strong opinions on slang and its users. Negative attitudes are even visible in the definitions of slang found in dictionaries; for example, *the Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines slang as “an informal nonstandard vocabulary composed

typically of coinages, arbitrarily changed words, and extravagant, forced, or facetious figures of speech”. According to Adams (2009, 13), some people consider slang “bad language for bad behavior”. Slang is also often seen as rude and insulting language, but as Coleman (2012, 20) points out, while many slang words may be abusive, many abusive words are not slang. Most swear words are not slang either, and most of the time, slang is used for many other purposes than insulting someone.

Slang-users are often dismissed as uneducated or unintelligent; they have a limited vocabulary and therefore have to use slang words because they do not know any better ones. However, slang-users may often actually have a wider vocabulary than people who only speak Standard English, and they know how to choose words that are appropriate for different social situations and contexts. They might say that something is *banging* when they are speaking to their friends but use the word *great* instead in a more formal situation. (Coleman 2012, 17-18.)

During the twentieth century, attitudes to slang have changed, and it is now viewed in a much more positive way than before. “Slang was once considered a sign of poor breeding or poor taste, but now it indicates that the speaker is fun-loving, youthful, and in touch with the latest trends” (Coleman 2012, 71). Parents want to understand and learn the slang used by their children, and slang now functions as an indicator of whether or not one can keep up with the times (2012, 71).

3. Words & word formation

In this chapter, I will have a look at some relevant terminology and concepts that have to do with new words and word formation. In addition, there will be a brief look at all the word formation techniques that are relevant for this study.

As Adams (1973, 1) mentions, the means by which new words are constructed and accepted into the language are usually taken for granted by the average speaker. It is not necessary to be aware of how a word was created in order to use and understand it, and people often accept new words into

their vocabulary without thinking twice about it. However, when the topic of new words and word formation is looked at in more detail, it becomes clear that there are many blurry concepts and discernible patterns that play a huge role in this area of linguistics.

3.1 Defining the word

Before looking at any other concepts that relate to words, it is important to know what exactly is talked about when we are discussing words. Even though *the word* seems like a fairly simple and straightforward concept, linguists have failed to provide a consistent definition of *the word* across languages (Adams 1973, 7).

According to Plag (2003), there are five different ways to define what a word is. First, a word can be seen as a unit in the writing system, which refers to the so-called orthographic word; “a word is an uninterrupted string of letters which is preceded by a blank space and followed either by a blank space or a punctuation mark” (2003, 4). This formal and technical definition might at first seem quite well applicable, but there are some issues. For example, are apostrophes considered punctuation marks? Is a compound one or two words? Thus, words often cannot be defined solely based on orthography, and four other ways of defining what a word is have been suggested (2003, 5).

Words could be defined phonologically, that is, in terms of sound structure. In speech, words may be surrounded by potential pauses, but people often speak fast without pausing, or they might pause for emphasis in the middle of a word. The use of stress is a more suitable criterion, because every word can only have one main stress. This applies even for compound words (e.g. *wéather forecast*), and thus this criterion seems to work better than the orthographic one. However, not all words carry stress, and thus the stress criterion cannot be applied to function words (e.g. articles and auxiliaries) or to words that are attached to other words, so-called *clitics* (e.g. *'s*, *'ll*). (Plag 2003, 6.)

The integrity criterion defines the word as a single unit into which no intervening material can be positioned; any modificational elements must be added before or after the word. For example,

negative elements such as *un-* in *unpopular* and plural endings such as *'s* in *dogs* never appear inside the word they modify. However, there are some cases where the word-integrity is violated, e.g. in cases of plural words such as *sons-in-law* or creations like *abso-bloody-lutely*, but these are quite rare, and can thus be considered typical exceptions that prove the existence of the rule. (Plag 2003, 6-7.)

Another definition of a word is the semantic one, which suggests that a word conveys a unified semantic concept. Even though this is the case for most words, every unified semantic concept does not correspond to a single word in a language: e.g., *the woman who lives next door* is definitely a unified concept, but it is not considered to be a word. Hence, this criterion does not really help us distinguish between words and larger units of language that are not words. In addition, the notion of “unified semantic concept” is quite vague itself and would need to be defined in more detail. (Plag 2003, 7.)

According to the syntactic criterion, words belong to certain syntactic classes, called *parts of speech*, *word classes* or *syntactic categories*. The syntactic rules of language determine where in the sentence given words can occur, depending on their word class. Thus, we can determine whether something is a word by inspecting whether it belongs to such a word class. For example, if a unit can be classified as a noun, then it is also considered to be a word. Another syntactic criterion is to consider that only words, but no smaller components, can be placed to a different position in a sentence. (Plag 2003, 8.)

According to Plag (2003,8), the stress criterion, the integrity criterion and the syntactic criteria most often produce the clearest result. He summarizes the properties of words as follows:

- words are entities having a part of speech specification
- words are syntactic atoms
- words (usually) have one main stress
- words (usually) are indivisible units (no intervening material possible)

Using these criteria, all of the slang terms in this study can be considered words. They all belong to the syntactic categories of nouns or adjectives, and thus have a part of speech specification. They also have one main stress (except for MVP, which is pronounced letter by letter) and are indivisible units.

3.2 Neologisms and nonce-formations

New words are created all the time, and the English language is constantly changing. Most of the time, we accept words that are new to us as words without even thinking about it. However, when we encounter new coinages, the reactions are often quite different. As Adams (1973, 1-2) states, innovations in vocabulary can often arouse strong feelings even in people who may not otherwise think very much about language. People may even protest against new lexical innovations, which often appears ridiculous to later generations: “who today would wince at *aviation* --, about which *The Daily Chronicle* commented in 1909: ‘You could hardly think of a worse word’” (1973, 2).

New words are often referred to as nonce-formations or neologisms. These terms have proven to be rather ambiguous and difficult to define, which is evident in the amount of various definitions given by different linguists. Particularly challenging is the notion of nonce-formation, and as Stekauer (2002, 97) notes, “its use by various linguists in different contexts indicates differences in its definition and/or understanding”. In dictionaries, *nonce words* are given a rather straightforward definition; “occurring, used, or made only once or for a special occasion” (*Merriam-Webster*), “a word coined and used apparently to suit one particular occasion” (*Encyclopedia of Britannica*). Linguists definitions are similar, but there are slight differences. Stekauer (2002, 97) recounts that Bauer (1983) ”defines nonce-formation as a certain specific stage in the 'life' of a word, the stage from the 'birth' (the act of coining) to its dissemination in the target group of a speech community, that is, to the stage of institutionalization”, whereas Hansen et al (1982, 37) ”maintains that nonce-formations are just coined for one occasion and do not acquire permanent validity”. According to Buzássyová (1999), nonce-formations are “new words, expressive units of parole that come into

existence in the process of text-production, and usually serve only one specific, contextually conditioned ‘application’” (Stekauer 2002, 97). Thus, nonce-formations could be defined as new words that were created for a single situation in order to resolve a particular communication issue, and are never used again. According to Bauer (1984, 45), “a form ceases to be a nonce formation as soon as the speakers using it are aware of using a term which they have heard already: that is to say, virtually immediately”. Thus, since the new slang words studied in this thesis have been used on multiple occasions, they can no longer be categorized as nonce-formations, even if some of them were originally created for a particular situation.

Neologisms have also been given many different definitions in dictionaries and by linguists. According to OCEL, a neologism is “a new lexeme or a sense of a word and the coining or use of new words and senses”, whereas *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines it as “[a] word or phrase newly invented or newly introduced into a language”. Thus, neologisms could be defined as new words or words with a new meaning that have recently entered usage in a language. As McMahon (1995, 193) remarks, “neologisms of any sort also have to struggle against conservative attitudes, and new words often stand more chance of acceptance if they are introduced first by some prominent person or in a more prestigious publication”. In addition, McMahon (1995, 193) notes that in order for new words to survive, and to be created in the first place, they have to “be felt necessary in the society concerned”. Some people may argue that many slang words are not very necessary, but their abundant use on social media and on the Internet proves that there is indeed a communicative need for these words.

Most of the slang words in this study could thus be said to be neologisms, since many of them are still considered quite new additions to the English language. However, many of them may not be considered “new” words for long, if they become part of the standard language and are thus more widely used. On the other hand, some of them may be completely forgotten in a few years, as if they never even existed.

3.3 Word formation techniques

New words are created in a variety of ways, and in the following sections, the word-formation techniques that have been used to create the 10 slang words included in this study will be looked at in more detail. There are also many other common ways to form new words, but since they are not relevant to this study, they will not be looked into.

3.3.1 Acronyms

Acronyms are words formed from the initial letters of a phrase (Adams 1973, 136). According to Adams, acronyms have been on the increase since the beginning of the 20th century, and many have been formed as short names for organizations and government agencies. Some acronyms remain ‘alphabetisms’ (Yule 1999, 68) or ‘initialisms’ (Coleman 2012, 38), which are pronounced as a series of letters, e.g. *BBC* (British Broadcasting Corporation), *CNN* (Cable News Network) and *VCR* (Video Cassette Recording). However, most acronyms are pronounced as single words in their own right, e.g. *AIDS* (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) or *NASA* (‘National Aeronautics and Space Administration’) (Yule 1999, 68). While the previous examples have kept their capital letters, most acronyms eventually lose their capital letters and become everyday terms such as *laser* (‘light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation’) and *scuba* (‘self-contained underwater breathing apparatus’). Some acronyms enter widespread usage so fast that most people do not even think of the meaning of their components, and might repeat some elements in their speech, e.g. *ATM* (‘automatic teller machine’) might be referred to as *ATM machine* (Yule 1999, 68-69).

Three of the slang words chosen for this study are acronyms: *bae*, *mvp* and *thot*. Only one of them, *mvp* (‘Most Valuable Player’) is pronounced as an initialism, whereas the other three are pronounced as single words. *Bae* is formed from the initial letters of ‘Before Anyone Else’ and *thot* from ‘That Ho Over There’. Thus, it seems that acronyms continue to be a rather popular method of forming new words, even with respect to slang.

3.3.2 Blending

In blending, two separate words are merged to create a single new term. This is usually achieved by joining the beginning of one word to the end of the other word. Some well-known examples include *smog* (smoke + fog), *brunch* (breakfast/lunch) and *motel* (motor/hotel). (Yule 1999, 66). According to Adams (1973, 146), consciously-formed blends are essentially a 20th century phenomenon, and only a few examples from 16th to 19th century have been recorded. These days, we are used to new and unusual-looking words, and because of the media and the Internet, the existence of almost every new blend is recorded, even if it ends up having a very short-lived life (1973, 146). The only slang word created through blending in this study is the negative noun *stan*, which is a blend of *stalk* and *fan*, and can be used either as a verb (e.g. “I stan her!”) or as a noun (e.g. “He is such a stan.”).

3.3.3 Clipping

Clipping takes place when a word of two or more syllables is reduced to a shorter form, without a change in its function taking place. There are seemingly no clear phonological or graphological rules that denote where a word may be cut, but in most cases the first syllable is retained, and sometimes the first two (Adams 1973, 135). Examples of clippings include common words such as *gas* (‘gasoline’), *ad* (‘advertisement’) and *exam* (‘examination’).

Clipped forms are often used in casual speech, or at least in less formal situations than their full-length equivalents (1973, 135). In many cases, the full-length equivalents have acquired a formal, even slightly pedantic sense, and their clipped forms have become the preferred version, and are on their way to independence (1973, 136). In this study, the slang words *sus* (‘suspect’, ‘suspicious’) and *cray* (‘crazy’) are examples of words created by clipping. *Cray* is an ‘irregular’ clipping in the sense that it retains the final *y*, but there are many other irregular clippings that have become part of the standard language, such as *maths* (*mathematics*) and *bike* (*bicycle*).

3.3.4 Compounding

According to Yule (1999, 65), compounding is the joining of two separate words to create a single form. However, as Plag (2003, 134) demonstrates, there is no structural restriction on the recursivity of compounding, and thus, compounds can, and often do, consist of more than two words (e.g. *university teaching award committee member*), but even in those cases, they can be analyzed as essentially binary structures.

Compounding is a very common process in English, and most compounds are nouns, such as *bookcase, boyfriend, wallpaper* etc. Noun compounds have a final element that is nominal, modified by one or more nominal, adjectival or verbal element (Adams 2001, 78). Thus, compounds are said to have a *modifier-head structure*: the right-hand member of the compound is the *head*, modified by the left-hand member, *the modifier* (Plag 2003, 135). Since the head of the compound usually occurs on the right-hand side, compounds are said to have a *right-hand head rule*: most of the compound's semantic and syntactic information is derived from its head (2003, 135). Thus, if the head is a noun, the compound will be a noun (e.g. *snowflake*), and the head is also where plural marking occurs (e.g. *taxi drivers*) (2003, 135-136). What separates *noun compounds* from *noun phrases* is the stress pattern; in compounds, stress is on the left-hand member of the compound (e.g. *bláckboard*), whereas in noun phrases, stress is on the last word of the phrase (e.g. *a black bóard*) (2003, 137).

The only slang compound included in this study is the negative word *fuckboy*, a combination of the words *fuck* and *boy*. It is a nominal compound, since the head is a noun.

3.3.5 Derivation

According to Yule (1999, 69), derivation is by far the most common word-formation process used to produce new English words. It is often also referred to as affixation, because derivation is the addition of affixes, which are bound morphemes such as *un-*, *pre-*, *-ful*, *-ness*, to bases, creating words like *unhappy, prejudice, hopeful* and *sadness*. As we can see, some affixes are added to the beginning of a word (e.g. *un-*) and are thus called *prefixes*. Other affixes are added to the end of the word (e.g. -

ful), and they are called *suffixes*. *Infixes*, which are affixes incorporated inside another word, are not normally found in English, but are quite common in some other languages. There are, however, some expressions even in English where infixes are used, usually in exclamations such as *Unfuckingbelievable!* and *Absogoddamnltely!*, but these ‘inserted’ forms can be viewed as a special version of infixing. (Yule 1999, 69.)

The slang words in this study created using derivation are *sassy*, *sicko* and *wifey*. *Sassy* involves the addition of suffix *-y* to the noun *sass*. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, *sass* is “talk or behavior that is rude and shows no respect”. Thus, someone who is *sassy* shows this type of rude and disrespectful behavior. However, in slang, being *sassy* is considered a positive thing, and for that reason, the term has been categorized into the group of positive slang words in this study. The word *Sicko* has been created by adding the suffix *-o* to the adjective *sick*, turning it from an adjective to a noun. *The Collins Dictionary* defines *sicko* as “a person who is sadistic or perverted”. *Wifey* has been created by adding the suffix *-y* to the noun *wife*, altering the meaning of the original word to something less formal, and the word *wifey* can be used to refer to one’s girlfriend.

3.4. Ways of forming new slang words

One of the main characteristics of slang is its everchanging vocabulary. Slang words are often seen as products of innovative, creative and influential individuals (Coleman 2012, 49). However, it is more often the social environment that causes new slang expressions and words to emerge rather than individual creativity or innovativeness. According to Coleman (2012, 55), slang arises best in a situation where the oppressed group is separated from the outside world, preferably for many years, and their interactions are restricted by physical boundaries and regulations. Slang also develops best where group identity is more powerful than external ties (2012, 55). OCEL proposes that slang is typically cultivated among people who do not have real political power (e.g. adolescents, college students, etc.) or who have some type of reason to hide what they know or do from authorities (e.g.

gamblers, drug addicts and prisoners). Thus, typical examples of slang include military slang, prison slang, public school/college slang, teenage slang and street slang. But slang can also be formed in less extreme circumstances, as long as there is a group of people who start using the new slang words and, in that way, bring them to life.

