

## From 'Brother' to 'Bro': A Study of Semantic Generalization and Connotative Meanings in Contemporary Slangs

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**Abstract:** *The present study bridges a gap in the current body of scholarly research by conducting an extensive analysis of the semantic and connotative development of the lexical item 'brother' as it evolves into the modern slang 'bro'. While semantic generalization and slang analysis are recognized phenomena, there is still a lack of studies that systematically account for the specific contextual factors, interpersonal dynamics, and subtleties of connotative shift that underpins intra-slang semantic shifts. The goal of the current research study is to fill this gap by examining the development from 'brother' to 'bro', tracing the changes in social intimacy, identity construction, and cultural expression, and thereby contributing to a more detailed insight. The study uses a qualitative content analysis methodology based on a collection of naturally occurring linguistic data from social media platforms.*

*The analysis shows the semantic generalization of 'bro'. The word has lost its original meaning of denoting mainly familial or formal fraternal relationships and now encompasses a wide variety of informal social relations, serving primarily as a mode of address for male acquaintances, an expression of camaraderie, an informal interjection, and much more. Connotatively, 'bro' has come to develop a multifaceted profile of connotations that have ranged from positive connotations of camaraderie and neutral address to negative stereotypes, and a far cry from the connotations of loyalty and familial obligation traditionally attached to 'brother'.*

*The findings highlight the fact that slang forms an important and innovative part of linguistic systems, which illustrates processes of semantic generalization and bleaching, in addition to processes of pragmatic re-analysis. The shift from 'brother' to 'bro' involves not just lexical reduction, but can be described as a wholesale reorganization of social and pragmatic salience, in which 'bro' can be seen as an identity resource and a device for social alignment. This linguistic evolution, often facilitated by digital communication platforms, reflects larger societal trends of informality, efficiency and expressiveness in modern discourse.*

**Keywords:** Connotative Meaning, Language Evolution, Psycholinguistics, Slang, Social Media, Sociolinguistics

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### 1. Introduction

Language is a dynamic phenomenon that is always in a state of changing to reflect, as well as to influence, the cultural, social, and psychological environments of the speakers. The phenomenon of slang is no exception, as it is an excellent example of this continuing linguistic change that manifests itself in certain subcultures and subsequently spreads to the wider discourse of society (Mattiello, 2005; Moore, 2004). This paper examines how semantic changes have taken place, specifically the use of the word 'brother' to become 'bro' in modern English. Through the analysis of such changes, the research study attempts to shed light on the processes of semantic generalization, and the critical part connotative meaning plays in the evolution of everyday language. Social media is widely used by youth and is well-known to everyone. Some of the popular social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Reddit, Discord, etc. The term social media can mean both socializing or society, as well as media that impacts society. Socializing on these platforms can be considered different as it involves not just textual conversations but sharing memes, reels, posts, etc. It is a regular sight to see many children and young adults scrolling through mostly Instagram reels, or what in slang terms can be called

‘doomscrolling’. The young generations chat or communicate via slang, which constantly changes in comparison with any other language. New words get added, their meaning changes, some words get clipped, while some go through coinage, a few have a semantic change, and some merely change pragmatically. The slang term ‘bro’ illustrates this constant change vividly. Originally known for its familial denotative meaning ‘brother’, it has broadened to signify friendship, camaraderie, and even romantic affectionate relationships, transcending gender boundaries. This research aims to explore the semantic and pragmatic evolution of certain slang words in English.

### 1.1. History of Slang Development

Slang is a common language that is often neglected in linguistic studies, even though it plays a significant role in the development of language (Mattiello, 2005). It is also defined by informal use, and most of the time it is limited to certain groups or situations (Keidar et al., 2022). However, in-group slang can be widely diffused as seen through the diffusion of simple slang terms to mainstream society (Moore, 2004), thereby indicating a change in society and its culture. The linguistic research on slang shows the mechanisms of the emergence and spreading and disappearance of new words or senses in social forces (Agha, 2015). In addition to informal language, slang helps to form an identity and interact (Damirjian, 2024) and promotes morphological and semantic innovation (Mattiello, 2005). Scholars have argued that the infiltration of slang in non-standard and standard varieties of English calls into question the assumption that slang is not very valuable (Mattiello, 2005).

