

# **Time For ‘Girl Dinner’ During ‘Brat Summer’**

A sociolinguistic analysis of the coverage and conversation surrounding slang words and language change in news articles

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This thesis examines the coverage and conversation surrounding slang words and language change in news articles and online dictionaries. Communication in modern media and with selected words hold power and a single word can hold much more meaning than what first meets the eye and should not be taken merely by face-value. This study specifically examines the slang words 'brat' and 'girl dinner' through articles and online dictionaries. The examined articles come from CNN, National Geographic and The Guardian. The examined dictionaries are Collins Dictionary, Dictionary.com and Merriam-Webster. The chosen materials were examined through Critical Discourse Analysis with the aim to analyse aspects of the chosen slang words, such as dictionary definitions and what type of discussion they elicited in the articles. The findings showed that slang words were less likely to be added to dictionaries despite their current popularity due to their historically fleeting nature. The articles, whether it was to inform or to promote readership, handled slang in a manner that recognised the power that slang words hold. 'Brat' and 'girl dinner' showed typical slang word characteristics and appeared as examples of using words to take agency over ones' actions. In addition to having individual and communal benefits, the interactivity of internet has made slang a tool of influence. Since the scope of this thesis was constricted, additional research around the topic could unveil meaningful findings that could further teach us about the way we communicate with one another.

**Key words:** language in media, news articles, online dictionaries, slang, language change, critical discourse analysis

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## 1 Introduction

In recent decades mass media has become an increasingly prominent part of human communication. Mass media is a term used to describe the change in the accessibility of information, and surveys “show that there are many sources available to the general public; including sources that previously were only available to paying professionals” (van der Wurff 2008, 76). Fundamental technological aspects such as digitalisation and the internet, which was dubbed to be “the most important common technological platform for the convergence between different kinds of communication and media industries” (Henter and Tadayoni 2008, 45), were the catalysts for this evolution. The increased accessibility with acquiring devices, and common usage of internet and media has made it a platform for fast paced communication. As a platform the internet has indeed been deemed efficient “e.g., in terms of reach, cost and quality”, resulting in possibilities for interactivity which is “a new development for the mass media that hitherto have been one-way media” (ibid.). This interactivity aspect then consequently plays a part in language use and facilitates the creation and communication of new utterances within the different corners of the internet. The so-called internet slang, as it is often dubbed, sometimes then transfers to everyday use and can become a viral phenomenon. It has also been acknowledged that a language that can foster slang terms, tells of a virile language (Coleman 2012, 10), thus being a positive marker. While some words may trickle out of use as fast as they were formed and live a short life, some become something more lasting. It is then meaningful to consider what makes a slang word last: “Some, but only the most deserving, will succeed and be adopted, but only when they have proved themselves useful” (ibid.).

Though buzzwords and other trending words have always occurred, the forementioned development of mass media has accelerated their rise. It is then meaningful to consider if all the circulating changes in language reach everyone. To battle this gap in communication, many news outlets and online dictionaries have started to accommodate for this by creating explanatory material. The sharing of these general explanations makes understanding one another easier and lessens miscommunications. In my thesis, I analyse certain slang words and why they are, in result of the world wide web and its distribution, considered ‘useful’ and therefore a topic of discussion. My analysis encompasses questions of whether these words that have found themselves in the spotlight ‘earn’ a spot in dictionaries and how the conversation around them is mediated in traditional media, specifically in the news articles.

My bachelor's thesis specifically focuses on two phrases and words coined in recent years: 'brat', (sometimes phrased 'brat summer') and 'girl dinner' as words and concepts. I examine the different ways they came to being, their distribution and the impact they had on traditional media platforms. To achieve this, I utilise articles and online dictionary pages to research how these words are further explained to the general public. I also explore the origins of the words and what significance the roots present.

