

FROM BOBA TO BORE-UP: SEXUAL METAPHORS AS SLANGUAGE ON TIKTOK IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the use of sexual metaphors in slang generated by Indonesian youth on TikTok, emphasizing the cultural and gendered meanings embedded within linguistic creativity. It is grounded in the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1981) and Kövecses (2006) and informed by a sociolinguistic lens. It analyzes forty-five metaphorical terms derived from thirty-seven viral TikTok accounts. The data reveal four dominant metaphor domains: sexual organs, female body parts, automotive mechanics, and agriculture. Morphological strategies, including blending, reduplication, and acronyms, are employed to encode sexual cues in playful and euphemistic forms. The findings demonstrate a persistent objectification of the female body, frequently depicted as passive and susceptible to consumption, exemplified by concepts such as “boba,” “fields,” and “milk.” Conversely, male sexual agency is portrayed as active and mechanized, as illustrated by terms such as “mechanic” and “bore-up engine.” These metaphorical choices contribute to the perpetuation of heteronormative gender ideologies within the Indonesian youth culture. This article explores the function of sexual language in digital youth spaces, which emphasizes its role as both slang and a discourse surrounding desire, identity, and power. The implications for media literacy and cultural discourse awareness are discussed.

Keywords: Sexuality; slang; metaphor; TikTok; Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

TikTok is a Chinese social media platform that focuses on short videos in a vertical ratio; it is owned by ByteDance, a company based in Beijing. TikTok itself emphasizes the visual nature of the content creators' look. Videos often show both the faces and bodies of creators, regardless of whether the creator is a man or a woman (Khattab, 2020). According to Kaufman (2020), TikTok is flooded with images that highlight attractive, sensual body shapes. These visuals nudge many users and creators to adopt specific stereotypes, or even special slang, about men's and women's sexuality (Khattab, 2020). In turn, this climate can fuel sexual harassment and sexualized talk that seeps into teens' everyday vocabulary, often in the form of metaphor-heavy slang (Mensah & Nkamigbo, 2016).

Teenagers are, by definition, exploring their sexuality. Sexual metaphors allow them to claim a space of their own and craft an identity that feels separate from that of older generations. There is a sharp

generational divide: today's teen code words for sex do not match those with which their parents grew up (Mensah & Nkamigbo, 2016). Batan (2005) frames this as a youthful push-back against adult culture, which is part of how subcultures form and young people grow into themselves. Slang and metaphor share a large amount of DNA: both are group-oriented, informal, and social. However, sexual metaphors stick around longer than many slang terms do; rather than dying out, they are refreshed and spawn new synonyms. Over time, they become conventional, accepted within the social matrix that birthed them (Mensah & Nkamigbo, 2016).

Eble (1996) defines slang as an ever-shifting set of everyday words and phrases that speakers use to build or reinforce social identity or correlate with the latest trends or fashion in wider society. This definition highlights its dynamism, informality, and exclusivity, marking youth subcultures and defining their sense of agency as a whole. Allen (1993) refers to slang as a "popular language" because, while widely used, its vocabulary is more generalized and not linguistically distinct from the standard tongue. This is why slang serves as a rich pipeline of fresh entries for contemporary dictionaries. This paradigm shift signals a growing openness to new words, moving away from historically rational, logical, analogical, or etymology-driven models toward models grounded in current and popular usage (Smith, 2011).

The metaphors that surface in slang show that modern society brings its own cultural lens to its perception of the world. Ottenheimer and Pine (2018) argue that language, to some extent, shapes the influence of terms on thought processes. Naming not only mirrors reality; it actively frames how society sees it, thus shaping culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981). Kövecses (2006) noted that culture is one of the core elements in metaphor, extending beyond linguistics to beliefs, social norms, mindsets, and worldviews. In short, whenever speakers use metaphors, those metaphors correlate with the worldview and culture in which they live.