### 1.2. The Meaning of Semantic Generalization

Semantic change is a known phenomenon in linguistics, and its processes are still being studied (Deo, 2015). The first of these is semantic generalisation, in which the meaning of a word expands to a broader referent (Traugott, 2006; Traugott & Dasher, 2001). As an example, a term that was originally associated with a limited scope can be broadened to a wider scope of referents. All such changes, and generalisation especially, have predictable routes (Li & Siew, 2022) and are influenced by how language is used and acquired by the speakers (Li & Siew, 2022). Socio-cultural and historical forces in speech communities, as well as cognitive and communicative preferences, also motivate them (Carling et al., 2023).

### 1.3. The Connotative Meaning of the Modern Language

In addition to denotation, words contain connotative meanings in the form of emotional connotations, cultural connotations, and subjective connotations (Villanueva & Mendoza, 2021). Although denotation is the definition found in the dictionary, connotation allows a more thorough and more detailed interpretation, which is crucial in the development of creative works and the perception of cultural ideas (Neuman et al., 2015; Villanueva & Mendoza, 2021). In modern informal communication, the connotative meaning takes center stage, which allows interlocutors to express a certain social connotation and even to change the shape and the features of the style of official speech significantly, as proper usage can guarantee the desirable effect on the interlocutor and successful fulfillment of the intended goal (Bozhenkova et al., 2015). The evolution of connotative meanings is also crucial to understanding the peculiarities of modern communication and the social meaning of the lexical choice.

## 2. Research Question and Objectives

### 2.1. Research Questions

- What communicative and social influences lead to the replacement of brother by bro and other forms of slang?
- What are the impacts of these semantic changes on comprehension, especially of ESL learners?
- What is the acceleration of such changes in communication between Gen Z through social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter?

### 2.2. Objectives

- To analyze linguistic processes, like that of metaphor and generalisation, which lead to such changes.
- To explore social and cultural aspects that encourage the use and diffusion of slang to Gen Z, and their purpose in self-identification and emotional representation.
- To determine the speed with which digital platforms, especially social media, assist with slang diffusion and redefinition.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1. Theories of Semantic Change

The semantic change or diachronic semantics focuses on studying the change in the meaning of words over time (Deo, 2015). The most important aspects are broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphor and metonymy (Traugott, 2006). Semantic generalisation broadens the meaning of a word to a general instead of a specific referent in the cases of examples in (Traugott, 2006) and (Traugott & Dasher, 2001). They are adaptation patterns (Li & Siew, 2022) that are shaped by the cognitive functions of the use and acquisition of language (Li & Siew, 2022). They are motivated by social-cultural and historical conditions in speech communities, as well as mental and communicative inclinations (Carling et al., 2023). Regular patterns across languages are highlighted by Traugott and Dasher through inference and reanalysis (Traugott & Dasher, 2001). Change is also affected by word frequency and context, as words with high frequency change more easily (Keidar et al., 2022).

#### 3.2. Social Linguistic Approaches to Slang

In the sociolinguistic perspective, slang is not only informal, but it helps in social interaction, identity creation, and group unity (Agha, 2015; Damirjian, 2024). Slang is created within the context of a particular social group or subculture, indicating in-group solidarity and differentiating between the insiders and outsiders (Keidar et al., 2022; Mattiello, 2005). It often leaks into popular culture, which indicates cultural and generational changes (Moore, 2004). Slang is found in both standard and non-standard English, which weakens attitudes that undermine its importance (Mattiello, 2005). It promotes language novelty in a way that involves creating new words or meanings (Mattiello, 2005). It is mediated by social processes through norms, communication patterns, power relations, age, sex, status, trends, and so forth (Agha, 2015; Auckle, 2017; Bucholtz, 2012; Drake, 1980).

#### 3.3. Psycholinguistic Connotative Meanings

Psycholinguistics explores the psychological aspects of connotative meaning, which involve emotional connotations, cultural connotations, and personal interpretations caused by words (Neuman et al., 2015; Villanueva & Mendoza, 2021). This emotional layer plays a significant role in the delicate communication process, allowing speakers to reflect hidden social elements, manifest attitudes, and affect emotions, usually unconsciously. The cognition of connotation is interconnected with the lexical knowledge, contextual information, personal experience, and cultural frameworks (Neuman et al., 2015).

Studies show that connotative meanings are not fixed and instead change according to the changes in cultural values, social situations, and the perceptions of an individual. Using the example of emotional valence and arousal associated with certain words, this can vary thus altering their connotative profile. Research studies have shown that emotional connotation plays a major role in the processing of internet slang, particularly among youth who use slang language to identify themselves within a group and convey emotions (Vlasov et al., 2024). To understand the intricacies of contemporary communication, especially in less formal and expressive language styles, like slang, a thorough insight into how these subjective meanings have changed over time is thus critical (Rohr & Wentura, 2022; Soriano, 2022; Vigliocco et al., 2009).

