

Variations of Mandarin Slang on Weibo: A Linguistic Trend in Social Media

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Abstract: Communication plays a vital role in human social interaction, with language serving as the primary tool for conveying messages, expressing identity, and shaping cultural development. Mandarin, as one of the most widely spoken languages, includes both formal and informal variations, such as slang. Slang is an evolving linguistic phenomenon that reflects social and cultural dynamics, particularly among young people. This study explores the characteristics, formation mechanisms, and social functions of Mandarin slang, with a focus on its usage on Weibo, one of China's most influential social media platforms. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze slang terms used in digital interactions between September and December 2023. The findings indicate that slang in Mandarin follows various linguistic patterns, including phonetic changes, abbreviations, metaphors, loanwords, and morphological adaptations. Additionally, slang serves multiple functions, such as strengthening social identity, fostering group cohesion, and enabling creative self-expression. Weibo significantly contributes to the dissemination and evolution of slang, as public figures, celebrities, and media organizations actively engage in language innovation through their posts. This study provides insights into the dynamic role of digital platforms in shaping modern language trends and highlights the impact of slang on communication patterns among Chinese youth.

Keywords: Mandarin Slang, Digital Communication, Social Media, Weibo, Language Evolution

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a crucial element in human life as social beings who need support and interaction with others. According to (Pohan & Fitria, 2021: 32), communication occurs when a message is formed, delivered, received, and processed, either within an individual or between two or more people, with a specific purpose. (Masrur et al., 2023: 2; Mailani et al., 2022: 2) state that language is the most effective communication tool in social life. Language not only functions to convey messages but also serves as the foundation of identity, social interaction, and cultural development. In both spoken and written communication, language allows individuals to express intentions, ideas, thoughts, and feelings more clearly and accurately.

Mandarin does not only have formal and official forms but also includes casual and informal variations used in daily life. One of these forms is slang. Sari & Siagian (2023: 2597) explain that slang is a non-formal language variation that was initially exclusive to certain groups as a coded language. However, over time, its usage has expanded and become popular, especially among teenagers. Slang terms often have meanings that differ from standard language, reflecting the adaptation of language to social contexts and specific subcultures, thereby enriching the diversity of Mandarin in daily communication.

Slang is an informal language form commonly used in casual conversations and social media. Zhang (2007: 3) describes slang as informal, locally distinctive, and reflective of social dynamics. Technological advancements, especially mobile phones

and instant messaging, have accelerated its development in digital communication (Gunawan, 2015: 57). This shift is evident in altered writing styles, such as phonetic substitutions and word modifications, e.g., "*dulu*" becoming "*duluw*." Mandarin slang, influenced by pop culture and English, is widely used by youth to express identity and social bonds (Anggini et al., 2022: 146; Khoirurrohman & Abdan, 2017: 2). (Baan, 2013: 183) highlights its creative and trend-driven nature, while (Li & Yan, 2001: 3) categorize it into dialects, jargon, coded language, and profanity. Besides enhancing group solidarity, slang can exclude outsiders, reflecting social and cultural shifts, especially in online youth communities. (Yuming, 2015) identifies several forms of slang:

- 1) Phonetic Changes – Occurs when pronunciation changes, such as "*aikidou*" becoming "*aikido*" due to phoneme adaptation (Mahsun, 2012).
- 2) Acronyms/Abbreviations – Simplifying words for more efficient communication, such as *Kuuki Yomenai* abbreviated as *KY*, meaning someone who is not situationally aware (Sutedi, 2019).
- 3) Metaphors – Using indirect expressions, such as *Ashi o arau* (washing feet), meaning repentance in Japanese idioms (Martell, 2017).
- 4) Loanwords – Adopting foreign terms, for example, "*アウカメラ*" (*Autokamera*) in Japanese, whose meaning shifts based on cultural context (Chaer, 2013).
- 5) Morphological Changes – Modifying words, such as adding *ru* in *wakaru* to indicate understanding (Ichikawa, 2005).
- 6) New Word Creation – Emerging from social needs, such as *Noukou Sesshokusha* to refer to close contacts of COVID-19 patients (Sumarsono, 2014).
- 7) Social/Cultural Conventions – Cultural influences in slang, such as *Torii* (temple gate), which also means "door" in an informal context (Yoshikawa, 1989).