Research on sexual metaphors in slang has been conducted in a number of studies. Crespo-Fernández's (2015) research on euphemistic and dysphemistic metaphors in expressions of sexuality on internet forums shows how individuals think and express sexual taboos in the form of metaphors to reduce the degree of taboo in sexual expressions, swapping blunt sex talk into coded language to soften taboos. This research also shows how people avoid explicit sex-related conversations by using euphemistic and metaphorical expressions, especially in internet forums. Research conducted by Mensah and Nkamigbo (2016), which examines sexual metaphors in slang language in Nigeria, revealed that Nigerian youth tend to use metaphors to refer to sexuality to increase familiarity, assert power relations that underline masculinity, and conceptualize the concept of youthfulness or youth identity in certain communities. In addition, research from Mensah et al. (2024) on the metaphorical expression of masculinity in some advertisements for male aphrodisiac herbal medicines in Nigeria shows that the metaphorical form in advertisements is used to reinforce the stance and ideology underlying the notion of the sexual power of men. A number of studies on sexual metaphors have been widely explored in the international language community, but the findings of metaphor studies in slang remain relatively rare in Indonesia.

Against this backdrop, previous studies have begun to explore the dynamics of slang and metaphor in Indonesian contexts, yet they remain limited in scope. For instance, Wijana (2019) demonstrates how code-mixing with English contributes to the emergence of new metaphorical expressions in Indonesian slang. However, the study focuses on lexical innovation and does not examine the underlying conceptual mappings or their sociocultural implications. Similarly, Zukhrufin et al. (2023), in their study of children's colloquial language on TikTok, provide valuable insights into youth language practices but pay limited attention to the formation and function of metaphor within such discourse.

These limitations point to a critical gap in understanding how metaphorical slang functions as a discursive resource for constructing and negotiating gendered meanings in digital environments. Addressing this gap, the present study examines sexual metaphors in Indonesian TikTok slang by analyzing their conceptual structures, linguistic forms, and sociocultural implications. It seeks to uncover how such metaphors reflect and reproduce gendered power relations within contemporary youth digital discourse.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Lakoff and Johnson (1981) state that metaphors can play a role beyond that of poetic and rhetorical devices. In other words, they argue that the essence of a metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. This theory has led researchers to discover that metaphors are cognitive devices as well as linguistic ones. In this case, Chamizo Domínguez and Nerlich (2002) argue that conceptual metaphors are cognitive, social, and rhetorical devices realized through inferential mapping between two conceptual domains, from the source domain to the target domain. Therefore, conceptual metaphor theory relates to the cognitive aspects of metaphor analysis.

In metaphor analysis, Lakoff and Turner (1989) distinguish between two levels of analysis: linguistic and conceptual metaphors. These two levels complement each other. Therefore, metaphorical expressions in

discourse are regarded as linguistic reflections of, or requests for, conceptual structures and processes. Metaphorical expressions embedded within language are then regarded as manifestations of the conceptual types inherent in cognitive processes (Ng, 2018). Thus, conceptual metaphors contribute to shaping or reinforcing certain perceptions (Kapranov, 2017; Sullivan, 2017).

Metaphors have been demonstrated to play a significant role in determining how individuals perceive the world and act. Individuals employ metaphors derived from diverse domains of experience to shape their conceptual understanding of social structures (Charteris-Black, 2014; Gibbs, 2017; Semino & Steen, 2008; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). This finding demonstrates the utility of metaphors as cognitive tools employed by individuals across diverse social and cultural contexts to construct meaning by accentuating certain aspects of reality while obscuring others.

While Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides a foundation for understanding how abstract meanings are structured through everyday experiences, it is not always sufficient to explain the ideological implications embedded in the use of metaphor. Thus, this study also draws on insights from Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), an approach influenced by critical discourse analysis to uncover the often implicit and potentially unconscious intentions underlying language use (Charteris-Black, 2004). CMA conceptualizes metaphor analysis as a three-level process: identification, interpretation, and explanation. At the level of identification, the focus lies on recognizing metaphorical expressions and examining the tension between literal source domains and metaphorical target domains. The interpretation stage addresses interpersonal meaning, particularly how metaphors construct social relations, identities, and power dynamics. Finally, the explanation stage situates metaphor use within broader textual and sociocultural contexts, revealing how patterns of metaphor contribute to the reproduction of ideology.