According to OCEL, slang items often diverge from standard usage in predictable ways, most often by generalization and melioration. In both of these cases, the slang usage is created by changes in meaning, while the word stays completely the same as in standard usage. In generalization, a term acquires a wider range of referents (OCEL); for example, in slang, *a bag* has the meanings “to acquire”, “one’s taste”, “a condom”, “to lie to; deceive”, “a displeasing woman” etc. (*The Online Slang Dictionary*). Generalization often operates together with melioration, a process in which the connotations of a word become more kind or favorable (OCEL). Coleman (2012, 31-32) refers to the same phenomenon, stating that standard meanings can sometimes be entirely reversed in slang usage; standard English terms of disapproval can become slang terms of approval. For example, in their slang meaning, *wicked* and *bad* are actually positive adjectives. Coleman also notes that a change in the meaning of one word will sometimes produce changes in the meanings of other, associated terms as well. Many general slang words originate from the taboo words of subcultures, and they can lose their shock value and attain more positive connotations through increased use and broad application (OCEL).

New slang words can be created in just as many ways as new words in general. Sometimes, slang words are created by changing the grammatical function of a Standard English word; for example, the noun *fire* can now be used as an adjective in its slang meaning to mean that something is really cool or amazing: “this new app is fire”. New slang words can also be formed by the process of back-formation; for example, the verb *emote* “to display the emotions” (1917-) has been created on the basis of the noun *emotion* (1808-) (Coleman 2012, 33). Words can also be generated on the basis of proper nouns (e.g. brand names such as *Hoover*), or proper nouns can be used generically

(2012, 33-34). For example, the new slang term *Linda* can be used to refer to any beautiful and sweet girl, regardless of what her actual name is (*Urban Dictionary*). *Linda* is also an example of a slang word borrowed from another language; in Spanish, it means “beautiful”.

Slang words are also created by changes in form: combining Standard English words in condescending or humorous ways resulting in slang synonyms, adding suffixes such as *-er*, *-ie*, *-io* or *-aroonie* (resulting in slang words such as *coolio*, *switcharoonie*), or adding prefixes or infixes (e.g. *superfly*) (Coleman 2012, 35-37). Slang terms can also be created by abbreviation (e.g. *bro* for “brother”, *sup* for “what’s up?”, *LOL* for “laughing out loud”) or by changes in spelling (e.g. *m8* for “mate”) (2012, 37-40). Imitative (also known as echoic and onomatopoeic) words are also common in slang, for example *barf* for “to vomit” (2012, 45).

All of these ways of forming new words mentioned above are also used for creating new Standard English words. However, far more slang words than standard words are produced by different types of abbreviation, by blending and by word-play. There are also more slang than standard words that are labelled ‘origin unknown’ or ‘origin obscure’. Only a few word formation techniques are unique to slang, and the best known one is rhyming slang. It is a form of word-play in which standard or slang words are replaced by a rhyming phrase. For example, one’s wife can be referred to as one’s *trouble and strife*. In many cases, the rhyming element is omitted; someone might for example be told to use their *loaf (of bread)* meaning their “head”. Another, much less productive, word formation technique unique to slang is back slang, where words are simply reversed; e.g. *yob* refers to “a boy; a thug”. (Coleman 2012, 46-47.)

4. Language and social media

Language is always shaped by the current society, generation and technical progress. Today, the Internet and social media are making a huge impact on the English language. English as a Lingua Franca is the language of the Internet, and it is constantly changing and evolving. Many people are

concerned about what the Internet is doing to the English language, and what the dominance of English on the Internet is doing to all the other languages. As Akbarov (2016, 9) mentions, people continue to be concerned that “standard language will be lost, and that new generations will be illiterate due to the influence of abbreviated informal language used on the Internet”. Thus, attitudes to Internet language are often very negative, and the Internet is seen as a bad influence on the English language.

There is nothing new about this fear of new communications technology; people have always been afraid that language will be ruined by new ways of communication. When printing was invented in the 15th century, the Church perceived it as an invention of Satan (Crystal 2001, 2). Languages will keep changing and evolving no matter what we think of it, and at the moment, a lot is happening to the English language on the Internet. Instead of seeing this as a negative thing, we should appreciate the new, creative opportunities made possible by the Internet and social media. In the following sections, the characteristics of social media and its influence on the English language will be looked at in more detail.

4.1 Web 2.0. and social media

The focus of this study is on the language found in the Web 2.0, or the social web, as it is also known as. While Web 1.0 was mostly used for sharing information, the term *social web* marks a shift towards the Internet as an interpersonal resource that is used to create and enact social relationships, rather than to simply transmit information (Zappavigna 2012, 2). However, the two functions are still clearly interconnected, but the way information is shared on the Internet has changed drastically during the last decade. On the social web, a great amount of the content is user-generated; any user of the Internet can share their ideas and values, and there are even many user-generated encyclopedias and dictionaries, e.g. *Urban Dictionary*, where anyone can add their own definition for a word (more

information in Section 5.5.). On Web 2.0, content can be written by anyone, read anywhere and anytime, and new conversations and content emerge in a constant flow.

Especially the rise of *social media* has had great consequences for the development of language and slang on the Internet. Zappavigna (2012, 2) defines social media as “technology that aims to support ambient interpersonal connection”, referring to all of the web-based services that promote some form of social interaction or ‘networking’. On many of these websites, users can establish and develop online relationships and share content with their “friends” or “followers”, which can then be commented on. The concept of social media is thus closely related to that of *social networking service* (SNS), which is the most commonly used form of social media. SNSs are services where users create an online profile in order to connect with other people and to be “findable” on the Internet. Perhaps the most well-known and used SNSs are Facebook and Twitter, which both have millions of active users each month. In this study, the focus will be on Twitter, which can also be described as a *microblogging* service, since it is a form of length-delimited communication using a social networking service. More information on Twitter can be found in Section 5.3. (Zappavigna 2012.)

Thus, Web 2.0 is a place filled with content created by all kinds of people from all over the world. Especially on social media and microblogging services, people express their personality through creative language that takes advantage of features made possible by the Internet. The dynamic, global and real-time nature of social media has consequences for how language is used, and the typical features of language used on the Internet and social media are examined in the next section.

4.2 Typical features of language on the Internet

In 2001, Crystal (2001, 18) termed the language used on the Internet as “Netspeak”. According to him, it is a type of language that displays features that are unique to the Internet, arising from its electronic, global and interactive character. However, Tagliamonte (2016, 3) claims that many of these features are not unique to *computer mediated communication* (CMC), but that instead, most of

them have existed for hundreds of years. While the acronym *lol* may have started to spread in the era of the Internet, the other common variants of laughter, *haha* and *hehe*, have been a part of the written language since 1000 AD, and even *lol* was supposedly used in a letter written to Winston Churchill by Admiral John Fisher in 1917 (2016, 3). Tagliamonte also claims that many of the typical features of CMC, such as abbreviations and non-standard spellings, are not actually new, but resume earlier practices of chat, much like how earlier generations of teenagers have passed around notes encrypted with special alphabets and secret spellings. There are, however, many features of language that are unique to social media and the Internet, since that is the only environment that allows for such features to exist. As Seargeant and Tagg (2014, 3) state, “online social media are having a profound effect on the linguistic and the communicative practices in which people engage, as well as the social groupings and networks they create”.

People talk to each other on different applications, social media platforms and websites’ comment sections, and use similar language that they would use in face-to-face communication. Thus, a lot of the language found on the Internet could be described as “written speech”, which could be the reason why slang, typically found in speech, can be so easily created and used on the Internet; Internet language is not that far away from speech even though it is in written form. New networks of slang are easily created on the Internet (Coleman 2012, 267), since the Internet builds connections between people from all different social groups, ethnicities and countries. There are some types of slang that have been created on the Internet and that are only used on the Internet. For example, *hackers slang* and *gamers slang* are products of the Internet, and there is really no use for them outside of the web. On the other hand, many *Twitter terms* (e.g. *tweet*, *retweet*, *unfollow*) began as jargon, with a fixed, constrained meaning, but have already become common knowledge even among people who do not use Twitter (2012, 282). Twitter users have also created a playful lexicon of Twitter slang including the prefixal accretion ‘tw’, derived from the word Twitter, which can be added to any regular word, creating words such as “tweeps” (variation of *peeps*, i.e. people), “Twittersphere”

(similar to *blogosphere*) and “tweetups” (*meetups*, i.e. face-to-face meetings) (Zappavigna 2012, 133).

The technical properties of websites and mobile phones have also affected the language used on social networking services. Because text messages or tweets may only contain a limited number of characters, people have created a great number of acronyms to make communication easier and faster; examples include BRB (“Be Right Back”), TY (“Thank You”), CU (“See You”), FAQ (“Frequently Asked Questions”), IMO (“In My Opinion”), etc. Other common features of Internet language include writing entirely in lower case, using block capitals for emphasis, leaving out apostrophes (e.g. *im* instead of “I’m”), duplicating exclamation marks for emphasis (e.g. *!!!!*), using typographical expressions of emotion and attitude (e.g. *lol*, *:D*), and duplicating letters for emphasis or to express enthusiasm (e.g. *soooo*) (Coleman 2012, 277-278). Phonological reduction via number and letter homophones is also common (e.g. ‘2’ for ‘to’ and ‘u’ for ‘you’), and both forms can often occur simultaneously (Zappavigna 2012, 149).

Internet language lacks many features that are crucial when it comes to expressing personal attitudes and opinions and moderating social relationships, such as facial expressions, gestures and conventions of body posture and distance (Crystal 2001, 37). This has led to the creation of *smileys* or *emoticons* (2001, 37.). They were originally made by combining keyboard characters (e.g. :-)), but these days, using *emojis* (e.g. 😊) is much more common. Emojis are small digital images or icons used to express emotions, things or ideas. Even though the set of available emojis is fixed and irrespective of a user’s location, the way they are interpreted and used may vary due to cultural differences (Barbieri et al. 2016). Thus, deciphering what is meant with a set of emojis is not always easy or unambiguous, but they are a great way of adding meaning and emotion to everyday online conversation in informal situations.

One feature unique to the social web is *searchable talk*. With the help of hashtags, we can mark our discourse so that it can be found by other people, and as a result we can bond with others around

particular values (Zappavigna 2012, 1). For example, by using the hashtag #fail in our tweet, we add our tweet into the world-wide collection of tweets relating to the topic of failing, and our short message can be found by anyone clicking on the hashtag. Zappavigna calls this form of online communion through the use of hashtags *ambient affiliation*: with the help of hashtags, people who have not had direct interaction online become part of the same virtual grouping. Thus, the use of hashtags on social media allow people to connect to others and find content that interests them in a way that is not possible through any other medium of language.

Another feature that separates the language on social media from other media is time. The content on social media is real-time, and most often chronologically displayed (Zappavigna 2012, 3). People can express their thoughts to thousands of others as soon as the thought comes to their mind, and it is received instantly by their “friends” or “followers”. Posts create a “stream” that is chronologically displayed, most often with the newest posts at the top of the page. This real-time aspect produces a semiotic world that allows users to have more or less instant access to what is being said on their social networking sites at any moment (2012, 4).

Using social media allows people to comment on great events as they are happening or being talked about on the media. This is referred to as “back-channel communication”: supplementary media is running in parallel to some main form of communication (Zappavigna 2012, 32). Such back channels have many different functions: they report information by posting informational highlights, enhance information by adding extra material and comment on information by presenting an opinion (2012, 32). By using social media, people can see many different points of view regarding any event, get more information that might be of interest to them and also express their own opinions and in that way connect with other people who have similar views on the topic. No other form of communication allows for such real-time commentary among people from all over the world.

According to Seargeant and Tagg (2014, 5), there are two fundamental social dynamics at the heart of SNS use: the presentation of self and the building and maintenance of networked

relationships. Thus, both the concepts of *identity* and *community* are enacted via social media. This needs to be done primarily through written language, which makes a specific set of visual resources available for identity construction; typography, orthography, the creative combining of different scripts, and photos and images. However, the text-based nature of communication on social media causes many other physical attributes related to identity, such as tone of voice, facial expression, gesture, gender, age and accent, to be less salient, if accessible at all. A key factor in identity management on social media is the notion of authenticity – the extent to which an online persona is seen by interlocutors to relate to the person behind it. People expect their interlocutor to be authentic, and this belief plays a pivotal role in the way that people interact online. Performances of identity on social media are also constrained by the perceived online audience; the exact composition of a user’s audience is unknowable, a concept known as *context collapse*. (Seargeant and Tagg 2014, 5-8.)

All of these factors have consequences for how people express their identity online, and, in many cases, online identities may be quite different than offline identities. It is common to keep communication “light” and “fun” on social networking sites, which provide a space for “ludic self-construction”, i.e. relating to ourselves and others in a playful manner (2014, 23). This playfulness is showcased by the types of interactions people typically engage in online – they play games, flirt, joke, or hang out with each other – and by the language and multimodal imagery they use (2014, 23).

One good example of multimodality on social media is the use of Internet memes – humorous images, videos or pieces of text that are copied and spread fast by Internet users. The term *meme*, modeled after *gene*, was coined by Richard Dawkins in 2006 to suggest that cultural units replicate and mutate as they are shared, just like genes (Zappavigna 2012, 100). Memes are created and shared online for social bonding, since humor is an important factor in maintaining social relationships (2012, 101). In fact, a common reason for creating a meme is for the “lulz”, “an act associated with humour that solidifies an ingroup by ridiculing others” (2012, 101). Thus, people often bond over

humorous memes on the Internet, and such memes become widely known and used cultural symbols and ideas.

Characteristics of social media also have consequences for the types of communities that people are able to form (Seargeant and Tagg 2014, 12). Online communities are not bound by geographical proximity and shared background, but more by shared interests (2014, 11). People form communities online with strangers who have similar interests, but SNS's are also used for the continuation of pre-existing offline social networks. When offline networks communicate online, the discourse is often very context-specific and comprised of a content and style which is replete with in-group reference points (2014, 12). Thus, while communication online is always potentially global with an unknown audience, it is also possible for existing groups to replicate and expand their offline community with the help of SNSs.

The main function of language on social media is thus to build connections. People have conversations with each other, even if some features that are important to conversation, such as turn-taking, are not readily available. Many social media platforms (e.g. Twitter) allow asymmetrical relationships, where reciprocation of a follower is not obligatory, and non-reciprocation is not viewed as rejection (Zappavigna 2012, 31). There is also no social expectation that followers reply to a *micropost*, such as a tweet, a feature which has been referred to as "dilution of conversational obligations" (2012, 31). Even still, the main reason behind posting a piece of text to a social media platform is often to start up conversation, or to offer one's followers information that will help build a connection. Thus, language on social media has the main purpose of connecting people to one another and selecting to use certain slang expressions and words can be of great help in making stronger connections and showing solidarity and involvement.

5. Material and Methods

In this chapter, the material and methods employed in this study will be presented. The following sections present the primary sources of material for this study: *the Corpus of Global Web-Based English*, *the Corpus of Contemporary American English* and the social networking service Twitter. A brief look at *Dictionary.com* and *Urban Dictionary* will also be taken, since these online dictionaries have provided definitions for many of the slang words in this study. After that, the methods employed in this study will be briefly explained.

5.1 The Corpus of Global Web-Based English

One of the two corpora used in this study is the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE). It includes 1,9 billion words from twenty different English-speaking countries, all gathered from the web between the years 2012-2013 (<https://corpus.byu.edu/>). The great number of words offers a richness of data which is particularly useful when searching for lower frequency words, such as the new slang words in this study. Another reason for choosing this corpus is the fact that it consists of data collected from the web, where the slang words studied are most likely used, and should thus offer plenty of relevant examples.