Slang has various functions in social communication. According to Yuming (2015), there are seven main functions of slang:

- 1) Social Identity Marker – Slang reflects status and membership in a group, creating exclusivity and strengthening social bonds (Sudaryanto, 1988).
- 2) Strengthening Group Cohesion – Slang usage strengthens relationships among group members by fostering solidarity (Iori, 2001).
- 3) Expression of Creativity and Individuality – Slang allows speakers to express themselves uniquely and creatively (Hirose, 1995).
- 4) Conveying Meaning in Internal Contexts – Slang is often used in informal communication to directly convey meaning or emotions (Hayashi, 2020).
- 5) Avoiding Formal Language – Slang provides an alternative for more relaxed and casual communication (Sudaryanto, 2015).
- 6) Humor and Satire – Slang is often used to convey social criticism and humor (Sudaryanto, 2015).
- 7) Cultural Identity Expression – Slang reflects cultural values and norms within a society (Rahmah, 2019).

Slang continues to evolve alongside culture and social interactions. In the digital context, Oktaviani & Pratiwi (2022: 2) highlight that slang plays a vital role in communication, particularly on social media. Sina Weibo, the largest microblogging

platform in China, developed by Sina Corporation in late 2009, is one of the main channels for slang dissemination. With over 300 million users and an average of 100 million posts per day (Fan Yang et al., 2012: 1) Weibo operates similarly to Twitter, where users can post short messages, comment, and like others' posts. Etymologically, "Weibo" means "microblog," derived from the words 博客 (*bókè*) for "blog" and 微 (*wēi*) for "micro" (Kim et al., 2017: 694). As one of the largest and most influential social media platforms in China, Weibo plays a crucial role in the development and spread of slang. The platform enables users to interact, share content, and express themselves more freely, thus creating and introducing new slang terms that are widely adopted.

Not only individuals but also public figures, celebrities, companies, and media contribute to the spread of slang through their posts. With its wide reach and significant influence, Weibo is not only a primary source of information and trends but also a center for linguistic innovation in China's digital world. This usage spreads across various segments of society, including individuals, celebrities, companies, and the media. An example of slang usage can be seen in the following Weibo post:

...十一月品牌官宣成为全球代言人, 生日收获 Versace 最高 Title, 好牛!
恭喜露思。

...In November, the brand officially announced her as a global ambassador. On her birthday, she received Versace's highest title—so impressive! Congratulations, Lusi!

(Weibo Account @LadyxGaga, November 9, 2023)

The slang word '好牛' (*hǎo niú*) means "amazing" and is formed by combining the morpheme 好 (*hǎo*), meaning "very," and 牛 (*niú*), which refers to someone who is hardworking or excellent. Over time, slang like this emerges in response to social and technological dynamics, reflecting the evolution of language in the digital era.

In an increasingly global digital era, understanding Mandarin slang on social media platforms like Weibo is essential, as language continues to evolve over time. Young people, particularly active Weibo users, play a significant role in creating and spreading these slang terms. This research aims to understand the dynamics of digital language and how Weibo influences communication patterns and the identity of China's younger generation. By analyzing posts and comments on Weibo, this study provides a comprehensive overview of slang usage in online communication. The collected data will reveal cultural trends and social changes in modern China while also highlighting the role of language in building social connections and digital identity.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. Qualitative research uses data in the form of words or phrases rather than numbers or statistics and is conducted in natural conditions (Sugiyono, 2013: 8). (Zakariah, 2020: 28) states that this type of research aims to explore subjects' experiences in depth, such as behavior and motivation, using a descriptive approach. In this study, a qualitative descriptive method is used to analyze the forms and functions of youth slang on Weibo without manipulating variables (Theodora, 2013: 181).

The data sources for this research come from Weibo (September–December 2023), covering aspects of slang such as phonetic changes, acronyms, metaphors, loanwords, and sociocultural conventions. The functions of slang are also examined in

the context of social identity, creativity, humor, and group cohesion (Arikunto, 1998: 61). The collected data is coded and analyzed according to the research topic.