Although metaphor studies provide a framework for understanding how abstract concepts are structured through everyday experience, they do not fully account for the social and ideological dimensions in language use. In this regard, insights from gender and language studies offer a complementary perspective. Research in this field has indicated that language serves as a site for the continuous construction and negotiation of gender identities and power relations. It has been demonstrated that conventional linguistic practices frequently perpetuate asymmetrical gender relations, which encompass the objectification of women and the legitimization of male dominance (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Meyerhoff & Ehrlich, 2019).

From this perspective, metaphorical expressions related to body and sexuality can be understood not merely as creative linguistic forms but as discursive mechanisms that encode and circulate gendered meanings. This phenomenon is salient within digital environments such as TikTok, where youth linguistic practices become prominent, rapidly disseminated, and entrenched within prevailing cultural ideologies. Through this lens, the present study seeks not only to identify and categorize sexual metaphors but also to critically examine how they reinforce sociocultural ideologies, especially those related to gender and power in Indonesian youth discourse.

3. METHODS

This research adopted qualitative research. To identify the relevant data, the researchers observed a number of TikTok accounts with certain criteria: (1) active TikTok accounts with more than 100,000 followers; (2) TikTok content that has reached the For You Page (FYP) so that it has a broad reach; and (3) the account must have ever shared content about sexuality, so it commonly involves slangs containing sexuality. FYP, although it is a personalized version of data collected from user habits, shows that audience uniformity leads to identical interactions. Based on these criteria, the authors compiled a database of 37 accounts. All the data were collected from publicly accessible TikTok accounts without downloading any personal media content or identifying any individual by name. Although the platform was public, user identities were anonymized with pseudonyms, including gender, which we could not determine because the filtered accounts lacked verifiable identities. Not only is it impossible to confirm that an account belongs to the same gender as the person whose face appears in the uploaded content, but it is also possible that a single account is managed by two or more people of different genders. Of all the data collected from these accounts, 45 phrases/clauses containing sexual metaphors in slang were found and massively used by content creators and content viewers.

In addition to content analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three informants to validate the metaphors from TikTok users' perspectives. The informants were selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) late adolescents (aged 18–25); (2) active TikTok users; and (3) individuals who followed or interacted with the selected TikTok accounts used as data sources. This research was conducted in 2025 because TikTok has become one of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesian society, with 108 million active users projected by 2025 (Kemp, 2025). Since its launch in 2018, and boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased overall internet usage in Indonesia, the number of TikTok users in the country has

kept growing (Potkin, 2018). The diverse user base and broad demographics indicate that this diversity creates diversity, making it relevant to conduct research on representation, including representations of the body and sexuality (Blackburn & Hogg, 2024). In this context, it is appropriate to conduct this study on the objectification of the opposite sex as presented through metaphors in the interactions of TikTok users in Indonesia. These interviews aimed to verify the contextual and cultural meanings of the metaphors, ensuring that the researcher's interpretation aligned with the community's perception and use of slang. Informal interviews were conducted with three individuals who voluntarily shared their interpretations of the slang used. Verbal consent was obtained before participation, and no identifiable information was collected.

From the collected content, the researchers compiled data on sexual metaphors in slang, found in hashtags, content, captions, and even in account names. This study applied conceptual metaphor theory by adapting procedures from Lakoff and Johnson (1981) and Kövecses (2006). First, the researchers manually identified and categorized all metaphorical elements based on their linguistic forms. It was followed by tabulating all identified sexual metaphors in slang language. Linguistic analysis in the form of morphological and semantic changes is also carried out in accordance with the rules outlined by Wijana (2019). Second, the data were separated based on the distributions of metaphorical elements, source domains, semantic similarity, and social factors that shape the construction of those metaphorical domains. In addition, microlinguistic analysis, including morphological analysis, is carried out at this stage. Third, the emerging data were analyzed via a descriptive-qualitative approach. Fourth, the data were synthesized and justified before conclusion drawing.

