NEWS LESSON

Who Gets to Decide What Counts as Real English?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What makes an expression feel like it belongs to you and your friends?
2. Why is it so hard to find out where a word started?
3. Is changing how you speak in different situations dishonest?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**stable**	☐	A	not changing or moving around
2	**sincerely**	☐	B	exact and clear in every detail
3	**viral**	☐	C	in practice, even if not officially
4	**establish**	☐	D	continue to exist for longer than something else
5	**deliberately**	☐	E	find out and prove that something is true
6	**outlast**	☐	F	on purpose, after thinking about it
7	**effectively**	☐	G	spreading very fast online to many people
8	**precise**	☐	H	in a way that shows you really mean it

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Slang connects friends, crosses borders and baffles adults. The more interesting question is not what the words mean but who carries them.

1 For roughly a year, two numbers were enough to start a joke. Saying six and seven in a particular way set off entire classrooms while adults asked what it was supposed to mean. The phrase came out of a rap song, spread through short videos and into schools, and Dictionary.com made it the 2025 word of the year while effectively conceding that it had no stable definition. The appeal was never the meaning. It was the pleasure of being in on something.

2 Slang lets people be quick, playful or precise about feelings their group recognises. It signals belonging: you get the reference because you share a friendship, an interest or a history. Psychologists writing for the American Psychological Association note that the same language which creates that connection also draws a line around everybody who does not have it. Both things happen at once, and usually nobody decides to do either.

3 The internet alters the scale rather than the mechanism. A phrase can move from a community into a song, a stream or a short video and reach millions who never meet its original speakers. It can be repeated sincerely, borrowed for a joke, and adapted again into something its first users would not recognise. Visibility is not authorship. The platform where you found a word is rarely the place it was made.

4 That distinction matters whenever people talk about Gen Z slang as though a generation had sat down and agreed a vocabulary. Expressions have roots in specific places and communities, and much English slang has come out of Black communities before being repackaged for a general audience. Sometimes the origin is genuinely hard to establish. Sometimes it is left out, which is a different problem. Admitting the uncertainty is more honest than crediting whoever went viral.

5 There is a practical lesson here. A dictionary entry tells you what a word can mean; context tells you what the speaker is doing with it. Are they being affectionate, sarcastic or unkind? Are they talking to a close friend or to somebody who has power over their grades? Fluent speakers move between registers without noticing, and learning to do it deliberately is worth more than forcing the newest expression into every sentence.

6 Adults often hear unfamiliar slang as proof the language is deteriorating. Young speakers hear formal rules as an instruction to sound like somebody else. Both readings miss how much range people already have. A group chat and a university application have different purposes, and being able to handle both widens your options instead of asking you to give one up.

7 Not every misunderstanding is generational, either. Two people the same age can follow different creators or speak different first languages, and a word that is ordinary in one school may never reach the next.

8 Most of these expressions will fade, and a few will become so ordinary nobody remembers thinking them strange. The joke may not outlast the school year. The habit that produced it will. Language changes because people keep finding new ways to describe what happened to them, and the most useful response to a word you do not know is curiosity.

Sources: American Psychological Association, The psychology of why we use slang; European Youth Portal, Gen Z slang words and phrases. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer suggests that a person who makes a word famous is not necessarily its creator. T F NG
2. The writer believes the internet has created a completely new way for slang to spread. T F NG
3. The rap song the phrase came from was widely criticised by teachers. T F NG
4. The writer thinks both adults and young speakers hold a limited view of how people use language. T F NG
5. The writer says two speakers of the same age will always understand the same words. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

affectionate	alters	deteriorating	fade	mechanism	register	roots	tentative

1. Economists disagree about the _____ that links rising wages to higher prices.
2. A change in the weather _____ the whole character of the old square, turning pale stone dark.
3. She wrote an _____ message to her grandmother, full of kisses and pet names.
4. Because treatment started late, the patient's condition kept _____ over the weekend.
5. Many of the town's traditions have their _____ in medieval farming.
6. Most internet jokes _____ within weeks, once the novelty has worn off.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Online dictionaries can be _____ because anybody can edit an entry. **(RELY)**
2. Critics pointed to an _____ in the way the dictionary labels slang. **(CONSISTENT)**
3. He _____ admitted that he had copied the phrase from a stream. **(RELUCTANT)**
4. The sheer _____ of the phrase surprised the people who first used it. **(POPULAR)**
5. Many linguists are _____ of the idea that slang ruins a language. **(CRITIC)**

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level a precise verb pairs with an abstract noun: draw a line, raise questions. A near synonym often sounds wrong.

break	draw	go	hold	raises	tell	wide

1. Teachers often _____ a clear line between formal and informal writing.
2. Confident speakers command a _____ range of styles, from slang to formal prose.
3. A harmless clip can suddenly _____ viral and reach millions.
4. The disputed origin of the phrase _____ questions about who deserves credit.
5. Even beginners can _____ a basic conversation after a few weeks.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. The article says visibility is not authorship. Why does that distinction matter?
2. Do adults criticise slang, or the people using it?
3. What would be lost if everybody spoke the same formal English?

9 Role-play: slang in a message to a teacher

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the teacher
A student sent you an email full of slang. You did not understand two words and it felt a little rude. Ask what the words mean, explain the problem, and agree a simple rule for messages to you.

Student B · the student
You sent your teacher a friendly message with slang in it. You did not mean it to be rude. Explain what your words mean and why you used them. Ask what is acceptable.

Useful phrases

I didn't mean it to sound rude.
What does that word mean?
That's fine with friends, but it's not right for an email to me.
It's just how we talk.
I'd like us to agree on a simple rule.
Let's use normal English when we write to teachers.

Afterwards, tell the class: what rule did you agree, and is it fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 H · 3 G · 4 E · 5 F · 6 D · 7 C · 8 B

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 mechanism · 2 alters · 3 affectionate · 4 deteriorating · 5 roots · 6 fade

6 Word forms

1 unreliable · 2 inconsistency · 3 reluctantly · 4 popularity · 5 critical

7 Language focus

1 draw · 2 wide · 3 go · 4 raises · 5 hold

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