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Semantic Change in IShowSpeed's YouTube Streaming

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ABSTRACT
The rapid development of digital technology and social media platforms has transformed human communication, particularly in live streaming contexts. This study investigates semantic change in the language used by IShowSpeed, a prominent YouTube streamer known for his expressive and improvisational communication style. The research aims to identify types of semantic shifts and analyze the factors influencing these changes. Using qualitative descriptive methods, data were collected from IShowSpeed's livestreams and viral clips from 2024–2025, followed by transcription, categorization, and contextual analysis. The findings indicate that his language exhibits various types of semantic change, including broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical extension, metonymy, synecdoche, and euphemism. Factors contributing to these shifts include linguistic mechanisms, historical and cultural contexts, psychological motivations, and social dynamics within digital communities, particularly among Generation Z. These results enrich the understanding of modern semantics, digital pragmatics, and the social construction of meaning in online environments.
Keywords: Emantic Change, Youtube Live Streaming, Digital Language, Youth Slang, Online Communication

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology and social media has profoundly reshaped patterns of human communication, particularly in the way language is produced, circulated, and interpreted in online environments. Digital platforms such as YouTube enable highly interactive, real-time, and emotionally charged communication, where meaning is continuously negotiated between content creators and audiences (Crystal, 2011; Androutsopoulos, 2014). In this context, language is no longer governed solely by formal linguistic norms but functions as a dynamic and adaptive system influenced by social interaction, identity construction, and digital culture (Tagg, 2015; Herring, 2018). As a result, semantic change has become increasingly visible in digital discourse, especially within the language practices of popular streamers and online influencers.

One prominent figure illustrating this phenomenon is IShowSpeed (Darren Watkins Jr.), a globally recognized streamer known for his spontaneous reactions, exaggerated emotional expressions, and unconventional language use during livestreams. His repeated use of expressions such as "SIUU!", "barkety bark!", and "IShowMeat" demonstrates how lexical items can shift away from their original meanings and acquire new pragmatic and symbolic functions within digital communities. These expressions are not merely individual linguistic creativity but are collectively adopted, replicated, and recontextualized by audiences, reflecting an active process of semantic change driven by participatory online culture (Eckert, 2012; Zappavigna, 2015).

In linguistic theory, semantic change refers to the evolution of meaning that occurs as a result of changes in usage, context, and social function over time (Ullmann, 1962; Traugott & Dasher, 2002). Hollmann (2009) classifies semantic change into several types, including broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical extension, metonymy,

synecdoche, and euphemism. These categories provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing meaning shifts in contemporary discourse. In IShowSpeed's language, such changes are evident in how expressions originally lacking clear semantic reference come to signify emotional intensity, humor, identity, or group membership through repeated contextual use in livestreams. Meaning construction in this case is highly pragmatic, emerging from interactional context rather than lexical origin (Leech, 1981; Yule, 1996).

IShowSpeed's linguistic practices are inseparable from his sociocultural position as a member of Generation Z, a generation characterized by deep immersion in digital media, meme culture, and participatory communication (Prensky, 2001; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Born in 2005, IShowSpeed gained prominence around 2021 through gaming and reaction-based content that emphasizes improvisation, absurd humor, and intense audience engagement. Previous studies have shown that youth-driven digital discourse often accelerates semantic innovation, as language is used creatively to express emotion, solidarity, and resistance to conventional norms (Eble, 2012; Bucholtz, 2016). In this sense, IShowSpeed's language functions not only as personal expression but also as a shared semiotic resource within his fan community.

The global circulation of IShowSpeed's language is further amplified by his massive digital reach and cross-platform visibility. With more than 41.5 million YouTube subscribers as of July 2025, his content regularly goes viral across TikTok, Reddit, and X, allowing his expressions to travel rapidly across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Research on digital virality suggests that repeated exposure, remixing, and memeification play a crucial role in accelerating semantic change in online environments (Shifman, 2014; Milner, 2016). His peak popularity in 2024, including a viral IRL livestream in Indonesia with over one million concurrent viewers, illustrates how digital events can function as catalysts for large-scale linguistic diffusion.

Previous studies on semantic change in digital media have highlighted that online communication fosters rapid meaning shifts due to immediacy, emotional engagement, and collective participation (Danesi, 2017; McCulloch, 2019). Research on YouTube discourse has also shown that streamers often develop idiosyncratic linguistic styles that later become normalized within fan communities (Tolson, 2010; Jones, 2016). However, despite growing interest in digital linguistics, empirical studies focusing on semantic change in livestreaming contexts—particularly involving global influencers such as IShowSpeed—remain limited, especially within the framework of established semantic theories.