The data collection technique employs the non-participatory observation method (Mahsun, 2017: 93), allowing the researcher to observe without direct involvement, as well as a note-taking technique to record relevant information (Gea & Salliyanti, 2023: 25951). The classified data is then analyzed to derive research conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, 31 instances of slang variations were identified on the social media platform Weibo as part of the youth's colloquial language. These data were described according to the forms and functions of slang based on sociolinguistic theory. The identified forms of slang are presented in the following table:

Table 4.1. Forms of Slang Language

No	Forms of Slang Language	Number of Data
1	Phonetic Changes (PC)	1
2	Abbreviations and Acronyms (AA)	6
3	Metaphors (M)	8
4	Loanwords (LW)	3
5	Morphological Changes (MC)	2
6	New Word Creation (NWC)	6
7	Social and Cultural Conventions (SCC)	5
Total		31

1. Phonetic Changes (PC)

Slang often involves changes in the pronunciation of standard words to create a more distinctive or creative form. These phonetic changes can include sound shifts, syllable omissions, or changes in intonation. The phonetic change in slang based on the research data is as follows:

集美

#2023 全球最帅最美面孔#

集美, 不能因为自担不在榜就 说野榜叭不能因为自担名次低就把高名次的截掉叭 怎么不笑啦集美

#2023World's Most Handsome and Beautiful Faces#



Sis, just because your idol isn't on the list doesn't mean you should call it fake.
And just because your idol ranks low, don't crop out the top-ranked ones. Why
aren't you laughing anymore, **sis**?

JM/丘丘小腸仔/28.12.2023/PC, MC

The term “集美” (jí měi) originally referred to the name of a district in Xiamen, Fujian, meaning “gathering beauty,” but it became popular as an internet slang term after a Kuaishou streamer mispronounced “姐妹” (jiěmèi — “sisters”) as “集美” due to phonetic similarity (jiěmèi → jí měi). This mistake triggered a phonetic change that utilized homophones (similar sounds) to create a new term, though with character substitution: “姐” (jiě) was replaced with “集” (jí), and “妹” (mèi) became “美” (měi). Although there was a graphical modification, the core adaptation was based on phonetic resemblance rather than morphological alteration. In slang, “集美” is used as an affectionate greeting on social media platforms (such as Douyin or Weibo) to address female friends with humor and warmth, e.g., “集美们，今天也要加油！” (“Sisters, let's do our best today!”). This shift reflects the dynamics of digital slang, which prioritizes auditory impressions over literal meanings, where similar-sounding words (jí měi) act as catalysts for the creation of new expressions (Malyk, 2014). Thus, “集美” falls under phonetic change as it originated from a mispronunciation that was adapted into a trend, demonstrating how spoken interaction in digital spaces can generate highly contextual and personal linguistic expressions.

2. Abbreviations and Acronyms (AA)

The use of acronyms or abbreviations is a common way of forming slang. Acronyms are often derived from longer phrases and frequently appear in casual conversations.

a. 啥

年中的时候，感觉自己没啥进步了

Mid-year, I felt like I hadn't made much progress.

S/公寓丸雪/10.12.23/AA

The word “啥” (*shá*) is a shortened form of “什么” (*shénme*-what). It is commonly used in informal speech as a more concise and easier-to-pronounce alternative. In the sentence “没啥进步了”，“没啥” means “nothing” or “not much”，making the entire phrase mean “not much progress”. This phenomenon illustrates the abbreviation process in Mandarin slang for the sake of practicality in everyday communication.

b. 5201314

“5201314 从北京到重庆” 王王王多多的微博视频

“5201314 (I love you forever) from Beijing to Chongqing” – Video on Weibo by Wang Wang Wang Duoduo

5201314/王王王多多/15. 10. 2023/AA

“5201314” falls under abbreviations or acronyms as these numbers are used to convey a shorter yet clear message. Each number in this combination represents a



Mandarin pronunciation that resembles a specific phrase. “520” sounds similar to “wǒ ài nǐ” (我爱你 – “I love you”); “1314” sounds similar to “yī shēng yī shì” (一生一世 – “forever” or “a lifetime”) By combining these numbers, the phrase “I love you forever” is conveyed in a more compact and efficient way. This concept aligns with the principles of abbreviation or acronym usage, where long messages are simplified into a practical form without altering their meaning.

c. 热搜

...为啥要骂他? 体育圈搞得像饭圈, 三天两头上热搜, 乒乓球需要球迷不是粉丝! 希望乒O远离饭圈, 少点撕逼大战...

...Why insult him? The sports community is turning into a fandom, trending on hot searches every other day! Table tennis needs sports fans, not crazy stans! Hope the table tennis association stays away from fandom culture and reduces toxic comment wars...