4. RESULTS

This section presents findings from two complementary analytical frameworks: morphological analysis of linguistic forms and conceptual metaphor theory, which is employed to explore creativity in sexual metaphors. From a morphological perspective, the study examines how sexual slang expressions are generated through processes such as blending, clipping, acronyming, and reduplication. These processes enable speakers to create innovative yet indirect ways of expressing taboo meanings. Moreover, the conceptual metaphor theory is employed to analyze how these expressions are structured through mappings between source domains and target domains. It enables abstract concepts, such as sexuality, to be understood in terms of more concrete and culturally familiar experiences. The integration of these approaches has enabled the analysis to not only identify the linguistic forms of slang but also discern the underlying conceptual patterns and sociocultural meanings that shape their usage in TikTok discourse.

4.1 Linguistic form

On the basis of linguistic form, findings on sexual metaphors in slang can be divided into two categories: single words and phrases. Furthermore, the division of these forms can be explored morphologically by classifying morphemes into monomorphemic and polymorphic. A monomorphemic word is defined as a morphological form that has only one syllable (no affixes) and does not undergo a morphological process, whereas a polymorphemic word is a morphological process that occurs due to a decrease in morphemes between free morphemes and bound morphemes, reduplication or repetition of free morphemes, and a decrease in free morphemes with free morphemes (Sudarno, 1990). This form also occurs and varies. Monomorphemic forms are seen, for example, in the words "*pulen*" (plumpy) to refer to "sexy female body," "*tumpah*" (spiled) to refer to "big boobs," "*tesla*" (refer to Tesla logo) to refer to "vagina," etc. These monomorphemic forms are closely related to the source domain, which becomes the domain in the metaphorical forms that arise. Moreover, polymorphic forms also appear in several of the data collected. These forms are categorized by types of morphological change (Cenderamata & Sofyan, 2019; Dawson et al., 2022; Zaim, 2015), which are blending, fusion, clipping, reduplication, acronyming, and affixation.

The data on blending words/phrases reveal several conditions that show morphological changes from a number of words/phrases that appear in slang containing sexual metaphors. Blending is an abbreviated form in form of a combination of syllables or letters and syllables from the existing word sequence (Dawson et al., 2022). Basically, blending itself is the combination of the initial syllable of the first word with the last syllable of the second word. However, in practice, this structure may vary and evolve depending on usage and creativity within the speech community. The analysis below will be presented through examples of such word/phrase usage.

(1) Pemburu **tobrut** bukan pemburu takjil (**Tobrut** hunters are not takjil hunters)

The analysis of the word "*tobrut*" is a morphological form of blending performed by combining the words "*toket*" (boobs) and "*brutal*" by combining the initial syllable "*to*" from *toket*, and "*brut*" from the initial syllable of "*brutal*." The morpheme "**toket**" is derived from the morpheme "*tete*" and is one of the slang that

undergo a unique morphological process, with infixation of -ok and apocrypha, the disappearance of the final sound, so it becomes “**toket**.” The word *tobrut* undergoes a number of affixation processes, such as the emergence of the word “**tobrutpobia**,” which adds the suffix -**pobia** to the end of the word.

(2) *Cewe mana yang ga suka konbrut* (which girl does not like **konbrut**)

The word *konbrut* is a morphological form of blending that combines the words *kontrol* (cock) and *brutal* by combining the initial syllable of the first word “**kon**” and the initial syllable of the second word “**brut**.” In addition to blending, another morphological process in slang is compounding, containing sexual metaphors. Compounding is a morphemic process that combines two basic morphemes into one word, either free or bound, to form a construction that has a different or new lexical identity (Verhaar, 2004).

Furthermore, another morphological process, clipping, is observed in the data. Clipping is an abbreviation in the form of cutting a word by mentioning a part that is considered to represent the word itself (Zaim, 2015). The clipping in this study was found only in the word “*modif*.” The word “*modif*” itself is classified as a form of clipping on the back of the word by leaving only the beginning of the word “*modifikasi*” (modify). This is common because the front part of the word is more often retained, whereas the back part of the word is often clipped (Zaim, 2015).