To explain the factors underlying these semantic shifts, this study draws on Abdul Chaer's (2009) framework, which identifies linguistic mechanisms, historical and cultural contexts, psychological motivations, and social dynamics as key drivers of semantic change. In digital environments, these factors interact intensively: linguistic creativity is encouraged by platform affordances, psychological motivations such as attention-seeking and emotional expression are amplified by live interaction, and social dynamics within online fandoms reinforce shared meanings (Kress, 2010; Boyd, 2014). For Generation Z audiences in particular, language innovation becomes a tool for identity formation and social belonging within digital communities.

Although the expressions popularized by IShowSpeed often diverge from standard language norms, they exemplify the adaptive and creative nature of language in contemporary digital society. Meaning is constructed collaboratively, stabilized through repetition, and legitimized through social acceptance rather than institutional authority (Fairclough, 1995; Coupland, 2010). This phenomenon highlights how semantic change in the digital era occurs at an accelerated pace, shaped by technological affordances and youth culture.

Therefore, this study investigates semantic change in IShowSpeed's YouTube livestreams and viral clips from 2024 to 2025. By applying Hollmann's (2009) classification of semantic change and Abdul Chaer's (2009) framework of influencing factors, this research

aims to identify the types of semantic change present in IShowSpeed's language and to analyze the linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural factors that drive these changes. The findings are expected to contribute to semantic studies, sociolinguistics, and digital discourse analysis, particularly within the context of youth-driven language innovation in global online communication.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to examine semantic change in digital communication, particularly within live streaming discourse. Qualitative descriptive research is suitable for this study because it aims to describe, analyze, and interpret linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur, without relying on numerical measurement or statistical testing (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaca, 2014). Language in this research is viewed as a form of social behavior and creative practice, shaped by interaction, emotion, and cultural context, which aligns with sociolinguistic and pragmatic approaches to meaning (Herring, 2018; Tagg, 2015).

The primary data source of this study is IShowSpeed (Darren Watkins Jr.) and his publicly available YouTube content, including livestream recordings and viral clips. These data are treated as authentic instances of digital discourse, reflecting spontaneous language use in interactive online environments. IShowSpeed is selected as the main subject of the study due to his distinctive linguistic style and global influence, which allow his expressions to circulate widely and undergo semantic reinterpretation within online communities. To support interpretation and contextual understanding, secondary information is obtained through observation of audience responses, informal interviews or discussions with regular viewers, and insights from linguists or digital culture observers. Such supplementary perspectives are commonly used in qualitative linguistic research to enrich data interpretation and validate meaning construction (Dцrnyei, 2007).

Data collection is conducted through systematic observation of IShowSpeed's official YouTube channel, focusing on livestreams and selected clips produced between 2021 and 2025, with particular emphasis on content from 2024 to 2025. Observation involves repeated viewing to identify recurring words, phrases, or vocal expressions suspected of semantic change. These expressions are transcribed verbatim to preserve their linguistic form, emotional delivery, and contextual features. In addition, commentary analysis is carried out by examining viewer comments, reposts, and memes related to the selected expressions in order to understand how audiences interpret, reuse, and redefine them. Informal interviews or casual conversations with frequent viewers and digital culture analysts are also used to gain insight into shared meanings and community interpretations. All identified expressions are documented and compiled into a glossary to track their semantic development across contexts, a practice commonly applied in qualitative discourse and semantic studies (McCulloch, 2019; Crystal, 2011).

Data analysis follows a qualitative interpretative procedure. First, the collected expressions are categorized according to the types of semantic change proposed by Hollmann (2009), including broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical extension, metonymy, synecdoche, and euphemism. This classification provides a theoretical framework for identifying and describing meaning shifts at the lexical and pragmatic levels. Next, thematic analysis is applied to examine social, emotional, and cultural themes surrounding the use of each expression, focusing on how performance, interaction, and digital context shape meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation is employed by comparing linguistic observations with audience comments and insights obtained from informal interviews, ensuring consistency across data sources (Patton, 2015). Finally, interpretation is conducted by relating the identified patterns of semantic change to broader linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural factors, drawing on Abdul Chaer's (2009) framework to explain how

digital interaction, emotional expression, and social dynamics contribute to meaning evolution.