#### 3.4. Past research on the Evolution and Meaning of Slang

Various academic studies have also shed light on the changes and the sense of slang, which have further determined that slang is significant in language studies. In their study, Keidar et al. have performed a causal analysis of the semantic change and frequency dynamics of a slang term and have shown that the frequency at which a slang term is used can greatly affect the direction and rate of its semantic changes (Keidar et al., 2022). This study highlights the complex connection between lexical spreading and semantic adjustment in informal language. Mattiello also has emphasized the ubiquity of slang in Standard and Non-standard English and supports a more comprehensive view of linguistics to consider the importance of slang in the larger language system (Mattiello, 2005).

Other researchers were interested in the social aspects of slang, including its contribution to the identity of a group and strengthening solidarity (Damirjjan, 2024). Agha analyzed Tropes of Slang and showed how slang uses rhetoric to create meaning and strengthen societal relationships (Agha, 2015). Sun and Xu discussed the topic of Tracing Semantic Variation in Slang, stating that the meaning of a slang word may vary among communities and hypothesizing that such variations may be caused by cultural needs or by the wishes to have a semantic differentiation (Sun & Xu, 2022a, 2022b). These historical efforts show that slang is a well-constructed linguistic laboratory where innovation, semantic drift, and socio-cognitive processes that make language change can be observed, where these processes may include generalisation or pejoration as these processes are repeated across communities of practice (Adams, 2009; Roth-Gordon, 2020).

### 3.5 Gap in Current Research: ‘brother’ to ‘bro’

In spite of the broad literature on general conceptions of semantic change, sociolinguistic roles of slang and the psycholinguistics of connotation, there remains a significant gap in more granular analyses of the semantic pathways of particular slang terms, especially where there is a lot of generalizations. Although the semantic generalisation phenomenon as a whole is acknowledged (Traugott, 2006; Traugott & Dasher, 2001), and the process of slang words semantically and connotatively generalizing has been widely analyzed (Keidar et al., 2022; Mattiello, 2005), few specific studies have captured the entire semantic and connotative trajectory of a popular word, like that of a brother, into a highly disinforming, slang word, bro.

Current scholarly literature seems to be deficient in the need to inquire:

- The exact contextual circumstances and interpersonal processes that form the basis of the shift between the familial connotation of the word brother into the informal generalized use of bro.
- An elaborate tracking of subtle connotative changes, such as emotional tinges, social implications, and identity performances that break down bro as its parent word.
- Empirical study of the correlation between sociolinguistic variables, including user demographics, particular speech groups, and specific interactional scenarios, and the practice, adoption, and usage of bro (Aggarwal, 2017).

The proposed research attempts to fill this research gap through a study of the ‘brother’ to ‘bro’ evolution. It seeks to add a body of knowledge in the semantic workings of generalisation and connotative development in modern slang, with potential success in the study of micro-processes of language change.

While several studies have shed light and explained slang from linguistic, technological and educational perspectives, most of them have focused on how slang is formed, detected or utilized in communication as well as teaching. However, very little attention has been given to how the meanings of slang words themselves evolve.

Even less attention is given to the secondary stage of semantic change in slang, where one slang meaning transforms into another slang meaning. This intra-slang semantic change remains underexplored - how they expand, shift, and gain new emotional or cultural tones. There is limited research on how a word like ‘brother’ evolves into ‘bro’, reflecting changes in social intimacy, identity, and cultural expression.

This gap calls for a deeper semantic and pragmatic exploration of contemporary slang to understand how meaning evolves within modern English and what these shifts reveal about present-day social relationships and communication styles, etc.

## 4. Methodology

The study under consideration makes use of a qualitative research method, namely the qualitative content analysis, in its attempt to investigate the semantic generalisation of the term ‘brother’ to ‘bro’ and the drift in the connotative senses. It is an especially effective approach to understanding subtle meanings and contextual applications of language, which has a strong theoretical foundation to unravel the meanings that users attribute to these words (Putri et al., 2023).

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### 4.1. Data Analysis Techniques

Data will be analyzed in a multi-stage form, which includes initial coding, thematic analysis, semantic analysis, and comparative evaluation.

*Initial Coding:* Inductively determining patterns, meanings, and contexts of the indications of brother and brother.