GloWbE does not offer its users access to entire texts, due to copyright issues. However, some context is provided for each example, and there is always a link to the original website where the example has been taken from. Each example of text is also categorized as either general (G) or blog (B), and I will provide this category along with the website link for each example that is looked at in this study.

Since the texts in GloWbE have been collected from websites, it is possible that there are some duplicates left, even though they should have mostly been removed by the compilers of the corpus. When compiling my data, I have removed all of the duplicates and other irrelevant tokens in order to avoid distorting the results of the present study. As is to be expected with examples of slang collected

from the Internet, the language is often very informal and has been typed fast, resulting in some spelling anomalies and vulgar or offensive words. I have not censored or edited the examples taken from either of the corpora (or from Twitter) in any way, and thus all of the examples presented have been produced as such by their original writer.

5.2 The Corpus of Contemporary American English

The other corpus used in this study is the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). The corpus is notably smaller than GloWbE, but it is the only large and balanced corpus of American English, including 560 million words collected from various different sources of American English. COCA includes material from the years 1990-2017 and can thus easily be used as an aid in determining when a word first started to become widely used in American English. (<https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>)

COCA was chosen as the second corpus for two main reasons; first, because many of the slang words included in this study originate in American English, it is expected that many of them can be found in COCA. Secondly, COCA offers more recent examples of language use, since there is material collected up to the year 2017, whereas GloWbE only includes examples from the years 2012-2013.

Similarly to GloWbE, all the texts in COCA have been categorized according to their genre; COCA includes examples of texts that are spoken (SPOK), popular magazines (MAG), fiction (FIC), newspapers (NEWS) and academic (ACAD) (<https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>). COCA also offers more context for each word than GloWbE, and the exact date when the text was created, as well as its title and source are also provided. I will include all of the relevant information for every example that is looked at, and, as with the examples from GloWbE, all of the pieces of text will be represented in their original form, and any possible duplicates and other irrelevant tokens have been removed.

5.3 Twitter

Twitter is one of the most popular microblogging services in the world. It combines aspects of social networking sites with instant messaging technologies, creating a platform where users can share thoughts and ideas and communicate with each other via brief 140-character messages known as “tweets” (Britannica.com). These tweets can be viewed, liked and commented on by the user’s “followers”, and “retweeting” other users’ tweets is also possible. Tweets can also include photos, videos and links to other websites, allowing people to easily comment on anything they discover on the Internet.

Twitter was launched by its founders Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone and Evan Williams in 2006 (*The Globe and Mail*). By 2018, it had 200 million users worldwide, with more than 140 million tweets sent every day (*The Globe and Mail*). Twitter has changed the media, political communication and business in many ways. It has also changed the language, and Twitter is a great place to look for when studying new words, since it basically offers a constantly updating corpus of real, current language use by people from all over the world. Thus, the slang words in this study will first and foremost be studied by looking at real, unedited examples from Twitter, which will best demonstrate how the words are used by those who use them the most.

5.4 Dictionary.com

Dictionary.com is a digital dictionary that was founded in 1995. It includes millions of definitions for English words, example sentences, word origins, spellings, and audio pronunciations. The website’s primary source is the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, which is kept up to date by Dictionary.com’s team of experienced lexicographers. Other established sources, including *American Heritage* and *Harper Collins*, are also used to make sure that the website caters to all language needs. (*Dictionary.com*)

What makes *Dictionary.com* particularly useful for this study is the fact that it offers definitions and etymologies for many new slang words that have not been entered into other dictionaries. In fact, detailed information about the origins and the use of most of the slang words included in this study was found on *Dictionary.com*. Thus, especially in relation to the slang words' origins and first usage, this study relies heavily on information found on *Dictionary.com*, since not that much information about such new terms was available elsewhere. Even though *Dictionary.com* claims that its content has been compiled by competent lexicographers and from established sources, it is still good to look at the information critically and to keep in mind that it may not be completely accurate.

5.5 Urban Dictionary

Urban Dictionary is an online crowdsourced dictionary that offers definitions for slang words and phrases that are typically not found in standard dictionaries. The site was founded by Aaron Peckham in 1999 as a parody of other dictionaries that take themselves too seriously. Today, *Urban Dictionary* has millions of entries, and thousands of new definitions are added daily. While anyone with a valid email address may submit their definition, it has to get more "Publish" than "Don't publish" votes from volunteer editors in order to be published on the site. People can also upvote or downvote definitions on the site, resulting in the definition with most upvotes being placed at the top of the page as the "top definition" for that word.

Urban Dictionary is used in this study, along with other online dictionaries, to discover how new slang words are defined and understood by the people who are their primary users. The informal approach of *Urban Dictionary* allows new slang words to be added faster than anywhere else, but it also means that the site includes not only definitions but also descriptions, personal opinions, and offensive language. Thus, a certain level of skepticism is needed when looking at the definitions on the site, and in this study, the emphasis is mostly on the top definitions, which have gained greatest acceptance on the site.

5.6. Methods employed

In this thesis, both qualitative and quantitative analysis are used in order to answer the research questions. The first step when carrying out this study was already taken in Section 3.3, where each slang word was analyzed in terms of which word-formation technique was used to create it. In the following Chapter, the origins of each slang word will be investigated with the help of online articles, websites and dictionaries such as *Dictionary.com* and *Urban Dictionary* introduced in the previous sections. As mentioned earlier, these sources were chosen because they are currently the only available sources of information regarding these new slang terms. All of the available texts and online dictionary entries for the slang words will be closely examined in order to find out where the slang words originate and when they were first used.

The next step after researching the words' origins is to study how they are used on social media. This will be done with the help of Instagram and Twitter. Instagram is a free application used for sharing photos and videos. Posts on Instagram can be tagged with hashtags, and the number of tagged posts for each slang word will be looked at in order to find out how popular the words are on social media, since Twitter does not offer any such numbers. Thus, Instagram is only used in order to obtain numbers for a quantitative analysis. This decision was made for multiple reasons. First, Instagram's main purpose is sharing photos and videos, unlike Twitter, which is mainly used to share thoughts and opinions in the form of text. Since the focus of this study is on written material, it is more suitable to look for examples on a website that focuses on text rather than image. Secondly, the search function on Instagram only allows to search for users, places and hashtags, making it impossible to search for examples of the slang words as being used as part of a text rather than just as a hashtag. In addition, people may often use English hashtags on Instagram even if the caption for their post is written in another language, which is another reason why looking for examples of the slang words' use as part of the English language on Instagram would be very difficult. Thus, the decision was made to keep the focus of the qualitative part of this study on Twitter, and to only use Instagram in order to include

some quantitative analysis as well. The numbers from Instagram were all gathered on 4 April 2019 and may have thus changed since.

After the number of hashtags is gathered from Instagram, examples of the use of each slang word on Twitter will be collected in order to analyze how the words are actually used on social media. These examples will be collected by committing a search for each slang word, and by selecting five relevant examples from the resulting list of tweets. Each word will be searched for in its basic, singular form (e.g. *bae*) in order to keep the data as simple as possible. The examples chosen for the analysis will, for the most part, be the first five relevant tweets (i.e. tweets where the slang word is found in the actual tweet, and not just in the username) that are found on the “Most recent” page of the search results, unless if some of these are incomprehensible, or would require more context, such as previous replies in the conversation or the attached picture, video or linked website, in order to be analyzed. Thus, the emphasis is on tweets that only include text and that can be understood and analyzed without knowledge of their context. By choosing the most recent tweets at the time of the search, it is ensured that the most current use of the words is studied. The identity of the Twitter users is protected, but the date when each tweet was posted is provided. Once relevant tweets have been collected, they will be analyzed in various different ways, for example by looking at which constructions the slang words usually occur in, which words they are typically used with, what type of language is used in connection to them, how they are typically spelled, etc.

After the slang word’s typical use on social media has been studied, it will be compared with its use in the two corpora. A search for each slang word in both GloWbE and COCA will be committed. All the irrelevant tokens and duplicates will be removed, after which the number of relevant tokens will be presented in order to compare it with the amount of tagged posts on Instagram. Then, five examples from the tokens will be analyzed to see whether the slang word is used in a similar way as on Twitter. The tokens will be chosen randomly, just like the tweets, but excluding any tokens that may be difficult to understand and analyze without additional context.

6. Results

In the following sections, the results for each slang word are reviewed individually. The results are divided into sections according to the original categorization of the words, i.e. positive words are looked at first, followed by negative words. Each word is first given some background information, after which its origins, use on social media and use in the corpora are looked at. A further discussion of all of the results can be found in Chapter 7.

6.1. Positive words

In the following sections, the results for all the positive slang words are looked at. This group includes the words *bae*, *mvp*, *sassy* and *wifey*.

6.1.1 *Bae*

Perhaps the most well-known out of all the slang words in this study is *bae*, a word that can be used to refer to one's partner. According to the *Merriam-Webster online dictionary*, *bae* means *sweetheart* or *baby*, and *Dictionary.com* states that the word is "a slang term for a significant other or an object of affection". In 2013, *bae* was nominated as the American Dialect Society's Word of the Year, and, in the following years, the word received growing attention and was added to many online dictionaries (*Dictionary.com*). In the following sections, *bae* will be looked at in more detail regarding its origins, creation, use on social media and use in the two different corpora.

6.1.1.1 The origins and creation of *bae*

According to *Dictionary.com*, *bae* has its origins in black slang in the early 21st century. It appeared in hip-hop and rap lyrics in 2005, before spreading into mainstream slang in the 2010's. Below are a few examples of *bae* used in song lyrics before the 2010's:

“What I Love About Bae She Turn Me On Anywhere” (in *Shawty [Remix]* by Webbie, 2008)
 “I shouldn't have to wait for you (for your love bae)” (in *Shouldn't Have to Wait* by Ryan Leslie, 2009) [Lyrics.com]

Dictionary.com states that *bae* appears to be a shortening or pronunciation of *babe* or *baby*, and this notion is supported by *Urban Dictionary*, which states that *bae* is an African American Vernacular English pronunciation of “babe”. However, many dictionaries claim that *bae* is an acronym for “before anyone else”, which is, according to *Dictionary.com*, merely “a popular folk etymology” that started to spread in the early 2010’s. Many dictionaries and websites do state that *bae* originated as a modified version of *baby* or *babe*, and that the acronym, or, as many websites call it, “backronym”, developed later, when the term became more popular. The earliest definition of *bae* was submitted to *Urban Dictionary* by user Trong on March 14th 2003, and it describes *bae* as a “bastardization of the term 'babe'” (knowyourmeme.com).

It appears that the word *bae* has most likely originally been created on the basis of the words *baby* or *babe* and could thus be seen as a clipping. However, nowadays it is also widely known that *bae* is an acronym for “before anyone else”, and it could thus be seen to represent both of these word-formation mechanisms.

6.1.1.2 The use of *bae* on social media

Bae is a very popular word on the Internet, used by millions of people to refer to their partner on various social media platforms. On Instagram, over 16,5 million posts have been tagged with the hashtag #bae. Below are five examples of the use of *bae* on Twitter.

- (1) Imagine going through your **bae**'s phone and see. "sidechick" in the call log and when you call it BoOom!. . your phone rings... 📞📞👉 (19 November 2018)
- (2) **bae** take longer than a damn female hurry tf up (19 November 2018)
- (3) Me and **bae** been on the phone for 5 hours 😭😭😭 (19 November 2018)
- (4) When she mad she call me my middle name Not **bae** (19 November 2018)

(5) I ain't got no **bae** I ain't catching no feeling (19 November 2018)

These tweets are very typical examples of how *bae* is used. One typical structure found in many tweets, not presented in the examples above, is sentences such as “When bae asks/says...” accompanied by a gif that reflects one’s feelings or reaction to what their bae has said or done. As Zappavigna (2012, 100) notes, multimedia content is often shared on social media networks, and thus combining text and image is a very common feature of communication on the Internet.

As we can see in the examples above, the language in many of them has features that are typical for AAVE; omission of auxiliaries, absence of verb-subject agreement and the negative indicator *ain't*. Some of the tweets also include other new slang terms and abbreviations, such as *sidechick* “a mistress” and *tf* “the fuck”. Thus, it seems that people who use the word *bae* are also familiar with other trendy slang words. On social media, *bae* is hence often used in certain typical constructions and together with other slang words, and the word’s origins in Black Vernacular English are still visible in its current use.

6.1.1.3 The use of *bae* in corpora

When searching for *bae* in GloWbE, the frequency is 2547. In most of these tokens, *bae* is either the name of a person or a company, and thus most of the search results are not relevant for this study.

Below is the only example of *bae* used in the sense “babe, baby” found in GloWbE:

(6) Oh yeah, if you couldn't tell, I'm in LOVE with him... mind ya business further from that Love you **bae**... (JM, General: outaroad.com)

In this example, *bae* is used in song lyrics, reflecting the word’s origins. Based on this, it would seem that the word has not spread to wider usage, but some more relevant results were found in COCA.

A search for *bae* in COCA yields 291 tokens, of which 24 are relevant to this study (with duplicates removed). Most of the tokens come from popular magazines (20 tokens), but there are also

a few examples of spoken language (3 tokens) and one of fiction. Below are five relevant examples from COCA.

- (7) The Weeknd, on the other hand, hasn't publicly said anything about his **bae's** ex. (MAG: Mashable, 2017)
- (8) Jon Snow is so woke, so **bae**. (MAG: Jezebel, 2016)
- (9) I had gotten very used to Drake being a beefy, bearded **bae** and I did not appreciate this regression. (MAG: Jezebel, 2016)
- (10) I have one blizzard **bae**. It is red wine. (SPOK: NPR: ATC Weekend, 2016)
- (11) Read sylviaobell's Black Twitter dictionary for explanations of shade, **bae** and more. (MAG: Essence, 2014)

Similarly to Twitter, *bae* is used together with other new slang terms also in COCA. In many cases, the slang words *bae* and *woke* are used in the same phrase, and these instances have most likely been a part of the same article. The phrases “bae Factor” and “blizzard bae” are also found on several examples, which shows how *bae* is often used in compounds. Whereas on Twitter *bae* was always written entirely in lower case, in COCA it is sometimes written with the first letter capitalized (*Bae*) or entirely with block emphasis (*BAE*). It would thus seem that in the examples from COCA, *bae* is treated more as a new, unfamiliar word, whereas on Twitter, it is already seen as an established part of the vocabulary. In COCA, *bae* is used in many cases when talking about celebrities, and most mentions of *bae* are from popular magazines. Thus, the word seems to only be used in a very specific context, and to not have spread to very widespread usage. All of the relevant mentions of *bae* are from the years 2014-2017, which showcases how the word has only become popular in the last few years.

While there are some examples of *bae* used in the two corpora, it seems that the word has not particularly spread to wider usage yet. In most cases, it is used as an attention-seeking device in magazine articles, and only in very specific constructions, such as *woke bae*. While *bae* was often used with features of AAVE on Twitter, reflecting the word’s origins, no such features appear in the

examples from the corpora, and, instead, *bae* seems to be treated as a piece of trendy language, often used in popular magazines to get the reader's attention.

6.1.2 MVP

The acronym *MVP*, which stands for “Most Valuable Player”, is often used when talking about sports and video games. According to *Merriam-Webster*, *MVP* is “the player who contributes the most to his or her team's success”. It is a word that is often used on the Internet in other contexts as well, and for that reason, it has been chosen for this study. In the following sections, the origins, creation and use of *MVP* will be looked at in more detail.