RS/晶刚专属/17.12.2023/AA

The term “热搜” is an abbreviation of “热搜榜”, meaning “hot search ranking”: “热” means “hot” or “popular,” and “搜” means “search”. Thus, this term refers to topics that are trending on the internet, especially on platforms like Weibo or TikTok. As an abbreviation, “热搜” simplifies digital communication, reflecting the trend of slang usage to convey information quickly and efficiently in the online world.

d. 爷青结

今年的难忘今宵好潮呀, 都是喜欢的歌手!但是没有李谷一老师的难忘今宵还是有点不习惯, 爷青结!#春晚

This year's Unforgettable Tonight is so cool, featuring all my favorite singers! But without Teacher Li Guyi's version, it still feels off. RIP my youth! #SpringFestivalGala

YQJ/一袋星光/30.09.2023/AA

The phrase “爷青结” is an abbreviation of “爷的青春结局”, meaning “the end of my youth.” “爷” means “grandfather” (used as an informal self-reference), “青” means “youth”, “结” means “end” or “closure”. This term expresses disappointment or nostalgia upon realizing that youth has passed, often with a humorous or sarcastic nuance. As an abbreviation in slang, “爷青结” facilitates communication by conveying emotions concisely and efficiently in digital conversations.

e. 吃瓜

更新各位吃瓜群众.....好像看着都不大聪明的亚子

Update for all gossip-watchers... Seems like isn't that smart.

CG/不用扶的阿斗本斗/31.10.2023/AA

The phrase “吃瓜” is an abbreviation of “吃瓜群众”, meaning “spectators of drama” or people who passively observe events without direct involvement. “吃瓜” literally means “eating watermelon,” symbolizing relaxation while watching gossip unfold, similar to “watching from the sidelines.” As an abbreviation, “吃瓜” simplifies

communication on social media, especially when referring to people who merely follow a situation without participating.

The usage of acronyms and abbreviations reflects the dynamic changes in language in contemporary culture, where speed of communication, ease of pronunciation, and practicality are important social ideals (He, 2024). Because they have a shared grasp of the language and the always changing digital culture, acronyms and abbreviations help users communicate more easily and build stronger social ties.

3. Metaphors (M)

Slang often uses metaphors or figurative expressions to create a more expressive and creative meaning. This form of language allows speakers to convey ideas in a non-literal but more colorful way.

a. 夜猫子

夜猫子淡然女子，写字不成三十余。

A calm night owl woman, writing imperfectly in her thirties.

YMZ/杨淡/29.10.23/M

The term “夜猫子” is a metaphor describing someone who is accustomed to staying up late. Literally meaning “night cat” (夜 = night, 猫 = cat, 子 = suffix), this term is inspired by cats' nocturnal habits. In popular culture, cats are often associated with nightlife, making “夜猫子” a fitting term for people who remain awake and active when most others are asleep.

b. 灯泡

第三人称的番外一般。总结就是三个竹马”我”成了电灯泡，最后

A side story from a third-person perspective. In short, three childhood friends—“I”—became background lights, and in the end...

DP/要开心呀/25.12.23/M

The term “灯泡” literally means “light bulb,” but in slang, it metaphorically refers to someone who feels out of place in a situation, especially as a third wheel in a romantic or social interaction. It humorously describes someone who “lights up” but is irrelevant, like a light bulb in a place that is already bright. This term is often used humorously or sarcastically to refer to an individual who unintentionally disrupts a couple's moment.

c. 竹马

总结就是三个竹马 “我”成了电灯泡，最后 oe。

In short, three childhood friends—“I”—became background lights, and in the end... (OE).

ZM/要开心呀/25.12.23/M

The term “竹马” literally means “bamboo horse,” but metaphorically, it represents a close childhood relationship between friends or lovers. Originally referring to a traditional bamboo toy that children played with, the term evolved to symbolize deep emotional bonds, whether in friendship or romance that lasts from



childhood. In Chinese culture, “竹马” is often associated with lasting relationships filled with nostalgia, and among young people, it can even refer to an “ideal man” or a partner who has grown up with someone since childhood. Thus, “竹马” is not just a toy but a metaphor for deep and enduring emotional ties, much like bamboo, which is known for its durability.

d. 放鸽子

好气，我还能放鸽子报仇

So frustrated! But I can't even stand someone up to get revenge!

FG/牙医/31.12.23/M

The expression “放鸽子” literally means “to release pigeons,” but in slang, it is a metaphor for canceling an appointment or failing to show up without notice. In Chinese culture, pigeons are often associated with freedom, but in this context, the meaning shifts to disappointing someone by not keeping a promise. This phrase is commonly used in informal settings to express frustration or dissatisfaction in social interactions, reflecting the importance of commitment and responsibility in Chinese communication culture. The phrase carries an expressive and emotional nuance, conveying the disappointment of unmet expectations in social or personal relationships.

e. 摸鱼

不过 微博单张一次性只能发 18 张所以整理的长条合集, 不然 放不下, 不麻烦的话晚点整理一份不太摸鱼, 摸鱼….