When it comes to slang, as a whole, it is an especially emotionally dividing topic, which makes it an interesting topic to research. Coleman describes the subject at hand in her writing as something that evokes strong feelings: "Some people love slang and make sure they're always using the latest terms", whereas "[o]thers hate it with a passion and look down their noses at people who use it" (2012, ix). In her view, the incorrect and inappropriate use of slang evokes strong and complex feelings: some may judge you for it, but to use it correctly can benefit you. This makes conveying information about conversation around slang words even more important. For Coleman (2012, x), slang can be a tool for power. Therefore, these seemingly passing words are not so meaningless after all, which makes it an important discussion often overlooked by academia. In my thesis I aim to shed light on the roles that slang words hold today in society and how they attain their positions. I begin my analysis by explaining the theory and background information surrounding my thesis, after which I introduce the chosen materials and methods. I continue by analysing the found material, such as articles and dictionaries published online, and further discuss my findings in the subsequent section. After discussing the why's and how's I end with a conclusion section, reviewing the thesis material as whole.

## 2 Theory & Background

In this section I introduce the theoretical frameworks I utilise in my research, then the relevant information regarding slang. Since slang words are not often researched due to their fleeting nature, my study fills a gap in the field regarding them. In my thesis, I utilise Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), sometimes also referred to as Critical Discourse Studies.

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

With the frame of Critical Discourse Analysis, I analyse the words I chose and the discussion around them critically. Norman Fairclough frames the analytical framework steps for CDA in *Critical Discourse Analysis As A Method in Social Scientific Research*: “Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect”, then “[i]dentify obstacles to it being tackled, through analysis of,” firstly “the network of practices it is located within” and then “the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned” (2001, 125), in the discourse itself. Four aspects of analysis are: order of discourse, interactional analysis, interdiscursive analysis, as well as linguistic and semiotic analysis. The next step is to consider how the examined aspects relate to the social order (practises) and to identify the “possible ways past the obstacles” (ibid.). Last step is to reflect on the four aspects of the analysis critically.

CDA analyses “the dialectical relationships between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practices” (Fairclough 2001, 123). Broadly speaking, semiosis can be divided into three social practices: particular language use in a practise, representations effected by “social constructions of practises” (ibid.), and performances. Moreover, “[p]eople who differ in social class, in gender, in nationality, in ethnic or cultural membership, and in life experience, produce different ‘performances’ of a particular position” (ibid.). CDA can be summarized as “the critical tradition of social analysis into language studies and contributes to critical social analysis a particular focus on discourse and on relations between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth)” (Fairclough 2012, 9). Therefore, it “can be understood as normative and explanatory critique” and its purposes is to evaluate and to explain realities “by showing them to be effects of structures or mechanisms or forces” (ibid.), which are theorised and examined from the material, and not simply described. This can also lead to a framing problem in CDA as “[a]ny aspect of context can affect the meaning of an (oral or written) utterance”, context being

“indefinitely large, ranging from local matters like the positioning of bodies and eye gaze, through people's beliefs, to historical, institutional, and cultural settings” (Gee and Handford 2012, 4). The challenge is that it is always possible to interpret another layer of context.

## 2.2 Slang

Language change and the use of slang rises as a topic of conversation with every language that seeks for regularity, and while change has often been frowned upon, it has been noted that for a language to stay alive it needs to evolve. It is common that propriety and, to be more specific, what is considered ‘proper’ language is state managed. One example of state management is declaring an official language for a country in hopes of regulating and standardising its use. Historically known as culturally diverse, The United States of America had English ordered as the official language by Donald Trump in March 2025. The White House page explains in its order that: “Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society” (2025). This change enables regulation upon what is considered ‘proper’ language, before this the US did not have an official language. As English becomes even more of a lingua franca, a globally used language, state regulated and otherwise, slang continues to spark conversation.

The public as well as scholars have expressed both negative and positive remarks regarding the use of slang in the English language. According to Coleman (2012, ix), there are two perspectives to slang. Firstly, it can be viewed positively. It depicts how people speak with one another in everyday life. It indicates people’s loyalties, as well as their aspirations. Secondly, it can be viewed negatively. It is understood as ugly, improper and uneducated. It is a sign of sloppiness, vulgarity and triviality. Whether it is acknowledged or not, the use of colloquial language to express familiarity and warmth in casual talk is more common than not. Every generation creates their own takes on language and even without noticing begin to favour their own expressions. Changes in language are usually frowned upon within the older generation, without them even realising that the generation preceding them had the same negative opinion about their changes on language. Coleman (2012) gives examples of people from different generations interacting, e.g. a young man with his father, talking, and using slang. She cites a recurring event: “Slang enables the young [...] to rebel against their elders, but it also allows their elders to pretend not to understand, which enables them to complain about the youth of today without acknowledging that they were young once too” (Coleman

2012, 4). Even with how emotionally charged slang as a concept can be, I discuss it from a neutral perspective.