6.1.2.1 The origins and the creation of MVP

MVP originates in sports, where it is an award given to the best-performing player in the league, in a specific competition or on a particular team. After basketball player Kevin Durant's acceptance speech for the MVP Trophy in 2014, during which he called his mother “the real MPV”, the phrase started to spread and become widely used also outside of sports (*Urban Dictionary*). It is a congratulatory term that is used when giving someone appreciation or thanks (*Urban Dictionary*), and thus belongs to the group of positive words in this study. *MVP* is most often used in the phrases “you the real MVP” or “the real MVP”, and there is even a popular Internet meme that includes the phrase and an image of Kevin Durant during his speech.

6.1.2.2 The use of MVP on social media

There are 3 million posts tagged with the hashtag #mvp on Instagram. Most of the recent tagged images are photos of different professional athletes, so it does appear that on Instagram, this may be the most typical context where the hashtag #mvp is used. Below are five examples of the use of *MVP* on Twitter.

- (12) You the real **MVP** Guys!! (4 December 2018)
- (13) Shoutout to the woman at the cafe that told me to take more sugars for free and only charged me for one. You the real **MVP**. (4 December 2018)
- (14) My auntie is the real **MVP** for sending me a care package from GUAM GU 🇬🇺 (4 December 2018)
- (15) shoutout to my cat for waking me up at 3 in the morning, u the real **mvp** (4 December 2018)
- (16) As I push through end of this 16hr shift shout out to #AmpEnergyDrink real **MVP** (4 December 2018)

As we can see in the examples above, the phrase *the real MVP* is the most common way this slang term is used. It is often used to say that someone is *the real MVP* without including the verb “be” (a feature of AAVE known as ‘copula deletion’), as in “you the real MVP”, a phrase that thus has an AAVE ring to it. There are also many tweets in which the word is not used in its current slang meaning, but instead in reference to the MVP award, and in those cases, it is just used on its own, e.g. “Said it before....it’s like when Lebron doesn’t win the MVP..” (4 December 2018). Most often, *MVP* is used to refer to people, but it can also be used in a humorous way to refer to virtually anything, like in Example 16, where it refers to an energy drink. The word is also sometimes used sarcastically to mean the opposite, e.g. in Example 15, and as mentioned earlier in Section 4.2, these sorts of playful usages of language are very typical of slang and Internet language.

6.1.2.3 The use of *MVP* in corpora

In GloWbE, there are 5343 results for *mvp*, and it appears that most of these have to do with sports and the MVP award, or that the acronym is used in a completely different, unrelated meaning. There are, however, 24 tokens in which the acronym appears to be used in its current slang meaning, and five of these are presented below.

- (17) Much to the dismay of sabermetricians everywhere, GIF was named Oxford American Dictionaries' Word of the Year. The **MVP** of lexicography, if you will. (US: General, espn.go.com)
- (18) This movie's **MVP** is really Jason Bateman from Arrested Development. (US: General, io9.com)
- (19) LG 3D HDTVs and home theatre systems were a definite hit, but the **MVP** of the event was the Canadian debut of LG's new Optimus smart phones, -- (CA: Blog, highroad.com)
- (20) My friends have even dubbed me the **MVP** of dating, -- (US: General, thecollegecrush.com)
- (21) She is my hero and deserves to be treated like a VIP. She is my **MVP**. (CA: General, urbanmoms.ca)

As the examples above demonstrate, *MVP* is used in many different ways in GloWbE. It is used to refer to people (Examples 18, 20 and 21), but also to words (Example 17) and smart phones (Example 19). Thus, it appears that this slang word is already used in other contexts besides sports, and while it is most often used to describe people, the more humorous use has spread outside of social media as well. In many of the examples from GloWbE, the structure “the MVP of...” is used, for example in Example 17 (“the MVP of lexicography”), Example 19 (“the MVP of the event”) and Example 20 (“the MVP of dating”). Interestingly, the phrase “the real MVP”, which was very popular on Twitter, is only found in two of the 24 relevant tokens from GloWbE. Thus, this phrase appears to be much more common on social media, but it is clear that the word *MVP* has already started to spread to wider usage outside of the context of sports.

In COCA, a search for *mvp* yields 3280 results, of which altogether 15 tokens are relevant. Most of these are from magazines (8 tokens), but there are also four examples of spoken language and three examples belonging to the category of news. The oldest token dates all the way back to 2000, and the newest tokens are from 2016. Five relevant examples are presented below.

- (22) Today's **MVP** is this dolphin, who wins a gold medal for stealing an iPad from allocated in a building shared by other corporations. (NEWS: The Detroit News, 2016)

- (23) You went to sleep hungry. You sacrificed for us. You're the real **MVP**. (NEWS: Washington Post, 2014)
- (24) Talk about a good defense -- guacamole, the **MVP** of Super Bowl parties, also helps reduce signs of skin aging. (MAG: GoodHousekeeping, 2012)
- (25) Sexiest Sports Guy David Beckham Becks is clearly Cosmo's **MVP** -- he won last year too. (MAG: Cosmopolitan, 2009)
- (26) For the past 40 years, the **MVP** of Good Morning America, " that man right there. (SPOK: ABC_GMA. 2007)

As the examples in above demonstrate, *MVP* is used in COCA in the same way as in GloWbE and on Twitter. It can be used to refer to people (Examples 23, 25 and 26), but also humorously of e.g. animals (Example 22) and food (Example 24). The structure “The MVP of...”, which was very common in GloWbE, is also found in COCA (Examples 24 and 26), as well as the phrase “the real MVP”, which was used in five of the 15 relevant tokens. The tokens also come from varied different genres, showing how *MVP* has already spread to magazines, news and the spoken language. Thus, even though the number of tokens for *MVP* in the two corpora is rather small, it does appear that the slang word is already used in various contexts outside of social media, and thus has the potential to become even more widespread in the future.

6.1.3 *Sassy*

Sassy is a positive adjective, used to describe someone who is “bold or fresh” (*Vocabulary.com*). The top definition for the word on *Urban Dictionary* states that *sassy* is used of “[s]omeone that is just the coolest person ever, and uses sarcasm in the coolest and funniest of ways”. Thus, a *sassy* person is bold, sarcastic and spicy, but in a lovable way. In the following sections, the origins and use of *sassy* will be looked at in more detail.

6.1.3.1 The origins and the creation of *sassy*

According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, *sassy* is a variant of the word *saucy*. It was first used in 1833 in the sense “impudent” (*Merriam-Webster*), but its meaning has since evolved into a more positive one, at least in its current use on social media. The word *sassy* is the result of affixation, with the suffix *-y* being added to the base *sass*, meaning “an appealingly exciting, lively, or spirited quality” (*Merriam-Webster*). The meaning of *sassy* does depend on the context, since it has not always been used in a positive sense, and its slang use could be misunderstood by people who are not familiar with the word’s current meaning.

6.1.3.2 The use of *sassy* on social media

On Instagram, 4 million posts have been tagged with the hashtag *#sassy*. Many of the recent tagged images are of people, and it is thus clear that this word is usually used to describe people. Below are five examples of the word *sassy* used on Twitter:

- (27) I am so **sassy** and I can’t change that. (3 April 2019)
- (28) “You got a bf” “nah why” “ya I doubt they’d put up w that **sassy** mouth of yours” they always do 😏 😏 😏 (5 December 2018)
- (29) I like making money and being **sassy**, and I literally have no money. Hello Twitter. (5 December 2018)
- (30) I just wanna be **sassy** and have no consequences (5 December 2018)
- (31) Give me Marvel babies to write with on Quirina. She’s **sassy** & I love writing a sorta evil child (5 December 2018)

As can be seen in the examples above, *sassy* is often used to describe people, typically women, and it is most often combined with the verb “be”. When searching for *sassy* on Twitter, many of the results were actually for user’s nicknames, e.g. *@SassyByNite*, *@SassyLitLover*, *@SassySasula*, *@SillySassy18*, *@SassySuuuze*, etc. Thus, it seems that people want to be associated with the word, and it is mostly used in a very positive sense. It is sometimes combined with an emphasizing word

such as “so”, or used as a part of a phrase, e.g. “that sassy mouth of yours”, where *sassy* is used to describe the type of language that the person uses. Thus, while the word is most often used of people on Twitter, it can also be used in reference to language.

6.1.3.3 The use of *sassy* in corpora

When searching for the word *sassy* in GloWbE, there are 1965 results, of which 1358 are relevant for this study (with duplicates removed). Below are five examples from GloWbE in which *sassy* is particularly used of people:

- (32) I had a huge, massive, oozing crush, and yet our relationship seemed to relegate me to the role of **sassy** friend of a much-younger sister' (if he'd had a sister). (US: General, thoughtcatalog.com)
- (33) We persevere. I have some of her sass. She's a little **sassy**. (US: General, lastagetimes.com)
- (34) This has the best Comments! It's great for all you **sassy** women out there! (US: General, amazon.com)
- (35) The author is young and **sassy**, and there's something irresistible about her. (US: General, barnesandnoble.com)
- (36) Playing the fierce and **sassy** Nina Simone would have been great for her. (US: General, blogs.indiewire.com)

Most of the results for *sassy* in GloWbE are from book or movie reviews, and it seems that the word is commonly used to describe female characters. It is used similarly to Twitter, i.e. in a positive sense, and it is sometimes combined with words such as “a little”, “really”, “particularly”, “so”, etc. to express the level of sassiness. *Sassy* is also often used in a phrase with other adjectives, e.g. “young and sassy”, “fierce and sassy”, “sweet, funny & sassy”, “cute, but sassy”, etc. Similar results can also be found in COCA (885 altogether), and five relevant ones are listed below.

- (37) My boss, a **sassy** redhead named Dixie, was only slightly less procedural than a brigadier general. (FIC: The dirt on ninth grave, 2017)
- (38) I caught the eye of a **sassy** young woman who had just boarded. (FIC: Stealing fire, 2017)
- (39) I love boots. They make me want to kick my heels. They also make me feel strong and **sassy**. (SPOK: Today Show, 2014)
- (40) It also gives you the confidence to show you're sexy, **sassy** and savvy. (MAG: Essence, 2014)
- (41) Lauren was a very sparkly, bubbly, **sassy** girl. (SPOK: CBS: 48 Hours, 2013)

As these examples show, *sassy* is systematically used in the same way on both social media and outside of it. It is almost always used to describe women, and outside of social media, the word is especially common in fiction, and in reviews of books, movies and TV shows. Thus, based on the great number of tokens, it can be said that this slang word has already spread to common usage, perhaps because it has been around for so long.

6.1.4 Wifey

Wifey is a slang alteration of the word *wife*, but with a much wider usage. According to the top definition on *Urban Dictionary* (posted in 2010 by MingMingTwo), *wifey* is the girl you are in love with, and it can thus be used whether you are married or not. In the following sections, the origins and the use of *wifey* will be looked at in more detail.

6.1.4.1 The origins and the creation of *wifey*



As mentioned earlier in Section 3.3.5, *wifey* is a result of the word-formation technique known as derivation; the suffix *-y* has been added to the noun *wife*. This suffix is also known as a diminutive: a word or suffix that expresses attitudes, either affectionate or derogatory, and denotes smallness (Schneider 2003, 4). According to Schneider (2003, 87), the suffix *-y* can be used to convey social closeness and positive attitudes, such as endearment. However, the same suffix can also express deprecation (2003, 87), and thus, depending on the context, the word *wifey* may be used either as a positive term for a loved one, or as a diminutive and pejorative term.

Most often, *wifey* is used of a woman who is seen as “wife-material”, “who is always there for you” and “who you are destined to be with” (*Urban Dictionary*). More rarely, it can also be used in the meaning “best friend”. Nevertheless, the word is most often used in a very positive sense in slang and for that reason, it has been categorized into the group of positive words in this study. However, some online dictionaries give the word a different description; *Collins Dictionary* simply states that *wifey* is “an informal word for wife”, whereas according to *Oxford Dictionaries*, *wifey* is “a condescending way of referring to a person’s wife”. Thus, if *wifey* is used to refer to someone’s actual wife, it might be received in a very negative way, but when it is used of someone’s girlfriend, the connotations are usually positive.

The earliest definition for *wifey* was posted to *Urban Dictionary* in May 2003 by Bettamackz, who defined it as “1. wife, 2. girlfriend”. Thus, the word has been used in its slang meaning at least since 2003, when multiple definitions were posted to *Urban Dictionary*. However, the exact origins of the word are still unknown.

6.1.4.2 The use of *wifey* on social media

On Instagram, 4,6 million posts have been tagged with the hashtag #wifey. Other popular hashtags include #wifeymaterial (480k posts) and #wifeyforlife (140k posts). Thus, it appears that the word is very popular on Instagram. Below are five examples of the use of *wifey* on Twitter:

- (42) She’s a **wifey** material brooooo.... She’s fucking the oneeeeeee brooooooah  (12 February 2019)
- (43) Watch offset include it in his song how his **wifey** got a Grammy and got these bitches shook. Same thing Travis did. Who won’t wanna gass their babe doing big things.  (12 February 2019)
- (44) Late night visit by our 90 year old friend mama Lupe & her Ohana... now with the **wifey** for some late night gym time [picture] (12 February 2019)
- (45) I’m done being **wifey** material. Y’all ain’t even worth it (12 February 2019)

(46) happy birthday to my best friend @howbadlyjonah ❤️ you r the only person that can make me feel happy when i'm down and u r one of the realest person i know,, i love you **wifey** have a good day 🍷 (12 February 2019)

As these examples demonstrate, *wifey* is used on Twitter to refer to both girlfriends and wives. There is also one example of the word's less common use; using *wifey* to refer to one's best friend. It is always used in a positive sense and is particularly common in replies to other tweets. The phrase "wifey material" appears to be very popular, and heart emojis are often found accompanying the text.

6.1.4.3 The use of *wifey* in corpora

A search for the word *wifey* in GloWbE yields 734 results, of which 704 are relevant for this study (with duplicates removed). Below are five examples:

- (47) WOW! Husband has to come on Patch to defend poor **wifey**. Just like as if she was a twelve year old girl being picked on. (US: General, clevelandheights.patch.com)
- (48) He seemed to like her so I asked him a simple question guys ask guys when speaking of newfound interests --' is she **wifey** material?' (US: General, edgemagazinesite.com)
- (49) You know your best friend? The one you call your " **wifey** " or " twin " and spend literally all of your waking hours with? (US: General, thoughtcatalog.com)
- (50) Thanks in advance for your help, i want to be with my future **wifey** (GB: General, migrantsrights.org.uk)
- (51) The guy may be thinking she's a cool **wifey**; meanwhile fire is burning her inside. (GB: Blog, bukkyapampa.com)

As these examples demonstrate, *wifey* is used in GloWbE in all of the same senses as it was used on Twitter. It can be used of someone who is "wifey material" (Example 48), of one's actual wife (Example 47) or even of one's best friend (Example 49). In most cases, however, *wifey* is used of someone's wife in GloWbE, a usage that was less common on Twitter. The word is also more often capitalized or surrounded by quotation marks, showing that it is seen as somewhat new or unusual in

some of its usages in GloWbE. However, the great number of tokens suggests that this word already has usage outside of social media, even if it is sometimes used in a somewhat different meaning.

In COCA, there are 75 relevant results for *wifey*, with the oldest token dating back to 1991.