But on Weibo, a single post can only upload 18 pictures at a time, so I made a long collage. Otherwise, it wouldn't fit. If you don't mind waiting, I'll make a tidier version later... while slacking off like this.

MY/ 海澜海澜/17.12.23/M

The phrase “摸鱼” literally means “to touch fish,” with “摸” meaning “to touch” or “to grope” and “鱼” meaning “fish.” However, in slang, this term is used to describe a situation where someone avoids work or responsibilities in a relaxed or non-serious manner, often by pretending to be busy or doing unrelated activities. For example, someone spending time on their phone or wandering around instead of working could be said to be “摸鱼”. This is a metaphorical phrase because its meaning extends far beyond literally “touching fish.” Instead, it symbolizes unproductive behavior or secretly slacking off, much like trying to catch fish unnoticed by supervisors or others.

f. 慢半拍

像我这种老是 慢半拍的人, 总感觉有点赶不上趟儿, 连追带赶, 又是一 年。

A person like me, who is always half a beat behind, always feels a little left behind. Chasing and rushing, another year has passed.

MBP/人在深圳/31.12.23/PMK

The phrase “慢半拍” consists of three characters: 慢 meaning “slow,” 半 meaning “half,” and 拍 meaning “beat” or “rhythm.” Literally meaning “slow by half a beat,” this slang term is used to describe someone who is slow to react, respond, or understand situations, whether in conversations, trends, or social settings. For example, in daily



conversations or on social media, someone who is “慢半拍” may struggle to keep up with cultural references, popular trends, or quick-witted responses. This phrase is a metaphor, as it uses the idea of musical rhythm to describe someone's slow comprehension or reaction time. It conveys a lighthearted and non-offensive way of saying someone is a little slow in catching on.

g. 翻车

知道翻车了 但没想到这么翻

I knew it was going to fail, but I didn't expect it to fail *this* badly...

FC/我的极品评论/17.10.2023/M

The phrase “翻车” literally means “overtaken car,” but in slang, it refers to a failure or disaster, especially one that is unexpected or embarrassing. It is often used to describe situations where things go wrong, particularly in public failures, mistakes, or blunders. The metaphor comes from the idea of a vehicle losing control and crashing, symbolizing how an effort or plan can unexpectedly derail.

Metaphors in slang offer a creative and expressive way to convey ideas beyond literal meanings, enhancing communication (Cheng and Wen, 2024). Terms like “夜猫子”, “灯泡”, and “竹马” describe behaviors and relationships, making language more engaging. Expressions such as “放鸽子” and “摸鱼” creatively depict avoiding responsibilities or disappointment. Similarly, “慢半拍” and “翻车” convey delay, failure, or embarrassment. Overall, metaphors add depth and connection to language, especially in digital communication.

4. Loanwords (LW)

Slang often adopts words from foreign languages, especially English, and adapts them into the context of Mandarin. These words often undergo phonetic or morphological changes to fit the structure of Mandarin.

a. 小确幸

要再见啦我拥有很多很多的小确幸呀

Goodbye 2023! I had so many precious little joys!

XQX/呦猫/31.12.23/LW

The term “小确幸” literally means “small but certain happiness” and refers to simple moments that bring genuine satisfaction in daily life. This term is borrowed from the Japanese phrase “小確幸” (shōkakukō), popularized by Haruki Murakami in his essay Afternoon on Langehans Island. The concept is rooted in appreciating small pleasures, such as enjoying a cup of tea or completing household chores, similar to the psychological state of “flow.” In Mandarin, 小确幸 has become part of youth slang, expressing appreciation for minimalist happiness—such as sipping tea or finishing a small task. As a linguistic borrowing, this term reflects cultural exchange dynamics and the modern generation's need to highlight simple joys in everyday life.

b. 凡尔赛

不得不说成毅打戏 真的帅呀, 真的不是凡尔赛呀



I have to admit, Cheng Yi's action scenes are truly amazing! Seriously, it's not 'Versailles' bragging at all!