Slang should not be confused with other terms such as *jargon* and *register*. They tend to be more complex and require conscious learning, whereas slang is more fluid and catches on differently (Coleman 2012). What *slang* refers to in my thesis is the “individual uses of individual terms which are inserted into the appropriate slots in standard or colloquial English sentences” (Coleman 2012, 13). It is also often possible to understand the meaning of slang words from the surrounding context. In my thesis, I examine how words, when unfamiliar, are then presented to larger masses. Though slang words that keep being used often end up becoming colloquial or part of standard language (Coleman 2012, 14), it is not necessary for them to remain in use. For example: “*Pig* has been used in reference to police officers since the beginning of the nineteenth century (c .1800 —), but it remains slang: it hasn’t become standard or even colloquial in that sense” (Coleman 2012, 15).

Slang usage usually conveys information in itself. According to Damirjian (2024, 145) there are three group-identifying functions of slang. Firstly, there is identity, which means that “speaker’s use of slang typically reveals the speaker’s affiliation with a group, for example, a social group, age group, or interest group” (ibid.). Secondly, borders pertain to “[a]n interlocutor’s competency (or incompetency) with slang typically reveals that interlocutor’s affiliation (or lack of affiliation) with a group” (Damirjian 2024, 145). Thirdly, cohesiveness points to that “[a] speaker’s use of slang among peers typically comes to reinforce social identity and cohesiveness within their group” (ibid.). These functions can furthermore be researched to understand why some slang words create the effect that they do.

### 3 Materials and Methods

This following section introduces the used materials and methods and further explain the chosen approach. In the following subsections I list the used materials considering articles and online dictionaries. The data I examine comes from already existing websites which I examine through CDA. From the chosen websites I examine material relating to the words in question. The used material is mostly in written text, some aspects are multimodal in nature, and although worthy of examination, they are not discussed in detail in this paper.

#### 3.1 CNN, The National Geographic and The Guardian

I decided to examine online news and article sites that offer articles on both ‘brat’ and ‘girl dinner’. I chose three websites: CNN, The National Geographic and The Guardian. From the respective websites, I chose one article surrounding each word with the word in their title except for CNN and ‘brat’, however, they used it in their website link name.

The article considering ‘brat’ is titled: *Collins Dictionary’s word of the year is a confident, messy way of life* (Rahimi 2024). It is featured in the CNN Style/Arts segment and explains the newfound meaning of ‘brat’ through dictionary entries and the interviews of the artist who brought the phenomenon about. From CNN the article considering ‘girl dinner’ is titled: *How to get in on ‘girl dinner,’ the new trend that’s been around all along* (Barber 2023). It is featured in the CNN health segment and contains explanatory text regarding the trend as well as ways to emulate it in your own life.

In the History & Culture section of the National Geographic, the writer utilises and brings about the new definition of ‘brat’ through historical figures in *Cleopatra IS brat? These 5 women in history were the OG brat girls* (DJangi 2024). In its science section the headline states that *‘Girl dinner’ broke the internet. Here’s what nutritionists think about it* (Worthington 2023). In this the ‘girl dinner’ phenomenon is examined via experts weighing in on its execution in practise and discusses its possible benefits.

In The Guardian Williams (2024) introduces ‘brat’ in the headline: *Brat summer: is the long era of clean living finally over?* and explains this phenomenon by going over the origin of the new meaning, and then further exploring its’ more profound meanings. Also in The Guardian, one article referring to ‘girl dinner’ focuses specifically on explaining the ins and outs of it. In *“Explain it to me quickly: What is a TikTok ‘girl dinner’ and should I eat one tonight?”*

Gorman (2023) explains it to Yvonne C Lam, creating a conversational back and forth setting to the explanation.