Reduplication is also observed in this study. Reduplication is a morphemic process that repeats a base form or part of it (Verhaar, 2004). “*Lato-lato*” and “*sekop-sekop*” represent pseudoreduplication (Alisyahbana, 1953; Keraf, 1991; Samsuri, 1980) since the reduplication process occurs at the phonological level with a repetition in the syllables, or syllables as part of the word, which becomes the basic form of this phonological reduplication. Nevertheless, pseudoreduplication is not considered a true form of reduplication by some scholars (Keraf, 1980; Parera, 1988; Ramlan, 1979) because the reduplication cannot be returned to its basic form, structurally or semantically.

Acronyms are a type of morphological process of word formation that uses the initials of each word (Cenderamata & Sofyan, 2019). The acronym formation is found in the word “*crt*,” which leaves the consonant morpheme “*crot*.” The word “*crot*” is an onomatopoeia that appears slang to refer to the imitation of the sound of semen during ejaculation. Although ejaculation does not produce a literal sound, the representational aspect of dramatic creativity characteristic of slang is realized in this case.

4.2 Creativity in sexual metaphors

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1981), metaphors can construct social realities by shaping and organizing experiences in a more coherent way. The domains of sexual metaphor include a wide variety of conceptual structures that provide models of metaphorical forms for understanding language. In the following analysis, the author discusses a number of domains that emerge from the use of sexual metaphors.

4.2.1 Sexual organs as objects

Sexual organs are often reconceptualized metaphorically as many tangible objects. In data (1) below, some examples are presented.

Table 1: Sexual organs as metaphorical objects

1	Sexual metaphors	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
(a)	<i>konbrut</i>	An acronym form of <i>kontrol brutal</i> (brutal cock)	Penis
(b)	<i>lato-lato</i>	Name of a toy	Testicles
(c)	<i>tesla</i>	Expensive car brand	Vagina
(d)	<i>apem tembem</i>	Traditional food in Indonesia	Vagina
(e)	<i>kacang</i>	Peanut	Clitoris

The objectification of sexual organs in Table 1 demonstrates how metaphorical target domains are often linked to elements in the surrounding environment that influence perception. In example (1a), male reproductive organs are described with the word “*konbrut*,” which is an acronym for “*kontrol*” (cock) and “*brutal*.” “*Kontrol*” is a Javanese word that means male genitalia, whereas the word “*brutal*” means cruel, insolent, impolite, rude, and barbaric behavior, according to the official dictionary of the Indonesian language (KBBI). The use of the word “*brutal*” to describe the penis shows that it is large and long, so it becomes visible even through clothing. The man’s penis still stands out and results in impoliteness that causes discomfort and awkwardness to others. Despite this negative implication, the expression creates a sense of pride in the man if he has a “*konbrut*” character. This is also what later became one of the types of men from some types of women. Such traits even influence partner preferences so that the meaning of “*brutal*” in the word “*konbrut*” has shifted to a positive connotation.

In addition, example (1b) shows the metaphor of male testicles with “*lato-lato*,” a traditional toy that trended online in 2024. The use of “*lato-lato*” as a referent of testicles refers to the shape of lato-lato, which stems from the toy’s shape—two mid-sized balls connected by a string, visually resembling the form of male testicles.

In the female sexual organs, there are a number of examples, such as in example (1c), which refers to the vagina as “Tesla.” Tesla is considered a luxury car brand known in Indonesia. One of the iconic things related to Tesla is its logo, which is considered similar to the shape of the vagina. It is evident when women wear very tight pants so that the vagina area forms and resembles the Tesla logo. In addition to being associated with the Tesla logo, the vagina also has another metaphor in slang, “*apem tembem*” in example (1d). “*Apem tembem*” is a compound of “*apem*,” a traditional Javanese food that is round and chewy, and “*tembem*,” which is a nonstandard form of “*tembam*,” which means puffy because it is fat and swollen and is usually embedded when discussing cheeks. However, in this compounding context, the word “*tembem*” is attached to “*apem*” and means “vagina.” It refers to the concept of “as if resembling,” as a plump or full-looking vagina. Therefore, this form is created because the round shape of “*apem*” is associated with the shape of the vagina, and the nature of “*tembem*” becomes an accompanying trait for a vagina that is “thick” with a full and dense shape.