FES/淇妙无比/26.12.23/LW

The slang term 凡尔赛 literally refers to “Versailles”, the French city known for the opulent Palace of Versailles, symbolizing 17th-century aristocratic luxury and power. However, in modern Chinese pop culture, the term has shifted meaning, becoming a metaphor for ‘humblebragging’—subtly boasting about wealth, status, or privileges in a seemingly modest or indirect way. Linguistically, 凡尔赛 is classified as a loanword because it borrows the French name “Versailles” but adapts its meaning to fit a local social phenomenon. The classification is based on lexical borrowing—it retains its original cultural connotation (French luxury) while developing a unique new meaning in Mandarin, criticizing consumerism and subtle bragging. Thus, 凡尔赛 is not only a reflection of cross-cultural linguistic exchange but also an ironic tool for commenting on modern society’s obsession with status and image.

c. 社畜

悲伤至今结论:社畜使人远离同人, 請到会内耗的 cp 就快跑吧

The sad conclusion so far: being a corporate slave keeps you away from fandoms.
If you find a CP (couple pairing) that drains you mentally, just run away!

SC/盐污/28.12.23/LW

“社畜” is a slang term borrowed directly from Japanese “社畜” (shachiku), a combination of 社 (company) and 畜 (livestock), literally meaning “corporate livestock”. It describes corporate workers trapped in an exploitative work system—Originally popular in Japan as a critique of overwork culture, the concept was later adopted by young people in China to reflect similar work conditions, as a loanword, the term retains its critical meaning of dehumanizing labor conditions but has been recontextualized within China’s socio-economic realities. Its classification as borrowed slang is based on its Japanese lexical origin, continuity in meaning, and adaptation as a critique of local corporate culture.

Loanwords in slang are a significant feature of modern language, as they introduce foreign concepts and ideas into Mandarin, enriching its expressive capacity (Youwei, 2020). Terms like “小确幸”, “凡尔赛”, “社畜”. These loanwords not only show linguistic exchange but also reflect socio-cultural critiques, adapting foreign terms to express local sentiments in contemporary China. They highlight how language evolves in response to global influences and local realities.

5. Morphological Changes (MC)

Slang dapat melibatkan perubahan dalam struktur kata, seperti penambahan awalan, akhiran, atau modifikasi morfologis lainnya. Perubahan ini sering kali digunakan untuk menambahkan nuansa baru atau makna khusus.

亚子

各位吃瓜群众.. 好像看着都不大聪明的亚子 哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈哈

Dear gossip lovers... You all seem to look not very smart, huh? Hahahahahaha.

YZ/不用扶的阿斗本斗/31.10.23/LW, MC

The term “亚子” is a modified form of “样子” where the character “样” is replaced with “亚”. This retains a similar pronunciation but adds a humorous or sarcastic tone. Often used in expressions like “你这是什么亚子？” (“What kind of look/behavior is this?”), this slang term is an example of morphological change, reflecting the linguistic creativity of young people in digital culture. It also highlights how language evolves as a tool for social expression in the internet era (He, 2024).

6. New Word Creation (NWC)

Slang Often Involves Creating New Words by Combining Existing Linguistic Elements. This process can involve the combination of words or the creation of new forms based on existing structures.

a. 学霸

年高考 600 分以上的人数排名，看看哪个地方的学霸最多

Ranking of students scoring above 600 on this year's Gaokao (National College Entrance Exam). Let's see which region has the most top students!

XB/云中不良人/15.12.23/NWC

The term “学霸” is an example of Mandarin slang formed by combining two characters: “学”, meaning “study” or “learning,” and “霸”, meaning “overlord” or “tyrant.” This combination creates a new meaning: “academic overlord” or “study tyrant”, referring to someone who excels academically. The term “学霸” emerged from China's highly competitive education system, where a clear distinction exists between “学霸” (academic elites) and “学渣” (underachievers, literally “academic trash”). Over time, the term has gained popularity on social media platforms like Weibo and Douyin, serving not only as praise for top students but also as a critique of the “toxic” culture that demands relentless perfection.

b. 炸裂

看秀造型+演唱会造型+清新自拍，这个小哥有很多面！炸裂的舞台感

Luxurious stage style + epic concert outfit + fresh casual selfies—this guy has many sides! His stage presence is truly explosive!