### 3.2 Collins Dictionary, Dictionary.com and Merriam-Webster

It is not common for a word to be adapted to dictionaries lightly, much less a slang originated one. Before the eighteenth century, “when written English became established in more or less the form that we now use it” (Coleman 2012, 14), slang was not a subject that writers and dictionary-makers paid attention to. Still, it was clear that “slang-speakers talk about specific subjects in such detail that Standard English can’t possibly supply all of the necessary synonyms” (ibid.). With the internet providing a place for fast paced examination of linguistic material, the additions have increased. I selected three dictionary sites to use in my thesis. The dictionaries differed in their criterion regarding word addition, which resulted in different outcomes. In a later section I examine these criteria statements offered by the dictionaries.

In Collins Dictionary, under the definition of ‘brat’ several definitions come up, including the more common noun definition of ‘brat’ meaning an “ill-mannered or unruly child” (*Collins Dictionary*, s.v. “brat”, n.). Under that has been added an informal adjective definition “characterized by a confident, independent, and hedonistic attitude” (ibid.). On the other hand, “girl dinner” has only been cited as a “New Word Suggestion,” defined by an unknown submitter late August of 2023: “When a girl picks out random foods from her fridge and arranges them on a plate in an aesthetically pleasing way” (*Collins Dictionary*, s.v. “girl dinner”, n.). It has yet to be added as an actual definition and is “being monitored for evidence of usage” (ibid.).

On Dictionary.com, the new meaning of ‘brat’ is yet to surface; it only shows the ‘older’ definition discussed before. Additionally, Dictionary.com is a site that offers real life example sentences of the words in use, although it is noted they “have not been reviewed” (*Dictionary.com*, s.v. “brat”, n.). One example that the site quotes is taken from the Los Angeles Times: “Could she prevent that from happening and keep her brat summer going?” (ibid.). When it comes to ‘girl dinner,’ it has been added as an informal noun, with a defining description” (*Dictionary.com*, s.v. “girl dinner”, n.).

To bring a different perspective I have included the Merriam-Webster online dictionary. In it the older definition of ‘brat’ is discussed (*Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “brat”, n.), but not a mention of the new one. ‘Girl dinner’ yielded no result at all, except for respective separate words.

## 4 Analysis

In this section I analyse the different elements regarding ‘brat’ and ‘girl dinner’ within articles and dictionaries. With CDA as my viewpoint, I examine how the words are presented in the articles and dictionaries and what kind of aspects can be found in them.

It is common for slang words to form from an already existing word, and it is not uncommon that they hold several meanings. Coleman exemplifies this with how “*wicked* isn’t slang when it’s used with the sense ‘extremely bad; evil’ ( c .1275 — ), but the sense ‘extremely good; excellent’ (1842 — ) is slang” (2012, 16). The ‘brat’ I analyse in my thesis originates from an album called BRAT by Charli XCX (Garvey 2024). The term ‘girl dinner’ originated on the video sharing application ‘TikTok’. Olivia Maher shared a short video showing a food arrangement made of light snacks, such as grapes, cheese, crackers, and bread, and in the background, she says: “This is my dinner, I call this girl dinner, or medieval peasant” (2023), referencing medieval meals.

### 4.1 Articles

In the coming subsections I focus on articles regarding the selected words separately. The articles approached the words from their own viewpoints and introduced and utilised them in their own ways to discuss them in a meaningful context.

#### 4.1.1 ‘Brat’ in articles

The CNN headline declares ‘brat’ as “a confident, messy way of life,” and even the Collins Dictionary word of the year (Rahimi 2024). Rahimi does not understate the success around the ‘brat’ phenomenon and further believes it to stay relevant stating it to be “[m]ore than a ‘brat summer’ – it may even be a brat year” (ibid.). While the definition given to CNN by the singer Charli XCX herself of a “girl who is a little messy and likes to party and maybe says some dumb things some times” (2024), might seem familiar to the previous definition of ‘brat,’ a spoiled and misbehaving child, the connotations are vastly different. This ‘new brat’ is explained to be someone unruly, not in a childish sense but someone “[w]ho feels like herself but maybe also has a breakdown” as Charli XCX herself explains (ibid.). The article explains it as an attitude of acknowledging one’s own complex feelings and moving forward in an honest and blunt way, though not always in a rational manner. The article focuses on

explaining the word as well as the culture surrounding it to laypeople, without judgement and highlighting its popularity.