Below are five relevant examples:

- (52) So I don't know. You better hope **wifey** wins, because happy -- happy wife, happy life.
(SPOK: CNN Newsroom, 2014)
- (53) " Hey, good morning, **wifey**, " he said, nuzzling her ear, his breath tickling her neck. (FIC: Killer Honeymoon, 2013)
- (54) What he didn't realize was that Tamia didn't scare very easily. So she'd be a good little **wifey** for as long as it took to convince him to put a ring on her finger. (FIC: Exposed, 2011)
- (55) And you go on and start Tweets -- Tweeting about your **wifey**, which, in fact, you werent married, you guys were engaged, according to the video. (SPOK: CNN Velez, 2010)
- (56) Six years later I went from **wifey** to wife. (FIC: Desperate hoodwives: an urban tale, 2008)

In COCA, *wifey* is most often used as a replacement for the word *wife*. In many cases, it is also used in a condescending way, preceded by words such as *little* and *precious little*. Thus, it appears that the new, slang use of *wifey* to refer to someone's girlfriend or best friend has not spread much outside of the Internet yet, even though there is one example (Example 56) in COCA in which *wifey* is contrasted with the word *wife* in a way that would suggest that *wifey* is used in its current slang meaning.

As the number of tokens and the examples from the two corpora demonstrate, the word *wifey* does appear to be used even outside of social media and the Internet, even though the word's connotations might be somewhat different than on Twitter. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that this slang word has already spread to wider usage outside of social media.

6.2. Negative words

In the following sections, the results for the negative slang words are looked at. This group includes the words *fuckboy*, *cray*, *sicko*, *stan*, *sus*, and *thot*.

6.2.1 *Fuckboy*

According to *Huffington Post*, a *fuckboy* (sometimes stylized “fuckboi” or “fuccboi”) is “a (usually straight, white) dude embodying something akin to the ‘man whore’ label, mashed up with some ‘basic’ qualities and a light-to-heavy sprinkling of misogyny”. The term has been given various different definitions, and there is no consensus on a singular definition, but the one given by *Huffington Post* accurately describes the word’s current use. *Fuckboy* has become particularly popular in the last few years, and the Internet is filled with memes and people’s stories and descriptions of typical fuckboys.

6.2.1.1 The origins and the creation of *fuckboy*

According to *Dictionary.com*, the earliest use of the word *fuckboy* was in 2002, in the song “Boy Boy” by rapper Cam’ron. After that, the word started to be used in other song lyrics as well, and took off properly in 2014, when the traits of a typical fuckboy were listed in a Tumblr post by user rememberingunday. In its original meaning, *fuckboy* referred to someone who is “always doing fuck shit. Just the dumbest, weirdest, lamest possible shit ever” (*Dictionary.com*). The first definition for *fuckboy* was given in 2004 in *Urban Dictionary*, in which it was defined as “a person who is a weak ass pussy” (*Huffington Post*). Since then, the meaning of the word has changed, and today, a *fuckboy* “is someone who doesn’t respect women, is a player who won’t commit, and is basic in his clothing choices and personality” (*Dictionary.com*). Thus, while the term originates in rap lyrics, its current meaning has been shaped by its use on the Internet.

The word *fuckboy* is a result of compounding; the words *fuck* and *boy* have been combined into one word. According to *The Atlantic*, the term *fuckboy* originates in prison slang, where it is used of

“men who are “gay for pay,” trading sex for food or other favors”. Because of this, *Affinity* magazine writer Don Dwayne warns people against using this term, since it originated as a slur against male victims of prison rape. Most people using the term today are most likely not aware of its history, and hence do not mean any harm when using it. However, to some people, *fuckboy* is more than just a new, trendy word for a man who is a so-called player, and it is good to be aware of all of its connotations.

6.2.1.2 The use of *fuckboy* on social media

On Instagram, 593k posts have been tagged with the hashtag #fuckboy. Other popular hashtags are #fuckboys (292k posts), #fuckboysbelike (28,3k posts), #fuckboymemes (13,1k posts), #fuckboyz (12,4k posts) and #fuckboyseverywhere (12,3k posts). Thus, the word *fuckboy* seems to be very popular on Instagram, and many of the recent tagged posts are different kinds of Internet memes.

Below are five examples of the use of *fuckboy* on Twitter:

- (57) Any boy who gets upset when they’re called a **fuck boy**, is more than likely indeed a **fuck boy**. I’ve let this ponder for a good year and a half and it is proven from my experience to be true 🤔 (27 November 2018)
- (58) The **fuckboy** vibes are strong with this one 🤔 wow (27 November 2018)
- (59) I was told I have the personality of a 2014 vine **fuckboy** and honestly that's the truest thing I've ever heard (27 November 2018)
- (60) Once a **fuckboy**, always a **fuckboy** (27 November 2018)
- (61) Kinda happy, kinda bummed I don’t have a boyfriend to spoil for Christmas. Definitely happy I’m not buying gifts for another **fuck boy** thoughb 😊 (27 November 2018)

In many cases, *fuckboy* is used by women in a very negative sense, to refer to someone they think is a fuckboy. However, there are also cases where men use the term, often ironically or sarcastically, to refer to themselves. *Fuckboy* is often used together with vulgar words and other slang words (e.g. *vibes*). Interestingly, there are also differences in how the word is spelled: there are more

or less the same number of examples of the word spelled separately (*fuck boy*) as there are of it spelled as one word (*fuckboy*). Thus, it seems that it is equally common to spell the word both ways on social media.

6.2.1.3 The use of *fuckboy* in corpora

When searching for *fuckboy* in GloWbE, no matching strings are found. When searching for *fuck boy*, there are eight results, all of which are relevant and seem to be song lyrics. Since many of these are duplicates, the only original tokens can be found below:

- (62) Me having a wonderful life is a given, seeing as how I'm not some broke ass, non-pussy getting, 40 y/o **fuck boy** – (JM: Blog, dancehallreggae.com)
- (63) -- More guts, **fuck boy**, you fucked up twice, you fuck, consider you drownin' Die in a lake with a date with a catfish – (PH: General, lyricsty.com)
- (64) Blood is thicker than the water Moneyyyy DOn't let the **fuck boy** dem take from Meee – (TZ: General, ymcmb.hottesttracks.net)
- (65) Fuck show money, I spent that on drapes Close the curtains, **fuck boy** out my face (TZ: Blog, babajonii.blogspot.com)

It is difficult to tell whether *fuckboy* is used in its current slang meaning in these examples, but the spelling of it as two separate words would suggest that it is not. However, since *fuckboy* was also spelled in two different ways on Twitter, it is not possible to make assumptions based on the spelling. But, since *fuckboy* originated in rap lyrics, it is possible that the word is used in its earlier meaning in these examples, since they all appear to be song lyrics. Thus, based on the small number of hits in GloWbE, *fuckboy* has not yet been widely accepted into usage outside of social media. When searching for *fuckboy* in COCA, there are two results, both from 2017:

- (66) -- and Jared Kushner, New York's prodigal **fuckboy**, -- (MAG: Jezebel)
- (67) -- and arguably the best song title on the countdown: " Donald Trump Is A **Fuckboy** " from Chicago psych rockers Netherfriends. (MAG: A. V. Club)

These clearly showcase similar usage of *fuckboy* as on Twitter, and they show that the word has already made its way into a few magazines, at least in the US. In COCA, there are no results for *fuck boy*, which could suggest that in contemporary American English, the spelling *fuckboy* may be more common.

The very small number of tokens found for *fuckboy/fuck boy* in the two corpora suggests that this slang word has not really spread to wider usage outside of social media. The fact that there are some examples, however, would suggest that the word may become more common in the future, but it is also possible that *fuckboy* might only have a short-lived life as a part of social media slang, eventually replaced by a new, trendy word.

6.2.2 Cray

Cray is a slang alternative for the word *crazy*, and it can also be used in the duplicated form, *cray cray*, to mean “really crazy” (*Urban Dictionary*). It is one of the oldest slang words included in this study, since it has been around for nearly two decades. It was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* on August 14th, 2014, and has thus already been recognized as a popular word for almost five years.

6.2.2.1 The origins and the creation of *cray*

Cray appeared first in its reduplicated form, *cray cray*, for which the earliest definition was published in the *Online Slang Dictionary* in 2001 by user Jeremy, who defined the meaning of the adjective as “crazy, i.e. strange, insane, or wild” (knowyourmeme.com). According to the *Oxford Dictionaries* blog, “in a development reminiscent of the history of bling (originally bling bling), what began as a double-barreled slang term ultimately became more widely adopted in a more concise, single-syllable form”, and thus, the form *cray* took over. The break-out moment for *cray* was in 2011, when rapper Kanye West uttered the word in the phrase *that shit cray* in Jay Z’s song “Watch the Throne”

(blog.oxforddictionaries.com). Thus, the duplicated form *cray cray* has been around for nearly two decades, but since 2011, the word has been more commonly used in its shorter form.

Even though *cray* has been assigned into the category of negative words in this study, the term can sometimes also be used in a positive meaning. This notion is supported by the fact that the sixth most popular definition for *cray* in *Urban Dictionary* explains its meaning as “short for crazy, it means crazy in a good way, like crazy wild, not like crazy loony bin” (by lizzyone June 06, 2006). Thus, the exact meaning of this slang word is always context-dependent.

6.2.2.2 The use of *cray* on social media

On Instagram, 739k posts have been tagged with the hashtag #cray, and 683k with the hashtag #craycray, proving the popularity of the term. Below are five examples of the use of *cray* on Twitter:

(68) man i swear cute girls make me go **cray** (22 November 2018)

(69) That shit **cray**? Naaah, that shit's just fucking lame. #bot (22 November 2018)

(70) AAAAA IM GOING **CRAY CRAY** (22 November 2018)

(71) Wherever it rains in LA we go **cray** (22 November 2018)

(72) It's bad enough Ariana has annoying Colleen in her TUN video. But if Gabi is in it... like girl, Ariana, WYD?! That girl is **cray cray**. (22 November 2018)

On Twitter, *cray* is very often used together with the verbs *go* and *be*, which are often in their basic form, a typical structure found in AAVE; *go cray/be cray*. The phrase *you cray* is also quite popular, showcasing another common feature of AAVE: absence of the auxiliary *be*, or *the copula* (Rickford 1999, 61). References to Kanye West's lyric, which popularized this *zero copula*, are also common (*that shit cray*), and the duplicated form *cray cray* seems to still be widely used. *Cray* is often used to refer to people, but it is also possible to use it to refer to practically anything that one finds “crazy”. It is also often used together with other slang words and abbreviations (e.g. WYD “What You Doing”), as is the case with most of the slang words in this study.

6.2.2.3 The use of *cray* in corpora

A search for *cray* in GloWbE yields 877 results. Most of these are the name of a person or a brand, but 200 tokens are relevant for this study (with duplicates removed). Below are five examples from GloWbE.

- (73) White lady gone **cray cray** lol, I like how they keep using the President as an excuse for their stupidity. (US: General, madamenoire.com)
- (74) This dude is batshit **cray cray** (US: General, dailycurrent.com)
- (75) We already know PETA is *cray*, but Rihanna is **cray cray** so the animal rights org might want to think twice about coming for her head -- or her feet in this case. (US: General, madamenoire.com)
- (76) I was over-heating like **cray** so it was time to take my polar piece off. (CA: Blog, raymitheminx.com)
- (77) As my mummy would say, that shit **cray**. (GB: Blog, the-flick.com)

The duplicated form *cray cray* seems to be very popular in this corpus, since it is used in most of the relevant tokens. This is probably caused by the fact that the duplicated form has been in use for longer and has thus become a more established part of the vocabulary. In example 75, the duplicated form is used to accentuate that someone who is *cray cray* is even crazier than someone who is *cray*, showing that there may be a slight difference in the meaning between these expressions, as was suggested earlier by *Urban Dictionary*. The phrase *that shit cray* is also encountered many times, and so is the phrase *be cray*, e.g. as in “bitches be cray”, and these two constructions were also popular on Twitter.

In COCA, 347 examples are found, but only 11 of these (with duplicates removed) are relevant. In the other examples, *cray* is either the name of a person or a company. Most of the relevant tokens are examples of spoken language (8 tokens), but there is also one token assigned to the genre of popular magazines, one to the genre of news and one to the genre of fiction. Below are five examples of the relevant texts from COCA.

- (78) Cersei is so sadistic it's **cray**: -- (MAG: Nerdist, 2017)
- (79) -- and sometimes when friendships end, they say for inappropriate behavior at the wedding, which means your bridesmaid goes a little **cray cray** – (SPOK: NBC: Today Show, 2014)
- (80) And that's when things get really **cray- cray**. (SPOK: CNN: Showbiz Tonight, 2014)
- (81) You're so **cray, cray**. (SPOK: NBC: Today Show, 2012)
- (82) Call me **cray, cray**. (SPOK: NBC: Today Show, 2012)

As we can see in the examples above, the word *cray* is used very similarly to all of the previous examples. Once again, the duplicated form is popular, and thus it appears that this word continues to be used in the form *cray cray*, even though *cray* on its own might be becoming more common, suggested by the fact that it is used in the most recent example, from 2017. In the examples from COCA, *cray* is often preceded by a descriptive adverb, such as *a little*, *really* or *so*, which help to determine the “level of craziness”. This feature was not as common on Twitter or in GloWbE, which could be explained by the fact that most of the examples from COCA are of spoken language, where such little descriptive words may be more common than in writing.

The great number of tokens in the two corpora suggest that the word *cray* is also used outside of social media. Since the word, and especially its duplicated form, have been around for so long, they have already started to spread to mainstream usage, and appear to be used quite similarly on social media and outside of it. It does seem that the duplicated form is more common outside of social media, whereas on Twitter, the shorter form *cray* is starting to take over.

6.2.3 *Sicko*

According to *Dictionary.com*, *sicko* is a slang term for someone who is considered “deranged, sadistic, perverted, disturbed, or the like”. The word has received definitions in many dictionaries; according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, a *sicko* is “someone who behaves or thinks in a strange and unpleasant, often sexual, way”, and *Merriam-Webster* defines it as “a person who is mentally or

morally sick”. In the following sections, the creation and the use of *sicko* will be looked at in more detail.

6.2.3.1 The origins and the creation of *sicko*

The noun *sicko* has been created by derivation; the suffix *-o* has been added to the adjective *sick*, a word which, according to *Dictionary.com*, has been used to describe someone as “perverted” or “repugnant” since Old English. Many other insulting slang words have been created in a similar way by adding the *-o* suffix (e.g. *weirdo*, *pinko*), so the word-formation strategy used in the creation of *sicko* is a very typical one for slang. (*Dictionary.com*)

According to *Dictionary.com*, the term *sicko* was first recorded in 1977 and it was preceded by *sickie* and *sicknik*, words with a similar meaning. Since Donald Trump’s election in 2016, *sicko* has become a popular word to characterize the U.S. president, even though Trump has also used the word himself, when calling the February 2018 Florida school shooter a *sicko*. In 2018, the word got even wider recognition, when it appeared in the name of Travis Scott’s Billboard #1 single “Sicko Mode”, in which featured rapper Drake says that Scott is in “sicko mode”. In this context, the word appears to be used in an inverted way, typical for slang, where *sick* means “extremely good”. (*Dictionary.com*)

Using *sicko* of someone with mental health issues is considered very offensive, and it stigmatizes mental illness (*Dictionary.com*). It is thus important to be cautious when using this word, and to be aware of its status as a very insulting word. However, even though this slang word is usually used in a very negative meaning, it can also be used positively, especially in today’s social media slang. In the next section, the current use of *sicko* on social media will be looked at more closely.