*Thematic Analysis:* The assignment of codes into themes, which demonstrate social functions, feelings, and circumstances (e.g., camaraderie, aggression) (Niswa et al., 2023).

*Semantic Analysis:* Tracking the changes of meaning between brother and bro, both denotative and connotative ones as well as expansion; pattern extraction could be performed using computational tools when necessary (Niswa et al., 2023; Tahmasebi & Dubossarsky, 2023).

*Comparative Analysis:* Comparing usages to show the differences and changes of bro.

### 4.2. Ethical Considerations

Taking into account the use of publicly available textual information, the study complies with the principles of ethical conduct in relation to privacy, consent, and anonymization (Horvathova, 2023; Miralimova, 2024). Public content does not require express consent and is in line with the benchmarks of social media research that allow analyzing anonymous public content without causing harm (Aporbo, 2023; Proceedings of the 57th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics: Student Research Workshop, 2019).

## 5. Results

In this section, important results of the qualitative content analysis of the corpus chosen are presented. It follows the semantic path of ‘brother’ to ‘bro’, determines the important shifts of connotation, patterns of contextual use, and examines demographic and sociolinguistic correlates of use. The analysis is based on the multi-stage approach outlined in the methodology first, inductive codes of patterns, meanings, and situations; thematic codes to demonstrate social functions, emotions, and situations (Niswa et al., 2023); semantic codes to trace the denotative and connotative changes (Tahmasebi and Dubossarsky, 2023); and comparative ratings of divergences.

### 5.1. Trajectories of Semantics of ‘Brother’ and ‘Bro’

The early coding and semantic analysis showed that there was a strong generalisation of the literal connotation of the word brother to the very loose application of the word bro. Precisely, the term brother has a close connection to familial or official relationships. The key shifts observed include:

- Literal kinship → Peer address: From family relations to casual male friendship.
- Fraternal bonds → Generalized solidarity: To shared experiences.
- Formal respect → Informal emphasis: As filler or intensifier.

These shifts align with broader patterns of slang generalization, where terms broaden their referents through social diffusion (Tahmasebi & Dubossarsky, 2023). To further contextualize the evolution of "bro" within this pattern, the following table presents 15 examples of slang terms that have similarly evolved or generalized within the category of relationship terms, shifting from specific kinship or relational denotations to broader peer, camaraderie, or informal address functions:

Original Term	Slang Form	Semantic Shift
Brother	Bro	Familial sibling → casual peer address/camaraderie/loved one
Sister	Sis	Familial sibling → female friend/peer
Baby/Babe	Bae	Romantic partner/endearment → casual affection/general loved one
Homeboy	Homie	Neighborhood friend → general close friend/solidarity
Dog	Dawg	Animal/pet → loyal friend/peer
Cousin	Cuz	Familial relative → casual acquaintance/friend
Family	Fam	Kinship group → close social circle/group
Man	Dude	Adult male → universal casual address
Friend	Buddy	Companion → informal friend/pal
Fellow	Fella	Companion/colleague → casual guy/address
Mate	Mate/Bro	Companion/workmate → general friend/address
Chap	Bloke	Gentleman → everyday guy
Comrade	Comrade	Political/ideological ally → ironic friend
Pal	Pal	Brother → casual friend
Best friend	Bestie	Close friend → playful female BFF

Table 1: Semantic Shift

The consistent pattern observed across the 15 examples in the table above highlights a broader sociolinguistic phenomenon where terms initially designating specific interpersonal relationships undergo semantic bleaching and widening, becoming versatile markers of affiliation, informality, or even general address within diverse social contexts. Furthermore, this semantic generalization is often driven by a need for linguistic efficiency and social cohesion within specific user communities. In addition, such semantic shifts align with observations in digital communication, where slang terms acquire new meanings and functions to express identity and facilitate efficient communication among specific groups. This phenomenon is further accentuated in online environments, where rapid dissemination and adaptive reinterpretation of terms are commonplace, confirming "bro's" evolution as emblematic of widespread slang generalization.

## 5.2. Semantic Trajectories of "Brother" and "Bro"

The analysis shows the obvious semantic generalisation of the denotative meaning of the word brother (a male sibling or close male relative) to the broader usage of the word bro. At first, the use of brother is mostly used in the meaning of family ties or official fraternity. Conversely, bro is found to have much greater referential breadth involving non-familial male peers, general acquaintances, and in some instances as a non-gendered interjection.

Usage of brother: The use of brother is always associated with biological relationships or officially established brotherhoods (e.g., religious, fraternal organizations).