In addition to the vagina, metaphors in the female reproductive organs in the form of the clitoris are also metaphorized. In example (1e), the clitoris is associated with “*kacang*” or “bean,” which is a plant commonly grown in fields and bears pods. This association is based on the similar shapes of the clitoris and beans, which, in this case, resemble the bean seed’s interior.

The use of metaphors to refer to sexual organs is closely tied to the lack of discussion of sexual education and the open introduction of intimate organs. Thus, when individuals express opinions on this matter, it is considered taboo. While conversations about sexuality have become increasingly common in many Western countries (Vancauwenbergh & Franco, 2024). These subjects remain culturally sensitive and are often avoided in Indonesia (Fatimah et al., 2017; Wulandari & Dessty, 2022). Frownfelter (2010) explained that women think of their reproductive organs as unclean or shameful, and they should be covered up and avoided at all times. As a result, any open discussion about sexual or reproductive anatomy tends to be limited, and public discussion of reproductive organs is limited and hidden in metaphors.

4.2.2 Women’s bodies and underwear as objects

Table 2: Women’s bodies and underwear as metaphorical objects

2	Sexual metaphors	Literal meaning	Metaphoric meaning
(a)	<i>pulen</i>	Soft and delicious rice	Sexy woman
(b)	<i>tumpah</i>	Spilt/liquid material that is poured out of place	Big boobs
(c)	<i>tobrut</i>	An acronym for <i>toket</i> (boobs) and <i>brutal</i>	Big boobs
(d)	<i>ceker babat</i>	Food made from chicken feet and offal	Hijabi woman with prominent boobs
(e)	<i>nasi padang</i>	Traditional food from Padang	Big boobs
(f)	<i>toge</i>	Sprouts	Big boobs
(g)	<i>boba</i>	Bubble tea	Boobs
(h)	<i>botol yakult</i>	Yakult drink bottle	Petite and small female
(i)	<i>nasi kfc</i>	KFC rice/rice from the KFC restaurant	Small breast
(j)	<i>paha mcd</i>	Mcd thighs/ mcd restaurant chicken thighs	Thick thighs
(k)	<i>paha LDR</i>	LDR thighs/thighs and <i>Long Distance Relationship</i>	Thigh gap
(l)	<i>armor</i>	Protection	Bra
(m)	<i>plat jambi</i>	Jambi police license plate	Bra

These examples of metaphors for women’s bodies and underwear in Table 2 convey a number of meanings related to food sources. The word “sexy” in example (2a) is realized through the use of a metaphor with the word “*pulen*” (plumpy). The word “*pulen*” is usually used to describe rice with a soft and delicious texture after cooking. The use of the source domain “*pulen*,” which is closely related to rice, to refer to the nature of “sexy,” is inseparable from the culture of Indonesian people, who make rice a staple and are familiar with the terms in rice. The use of the source target of other foods to be attached to the female body shape is also reflected in example (2d), *ceker babat*, which refers to the acronym “*cewek kerudung boba padat*” (hijabi girl with firm boba). In the Indonesian community, *ceker* and *babat* are offal. They have become favorite dishes, so the acronym created is based on the closeness to the Indonesian people. Other traditional foods used as source domains, such as, in example (2e), *nasi padang* (padang rice), also refer to the shape of *nasi padang*, which has a large portion mold compared with rice portions in general, to explain the meaning of big boobs. It depicts a sign that the naming and formation of metaphors are inseparable from the related cultural elements

behind. In example (2f), “*toge*” (sprouts), which stands for “*toket gede*” or big boobs, is another example of the use of acronyms with source domains familiar to speakers of the language.