DJangi credits Charli XCX in the National Geographic as having popularised “the ‘brat’ persona” but makes a point that “this rebellious lifestyle has deep historical roots” (2024). The article goes on to explain that in history “women who embodied boldness, independence, and unapologetic self-expression faced admiration and criticism”, the ‘brat’ girls of today “enjoy freedoms their predecessors could only dream of” although “they still navigate a landscape where their boldness can be both celebrated and weaponized” (DJangi 2024). The article uses five powerful women in history as examples of people who were judged by their ambitions and plagued by negative connotated accusations, reflecting the narrow views of their time. These criticisms held up for centuries “attacks on women who didn’t always behave as they were supposed to” but nevertheless “[l]ike modern-day brat girls, they dared to live how they wanted” (ibid.). The article explains then how this daring attitude in women has long been identified, but it now has a new label to it. ‘Brat’ then is revamped to harness an age-old attitude in the context of modern times, where the acknowledgement and owning of this daring attitude is more acceptable, a trend even.

Williams takes a more philosophical overview of ‘brat’ in her article for The Guardian. She goes over different trends that have periodically emerged but dubs ‘brat’ as different “neither a social media nor a consumer creation,” although it did emerge anew from an album title, differing “perhaps because it actually means something” (Williams 2024.). She continues by explaining that “brat *is* a girl, but it’s a self-defining category – it is what you make it – so it doesn’t have to be,” (ibid.) making the definition broader and not exclusive, but as stated, what you make of it. By the articles definition it is a word for a complex way of being. Explained by Monica Heisey as “feminine contradiction” (ibid.). For example, feeling both empowerment and anxiety in “friendship with other powerful women” (ibid.), but not giving into those contradictions, instead having fun without caring about the opinions of others. It then encompasses a much broader meaning than what may be perceived at first.

#### 4.1.2 ‘Girl Dinner’ in articles

Starting with the title, CNN explains “[h]ow to get in on” the ‘girl dinner’ trend but also highlights how it has “been around all along” (Barber 2023). The concept is acknowledged as something existing that is revisited with a new title. The phrase consists of ‘girl’ and ‘dinner,’ but together form a less obvious definition. The article states that the phrase “is being

popularized by young women promoting throw-together meals on TikTok” but is still “an inclusive meal” (ibid.). The ‘girl’ aspect of the phrase then can be understood as something that is not solely binding to the gender binary, rather something more inclusive, possibly an invitation to fun and free ‘girlhood’. Barber (2023) goes on to explain that “[i]f you identify as a human” you have most likely made this type of meal. She goes on to give examples of low effort “snack dinner”, which is exempt from rules and guilt “there’s inherent permission to eat what brings you joy” (ibid). People were quick to identify with this attitude and adopt the phrase.

The National Geographic article starts by light-heartedly and humorously recounting what they consider as the internet breaking ‘girl dinner’. By scouring the cupboards of light snacks, quickly and with minimal use of cutlery, “[y]ou, my friend, have just made yourself a “girl dinner” (Worthington 2023). The article then takes a more serious approach by looking into what food experts have to say about this “low-effort, snack-forward meal—and what it reveals about our relationship to food and each other” (ibid.). Like the CNN journalist Barber, nutritionist Alissa Rumsey also finds “something deeply familiar about the concept of girl dinner” and calls it similarly “snack plate meal” (ibid.), reinforcing the idea that this ‘girl dinner’ is a new name, a slang term, for an older concept. Food and nutrition focused psychology professor Kima Cargill adds that cultures and countries differ in their meal structures and times, and in some a light dinner is a norm (ibid.), therefore challenging the trend aspect of this phenomenon. The intuitive nature of this definition of a meal also gets linked to academia where studies show it correlating with health benefits (ibid.), though this discussion is beyond the scope of my thesis. The article also discusses how ‘girl dinner’ is linked to gender roles. In addition to other responsibilities in life “[w]omen often assume caretaking roles in a household,” therefore, “[g]irl dinner can be a celebration of freedom, if only for one meal, from that domestic labor” (ibid.). The article additionally points out that for many “food tends to be one of the things we can control in our lives” (ibid.). These aspects highlight the agency and empowerment using ‘girl dinner’ can bring, especially for ‘girls’. Overall, the experts dubbed this ‘trend’ potentially beneficial, while being critical that individual needs need to be considered (ibid.).