For example:

- My brother is coming to visit me next week.
- He vowed loyalty to his brother in arms.

Usage of Bro: The usage of bro has undergone a semantic shift, as the word is no longer used strictly as a family term and now has other generalized uses:

Generalized Male Peer Address: The most common one is when the term bro was used as an informal way of addressing any male friend or acquaintance.

- Hey, bro, don't you know what you are doing tonight?
- Appreciate the fact that you helped me move, bro.

Comradery/Solidarity: Bro is commonly employed to mean experience, understanding, or mutual support, and went beyond direct address.

- "That emotion when you are two in the struggle, absolute bro.
- Interjection/Filler In other cases, bro is an interjection of a non-referential type, similar to man or dude, indicating informality or stress.
- "No way, bro, that's insane!"
- Non-gendered Usage (Emergent/Limited): A small number of cases observed the use of bro in an intent to be playful or ironic in addressing females or mixed-gender audiences, indicating the possibility of an early stage of further generalisation beyond gender, but less than male-specific usage.
- Hey, we are heading to the concert, bros, go!

The shift emphasizes the change between a more literal, kinship-based set of lexicons to a more versatile, social-relational word, which points to an effective semantic generalization (Niswa et al., 2023).

### 5.3. Determination of Major Connotative Shifts

The connotative space of bro differed from that of brother, acquiring connotations to do with informality, casual solidarity, and, occasionally, to particular subcultural affiliations.

*Brother-Connotations:* This is mostly used to give strong positive connotations of a profound loyalty, love for a family, and long-lasting connections, which are likely to be accompanied by a feeling of respect and responsibility.

*Connotative Keywords:* Family, loyalty, respect, protection, blood-tie.

*Bro Connotations:* The connotations of bro are also more diverse, as those were either explicitly positive, neutral, or sometimes even negative, meaning they varied depending on the context and the intent of the speaker.

*Positive Connotations:* Informality, comradeship, friendship, understanding between the partners, and easy social engagement. It is usually marked by bad, unfettered communication.

*Neutral Connotations:* Since it is a plain, informal speech, it may not have a strong emotional appeal, being a social lubricant.

*New Negative/Stereotyped Connotations:* In certain contexts, the word bro had the negative or ironical implications of certain subcultural stereotypes (e.g., bro culture), which may involve some behaviour or attitude depending on the user. That means that it is both a game of good and bad affective meanings (Vlasov et al., 2024).

The connotative changes demonstrate that bro came to denote a certain type of informal social interaction, which is not similar to the deeper and more serious implications of the word brother.

### 5.4. Contextual Use Patterns of Bro

The contextual usage pattern analysis demonstrated that the word bro is mostly used in informal and casual communication contexts, regardless of the online and transcribed language of speech.

*Online Communication:* This is very widespread in social media comments, instant messaging, and video games. The use of it usually coincided with shorter and more immediate communications.

*Spoken Language:* This was often used in informal dialogues amongst peers, which means that the communication was not strict.

In Speech acts, Bro was frequently applied in:

<i>Greetings:</i>	What's up, bro?
<i>Affirmations/Agreement:</i>	Ah, bro, I understand it all right.
<i>Surprising or Frustrating Langs:</i>	Are you serious, bro?
<i>Requests/Commands:</i>	Give me that, bro.

The data implies that there is a high level of correlation between the use of bro and social contexts, which necessitates swift, low-stakes social interaction, where the establishment or reestablishment of a casual bond is implicitly held in high regard. The role of bro seems to be too strong in the establishment and preservation of social interaction in informal environments (Niswa et al., 2023).

### 5.5 Demographics and Sociolinguistic Usage Correlates

Although in many cases, demographic data was not available because of the anonymisation procedures, some sociolinguistic trends were observed in the use of the term bro.

*Age:* In the corpus that was collected, bro was significantly more prevalent in younger age groups (e.g., teens and young adults). The older users were inclined to use either more often or to use bro in an ironic sense.

*Gender:* Bro is mainly used and referred to by males, especially in peer-to-peer communication. Nevertheless, according to the semantic shifts, there are also cases of female users applying the term bro to male friends, or other females to mock.

*Social Group Affiliation:* Bro is used as a strong in-group symbol in all kinds of informal social groups, such as online communities that play games, sports lovers, and certain youth subcultures. Its use strengthens grouphood and unity.

These results indicate that although the term bro has been greatly generalised, its application remains stratified by sociolinguistic constraints to the extent that it has been used in identifying social differences and identifications.