The research procedure begins with collecting data through observation and transcription of IShowSpeed's YouTube content. This is followed by selecting expressions that demonstrate noticeable shifts from their original or conventional meanings. The selected expressions are then classified based on established semantic change theory, after which contextual analysis is conducted to explore the sociocultural and psychological factors influencing their use. Validation is achieved through cross-checking findings with audience reactions and interview data, and the final stage involves synthesizing the results to answer the research questions and present conclusions regarding semantic change in digital live streaming discourse.

RESULTS

The analysis identified 12 prominent expressions that demonstrate semantic change.

Table 1. Types of Semantic Change in IShowSpeed's Expressions

No	Expression	Original / Conventional Meaning	New Meaning in IShowSpeed's Usage	Type of Semantic change
1	SIUU!	Cristiano Ronaldo's celebration shout	General expression of extreme emotion: victory, excitement, anger	Broadening
2	Barkety bark	dog barking sound	Expression of high energy, dominance, or excitement	Metaphor
3	IShowMeat	Parody name; meat = flesh	Humorous identity, comedic alter ego	Narrowing
4	You're done!	Finished / completed	Mock or insult someone	Pejoration
5	Get sturdy	Hip-hop dance	Call to act boldly, perform confidently	Broadening
6	I'm cooked	Food being well done	Feeling mentally exhausted, defeated, panicked	Metaphor

7	Fire	Literal fire	Something very good, impressive	Amelioration
8	He's a demon	Evil supernatural being	Extremely skilled or aggressive	Amelioration + Metapho
9	You sold!	To sell something	To make a big mistake / ruin something	Pejoration
10	No cap	No hat	Telling the truth / not lying	Metonymy
11	Chat!	Chat room	Collective call to address all viewers	Narrowing
12	W and L	Alphabet letters	Judgment: W = win; L = loss	Metonymy / Synecdoche

Table 2. Factors Influencing Semantic Change in IShowSpeed's YouTube Streaming

No	Factor	Description	Example from data
1	Lingustic factors	Semantic change occurs through metaphor, metonymy, repetition, and contextual reinterpretation	I'm cooked, barkety bark
2	Psychological Factors	Emotional intensity, spontaneity, and performative expression influence meaning shift.	Exaggerated reactions during livestreams
3	Social Factors	Audience interaction reinforces and stabilizes new meanings through repetition and collective usage.	Chat!, W and L
4	Cultural Factors	Shared cultural frameworks such as gaming, football fandom, hip-hop	SIUU!, No cap

		slang, and meme culture shape interpretation.	
5	Technological Factors	Live-streaming affordances enable rapid dissemination and viral spread of new meanings.	Real-time chat, clips, cross-platform sharing

Interpretation of results should not be included in this result section, unless the research required a combination of both findings and discussion in one section.



Figure 1. This is the title of your picture. The image position is "in line with text"

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DISCUSSION

Types of Semantic Change in IShowSpeed's Language

The findings of this study demonstrate that the language used by IShowSpeed exhibits a wide range of semantic changes, reflecting the dynamic nature of meaning construction in digital live streaming discourse. The expressions identified in the data reveal that semantic change in this context is not random, but systematically shaped by emotional performance, repeated usage, and interaction with online audiences. In line with Hollmann's (2009) framework, the semantic changes observed include broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical extension, metonymy, and synecdoche, indicating that multiple mechanisms of meaning shift operate simultaneously within digital communication.

One of the most frequent types of semantic change identified in the data is broadening, where expressions acquire a wider range of meanings than their original usage. The expression "SIUU!", originally associated with Cristiano Ronaldo's celebratory shout, undergoes semantic broadening in IShowSpeed's discourse as it is used to express not only victory but also excitement, anger, and emotional intensity in general. Similarly, "Get sturdy," which conventionally refers to a specific hip-hop dance style, is broadened to function as a motivational command encouraging bold action or confident performance. These findings align with previous research suggesting that digital discourse often facilitates semantic expansion due to flexible contextual boundaries and emotionally charged interaction (Traugott & Dasher, 2002; McCulloch, 2019).

Metaphorical extension is another dominant mechanism of semantic change found in IShowSpeed's language. Expressions such as "barkety bark" and "I'm cooked" demonstrate how literal meanings are mapped onto abstract emotional or psychological states. "Barkety bark," derived from the sound of a barking dog, metaphorically conveys high energy,

dominance, or aggression, while "I'm cooked" shifts from a culinary process to expressing mental exhaustion, defeat, or panic. This metaphorical usage supports Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) claim that metaphor is a fundamental cognitive tool through which speakers conceptualize abstract experiences. In the context of live streaming, metaphorical expressions become particularly effective due to their immediacy and emotional resonance.