The Guardian brings the conversation around ‘girl dinner’ to the laypeople by having Gorman explain it to Lam. The “culinary non-conformity” as Gorman dubs it, is once again propped up with a question of its familiarity, and whether it is “just a cheese plate, or a ploughman’s lunch, rebranded” (2023). Lam then bluntly queries whether “deeper layers of

social/anthropological/historical theory” are “being projected on to this seemingly inconsequential internet trend” (ibid). The phrase indeed is not to be taken at face value and can be seen as either liberating or oppressing (ibid.). Those in favour deem women's freedom to choose alone “an antidote to both diet culture and the mental load traditionally required to get food on the table”, a study in fact “showed significant gender differences in comfort food preferences” (ibid.) which emphasises the importance of one's own choice. The critique is given to the meals shared on the internet aestheticizing low nutritional value meals which perpetuate “both diet culture and performed femininity” (ibid.). Briefly through TikTok posts Gorman examines ‘boy dinner,’ which she deems as basically the same as ‘girl dinner’ the only difference most likely being the previously mentioned preferences for comfort food (ibid.).

## 4.2 Online Dictionaries

Below in the subsections I analyse the three chosen dictionary websites and the findings regarding first ‘brat’ and then ‘girl dinner’.

The Collins Dictionary website state under “*Some Criteria for Inclusion*” (2012) that they do not offer details why word suggestions get into their dictionary. Instead, they offer some guidelines: they limit the amount of slang terms, especially gratuitous in nature, proper names that do not hold a certain criterion of cultural significance, as well as “[p]hrases whose meanings can be determined from the literal meanings of the words” (ibid.), and non-English words. Similarly, Dictionary.com explain on their website under “*How New Words Get Added To Dictionary.com—And How The Dictionary Works*” (2023) how their lexicographers add words to their site: the word needs to be widely used, similarly, seem to last, and be “useful for a general audience.” Merriam-Webster’s (n.d.b) ‘Help’ section headlined “*How does a word get into a Merriam-Webster dictionary?*” explains that ‘usage’ is the key factor as to how their dictionary editors add words to their dictionary.

### 4.2.1 ‘Brat’ in dictionaries

In the analysed dictionaries ‘brat’ had its ‘old’ meaning listed and often lacked the ‘newer’ version. Collins Dictionary had ‘brat’ added with several definitions, including the 2024 version. The new addition was even dubbed ‘word of the year’ for 2024 (Rahimi 2024), highlighting the sudden popularity of this definition. In Dictionary.com (Dictionary.com, s.v. “brat”, n.). the definition found was the ‘old’ but within the page the ‘new’ definition was

within the recent examples collected to the page from the internet. The lack of a new addition can be explained by the criterion of lasting extensive usage; the newer version has not been in use long enough. Merriam-Webster's simply and strictly ruled usage as a criterion for addition (Merriam-Webster n.d.b), it then seems improbable for a new slang word or 'an informal' word to gain a definition. Since 'brat' is also an existing word itself that is in use, it is not likely that the new definition will be overtaking it in quantity quite that fast.

#### 4.2.2 'Girl Dinner' in dictionaries

When looking at 'girl dinner' in dictionaries, the definition was scarcely found. In Collins Dictionary the phrase had been added as a 'new word suggestion,' by an anonymous submitter 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2023. Its' status has not advanced to a definition but is "being monitored for evidence of usage" (Collins Dictionary, s.v. "girl dinner", n.). Collins Dictionary stated in their guidelines for suggestions that if the meaning of a phrase can be understood from the words, it is less likely to be added (Collins Dictionary 2012). 'Girl' and 'dinner' are two common words which together can to some extent explain the meaning of the phrase. In Dictionary.com the phrase has been added as a noun, with a specification of it being 'informal' (*Dictionary.com*, s.v. "girl dinner", n.). In Merriam-Webster it yielded no result and as discussed in the previous section, new additions need to be used substantially to be added to the site.

## 5 Discussion

This section and subsections focus on exploring the findings in greater detail. From the findings I identify different societal aspects and theorise potential conclusions.