This paper explores how the semantic generalisation of the term brother to the word bro is possible and how its connotative senses have changed over time in modern English. Based on a qualitative content analysis, the results shed light on the interaction between the language change and socialization, as well as the processes of thinking and interacting. These findings are interpreted in this discussion, traced back to the existing theories of semantic change, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics and discussed in terms of their overall implications to the study of modern-day communication.

### 5. 6. Semiotic Generalisation of Slang

The identified semantic pathway of the word brother to the word bro is a good example of semantic generalisation, which is consistent with the theoretical backgrounds suggested by (Traugott, 2006) and Traugott and (Traugott & Dasher, 2001). What had started to refer to a particular relationship in the family or official fraternal connection has come to refer to a considerably wider array of social functions and referents, especially as a generalized term used to address male peers, a signifier of camaraderie, and even as a general interjection.

This expansion is an indication of the process under which a given concept is broadened to include more comprehensive meanings (Traugott, 2006).

The semantic shift presents the high frequency of words, especially in informal language, like slang, as particularly prone to semantic change (Keidar et al., 2022). Bro brother becomes bro is not just a phonological contraction of brother, but a deep semantic re-engineering in which the lexical object loses its rigid denotative frame to be more flexibly a social instrument. This dynamism enables bro to be able to support quick, low-stakes social interactions, indicating that language responds to communicative demands by developing lexically efficient and socially salient structures. According to our tentative results, the functional load of bro has escalated much against brother in informal contexts, confirming the observation of the ubiquitous quality and innovative capabilities of slang (Mattiello, 2005).

### 5.7. Factors that Affect the Evolution of Connotative Meaning

The difference between the connotative meaning of brother and bro has shown how emotional associations and cultural implications of linguistic units are dynamic. Although some connotations of loyalty and familial responsibility still carry a tinge with them, bro has gained a range of connotations of informal friendship and camaraderie, to, in other cases, stereotypical links with some of the behaviours of the bro culture. It means that the connotative meanings are not as static as they change according to the cultural values, social contexts, and even personal perceptions. Both positive (camaraderie, informality) and occasionally negative (stereotypical behaviour) connotations of bro may be generated and this highlights the intricate nature of affective meaning in language processing (Vlasov et al., 2024). This is consistent with psycholinguistic insights that words do not only have referential meaning but also have emotional coloring and social meaning (Rohr & Wentura, 2022; Soriano, 2022; Vigliocco et al., 2009). The connotative sensitivity of bro based on context also shows that the intention of the speaker, perception of the audience and the situational consideration are very essential to its interpretation, making it an important subject to study the dynamism of meaning in the modern language.

Building on this analysis, the paper aims to study the slang words or phrases that come under two categories, one being relational and/or having more than two usages. **Tea** as a slang word for example went through semantic evolution twice, it has two different connotative meanings in slang vocabulary. Tea in literal terms means a beverage while in the phrase “What’s the tea?” or “Spill the tea”, indicates gossip. It originated from the drag queen community. It should also be noted that semantically “Spill the tea” is not as same as “Spilling the beans” as tea refers to gossip about a third party and beans refers to revealing one’s own secrets.

Another connotative meaning of the word tea would be “Your body is very tea”, here the meaning of the said word becomes someone who has an attractive, shapely or killer body. It is referred to as a compliment that evolved from the original slang word mentioned above that meant gossip/truth to further describe attractive physique or a great figure. It got popularized by TikTok around 2023 as a compliment towards someone’s good looks. The usage goes from casual to flirting.

Another slang word that comes under the second category would be ‘brother’ which has the denotative meaning as ‘sibling’ which connotatively means ‘a close male friend’. According to Nair bro is a slang word which goes beyond gender and is termed as a universal slang. The semantic evolution of the term bro is shown in the figure below. Nair says ‘Even though the female equivalent, ‘sis’ or ‘sister’, is available, bro has made its foothold, and its usage is widespread’.

Close male friend → General address → Bro culture (Stereotype) → Slight insult → Bro code → Gender Neutral

Table 2: Semantic Evolution of ‘bro’

‘Bro’ is most commonly used to express a strong informal bond between two males. According to Merriam Webster, the first known use of bro was circa 1530. The first recorded usage was by Thomas Lupset, an English scholar before 1530. He used the word bro as a simple abbreviation for brother in writing. To quote Devin Gordon as an example for slang word bro as a male friend ‘One quirky edge the Olympics haven’t yet sanded

away is the habit of extreme athletes to stick together. Like, no matter where we're from, we're all bros. That kind of thing.'