6.2.3.2 The use of *sicko* on social media

On Instagram, 79,7k posts have been tagged with the hashtag #sicko. A far more popular hashtag appears to be #sickomode, which has been used in 239k posts. Below are five examples of the use of *sicko* on Twitter:

- (83) These ppl have families to feed, no money, and it's ur fault...but you aren't doing anything to help !!! Fucking **sicko** (21 January 2019)
- (84) I'm bout to go **sicko** mode (21 January 2019)
- (85) hello it is 5am and i can't sleep becuz i'm stuck in **sicko** mode (21 January 2019)
- (86) I left you alone, but you won't leave me?? What kind of **sicko** game is this though? (21 January 2019)
- (87) You should be ashamed of yourself. You need to find a new line of work, you should NOT be around any children. You are a **sicko**. I hope you get fired. (21 January 2019)

On Twitter, the word *sicko* is most commonly used in the phrase *sicko mode*, and thus references to the song by Travis Scott are very common. However, there are also examples of *sicko* used in the sense “perverted” or “disturbed”, so the negative use is still around as well. *Sicko* can be used on its own (“You are a sicko”), in a phrase (“sicko game”) or together with an emphasizing word (“Fucking sicko”). Thus, the word is used in various different ways on social media, but by far the most popular way to use it is in the phrase *sicko mode*, showing how big of an influence the song has had on Internet slang.

6.2.3.3 The use of *sicko* in corpora

In GloWbE, a search for *sicko* yields 426 results, of which 295 are relevant for this study (with duplicates removed). Below are five examples:

- (88) I do feel like a **sicko** for saying that, but I can't not, and if you've seen the film I'm hoping you know what I mean. (US: General, thewindingway.blogspot.com)
- (89) Another Rich Republican Wacko with a closet case of being a bully and a **sicko**. (US: General, nationalmemo.com)
- (90) He could be a serial killer, a rapist, a kidnapper or someother sort of **sicko**. (US: General, askville.amazon.com)
- (91) There's always some **sicko** out there poisoning random trick-or-treaters. (US: General, ken-jennings.com)
- (92) The man was clearly a **sicko**. (US: Blog, althouse.blogspot.com)

Sicko is used in GloWbE very much in the same way as on social media, except for the fact that the phrase *sicko mode* does not appear at all. Instead, *sicko* is always used in the meaning “disturbed” or “perverted”, and the word thus has even more of a negative connotation in all the examples from GloWbE. The word is not used humorously, but instead only as a great insult and a way to characterize someone as very disturbed. It is often written in block capitals and followed by an exclamation mark, since the word appears to elicit very strong emotions in people.

In COCA, a search for *sicko* yields 116 results, of which 60 are relevant to this study. Below are five examples:

- (93) The perfect community turns out to have some **sicko** out in the woods with a gas can and a lighter. (FIC: Once Burned, 2016)
- (94) Can we call him a terrorist instead of a **sicko**? (SPOK: ABC: The View, 2015)
- (95) If you are dating someone online, we're going to tell you exactly what you need to know to make sure the person you're dating is not some kind of creepo, **sicko**. (SPOK: CNN Velez, 2011)
- (96) That heavy-breathing **sicko** that called the other night could've only found out about me from you. (FIC: Erin Brockovich, 2000)
- (97) He does, sure this **sicko** is going simply to shoot him in the head. (FIC: Bean, 1997)

These examples, once again, showcase the typical use the word *sicko* in its negative meaning. The earliest example (not presented in the examples above) is from 1991, demonstrating that the word has been actively used in the English language for a long time. Thus, it appears that this slang word is not particularly new, but it has gotten wider usage and new connotations in the recent years. The positive use of the word, found in today’s slang, seems to not have spread wider yet, and the word’s offensive usage clearly prevails outside of social media.

6.2.4 *Stan*

The slang term *stan* is a blend of the words *stalker* and *fan*, and it is used to refer to someone who is obsessed with a celebrity. In the following sections, the creation and use of *stan* will be looked at in more detail.

6.2.4.1 The origins and the creation of *stan*

According to *Huffington Post*, *stan* originates in rapper Eminem's 2000 song of the same name, which is about an obsessive Eminem fan called Stan. The term has become widely used as synonymous with hardcore fans of a celebrity, and it is often associated with musicians whose fan bases have a name, e.g. Lady Gaga's "Little Monsters" and Justin Bieber's "Beliebers" (*Huffington Post*). Even though the word is often associated with fans of musicians, there are no limitations to being a *stan*. There are e.g. sports stans, food stans and Youtubers' stans (*Huffington Post*). Lately, the word has even begun to be used as a verb, e.g. "I stan her", and it is sometimes even used when talking about someone in the form "I stan!", with no object required.

The first definition of *stan* was posted to *Urban Dictionary* in 2006, when the term was defined as "an overzealous fan of a celebrity or athlete" (knowyourmeme.com). Later, the term has been defined in various new publications and was even added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2017 (knowyourmeme.com). Thus, it would seem that *stan* is already quite a well-established word.

6.2.4.2 The use of *stan* on social media

On Instagram, 1,2 million posts have been tagged with the hashtag #stan. It is thus clear that this is a very popular word, often used as a hashtag. Below are five examples of the use of *stan* on Twitter:

(98) that video never gets old i would personally like to thank the **stan** who was brave enough to pull this on live tv (14 January 2019)

(99) my best friend and i are going to the borhap sing along and we were talking about it and my mum (a huge queen **stan**) over heard and said she was wanting to go but had no one to

go with so i just bought her a ticket next to us and she's so excited sjsjs :) (14 January 2019)

(100) i feel like I went from “aw i love her” to full **stan** in 0.2 seconds (14 January 2019)

(101) forever a Nicki **stan** , sorry 🙄 (14 January 2019)

(102) I might be a soft **stan**... but I'm also a crackhead **stan** (14 January 2019)

In many of these examples, *stan* is preceded by some type of descriptive word, e.g. “a queen stan”, “full stan”, “a Nicki stan”, “a soft stan” or “a crackhead stan”. Thus, *stan* is treated as a typical noun, which can be a part of a noun phrase. Even though the word has, at least originally, had very negative connotations, people proudly use it of themselves, perhaps to communicate that they are aware of being really obsessed with something. The verb use of the word was also more or less equally popular on Twitter, but in this study, the focus is on the noun use of the word. Most of the users of this slang word seem to be quite young and belong to a fandom (a group of fans of e.g. a musician) that is very active on social media, so the word appears to be used mostly in a very specific context.

6.2.4.3 The use of *stan* in corpora

In GloWbE, a search for *stan* yielded 6558 results, of which altogether 71 were relevant for this study. In the other tokens, *stan* was most often the name of a person. Five relevant examples can be found below.

(103) When it comes to Nicki Minaj I am not just a fan I am I **STAN**. (Stalker fan). (US: Blog, lamusicblog.com)

(104) I can tell you're a **stan**. You're putting to much emotions into this, child. (US: General, necolebitchie.com)

(105) Whenever anyone has anything positive to say about a celeb they are automatically labeled a **stan**. It's just ridiculous. (US: General, necolebitchie.com)

(106) Roulette... my gosh. It's what actually turned me into a Rihanna' **stan**'. (GB: General, popjustice.com)

(107) I am not a 2 Chainz fan but I **stan** for Kanye like it's my job – (GB: General, oneofthoseipods.com)

As we can see, the word *stan* is used very similarly in GloWbE as it is on Twitter. It is used both of other people and of the writer themselves, and in most cases, written in lower case. There are, however, also examples of *stan* written with the first letter capitalized, all letters capitalized for emphasis (Example 103) and with quotation marks (Example 106). In the first example (Example 103), the word is even followed by an explanation inside brackets, showing how the word is seen as possibly new to the readers and thus needs an explanation. In many tokens, *stan* is used together with the preposition *for*, as in “a stan for someone”, which is a less common way to state that someone is a *stan* for someone than simply saying e.g. “I’m a Nicki stan”. The verb use of *stan* (Example 107) was also very common in GloWbE, and it can thus be said that this slang word is used both as a noun and a verb on both social media and outside of it.

In COCA, a search for *stan* yielded 4755 tokens, of which only one was relevant for this study:

(108) Yes, that's right folks, Ian Connor -- the fashion nigga people love to **stan** for -- is a rapist.
(2016, MAG: Daily Beast)

In this example, *stan* is used as a verb, which has proven to be as popular as the noun version of this slang word. In any case, it seems that the word *stan* is definitely most common on the Internet, and its use has not spread much outside of it. However, it is a very popular word on social media, and could potentially spread into wider usage in the future, since over 70 examples of its use outside of social media were already discovered.

6.2.5 *Sus*

Sus is generally understood to be short for “suspect” or “suspicious”, meaning that something is shady or questionable. However, in its top definition in *Urban Dictionary*, the word is also given the

meaning “[w]hen someone says something that’s gay, or sexual on accident. This is usually said by an accompanying person who is next to the one who slips up. After sus is said, it’s followed up by a quick no homo”. In the following sections, the use and origins of this word will be looked at in more detail.

6.2.5.1 The origins and the creation of *sus*

To put it simply, *sus* is a shortening of “suspicious” or “suspect”. However, this shortening has been a part of the English language way before its current slang meaning. The shortening has been used in England and Wales since the 1950s in connection to *sus laws* (*Dictionary.com*). *Sus law* is a stop-and-search law that gave the police permission to arrest *suspected* persons if they were caught violating the Vagrancy Act of 1824. Black and ethnic minority groups, who felt particularly targeted by sus laws in the 1970-80, ran a campaign called *Scrap Sus*, which succeeded, and the law was dismissed in 1981. (*Dictionary.com*)

The current meaning of the word *sus* may be completely independent from its meaning in *sus laws*, and it is difficult to know whether the word’s earlier use has affected its use today. In its current meaning, *sus* refers to people’s behavior, beliefs or anything else that is deemed “shady” or “sketchy” (*Dictionary.com*). It started to spread online in black and Internet slang during the early 2000s, and its first definition in *Urban Dictionary* was back in 2003, when it was simply defined as “short for ‘suspect’ or ‘suspicious’” (*Dictionary.com*).

6.2.5.2 The use of *sus* on social media

On Instagram, 575k posts have been tagged with the hashtag #sus. It seems thus that the word is quite common on Instagram. Below are five examples of the use of *sus* on Twitter:

(109) y’all should have known Joe from You would be **sus** Penn Badgley been **sus** to me since gossip girl. #ifyouknowyouknow #YouOnNetflix (15 January 2019)

(110) Seems a lil **sus** too me 🤔 (15 January 2019)

- (111) can someone explain to me why boys are so **sus** (15 January 2019)
- (112) I'm goin bacc to sleep but yall **sus**. (15 January 2019)
- (113) Yo, if you start shit on social media, you're **sus**. If you argue and threaten to fight people over tweets, you're **sus**. Settle your shit in private instead of trying to be "edgy" for clout/followers. I swear people more and more childish every year it's 2019 wtf (15 January 2019)

As we can see, in all of the examples, *sus* is used to refer to people. The word is often used together with the phrase "to me", to indicate that the tweeter is telling their personal opinion. *Sus* is also often preceded by a descriptive word, e.g. "a lil" or "so" to express the level of suspicion. The phrase "yall sus" also appeared to be quite common on Twitter. People who use this word on social media also use other current slang words and expressions, such as *clout* in Example 113, and unusual spelling, such as *bacc* for *back* in Example 112.

6.2.5.3 The use of *sus* in corpora

In GloWbE, a search for *sus* yielded 560 results, of which 49 were relevant for this study (with duplicates removed). Below are five relevant examples.

- (114) Their family always has parties for their milestone birthdays, and so she will get pretty **sus** if we don't talk to her about planning a party for her 60th in october. (CA: General, sowrey.org)
- (115) sorry hun if it was me the whole thing sounds really **sus** i would ask him why he now feels he has to hide it – (GB: General, community.babycentre.co.uk)
- (116) Is it just this paper or the whole adaptionist programme that he is **sus** about? (GB: General, badscience.net)
- (117) Susie O'Neill, a gold medallist for Australia in 1996 and 2000, described De Bruijn's achievements as 'pretty **sus**'. (GB: General, dailymail.co.uk)
- (118) Had a **sus** phone call from Indian " gentleman " saying our computer had notified them that we had a virus on our computer. (GB: General, theogray.com)

In these examples, *sus* is used to refer to other things than people as well, e.g. phone calls and achievements. The word is used in the same meaning of “suspicious” as on Twitter, and the large number of relevant tokens is a sign that this word has already spread outside of social media and acquired wider usage. *Sus* is here again often preceded by words such as “pretty” and “really” to describe the level of “suspicion”.

In COCA, only one (possibly) relevant example was found:

(119) Listen, this isn't a **sus** proposition. I got a girl coming with me, that warden with the brand.
(2010, Fantasy & Science Fiction)

Thus, it seems that the use of *sus* is still very much limited to the Internet and social media, but it has acquired quite wide usage on the web. One possible reason for its popularity could be the fact that the word is rather easy to understand and to use, since it is a clipping of a very common word. It will be interesting to see whether this shortening is still used in a few years, or whether it enters the standard language at large as well.

6.2.6 *Thot*

Thot is a new slang acronym that stands for “that ho over there” or “thirsty hoes over there” (*Dictionary.com*). According to *Urban Dictionary*, a “thot is a hoe”, and the word is used as a vulgar synonym for offensive words such as *slut*, *bitch* or *whore* (*Dictionary.com*). *Knoturname* defines *thot* in *Urban Dictionary* as “A woman who pretends to be the type of valuable female commodity who rightfully earns male commitment—until the man discovers that she’s just a cheap imitation of a “good girl” who is good only for mindless sex, not relationships or respect.”. Thus, *thot* is a very sexist term, but some women do use it nonetheless (*Dictionary.com*). In the following sections, the creation and use of this slang word will be looked at in more detail.

6.2.6.1 The origins and the creation of *thot*

Thot (sometimes written as *thotty* or in plural *thotties*) has spread online as an insulting term for any woman who is seen as “bitchy” or “attention-seeking” (*Dictionary.com*). Even though the exact origins of the word are unknown, *thot* appears to have first been used in the Chicago rap scene in late 2011. Apparently, videographer Duan Gaines first heard someone say *thot* during the music video shooting for rapper Chief Keef’s song, “Aimed at You”. The word caught on with the crew and was even included in the song lyrics: “But them bullets hit you hot, show no love for a thot.” Following this, other Chicago rappers, such as Katie Got Bandz, Fredo Santana, and Chance the Rapper, started to include the word in their lyrics as well, and, along with Chief Keef, continued to use and popularize the word in their music during the following years. *Thot* was used by other rappers in 2014, and by 2015, it was already a very common word in hip-hop. (*Dictionary.com*)

Since the word started to spread outside of the hip-hop community, it has become to be used in casual speech, social media and in memes to mock women who are perceived as cheap and easy. Though *thot* largely remains a misogynistic term, it is sometimes used when targeting promiscuous men as well. The word has inspired plenty of wordplay, and a popular meme, “Begone thot”, which arose in response to what young male Internet users saw as an excess of *thots* on social media. (*Dictionary.com*)

6.2.6.2 The use of *thot* on social media

On Instagram, over 110k posts have been tagged with the hashtag #thotties. Other popular related hashtags include #begonethot (127k posts), #thotsexposed (42,3k posts), #thotlife (50,6k posts) and #thottie (26,1k posts). Interestingly, the hashtag #thot does not exist at all, which could possibly be the result of banning, if the hashtag or the images it was used for were considered too offensive or inappropriate by the administrators of Instagram. Below are five examples of the use of *thot* on Twitter:

- (120) Find a girl who just wanna make money when she stressed out.. not Go out and be a **Thot** lol (18 January 2019)
- (121) Trust no **thot** 😏 (18 January 2019)
- (122) i wore the same socks as the **thot** of my school omg what does that mean (18 January 2019)
- (123) if she breathe she a **thot** (18 January 2019)
- (124) How you still trynna work things out with your bd while being a **thot** on twitter? (18 January 2019)

As can be seen in the examples, in most cases, *thot* is written with all lower-case letters. In one case, the word is capitalized, perhaps because the word is seen as new, or for added emphasis. The word is sometimes used without a verb, e.g. “she a thot” (Example 123), similarly to other slang words in this study, showcasing the popularity of features of AAVE on social media. Most of the recent tweeters using *thot* are men, so it does appear that the word is more popular among men, at least on Twitter.