The data also reveal instances of narrowing, where meanings become more specific and context-bound. The expression "IShowMeat," originally a playful parody combining the streamer's name with the literal meaning of "meat," is narrowed to function as a humorous alter ego uniquely associated with IShowSpeed's on-screen persona. Likewise, the term "Chat," which conventionally refers to a mode of online communication or a chatroom, is narrowed to address the collective audience watching the livestream. This type of semantic narrowing reflects how repeated usage within a specific discourse community can stabilize new, specialized meanings (Hollmann, 2009; Eckert, 2012).

Pejoration is evident in expressions such as "You're done!" and "You sold!", both of which shift from neutral or literal meanings to negative evaluative judgments. "You're done!" moves from indicating completion to mocking or insulting someone, while "You sold!" shifts from the act of selling to blaming someone for making a critical mistake or ruining a situation. These semantic shifts illustrate how negative evaluation becomes embedded in meaning through pragmatic context and emotional delivery. According to Abdul Chaer (2009), such changes are often driven by psychological factors and social interaction, particularly when language is used to express frustration, dominance, or criticism.

In contrast, amelioration is observed in expressions such as "Fire" and "He's a demon." While "fire" originally denotes a potentially destructive element, it is used positively in IShowSpeed's discourse to describe something impressive or excellent. Similarly, "He's a demon," which traditionally carries a negative moral connotation, is reinterpreted to praise exceptional skill or aggressive performance, particularly in gaming contexts. These findings support earlier studies indicating that youth and digital cultures frequently reframe negatively marked terms into positive evaluative expressions as a form of linguistic creativity and identity construction (Eble, 2012; Bucholtz, 2016).

Metonymy and synecdoche also play a role in IShowSpeed's semantic innovations. The expression "No cap," originally referring to the absence of a hat, functions metonymically to mean honesty or truthfulness, drawing on cultural associations within hip-hop and internet slang. Similarly, the use of "W" and "L" as shorthand for "win" and "loss" demonstrates both metonymic and synecdochic processes, where single letters represent complex evaluative judgments. These forms of semantic compression are characteristic of digital communication, where brevity and immediacy are highly valued (Crystal, 2011; Zappavigna, 2015).

Beyond identifying types of semantic change, the findings also highlight the factors influencing these shifts. Consistent with Abdul Chaer's (2009) framework, semantic changes in IShowSpeed's language are shaped by linguistic mechanisms, psychological motivations, and social dynamics within digital communities. Linguistically, repetition and contextual consistency help stabilize new meanings. Psychologically, exaggerated emotional expression and performative behavior amplify the impact of expressions, making them memorable and easily adopted by viewers. Socially, the collective participation of fans through comments, memes, and imitation reinforces shared meanings and accelerates semantic diffusion across platforms.

These findings corroborate previous studies on digital discourse, which emphasize that meaning in online environments is co-constructed by speakers and audiences rather than imposed by formal linguistic authority (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Shifman, 2014). In the case of IShowSpeed, semantic change is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a cultural process, reflecting how Generation Z users negotiate identity, humor, and emotional expression in global digital spaces. His livestreams function as sites of rapid linguistic

innovation, where meanings are continuously reshaped through interaction, performance, and collective interpretation.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that IShowSpeed's language use exemplifies contemporary semantic change in digital live streaming culture. The variety of semantic shifts identified and the factors influencing them illustrate how language evolves rapidly in response to technological affordances, emotional communication, and social interaction. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of semantic change in the digital era and highlight the relevance of established semantic theories when applied to modern online discourse.

Factors Influencing Semantic Change in IShowSpeed's YouTube Streaming

The Semantic change in IShowSpeed's YouTube livestreams is not random; it is shaped by multiple interacting factors. Table 2 summarizes these factors, but a deeper discussion helps to understand the mechanisms behind meaning shifts.

1. Linguistic Factors

Linguistic mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, repetition, and contextual reinterpretation play a central role in semantic change. For example, expressions like "I'm cooked" originally refer to food being overdone but, in IShowSpeed's context, metaphorically express emotional exhaustion or panic. Repeated usage across multiple livestreams reinforces these meanings, stabilizing them within the community. This aligns with Traugott and Dasher's (2002) claim that frequent usage is crucial for semantic change. Additionally, contextual reinterpretation allows the same expression to carry slightly different meanings depending on situational factors, such as gameplay events or interactions with viewers.