'Hey bro, what's up' or 'Catch you later bro' are some of the examples of the slang word bro that is used to generally address any guy regardless of actual relationship. Here we can say, the term is, majority of the time used for males. Not only that, but the relation between the same two or more males can and cannot be of sibling nature. The term bro in slang terms breaks the barrier of its literal meaning of that of relational and goes beyond.

Bro culture originates from the North American sub culture of young men, hence 'brother' who are usually seen partying, are into sports and are supposed to be very confident. Even though the bro culture is not defined concretely or with consistency, it typically refers to 'fratty masculinity' or as seen in western movies where a jock in a baseball uniform can be seen with his supposed bros hanging out together everywhere. The whole group eludes the tight bond they share and are also shown bullying the lesser popular kids in school/college. They are also supposedly associated with frayed brim baseball hats, oxford shirts, sports team T-shirts, and boat shoes or sandals. Although bro usually referred to white males, NPR noted that bros can include people of colour and women.

The term, depending on the tone of voice, intent, and the relationship between the speakers could mean slight insults ranging from implying foolishness, patronizing/condescending tone, refer to negative subculture, to a friend zone context. The implying foolishness refers back to the point of its connotative meaning of frat boys culture. It can imply that the person is foolish, self-important or uncultured. In a patronizing tone, the term also refers to talking someone down, similar to 'buddy' or 'pal'. In terms like 'tech bro' or 'finance bro' the term bro is a deliberate epithet used to criticize a perceived arrogance or misogynistic culture within a specific group. In context a female could use the term to empathize or make it clear the lack of interest to another male seeking romantic interest. In such a context it is defined as mildly insulting or unwanted to the person being 'friend zoned'.

Increasingly the slang bro is used as a gender-neutral term, with many women addressing each other as bro. A couple even might use 'bro or dude if they're very comfortable and don't feel the need for traditional pet names, according to a reddit thread.

Moreover, it is also used as a conversation filler to add emphasis to a sentence. It does not limit with denotative and connotative meaning but further re-analyze towards compounds and variants of the slang bro. The variants and compounds are explained in the table below.

1	<b>Bromance</b>	A close, non-sexual friendship shared between two males
2	<b>Brogrammer</b>	A male computer programmer who fits the category of bro culture stereotype.
3	<b>Bernie Bro</b>	Certain vocal supporters of Bernie Sanders
4	<b>Bro culture</b>	Subculture of young men associated with partying, sports and fraternities.
5	<b>Bro code</b>	An unwritten set of social rules stating how bros should interact and prioritise their friendship.
6	<b>Bro hug</b>	Another term for a man hug
7	<b>Bruh</b>	A variant popularly used to express shock, disappointment, or chill vibes
8	<b>Brah</b>	A variant frequently used in surfer or gym cultures
9	<b>Bruv</b>	A commonly used British English alternative, particularly in London
10	<b>Gym bro</b>	A male friend for working out together, focusing on fitness and the gym.
11	<b>Brofessor</b>	A bro who teaches others, specifically about surfing or gym knowledge

Table 3: Variants and Compounds

The table shows limited variants of the term bro as they are increasing till the date. There are different posts and social media groups on Reddit still using many more variants and discussions are still popular.

## 5. 8. Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics Implications Theoretically

The research has implications for sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. The development of bro proves the important role of slang in identity and group membership (Agha, 2015; Damirjian, 2024) from a sociolinguistic perspective. It is a powerful in-group identity, particularly among the youths and online groups, which depict a common norm and communication patterns (Bucholtz, 2012). Monitored demographic trends demonstrate the ways language preferences become integrated into social settings, as they assist people in indicating membership and maneuvers in hierarchies (Auckle, 2017; Drake, 1980). The non-gendered use of 'Bro' here and there indicates a shift in the terms of address that might oppose the usual gendered norms informally.

The semantic shifts are depicted in the psycholinguistic way that bro depicts. Speakers are eager to generalize 'bro' and interpret its connotations in the contexts and demonstrate the cognitive flexibility in language use. This demonstrates that predictable semantic change is being motivated by mechanisms like inferencing and re-analysis (Li & Siew, 2022; Traugott & Dasher, 2001). The informal use without difficulty by 'Bro' is a sign of the generalized meaning and connotations that can be easily incorporated into lexical-semantic networks, which means an effective method of describing social relationships.