6.2.6.3 The use of *thot* in corpora

In GloWbE, a search for *thot* yields 367 results, but none of these are relevant. *Thot* is simply just a misspelled word, most often *thought*, and this was also quite common on Twitter. In COCA, a search for *thot* yielded 15 tokens, of which three were relevant for this study, and they can all be found below.

- (125) You better make sure ya nigga ain't out there throwing his paper at the next **thot**. (FIC: Schemes, 2017)
- (126) In iOS 9, QuickType learns phrases and updates the dictionary on your individual device - - so if you type " **thot** " or " on fleek " enough times, autocorrect will eventually stop changing the phrases to " Thor " and " on fleet. " (MAG: TechCrunch, 2016)
- (127) She had long, silky hair and doe eyes and a sweet face that seemed destined for a Girl Scouts pamphlet, not an Instagram account where girls were called out as hos or **thots** (thot stands for " that ho over there "). (MAG: Atlantic, 2014)

In these examples, *thot* is used in the same way as on Twitter. The earliest example is from 2014, showing that this word has been used for quite a few years already. Some features of AAVE are also present, for example in Example 125, which includes the negator *ain't*, and *thot* is sometimes used together with other slang expressions, such as *on fleek* in Example 126. However, the small number of relevant tokens does suggest that *thot* is still mostly used on social media, and it has not spread to very wide mainstream usage yet.

7. Discussion

In this Chapter, I will discuss the results of this study and answer the research questions introduced in Chapter 1. This thesis studied 10 current English slang words and how they are used to describe people on social media and outside of it. The aim was to answer the following research questions:

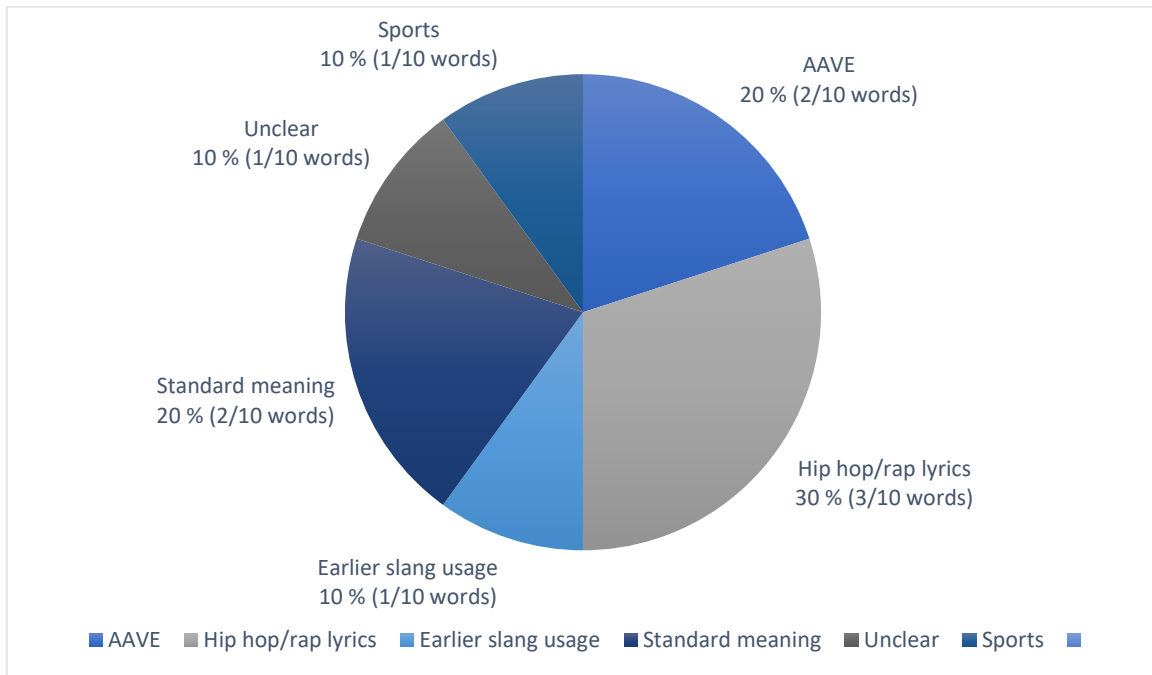
- (1) Where do these new slang words come from? How were they created?
- (2) How are these words used on social media?
- (3) Are these words used on a larger scale?

In the following sections, I will go through each research question separately and discuss the results.

7.1. Origins and creation

The first research question has to do with the origins and the creation of the slang words studied. Online articles and dictionaries were looked at in order to discover the origins of these slang words, and to discern where they were first used. These results are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Origins of the slang words



As Figure 1 demonstrates, most of the slang words (30%) originate in hip hop or rap lyrics. This includes the words *fuckboy*, *stan* and *thot*. Popular culture is often a very productive source for new words, and because it relies on novelty and innovativeness, popular culture has “fed into and fed on a faster turnover of slang terms” (Coleman 2012, 185). The media and entertainment industries have raised the profile of slang, making it possible for us to pick up slang from all over the world (Coleman 2012, 187). And thanks to social media, slang that originates in popular culture can now spread faster and wider than ever before.

The second most influential sources of slang words in this study are African American Vernacular English and the standard meanings of the words. Many African American slang expressions spread into mainstream usage through hip hop, and for this reason, these two sources can be seen as partly overlapping. 20 % of the slang words studied originate in AAVE, namely the words *bae* and *sus*. As Rickford (1999, 324) states, a great deal of African American slang has “crossed over” to other ethnic groups, and many expressions that originate in AAVE are so widespread in American culture that most people do not even realize where they come from. Because of its informal character, Ebonics lends itself to the creation of new, exciting slang words. According to Davies

(2013, 69), many terms from AAVE have become widely known through rap music and international popular culture, through which white speakers, especially younger people, have adopted them. Wolfram (2016, 233) states that the center of today's African American youth culture is mostly urban, and that "many cultural products, practices, and behaviors, including music and language, radiate outward from these urban cultural centers". Such cultural products spread incredibly fast on social media, where the lines between different ethnicities and cultures are blurry and, most often, irrelevant.

20 % of the words (*cray* and *sicko*) have their origins in the standard meanings of the words. Slang often appears when groups of people begin to use Standard English words in a new meaning. The word can either be accepted into slang usage without any changes in its form, or it can be modified for example through clipping (e.g. *cray*) or derivation (e.g. *sicko*). As Coleman (2012, 30) states, one of the most common sources of slang is the figurative, extended or narrowed use of Standard English words. Most often, the standard and slang meaning are not that different, and it is easy to see where the slang meaning comes from. It is more common for these types of slang words to meet resistance and disapproval, but especially on the Internet, new ways of using Standard English words are often welcomed and start to spread rapidly.

The word *sassy* has its origins in earlier slang usage; it has been used in slang since the 1830's. Many words have a long history of being used in slang, and, as time has passed, such words have fallen in and out of slang usage, with a new, popular slang meaning and usage appearing every now and then. As Coleman (2012, 68) mentions, changes in slang happen more freely and without the disapproval that often meets change in the standard language. Thus, people are open to adopting new meanings for old slang words, and as long as there is a useful function for the slang word, it will continue to be used.

10 % of the slang words in this study have an unclear origin; no information was found about the origins of the word *wifey*. It is very much possible that this word also has its origins in the Standard English term *wife*, since the spelling and the meanings are so closely related. However, as was

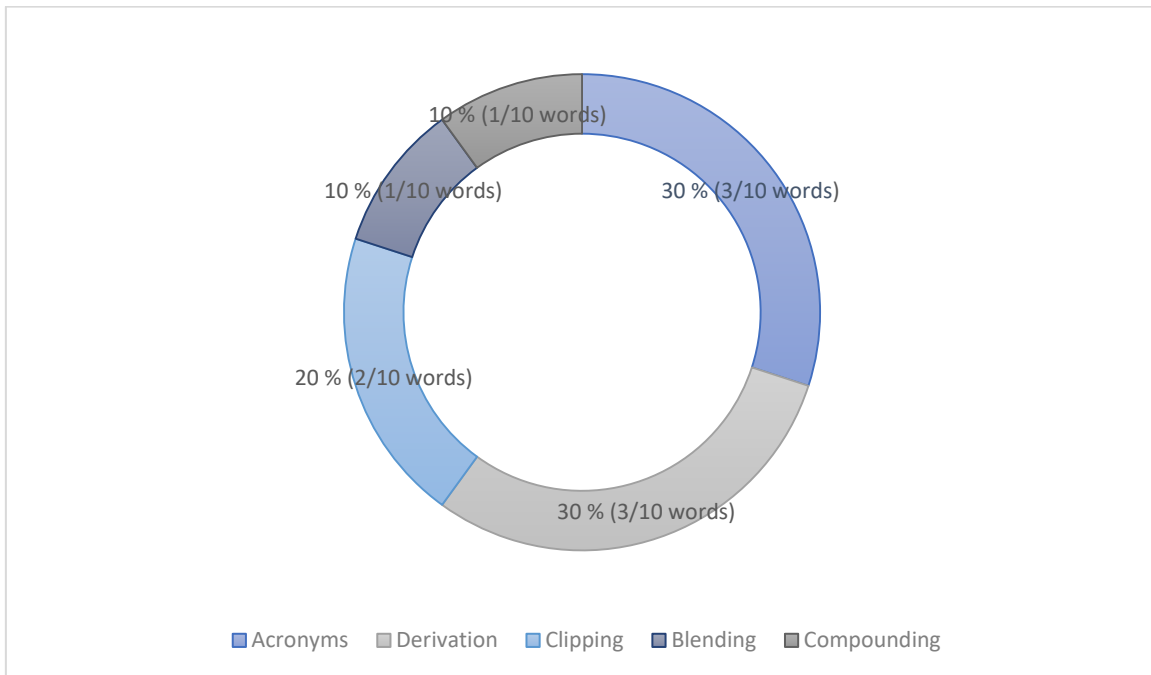
mentioned in Section 3.4, there are way more slang than standard words that are labelled ‘origin unknown’ or ‘origin obscure’ (Coleman 2012), so it is thus no surprise that no clear origin was found for every slang word in this study.

Finally, the slang word *MVP* has its origins in sports. According to Coleman (2012, 135), “the vivid language of sporting commentaries often finds its way into the conversations of sports fans and then into more general use”. In this case, a well-known acronym for a sports award has gotten a more general meaning which has allowed it to spread to wider usage. Thus, other sides of popular culture besides music are also influential when it comes to slang, and yet again, the Internet has made it easy for these terms to deploy wider usage.

The first research question is also concerned with how these slang words were created, i.e. which word-formation techniques were used to create them. The results for this research question are presented below in Figure 2.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, the most common word-formation techniques used to create the studied slang words were acronyms (30%) and derivation (30%). The slang words *bae*, *mvp* and *thot* have all been formed from the initial letters of a phrase and are thus acronyms. As noted in Section 6.1.1.1, *bae* could also be categorized into the group of clippings, which needs to be kept in mind when looking at these numbers. Acronyms are particularly common when it comes to technology; there are countless different acronyms relating to electronics, computers, the Internet, etc. However, as the popularity of this word-formation technique shows, acronyms are also popular on social media, and offer a fast and concise way of describing people who are seen as e.g. the “most valuable player” or “before anyone else”. One reason for their popularity could also be the fact that such acronyms are not familiar to everyone, which can make their user feel like they belong to an in-group that has its own, special vocabulary.

Figure 2. Word-formation techniques



Derivation (30%) was as common as acronyms; the slang words *sassy*, *sicko* and *wifey* have been created by adding suffixes to existing words. As was mentioned in Section 3.3.5, derivation is by far the most common word-formation process used to create new words in the English language (Yule 1999, 69). It appears to be popular regarding slang as well, perhaps because of its simplicity: one does not have to come up with a completely new word, but instead just add a prefix or a suffix to alter the meaning of an already existing word. For the same reason, it is easy for others to deduce the meaning of this new word and thus start using it themselves. Even if one has not heard of the slang words *sassy*, *sicko* and *wifey* before, it is easy to guess what they most likely mean.

The next most common word-formation technique was clipping (20%). The slang words *sus* and *cray* have been created by reducing the words *suspect/suspicious* and *crazy* to a shorter form. As mentioned earlier, *bae* could also be categorized into this group, since, according to many sources, it is a clipping of *babe* or *baby*. It is easy to see why such clipped words are so popular; it is fast to type them on a smart phone or a computer keyboard, and they sound more playful and fun than their Standard English varieties. As was mentioned in Section 3.4, far more slang than standard words are produced by abbreviation of various sorts (Coleman 2012, 40).

The remaining two word-formation techniques used to create the slang words in this study were blending (*stan*) and compounding (*fuckboy*). These are two very popular ways to form new words, since they allow people to put together words that already exist in a new, fresh way. Blends are very common today, with words such as *brunch* and *smog* being widely used, and new compounds also appear constantly. Because of the massive influx of new blends and compounds, some of them can have very short-lived lives, and only time will show whether *stan* and *fuckboy* stay in the English vocabulary.

To summarize the answer to the first research question, it can be said that these new slang words primarily come from hip hop music, African American Vernacular English, and the standard meanings of the words. They have been created with the help of five different word-formation techniques, of which acronyms, derivation and clipping are most common. Now, it is time to look at the second research question, which deals with how these slang words are used on social media.

7.2. Use on social media

The second research question has to do with the words' use on social media. In order to answer it, examples of the words' usage on social media were collected from Twitter. This was done by searching for each word with the help of the Search tool on Twitter, and collecting relevant recent tweets including each word for analysis.

Perhaps the most prominent feature in the words' usage on Twitter was the fact that many of these slang words were often used together with other new slang terms and abbreviations. For example, *bae* was used in the same tweet as *sidechick* ("a mistress"), *cray* with the acronym *WYD* ("What You Doing"), *fuckboy* with *vibes* ("emotional atmosphere"), *sus* with *clout* ("fame, influence"), etc. Thus, it appears that people who use these slang words on social media are also familiar with other new slang terms and expressions and will naturally combine them in their tweets. The more common abbreviations *omg* ("Oh My God"), *idk* ("I Don't Know"), *wtf* ("What The Fuck")

and *lol* (“Laughing Out Loud”) also continue to be used. It is also common to emphasize the meaning of the slang word or the whole message with the help of vulgar phrases such as “as fuck”, typically shortened as *af*, “the fuck”, shortened *tf*, and many common swear words. The offensive word *bitch* was also used in some tweets, e.g. in the popular phrase “bitches be cray”. Thus, particularly with the negative slang words, it is common to use vulgar or offensive words, and new expressions are typically used in combination with each other.

Another very prominent feature that surfaced when looking at the use of these slang words on Twitter was the ample use of features of African American Vernacular English. Especially common were the use of the negator *ain't* (e.g. “I’m done being wifey material. Y’all ain’t even worth it”), the absence of copula/auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tenses and actions (e.g. “You the real MVP Guys!!”), absence of verb-subject agreement (e.g. “if she breathe she a thot”), multiple negation (e.g. “I ain’t got no bae I ain’t catching no feeling”), and the use of habitual *be* (e.g. “bitches be cray”). The rich use of features of AAVE could be explained by the fact that many of the slang words studied have their origins in AAVE, or in hip hop culture, which is typically very much influenced by African American artists. Thus, the slang words’ use might be influenced by their origins and using features of AAVE on social media appears to be quite popular in general. Using such features might be a stylistic choice, giving the language used a more colloquial and humorous feeling, or it may be an attempt to feel connected to the ethnic group that has provided American English with so many fun and creative slang words, many of which have later become an inseparable part of colloquial speech. It is important to note, however, that in many cases, features of AAVE were found in tweets that were tweeted by black people. Thus, while some features of AAVE may have spread to other ethnic groups, it is also possible that the studied slang words are particularly popular among black people and were found with many features of AAVE for that reason.