2. Psychological Factors

The streamer's emotional intensity, spontaneity, and performative style strongly influence semantic shifts. Expressions delivered with heightened excitement, surprise, or exaggeration are more memorable and likely to be adopted by viewers. For instance, when IShowSpeed exclaims "Barkety bark!" with high energy, it signals dominance or excitement rather than a literal dog sound. Chaer (2009) emphasizes that psychological motivation is particularly potent in informal speech contexts, where speaker intention and affective expression accelerate meaning change. This shows that the streamer's personality and affective display are key drivers of semantic innovation.

3. Social Factors

Social interaction within the livestream environment reinforces semantic change. The live chat allows immediate feedback, repetition, and co-construction of meaning. Terms like "Chat!", "W", and "L" gain their significance through collective understanding rather than conventional definitions. Audience imitation, collective endorsement, and peer reinforcement contribute to stabilizing new meanings. Androutsopoulos (2014) explains that in digital discourse, meaning emerges through collaboration between speaker and audience, not solely from linguistic rules. The community's role illustrates that semantic change in digital contexts is socially mediated.

4. Cultural Factors

Cultural influences shape semantic change by providing shared reference points. IShowSpeed's language draws heavily from gaming culture, football fandom, hip-hop slang, and meme culture. Expressions like "SIUU!" (from Cristiano Ronaldo's football celebration) or "No cap" (from hip-hop slang) are recontextualized within livestreams. Viewers familiar with these cultural codes instantly recognize and adopt the new meanings. Cultural factors

thus act as a framework for semantic innovation, allowing rapid comprehension and dissemination among Generation Z audiences.

5. Technological Factors

Technological affordances significantly accelerate semantic change. YouTube livestream features, including real-time chat, clip creation, and cross-platform sharing, allow expressions to spread rapidly beyond the original context. Viral moments ensure that certain phrases are adopted widely, even by viewers who did not watch the livestream live. Crystal (2011) and Shifman (2014) highlight that digital platforms increase the speed and visibility of semantic change, making online communication a fertile ground for linguistic innovation.

Interaction of Factors

Importantly, these factors are interdependent rather than isolated. Linguistic creativity works hand-in-hand with psychological expression, social reinforcement, cultural recognition, and technological amplification. For example, a metaphorical expression (linguistic) delivered with excitement (psychological), repeated in chat (social), tied to a meme or cultural reference (cultural), and shared widely via clips (technological) can spread and stabilize extremely quickly. This interplay explains why semantic change in livestreams occurs more rapidly and dynamically than in traditional offline communication.

CONCLUSION

I'This study investigates semantic change in IShowSpeed's YouTube livestreams, focusing on two research questions: (1) the types of semantic change present in his language, and (2) the factors influencing these changes.

Regarding RQ1, the analysis shows that IShowSpeed's expressions exhibit various types of semantic change, including broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical extension, metonymy, and synecdoche. Examples such as "SIUU!", "Barkety bark", and "I'm cooked" illustrate how lexical items acquire new emotional, humorous, or evaluative meanings within digital communities. These findings highlight the dynamic and adaptive nature of language in livestreaming contexts, where repeated usage, audience interaction, and performance shape meaning.

Regarding RQ2, semantic change in IShowSpeed's language is influenced by multiple interrelated factors:

Linguistic factors: metaphor, metonymy, repetition, and contextual reinterpretation;

Psychological factors: emotional intensity, spontaneity, and performative style;

Social factors: real-time interaction, audience participation, and collective endorsement;

Cultural factors: gaming, football, hip-hop, and meme culture;

Technological factors: YouTube's livestreaming features, viral clips, and cross-platform dissemination.

The interaction of these factors accelerates the diffusion and stabilization of new meanings, demonstrating that semantic change in digital live-streaming environments is highly dynamic, socially mediated, and technologically facilitated.

In conclusion, IShowSpeed's YouTube livestreams function as sites of rapid semantic innovation, reflecting how Generation Z creatively negotiates identity, emotion, and community norms in online spaces. This study contributes to digital pragmatics,

sociolinguistics, and semantic theory by illustrating the mechanisms and driving factors of meaning evolution in contemporary online discourse.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could expand to other digital platforms such as TikTok or Twitch, examine cross-cultural reception of semantic innovations, or employ quantitative methods to measure audience adoption and interpretive variation. Limitations of this study include its focus on one platform and reliance on qualitative analysis, which may not capture the full spectrum of audience interpretation.

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