### 5. 9. Conclusions about Learning Modern Communication

The change of using the word brother to bro has some important implications to contemporary communication. First, the slang evolution is very fast on digital platforms. They facilitate rapid creation, change of spread, and meaning that previously took generations (Keidar et al., 2022). This extension and change of connotations is motivated by online relationships.

Second, it displays the increase of the informal use of language, such as bro, which helps build casual relationships. Bro instils friendship and unity within fast, temporary environments. The familiarity of such terms contributes to the interpretation of social cues, groups, and values.

Lastly, the study perceives slang as an important and innovative element of language, and not marginal. Words like bro add more to the methods of communication of relationships and identities (Mattiello, 2005). It associates minor semantic variation with major transformations in English and society.

### 6. Discussion

The semantic change of brother to bro can also be used as a good example of processes of semantic generalisation, bleaching, and pragmatic re-analysis as it has been described in semantic change theories (Traugott, 2006; Traugott & Dasher, 2001). These results suggest that slang innovation does not only entail the lexical reduction but an extensive re-organization of the social and pragmatic meaning.

Sociolinguistically, bro is used as an identity resource and source of social alignment to strengthen group membership and collective communicative norms (Agha, 2015; Bucholtz, 2012). Its quick acquisition and loose interpretation are psycholinguistically linked to the ability of speakers to generalize the meaning by inference in a situation and repeated exposure (Siew, 2022).

The paper also highlights how digital platforms facilitate semantic change and make slang one of the key processes of language adaptation in modern English. The historical development of the term bro can therefore be understood as a reflection of larger trends towards informality, efficiency, and expressiveness in communication relating.

#### 6.1. Limitations of the Study

Although an attempt is made to diversify the corpus, the data gained on digital platforms might not be a perfect sample of all the possible diversity of language speakers and all the contexts where bro is used. It did not allow non-digital or private means of communication. Sometimes it is not easy to detect nuances of meaning in the purely textual data, even though the context is carefully captured, because non-verbal communication can be missing (e.g., tone, gesture). Because of all qualitative research, interviewing is subject to the interpretation of data based on the views of the researcher. Peer debriefing and an audit trail are some of the strategies that were

used to reduce the possibility of bias. Slang is very dynamic; meanings and use may shift very quickly. The results will be a reflection of how the term has changed during the timeframe of the data gathering and may not be an indication of how the term will change in the future. Due to the deep qualitative nature of this study, however, allowing such valuable information about the process of changing brother to bro, the findings cannot be directly generalized to other slang words or changes in semantics without further comparative studies.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper critically followed the semantic generalisation and connotative development of the word brother to bro in modern English through a qualitative content analysis method. The results of our research, based on the study of usage patterns and semantic change, offer detailed information about the changes in the process of language change in informal communication.

The study shows definite generalisation of semantics in bro. It changed the meaning of a family or formal fraternal relationship to a broad spectrum of informal social roles. Bro is primarily used as an address to male friends, a sign of fraternity and togetherness and an informal term of interjection regardless of the situation. Its non-gendered use is less popular but is on the rise. Such transformation offers a more adaptable definition of social relations, which is characterized by quick and low-stakes interactions (Niswa et al., 2023).

Connotatively, bro has acquired a difficult profile, as compared to brother, which reminds one of loyalty and family obligation. The connotations of bro are based on positive camaraderie and neutral address to negative stereotypes that are sometimes negative. This indicates its relative sensitivity to the context and the dynamism of affective meanings. Patterns of use indicate that bro is flourishing in informal, online, and oral environments, commonly used to say goodbye, affirmation, and feelings. Sociolinguistically, it is closely associated with younger users and serves as an in-group identity in online and social groupings, which are attached to social structures.

## Future Research Directions

Further research based on the findings of this study may investigate:

- Cross-linguistic comparisons: Cross-linguistic comparisons: Semantic generalisation and connotative shifts Semantic generalisation and connotative shifts may exhibit common or language-specific patterns in the use of similar terms in other languages.
- Longitudinal studies: The rate of semantic change of bro could be tracked over a long period of time, which would help determine the direction of alteration.
- Psycholinguistic experiments: Experiments testing the processing of bro by different groups may help elucidate the psychological and emotional implications of bro.
- Corpus analysis: Patterns and connections with demographics or contexts could be proven statistically with the use of large datasets and computational tools.
- Address terms other: The General theory of informal address evolution could be constructed by using the same methods on similar terms.
- Pejoration and amelioration: Social causes of positive or negative changes in slang might show the social functions of language.

The work provides a basis for the broader research on semantic change in contemporary language.

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