When it comes to news coverage considering these words, they were well covered. The overall approach found in the chosen articles was seemingly positive and informational in nature. The writers utilised multiple sources when gathering ‘word-defining’ material and included thorough explanations of the words. This shows that the articles were written with a broader demographic in mind, not solely consisting of people who use these slang utterances. The articles therefore created an environment for learning and understanding the new communicational utterances and the culture surrounding them. Although it is common to assume generational gaps in slang-usage, even subcultures create peer to peer gaps and “[m]uch of what adults hear as unintelligible adolescent youth slang is equally unintelligible to many youth” (Labov 1992, 343).

The dictionaries were restricted by their criterion, which brought about varying results. Although definitions were not found in all dictionaries for both words, dictionaries, as well as laypeople through the internet’s interactivity, showed interest in introducing these newer definitions. The interest in dictionary definitions increased, since both words quickly became popularised in media, ‘girl dinner’ through casual video sharing on TikTok, and ‘brat’ through interactions online following an album release. The various ways “[w]e engage with and participate in products and events created by the media online” enables us to “reveal and observe changes taking place in slang around the world” (Coleman 2012, 266). Furthermore, “[c]onnections between media types increase our exposure to new slang” as well as “reinforce new terms which sometimes feed into our face-to-face conversations” (Coleman 2012, 266-267), highlighting the impact of media outlets in slang distribution.

An aspect found from the articles considering ‘girl dinner’ was that it was a considered a renaming of an already existing concept. Experts discussed similar titles for a similar concept, which were not generally used by laypeople. There seemingly was a previously unnamed shared experience among some that needed a definition, which ‘girl dinner’ filled. This way of sharing experiences through mass media also invites discourse around the concept. In similar fashion ‘brat’ was a rebranding of concept. This time the word already existed in common usage, but the meaning was altered to fit an attitude that some have identified

existing throughout history (DJangi 2024). By “using the very old-fashioned medium of their own voices” (Shariatmadari 2024.), people across history have resurfaced old words to narrate their own experience. ‘Brat’ also generated additional discourse, e.g. surrounding societal rules and the attitude it reflected. The digital world further enables extensive discourse which helps to attain “[m]ore information about the use of slang terms by different social groups” which “will allow us to trace the direction and velocity of social change, as well as its source” (Labov 1992, 339).

## 5.1 Controlling The Narrative

Words hold meaning past their face value and since “[t]he Internet builds connections between people, and these connections generate new networks of slang” (Coleman 2012, 267), it can create a rapidly evolving environment where dissecting the meaning can be a complex task. Language choices can then be used to shape the narrative regarding multitude of communicational aspects. What often connects these different informal utterances, including ‘brat’ and ‘girl dinner’ is that they are used to defy the norms set by society as well as creating identities and community around them. Coleman lists four characteristics of slang, first the tone of informality, secondly “its use implies familiarity with the thing being referred to and a rejection of the more conventional views of those who might not be familiar with it” (2012, 297-298). It can also be “a taboo word” when conversing with “higher social status” people, and “used in place of a more widely known synonym” (ibid.). However, important aspect overlooked by these characteristics “is the importance of slang in creating and maintaining a sense of group or personal identity” since “[s]lang isn’t just about rejecting conventional values and words” but “also about fitting in” (ibid.), slang can then be used as a tool to create implications of character.

The discourse in mass media is not trivial to those living outside the internet, since “[o]nline communication is a hybrid between speech and writing” (Coleman 2012, 267), blurring lines between terms used in both, e.g. ‘brat’ which infiltrated political discussion and ‘girl dinner’ the kitchens. Meaning that those “who use slang terms in writing will probably also use at least some of the same slang in their conversations (and vice versa)” (ibid.). Therefore, the people one socialises around often lead to attaining or becoming familiar with the slang of those communities, e.g. peers at school. Because “teenagers will always seek to distinguish themselves not only from their parents, but also from” other subgroups (Coleman, 2012, 19), slang varies from generation to generation. What diversifies and universalises slang nowadays

is the aspect of mass media as different generations can stumble upon or search media platforms regarding information about new terms easily. As well as “use and discuss their own slang in dictionaries and online discussions” (Coleman 2012, 302), consequently affecting the variation and pace of change. This interactive activity is also visible in the analysed words, which explains their success as ‘viral’ slang words. ‘Brat’ and ‘girl dinner’ are both examples of using words to take agency over ones’ actions, whether that be relating to eating habits or attitudes that defy the norms. Slang helps establish identity and further “fosters inclusivity by creating shared language among groups, allowing users to feel a sense of belonging and connection” (Alimova 2025, 109). News outlets comprehend their effect and articles, whether it be to inform or to promote readership, handle slang in an understanding manner.