ZL/-贾越/29.12.23/NWC

Literally, “炸裂” (zhàliè) consists of two characters: “炸” (zhà) meaning “explode” or “to detonate,” and “裂” (liè) meaning “crack” or “split.” When combined, they create the literal meaning “explode and shatter” or “explode with great force”. However, in modern slang, particularly online, “炸裂” is often used figuratively to describe something extremely impressive, shocking, or outstanding. It is commonly used to refer to spectacular performances, incredible events, or astonishing moments that figuratively “explode” with excitement or energy. Thus, “炸裂” falls into the category of newly created slang words. Even though the two characters already exist in Mandarin, their combination and figurative usage create a fresh, expressive phrase widely used in everyday conversations. The term conveys a much stronger and more vivid meaning than its literal definition, reflecting how slang gives new life to existing words.

c. 鬼畜

龚琳娜、张嘉倪、芝芙、瞿颖、蔡少芬自制《姐姐》鬼畜短片，翻白眼、抓腋下、挖鼻孔

Gong Linna, Zhang Jiani, Chi Fu, Qu Ying, and Cai Shaofen created a hilarious absurd video called 'Sister'—featuring eye-rolling, armpit scratching, and nose picking!

GC/MrWG/29.09.23/NWC

Literally, “鬼畜” (guǐchù) consists of two characters: “鬼” (guǐ) meaning “ghost” or “demon”, and “畜” (chù) meaning “livestock” or “beast”. This combination originally referred to something highly evil or monstrous. However, in modern internet culture, “鬼畜” is often used to describe weird, exaggerated, or absurd content, particularly in humorous or grotesque videos and memes. The term is commonly applied to bizarre or extreme media content that combines dark humor and surreal elements. Thus, “鬼畜” exemplifies slang that repurposes existing words into new, highly expressive meanings. While its original meaning suggested something evil and inhuman, its modern slang usage refers to over-the-top humor and absurdity—demonstrating how internet culture reshapes language.

d. 吃货

2023 美狮#锋味摇滚美食节#吃货 er 们最爱的 part

Liu Yuxin, the Cat-Eyed Beauty, is absolutely stunning! Look, this is an unedited photo! #LiuYuxinMagicalNight2023

CH/锋味官方/08.12.23/PKB

The phrase “绝绝子” consists of “绝”, meaning “amazing” or “unparalleled”, and “子”, a suffix often used to add a casual or affectionate tone. This slang term expresses admiration and excitement, roughly translating to “super awesome” or “absolutely amazing”. It is frequently used on social media to praise someone’s looks, talent, or impressive performance. The repeated use of “绝” emphasizes excellence, while “子” softens the phrase, making it feel more informal and lively. This reflects how modern slang enhances expressions by modifying traditional words in playful and creative ways.

New word creation in slang combines existing linguistic elements to form fresh expressions (He, 2024). For example, “学霸” (academic overlord) blends “学” (study) and “霸” (overlord), describing top students. “炸裂” (explosive) uses “炸” (explode) and “裂” (crack) to describe something impressive. “鬼畜” (bizarre) combines “鬼” (ghost) and “畜” (livestock) to refer to absurd content, and “吃货” (foodie) merges “吃” (eat) and “货” (goods) to describe food lovers. These new words showcase how slang creates expressive meanings by reinterpreting traditional vocabulary.

7. Social and Cultural Conventions (SCC)

Slang language is influenced by social and cultural conventions within certain communities or groups. Slang reflects specific social dynamics and cultural identities. For example, slang terms can change over time and become more associated with particular age groups or subcultures, reflecting trends and changes in society.

a. 魔性

...太可爱太萌啦！姐姐们都好拼！好魔性！好喜欢！这拿到舞台上，满分乘风值哈哈哈！姐姐们好有爱，彼此练在一起玩在一起，结下难得的友谊，真好！
...Too cute and adorable! The sisters are giving it their all! So addictive! I love it! If this were performed on stage, it would get a perfect Sisters Who Make Waves score! Hahaha! The sisters are so united, practicing and playing together, forming a rare friendship. Amazing!

MX/MrWG/29.09.23/SCC

The term “魔性” in Mandarin consists of two characters: “魔”, meaning “magic” or “demonic”, and “性”, meaning “nature” or “character”. Literally, “魔性” can be translated as “magical nature” or “supernatural charm”, used to describe something highly attractive and irresistible, as if it possesses a supernatural force. In popular culture, this term is often used to describe things or individuals with a strong allure, even if they appear strange or exaggerated. From the perspective of social and cultural conventions, “魔性” represents the shift in social norms that have become more accepting of unconventional or eccentric elements in entertainment culture. This reflects changing societal values, where uniqueness and diversity are considered appealing and embraced, especially by younger generations who are more open to innovation and experimentation in entertainment. Thus, “魔性” symbolizes the acceptance of the unexpected and the formation of a more inclusive and flexible cultural value system.

b. 996

但是近期的 996, 我很少有时间锻炼, 有时候到家都 11 点, 每次回来只想睡觉
But lately, because of the 996-work schedule, I barely have time to exercise. Sometimes I get home at 11 PM, and all I want to do is sleep...