Many of the slang words studied appeared on social media in typical phrases or expressions. For example, the slang word *cray* was often used in the phrase *that shit cray*, *wifey* in the phrase

wifey material, *sicko* in the phrase *sicko mode*, and so on. Thus, it appears to be very common to use these slang words in some well-established phrases on social media, and in many cases the words have most likely started to spread into popular usage in the form of these phrases. It was almost impossible to find such examples of for example *MVP* in which it was not used as part of the phrase *(you) the real MVP*. Many of the words were also typically combined with particular verbs (e.g. *go/be cray*) or adverbs (e.g. *so sassy*). It can thus be said that almost every one of these words has a “typical usage” online, and such phrases and constructions are always used without any explanations, assuming that they are familiar and comprehensible to everyone. Some such usages may even become Internet memes (Section 4.2.), as is the case with the phrase *you the real MVP*, which are then deployed for social bonding on the Internet.

Using these slang words humorously on social media was also very common. As was mentioned in Section 4.2, communication on the Internet is often fun, light, and playful, and social networking sites provide a space for “ludic self-construction”, i.e. relating to ourselves and others in a playful manner. For example, the slang words studied are often used ironically to make fun of oneself; people might call themselves *cray* (“man i swear cute girls make me go cray”) or a *stan* (“i feel like i went from “aw i love her” to full stan in 0.2 seconds”). The slang words can also be used ironically to mean the exact opposite; for example, in the following tweet, the cat is really seen as the complete opposite of “the most valuable player”: “shoutout to my cat for waking me up at 3 in the morning, u the real mvp”. This tweet also demonstrates yet another humorous use of the slang words; while they are in most cases used to describe people, they can also often be used in reference to something completely different, such as food or drink (e.g. “As I push through end of this 16hr shift shout out to #AmpEnergyDrink real MVP”). There is essentially no limit when it comes to the words’ reference, which can make it difficult to understand new slang expressions that are used on the Internet, since they often have multiple different uses.

As was mentioned in Section 4.2, Internet language often uses spelling to make the text more vivid and to express emotions. Some features that were found in connection to the slang words studied were using block capitals, (“AAAAA IM GOING CRAY CRAY”), duplicating letters (e.g. “She’s a wifey material broooo.... She’s fucking the oneeeeeee broooooah”), and duplicating question or exclamation marks (e.g. “These ppl have families to feed, no money, and it’s ur fault...but you aren’t doing anything to help !!! Fucking sicko”). All of these typographical features help to emphasize the message and transmit emotions. Emotions were also expressed with the help of emojis and common acronyms (e.g. *lol*). Many of the slang words that were studied elicit strong emotions in people, and thus when they are used online, all the available ways of expressing emotions through written text are taken advantage of. Other common features of Internet language were also present, such as leaving out apostrophes (e.g. “im” instead of “I’m”), writing entirely in lower case, and using unfamiliar spellings (e.g. *ppl* for *people*, *bacc* for *back*, etc.). Thus, spelling has an important role in slang used on the Internet, and by using different typographical features the meaning and the emotions transmitted through a tweet can be greatly altered.

To summarize the answer to the second research question, it can be said that the following features were commonly found in connection to the slang words’ use on social media: using the slang words together with other new slang expressions, vulgarity, features of AAVE, typical usage, humorous or ironic usage, uncommon spelling and typographical expressions of emotion. Most of the time, the words are used to describe people on social media, but as was mentioned earlier, they can also be used humorously to refer to almost anything. Thus, the words’ usage is very typical of Internet language in general.

7.3. Use in the corpora

The third research question has to do with whether these slang words are used on a larger scale, i.e. outside of social media. In order to answer this question, a search for each word was committed in two corpora, the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE) and the *Corpus of Contemporary*

American English (COCA). Relevant examples of each slang word were collected and analyzed, in order to see whether they were used in the same sense as on Twitter. In addition, the number of relevant tokens found in each corpus was compared to the number of tagged posts on Instagram in order to see how big of a difference there is between the words' popularity on social media and outside of it. These numbers can be seen below in Table 1, in which the words that were most popular outside of social media are at the top.

Table 1. Number of tagged posts on Instagram versus tokens in GloWbE and COCA

Word	Tagged posts on Instagram	Tokens in GloWbE	Tokens in COCA
<i>Sassy</i>	4m #sassy	1358	885
<i>Wifey</i>	4,6m #wifey	704	75
<i>Sicko</i>	79,7k #sicko	295	60
<i>Cray</i>	739k #cray	200	11
<i>Stan</i>	1,2m #stan	71	1
<i>Sus</i>	575k #sus	49	1
<i>MVP</i>	3m #mvp	24	15
<i>Bae</i>	16,5m #bae	1	30
<i>Fuckboy</i>	593k #fuckboy	4	2
<i>Thot</i>	110k #thotties	0	3

As Table 1 demonstrates, the numbers on Instagram and in the two corpora are more or less incomparable. Many of the slang words have been used as a hashtag on millions of posts on Instagram (*#bae* being the most popular with 16,5 million tagged posts), but only a few thousand relevant tokens at most were found in the corpora. And, for half of the words, only 50 or less tokens were found in the two corpora altogether. Based on these numbers, it appears that, for the most part, these slang words are not really used in the corpora. Only a few of them can be seen as possibly starting to become more widespread, namely the first four words that have over 200 tokens in the corpora; *sassy*, *wifey*, *sicko* and *cray*. By far the most popular is the word *sassy*, for which altogether 2243 relevant tokens were found in the two corpora. The word appeared to be used in a very similar way on both Twitter and in the corpora; it was used to refer to people, mostly women, it was often preceded by words such as “a little” or “so”, and most of the time, it was used in a positive sense. The word appeared to have

spread in particular to fiction and was commonly used outside of social media when describing female characters.

The word *wifey* also seems to be quite well-established outside of social media, perhaps because it can be used in multiple different meanings. In its current slang use, *wifey* can be used in a positive sense to refer to any female from a best friend to a girlfriend or wife, but the word can also be used in a more negative, derogative sense to refer to one's actual wife. It appears that the positive slang meaning is more common on social media, whereas the negative sense is more popular elsewhere, but there are examples of both kinds of usage on both Twitter and in the corpora.

The word *sicko* is also quite popular outside of social media, and yet again, it is used somewhat differently on Twitter and in the tokens collected from the corpora. On Twitter, it is often used in the phrase *sicko mode*, where the word has more positive connotations, whereas in the corpora, the word is used solely in a negative sense to refer to people who are seen as “perverted” or “disturbed”. This type of usage dates all the way back to 1991, where the first token in COCA is from. It appears that *sicko* is yet another slang word that arises with a slightly changed meaning every now and then, which explains the large number of tokens. As Stenström et al. (2002, 64) mention, slang terms are typically multifunctional, so that their different functions are often intertwined. Thus, as is the case with the terms *wifey* and *sicko*, the word may be used in multiple different functions simultaneously.

The word *cray* is also common outside of social media and has been around for a long time. It still continues to be used in its duplicated form *cray cray*, but the shorter form is also becoming more common. What all of the four slang words that are most widespread outside of social media have in common is the fact that they are all different versions of Standard English words: *sassy* is based on the noun *sass*, *wifey* is an alteration of *wife*, *sicko* is a noun version of the adjective *sick* and *cray* is a shorter version of *crazy*. Thus, it seems like slang words that have an easily discernible meaning are the ones that are more likely to spread to wider usage. The meaning of all of these four slang terms

can easily be guessed, since they look so similar to the Standard English words, and thus it is easier for people to adopt them into their vocabulary.

Most of the words studied cannot be seen to have spread to wider usage outside of social media yet. The small number of tokens for *fuckboy* and *thot* suggest that these new slang words are only used on social media, whereas the words *stan*, *sus*, *MVP* and *bae* may be on the way to becoming more widely used, even though the number of tokens is still very small. A possible reason for the small number of tokens for *fuckboy* and *thot* could be the fact that they are such vulgar words, which may be viewed as too rude or offensive to be used outside the context of social media. Because people's attitudes to slang are typically very negative, and slang is often seen as rude or offensive language (Section 2.5.), people may manifest even more resistance when it comes to vulgar and offensive slang words, and will consciously avoid using them, especially in written text.

The somewhat small number of tokens (72 altogether) for *stan* could be explained by the fact that this slang word is mostly used in a very specific context; when discussing over-enthusiastic and obsessive fans of e.g. musicians, athletes or actors. It does appear that there is a need for this word in its context, and the word is already used outside of social media as well. Since there is no synonym for this word, it appears to fill a gap in the vocabulary and for that reason, *stan* has a chance of becoming a steady part of the vocabulary of even more people in the future. This is supported by the fact that the word has already been added to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. At the moment, though, *stan* is mostly used on social media, where members of fandoms use it both of other people and of themselves.

The words *sus*, *MVP* and *bae* had 50 or less tokens in the two corpora. The small number of tokens for these words is somewhat surprising, since, at a first glimpse, there is nothing about the words themselves that would make them particularly difficult to adopt into one's vocabulary. The words *sus* and *bae* are clippings of very common words, *suspect/suspicion* and *babe/baby*, making their meaning quite easily discernible. It is possible that because the word *bae* is so popular on social

media, it is seen as an example of typical Internet slang, mostly used by teenagers, and for that reason, people do not want to accept it into more general usage. In the corpora, it was mostly found in popular magazines, where the word was often used ironically or humorously, showing that *bae* may just be seen as a trendy and fun piece of slang, not meant to be adopted into the general, more serious vocabulary. Thus, only time will tell whether *bae* will eventually enter wider usage, or whether it will soon be forgotten.

While the meaning of *sus* may be easy to deduce, using a clipping of such a common word may be seen as unnecessary or too “slang-like” by most people. The connotations of *sus* and *suspect/suspicious* may also be quite different, with *sus* only lending itself to very informal situations. For this reason, it is very much possible that *sus* might only carry on as a part of Internet slang, or in very informal language, whereas the original words continue to be used as part of Standard English.

The word *MVP* also had a quite small number of tokens in the corpora, only 39 altogether. It was, however, used in the same way in the corpora as on social media, suggesting that the slang use has started to spread outside of social media, even if the word is still more commonly used in reference to the MVP award. A possible reason for the small number of tokens could be the fact that the meaning of this slang word could be difficult to deduce if one is not familiar with the sports award. The word may also be seen as belonging to sports slang or gaming slang, and for that reason, people may be confused about whether it can be used as a more general term as well.

To summarize the answer to the third research question, it can be said that only a few of the words, namely *sassy*, *wifey*, *sicko* and *cray*, appear to be used on a larger scale. All of these words had between 211 and 2243 tokens in the two corpora, and while the number of hashtags on Instagram was incomparable, the number of tokens proves that these words are definitely used outside of social media as well. The words *stan*, *sus*, *MVP* and *bae* all had between 31-72 tokens in the corpora and can thus be seen as possibly becoming more widespread, even if they are still quite uncommon outside of social media. Finally, the words *fuckboy* and *thot* have not entered wider usage, and only a few

tokens were found for each word. Thus, it appears that words with an easily discernible meaning and multiple functions may spread to wider usage easier than offensive or vulgar slang terms.

8. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to study the use and spread of 10 English slang words that can be used to describe people. The goal was to find out how these words have been created, where they originate, how they are used on social media and whether they are used on a larger scale. The material for this study consisted of information gathered from online dictionaries and websites, which was used to decipher the words' origins. In order to find out how the words were used on social media, examples were collected from the microblogging website Twitter. The number of hashtags for each word on Instagram was compared to the number of relevant tokens for each word in two corpora, GloWbE and COCA. In addition, examples from the two corpora were analyzed in order to see whether the slang words were used similarly on social media and outside of it.

Most of the studied slang words (30%) had their origins in hip hop or rap lyrics. This group included the words *fuckboy*, *stan* and *thot*. Thus, popular culture is a great source for new slang terms, since it relies on innovativeness and novelty. Two of the slang words (20%), *bae* and *sus*, originated in African American Vernacular English, and since many such words spread to more common usage via hip hop or rap lyrics, these two groups can be seen as partly overlapping. 20 % of the slang words (*cray* and *sicko*) originated in the standard meanings of the words (*crazy* and *sick*), reflecting the fact that one of the most common sources of slang is the figurative, extended or narrowed use of Standard English words. Some words may also have been used in slang for a long time, and the word *sassy* had its origins in earlier slang usage. The origins of the word *wifey* were unclear, which is quite typical for slang, but it is likely that it originates in the standard meaning of the word, i.e. *wife*. Finally, the word *MVP* had its origins in sports, demonstrating how sports terms may become popular even in other contexts.

The study showed that many different word-formation techniques were used to create these slang words. The most common word-formation techniques were acronyms (30%) and derivation (30%). Acronyms (*bae*, *MVP*, *thot*) are a very common feature of Internet language, and their popularity could be explained by the fact that they are a quick and easy way of communicating via electronic devices. Derivation (*sassy*, *sicko*, *wifey*), on the other hand, is the most common word-formation technique in English and offers a simple way of creating new slang words, since one does not have to come up with a completely new term, but instead just add a prefix or suffix to alter the meaning of an already existing word. Clipping (20%) was also popular; the words *sus* and *cray* are shorter versions of the words *suspect/suspicious* and *crazy*, offering a faster and more fun version of Standard English terms. Slang words were also created by blending (*stan*) and compounding (*fuckboy*), other techniques that allow Standard English words to be used in a fresh, new way in slang.

The examples collected from Twitter demonstrated how the slang words are typically used on social media. The most common features found in connection to the slang words were using the slang words together with other new slang expressions, with vulgar words and expressions, with features of AAVE, in typical constructions and expressions, in a humorous or ironic way, with uncommon spelling and with typographical expressions of emotion. It was also observed that while the chosen slang words were often used to describe people, they could essentially be used in reference to anything. Thus, these slang words can be used in many creative ways, and while the words were originally categorized into positive and negative terms, it became evident with several words that the same word may be used as both a positive and an offensive term, depending on the context.

Finally, the study showed that most of the slang words studied are not used on a larger scale. The only words that can be seen to have spread to somewhat wider usage were *sassy*, *wifey*, *sicko* and *cray*, all of which had over 200 relevant tokens in the two corpora. All of these four words are slang versions of Standard English terms, with an easily discernible meaning, making them easy to adapt into one's vocabulary. In addition, the words *wifey* and *sicko* have multiple functions, i.e. they can be

used as both positive and negative terms, which may further help them spread to wider usage. It appears that vulgar and offensive words (*fuckboy* and *thot*) have a harder time gaining acceptance outside social media, whereas the words *stan*, *sus*, *MVP* and *bae* have the potential of possibly becoming more common in the future.

This study offered a first look into new slang words that have never been studied before and presented information about typical sources for new slang words, common word-formation techniques, and about the slang words' typical usage on social media and on a larger scale. The focus of this study was on written language, and in future research, these slang words could be studied from the perspective of spoken language, since many of them could be more widespread in informal, spoken English. It would also be of interest to search for these slang words in other corpora to get a more versatile view on the topic. Another interesting aspect would be to examine whether these words are still used in a few years, and which of them might have become a part of Standard English. This current study showed how these slang words have come about and how they are currently used on social media and outside of it. It has also shown how creative, playful, versatile and vivid slang on social media is, and that slang is so much more than just vulgar, bad or offensive language. The humor, descriptiveness and playfulness offered by slang can bring together people from all over the world, proving that language does not always need to be taken so seriously.

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