## 5.2 Slang Sells

In addition to having individual and communal benefits, the interactivity of internet has made slang a tool of influence. Slang has progressively been destigmatised “[w]ith increasing literacy, relaxed censorship, and greater access to publishing technologies, including the Internet” (Coleman 2012, 301). This has resulted in broader use of slang as it is not merely used by ‘common people,’ anymore but now corporations and public figures have started to use it to their advantage as well. For example, ‘brat’ was used in political conversations and the USA 2024 Presidential Candidate Kamala Harris utilised it in her campaign. More accurately, however, “Charli XCX called Kamala Harris ‘brat’” (Respers 2024). Harris then proceeded to respond, “in a way that signaled to the internet they understood the compliment and are embracing it” (ibid.). Both Charli XCX and Harris then utilised this slang phenomenon to further their political views, perhaps in a more palatable fashion for the younger generation. Likewise, generations that “grew up on the internet” understand “how to use social media to organize to push for change” (ibid.). Since slang that is used is often created by younger generations, articles regarding explanation of widespread utterances are in demand and meaningful.

It is no wonder that companies and even politicians utilise the internet for marketing purposes and specifically use slang strategically. Internet offers fast and widespread platform and slang shows to the audience that corporations understand their audience, the ‘common folk’. The benefits of this have also been studied and the results of two empirical studies examining “the effect of internet slang on attention to advertisements, product evaluation, and advertising

attitude” (Liu et al. 2019, 10), found that utilising slang language in advertisements, yielded a positive outcome. The findings revealed “the complex effects of internet slang on advertisements and extend the external validation of code-switching theory” (ibid.). The capitalistic approach to slang creates both opportunities and demand to try and use it in an impactful way. Many try to participate in these ‘viral phenomenon’, such as the analysed words, to emulate the success. The virality aspect might also make it hard to keep up with the demand for meaningful explanatory material, such as articles and new ‘official’ definitions. This can be seen from the dictionaries, which had difficulty adding new definitions since they were too recent.

## 6 Conclusion

Since the scope of this thesis was restricted, I chose to do it from relatively constrained materials. That being three article and dictionary pages per word. It would be meaningful to conduct research with a wider scope to broaden the findings. Furthermore, take into consideration the multimodal aspect of these specific words since they exist in a multimodal space and hold meaning in other aspects in addition to the word itself.

I specifically examined the words ‘brat’ and ‘girl dinner’ in my thesis. Both showed aspects common for slang words and whether they will stay in use or be added to more dictionaries is unpredictable, as is common for slang. Notable is that even if a slang word is short-lived, they can convey much meaning. In the end “[i]t isn’t bad to use slang, but it isn’t good to use it either” the “key is whether you use it well—in an appropriate context and in a way that achieves the result you want” (Coleman 2012, 297). Slang therefore is what you make of it.

Communication in modern media and with selected words hold power and a single word can hold much more meaning than what first meets the eye. When it comes to coverage and conversation surrounding slang words and language change, in news articles and online dictionaries, the popular slang terms often get informatively explained to the laypeople and depending on the publication platform, are explained with a secondary example of it in use. Whether the journalists wanted to use the trending word to reach and appeal to more readers or use different stories as means to explain the word is possibly up to debate, but it is probable that both occurred and maybe even simultaneously. The articles included insightful discussion of the phenomenon in addition to explaining the word definitions. Dictionaries were less likely to adapt quickly to these changes and varied by the dictionary since each had their own criterion of what warrants a new addition. Ultimately slang continues to be used to communicate and create discussion around a multitude of topics, it has and will continue to spark conversation, so additional research around the phenomenon could unveil meaningful findings that could further teach us about the way we communicate with one another.

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