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Candles, Stoners, Emotions, Oh My!

by Ashley Gruca

Introduction:

Have you ever said something that someone completely misunderstood? Have you ever gotten in trouble for saying something that you did not know had a bad meaning to it? Did you ever think that you are saying the same words as your favorite music artist? This is extremely common in our complex and confusing language. We are subconsciously changing our language little by little with each generation. There are plenty of examples of this, but one that stands out to me is the word “lit.” There are multiple layers and meanings to this word. The meaning of lit I am focusing on is, according to *Urban Dictionary*, “when something is turned up or popping.” In more simplified terms, “lit” means when something is exciting.

I chose this word because I used to use it often with my friends and family when I was in middle school and high school. It is also a joke between me and my family because I said it so much; it was a main part of my vocabulary. I used “lit” so much that I signed my friend’s yearbook using “lit.” This word can also be found in songs (normally in songs targeted for a younger audience) but specifically in all of Travis Scott’s songs because it is his signature ad-lib, which is a repeated word or phrase rappers use in their songs. I believe these two examples give two completely different instances of the word and show the difference between the generations. I find it extremely interesting that every generation has its own “language” within the same language. Humans are made to be different, evolve, and change, so it is inevitable that certain words change their meanings and new meanings are created. The word “lit” allows people to

express excited emotions, but since the word has different meanings with every generation, this meaning is exclusive to a certain generation and is considered “cringey” when others use it. Using the word “lit” with the new meaning was invented to create connections—such as an eighth grader to a famous artist—and focus on people rather than a thing.

Intro into Yearbook Example:

Looking back on my eighth-grade year, it was a very strange and cringeworthy time. It was a time when everyone was trying to figure out how to interact with each other and figuring out how we wanted others to perceive us. When I stated, “can’t wait to see you in high school; it’s gonna be lit” in my friend’s yearbook, (which is unarguably cringey and somewhat humorous), I used the correct definition of the word, but it’s still considered somewhat unacceptable. This is simply because, though they can use it correctly in a sentence, a younger person cannot fully understand, or should not fully understand, the meaning of it. “Lit” should strictly be used by high schoolers and possibly college students. Just as younger people are judged for using this word, older people also are judged because they use “lit” with a different intended meaning. This creates a barrier for the usage of the word between generations. My friend’s mom saw the yearbook and called my mom concerned because she was afraid “lit” meant getting drunk and high. As an innocent teenager, that was definitely not what I was going for. The older generations used this word as a way to describe people being stoned or drunk. This is a great example of how the older generation has a completely different meaning to the word “lit”. It can create a sense of excitement, or it can create a sense of frowned-upon behavior; it depends on the situation and timing.

Kairos for Yearbook Example:

Kairos plays a huge part in these different meanings because it truly depends on the timing of a situation to determine which meaning of the word is being used. Depending on the audience, context, and timing of the circumstance, “lit” could be used as describing a candle that’s burning; a term to describe a stoner; or used to express happy and hype emotions. It can be considered cringey, incorrect, or just completely misunderstood. Our language is confusing; understanding that there are many components that contribute to the meanings of words can make it a little more navigational. With that being said, I believe once you hit a certain age, there are words that you will never quite understand the meaning of if they come from younger generations. Words and their meanings are constantly changing. The older you get, the less “in the know” you are and the less you care about it.

I am sure we all remember the last day of school each year (especially eighth and twelfth grades) where everybody signed everyone’s yearbooks. It is a day that is anticipated and a day that many look forward to each year. My eighth grade yearbook signing was especially special because I went to a private school and had been around the same people since kindergarten. I was overwhelmed with emotions that day, to say the least—mostly excitement. Since “lit” is associated with excitement and connecting with people, it is clear why my emotions would gear me towards using the word “lit”. I was happy for the school year to be over and to start a new chapter in my life going to high school, but I was also sad to leave the people I had been with for my whole school career thus far. By using the word “lit” to sign my friend’s yearbook, I was expressing my excited feelings but also connecting with him in a way that we are both going to the same high school and are going to have a good time together.

