NEWS LESSON

Why Do New Words Spread So Fast?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What word or phrase do you hear all the time at the moment?
2. Have you ever misunderstood a message because of how it was written?
3. Do you talk the same way to your friends and to your teachers?

2 Key words

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

1	**annoyed**	☐	A	has someone as part of the group
2	**stuck**	☐	B	something you can do well because you have learnt it
3	**reverse**	☐	C	a bit angry because something keeps happening
4	**unkind**	☐	D	the opposite way
5	**skill**	☐	E	stayed and did not go away
6	**includes**	☐	F	making you feel happy and full of energy
7	**exciting**	☐	G	under the top part, not easy to see
8	**underneath**	☐	H	not nice to other people

3 Read

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

A word can travel from one group chat to the other side of the world. The reason people pass it on is much older than the internet.

1 Imagine opening your group chat after school. Somebody has posted a photo. Somebody else has replied with a word you have never seen, and everybody else seems to find it funny. You could look it up. It is probably faster to ask. Ten minutes later you are using it yourself.

2 Slang means informal words used by a particular group. Some words are brand new. Others are ordinary words that have been given a different job. A word can also change because somebody used it as a joke and the joke stuck. The same word can feel friendly between two friends and completely confusing to anybody else.

3 Young people have always done this. Your parents had words that annoyed their parents, and so did their parents. What has changed is the speed. A song, a game or a short video can carry a word out of one town and into a hundred countries in a few days. Somebody hears it, repeats it, and gives it a new audience.

4 Words like this do a real job. They make people feel close. A group of friends might have a joke that makes no sense at all to anyone outside it, and using it reminds everybody of the day it started. Slang can also be quicker than ordinary language. There are feelings that take a sentence to explain and one word to share.

5 The same thing works in reverse. A word that includes your friends can leave somebody else standing outside the conversation, wondering what everyone is laughing about. That is not always unkind, but it is worth noticing.

6 If you are learning English, this can be exciting and annoying at once. A dictionary can tell you what a word means. It cannot always tell you whether it belongs in a message to a friend or in an email to a teacher. That depends on the context, which means the situation and the people involved, and working it out is a skill rather than a mistake.

7 You do not have to use every new word you hear. Some will last for years and most will be gone by the summer. What lasts is the habit underneath: people changing language to make jokes, to be understood, and to feel like part of something.

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. Slang is only ever made up of completely new words. T F NG
2. A word can travel to many countries in a few days. T F NG
3. The writer thinks adults should learn the new words. T F NG
4. Slang can leave somebody outside a conversation. T F NG
5. The article says you must use every new word you hear. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

confusing **friendly** **habit** **message** **ordinary** **replied** **speed**

1. I sent her a message on Monday, but she only _____ on Friday.
2. The instructions were so _____ that I had to read them three times.
3. It was an _____ morning, with nothing unusual in it.
4. The car's top _____ is 200 kilometres an hour.
5. Biting your nails is a bad _____ that is hard to stop.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Last week my brother _____ a new word at school and used it all weekend. (HEAR)
2. Ten minutes later you are _____ the word yourself. (USE)
3. Young people have always _____ this. (DO)
4. When my parents were young, they _____ words that annoyed their own parents. (USE)
5. She _____ me what the word meant before I could look it up. (TELL)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Collocations are words that go together naturally. Learn the pair, not just the word.

group	joke	last	make	new	send	take

1. Words like this _____ people feel close.
2. Some words _____ for years, but most are gone by the summer.
3. Many slang words are brand _____ and are not in the dictionary yet.
4. Close friends often share a private _____ that outsiders do not understand.
5. Somebody sent the photo to the _____ chat.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. Where did the last new word you learnt come from?
2. Is it annoying or interesting when adults use your slang?
3. Which word from when you were younger deserves a comeback?

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 replied · 2 confusing · 3 ordinary · 4 speed · 5 habit

6 Verb forms

1 heard · 2 using · 3 done · 4 used · 5 told

7 Language focus

1 make · 2 last · 3 new · 4 joke · 5 group

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