996/旺旺小福星星儿/10.12.23/SCC

The term “996” in Mandarin refers to an extreme work schedule—working from 9 AM to 9 PM, six days a week, totaling 72 hours of work per week. Initially used to describe the work policies in major Chinese tech companies like Alibaba and Tencent, this term has now become a symbol of social criticism against excessive and inhumane work culture. In the social and cultural context of China, “996” reflects the norm of hard work as a symbol of dedication and social status, where longer working hours are seen as a sign of seriousness and commitment. However, as awareness of its negative impacts on physical and mental health grows, the term has also become a form of protest that has gone viral on social media platforms like Weibo. “996” now serves as a crucial symbol in China's digital culture, illustrating the tension between workplace demands and individual well-being.

c. 任性

无好再干任性了, 但戏就戏因为剧第一直戏度称我我先会有得任性。
There's no more room for being willful, but in this drama—since my name is mentioned first in the opening scene—I can still do as I please.

RX/moneyah/31.12.2023/SCC

The term “任性” consists of two characters: “任”, meaning “free” or “without limits”, and “性”, meaning “nature” or “character”. Literally, it refers to a “free-spirited nature” or “stubborn personality”, describing someone who acts according to their own will without considering boundaries or others' opinions. In slang usage, “任性” often describes selfish or stubborn behavior, where someone acts as they please without thinking about the consequences. However, it is frequently used in a lighthearted or humorous manner and can have a negative connotation if someone is excessively self-centered or reckless. Although often used in casual conversations, particularly on social media, “任性” highlights a shift towards valuing freedom in decision-making and personal expression, signifying a greater appreciation for individuality over strict social norms.

d. 懒癌

年最后一天, 今年的照片多到爆, 懒癌晚期年终来 一个年度总结吧~

Last day of the year, so many photos this year—if you're super lazy, let's make an annual recap!

LA/吃一颗张豆豆/31.12.23/SCC

The term “懒癌”, literally meaning “lazy cancer”, is a slang term in Mandarin used to describe an extreme or chronic level of laziness, as if laziness itself were a severe illness. Although not meant literally, the term is used to jokingly describe someone who is too lazy to do anything, even for simple tasks. In its usage, “懒癌” is often said with a humorous or sarcastic tone, exaggerating the concept of laziness for comedic effect. This term is highly popular on social media, where people use it to share their experiences of being lazy or tired in a lighthearted and entertaining way. From a social and cultural perspective, “懒癌” reflects China's attitude towards laziness, which is often viewed negatively in a society that values hard work. However, the use of this slang also highlights a social phenomenon in the digital world, where people are more open about discussing their feelings—such as exhaustion or laziness—in a casual and humorous manner.

Slang reflects the evolving social and cultural conventions of a community, especially in the digital age. Terms like “魔性” (magical nature) illustrate a shift toward embracing unique and unconventional traits, particularly in entertainment, as younger generations celebrate diversity and creativity. Similarly, “996” symbolizes the harsh work culture in China, where long hours are both a badge of dedication and a point of social critique. “任性” (willful) reflects the growing value placed on personal freedom and individual expression, while “懒癌” (lazy cancer) humorously exaggerates chronic laziness in a society that traditionally values hard work. These slang terms highlight the changing social norms and attitudes towards work, personal behavior, and individuality in contemporary China (Xie, 2023; He, 2024).

CONCLUSION

A study on the differences in Mandarin slang on the social media site Weibo found a total of 31 slang variation cases spread across several categories including phonetic changes, abbreviations, metaphors, loanwords, morphological changes, new word creation, and social and cultural conventions. Every one of these categories shows various ways in which language changes to satisfy the social, cultural, and

communicative demands of modern society. Usually used slang words; metaphors and idioms (M) are the most prevalent type. Metaphors help digital communication to be creative and symbolic, such as the phrases “摸鱼” (avoiding labour) and “吃瓜群众” (bystanders or gossip spectators). Technological developments, social identity, pop culture creativity, and globalisation all shape the evolution of slang on Weibo. In the digital age, slang not only reflects social, cultural, and technological changes but also acts as a means of communication. This research shows that Weibo provides a platform for linguistic creativity since language in social media is always changing. These results could provide a basis for more study on the development of digital language and its influence on contemporary communication patterns.

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