Ethos for Yearbook Example:

Though an eighth-grade girl and a random suburban mom may not be the most credible sources, each shows a distinct perspective of the word “lit” which is nonetheless fascinating. It truly shows how different each generation's language is and how twisted certain words get, because with each generation comes new meanings and innovative words. From an eighth grader’s point of view, the word is something that would be considered cool to use. However, in an older person’s mind, it is something that should not be used by younger people because no one wants their kids to be drunk or high. It is crazy to think about how younger people do not want older people to use it, but older people do not want younger people to use it either for two completely distinct reasons. Me, the yearbook signer, and my friend, the owner of the yearbook, were both credible to each other because we both knew the meaning of the word. But my friend’s mom did not see us as credible at first until we told her that there was a new meaning to the word “lit” and to us, it was the only meaning. Through different forms of social media using the word, it slowly became increasingly popular with generation z, especially.

Introduction and Pathos for Travis Scott Example:

As a huge Travis Scott fan, it was easy for me to choose this as one of my examples to represent “lit.” Travis Scott is a famous contemporary rapper known for his “party” type music and dope beats. In all his songs, he incorporates yelling “It’s lit!” as a signature ad-lib. As you can see in this [one minute compilation](#) of Scott singing “It’s lit” in multiple different songs, it can be described as upbeat and gets one excited (Young Redd). Scott sings and yells this with autotune to soundlike a typical rap song. When people regularly listen to his songs, it is easy to sing along to the ad-lib and say it while not listening to the song; it is extremely catchy. Since Scott creates rap music which is normally associated with teenagers and young adults, it

makes sense that the majority of people who use this word are in that age group. He often collaborates with other contemporary artists to be featured in the song or help write a song, which also gives different perspectives on the audience. While he does work with other artists which could lead his work to a larger audience, most of his songs feature other modern rappers, so his targeted audience actually remains the same. It is also easy to assume Scott's music is played at parties as away for people to get amped up. The repetition of this word persuades people to feel hyped up, live his materialistic lifestyle that he raps about in many of his songs, and/or listen to more of his music. This use of the word mainly applies to a limited number of people in a certain age range because Scott knows his main audience and tries to appeal strictly to them.

Ethos for Travis Scott Example:

Since using "It's lit" became so repetitive in his songs, and Travis Scott is a very well-known rapper who many people look up to, I think he subconsciously used his power and fame to create a heightened usage of the word in the younger setting with a completely different meaning than what older generations are used to. I believe Scott is the one who got people saying the word "lit" again with a new repurposed meaning to it. This new meaning carries an underlying logos aspect to it because the original definition of the word "lit" was to describe something that was illuminated with light, such as a light bulb. Bright things, such as a sunny day or a flash from a camera, can be associated with happy and excited emotions, so it makes sense that this new meaning is related to expressing feelings of excitement and amped up emotions. It has the same meaning, in a sense, with a refurbished and modern twist to it. This meaning is exclusive to only a certain age group and creates a sense of diversity in language. Each generation has its own words that are known as important or unique to them; that is what makes our language and culture so unique.

Conclusion:

While writing this paper, I realized how often people use rhetorical devices without even realizing it. Along with that, I noticed how much language changes between the different generations. With this knowledge, we can be more aware of how we speak to certain audiences. Also, we have learned that the new meaning creates a new way to connect people and creates a focus on people rather than a thing, whereas other words such as “rockin’” and “bitchin’” are focused on a thing and have no way to connect people with others. This new meaning of “lit” brings all kinds of different of people together, whether that be an eighth grader with a famous rapper, or anyone else. Along with expressing elated emotions, “lit” is a great way to talk with your friends about a party or a function, sing along with your favorite song, or connect with your elders by educating them on the new meaning.

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