In addition to local foods and ingredients, foreign foods widely consumed by the public also become the source domain, as in example (2g), “boba” (tapioca pearl), or bubble tea, which resembles a large black pearl. The shape is then associated with women’s breasts because of their similarity in shape. In addition, example (2i), “nasi kfc” (KFC rice), refers to rice at KFC restaurants, which is considered a small portion. Thus, it is associated with “small breasts” because the shape of the rice is similar to a small curve. Meanwhile, in example (2j), “paha mcd” (McD thighs) refers to chicken thighs at McDonald’s restaurants, which are considered larger than those at other chicken restaurants, and is used to refer to “big women’s thighs.” The metaphor in example (2k) uses the word “*paha ldr*” to refer to “spaced female thighs,” which can be slender or ideal in shape. This form borrows the long-distance relationship (LDR) form to describe the target domain, even though it is not a distant relationship. The use of this term also highlights the typical youth terminology, LDR, which is commonly used by young couples to form a new slang metaphor. The form of the sexual metaphor that uses the source domain as its food is the example (2h), “*botol yakult*” (Yakult bottle). This metaphor refers to the shape of the Yakult bottle, which is small and petite compared with other bottles, to describe women with small and petite body sizes.

The concept of using the food-source domain as the target domain for female body shape is rooted in the belief that the human need for sex is as fundamental as the need for food. Food and eating are part of the cultural history and social structure in which youth subcultures are embedded (Mensah & Nkamigbo, 2016). Moreover, the use of the source domain of food also serves as a camouflage, which increases internet users’ acceptance of visual analogies of sexuality with food (Fauzia, 2020) than if the visuals of the limbs were bluntly expressed.

In example (2b), the word “*tumpah*” (spilt) refers to “big boobs.” It refers to women who have enormous breasts. Therefore, because of their large size, the impression obtained is “*susunya tumpah*” (her milk is spilt). The word “milk” not only has the meaning of “drink material” but also has the meaning of “breasts.” Because there is still a connection between “milk” as a liquid and “milk” as breasts, large boobs are associated with “spilt milk” because they are larger in size.

In example (2c), “*tobrut*” is also a metaphor to refer to “big boobs.” Like “*konbrut*” in example (1a), “*tobrut*” is also an acronym for “*toket brutal*” (brutal boobs) and has a similar meaning. The word “brutal” is interpreted as something impolite and inappropriate. It refers to a woman’s intimate part that appears in an enormous shape, so if she wears tight clothes, it will show a boob bulge that is impolite according to the norms in society. However, this form has also shifted in meaning toward positive connotations, as this expression is often used as a standard and a point of pride, especially in the context of attracting the opposite sex.

In addition to metaphors for the female body, metaphors for women’s underwear include example (2l), “armor,” and (2m), “*plat jambi*.” The word “armor” usually refers to body protection in gaming or combat contexts. It has undergone a semantic shift to mean “bra.” The metaphor works as a bra’s role as a breast protector to “armor” because both have a protective function. Like example (2l), example (2m) “*plat jambi*” (a license plate for a vehicle registered in Jambi city) also represents “bra.” It refers to the Jambi Province police license plate number code “BH,” which, in Indonesian, is synonymous with “bra.”

4.2.3 Sex as an automobile

Table 3: Sex as an automobile

3	Sexual metaphors	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
(a)	<i>mekaniknya handal</i>	What a certified mechanic – “the machinist is reliable”	Sexual partner (male)
(b)	<i>gampang ngko iso dimodif-modif</i>	Easy, we can modify it later – “modification”	Have sex
(c)	<i>full servis</i>	Full service	intercourse
(d)	<i>dia minta spek bore up soalnya</i>	He asked for bore up , that’s why	He asked for an increase in body size
(e)	<i>katanya masih std, kok pas dibuka udah diporting</i>	She said she was still stocked , but when she opened it up, it was already ported	She said it was still a virgin , but when I opened it , it was not
(f)	<i>yang coba sekali-kali jadi cewe spek yalili yalala</i>	Babe, please try being a ‘yalili yalala spec girl’ just once	Try to be a girl with a yalili yalala style once
(g)	<i>kilometranya udah tinggi</i>	The kilometers are already high	There has been a high frequency of sexual activity
(h)	<i>ini mah bukan modif tapi bongkar mesin</i>	This isn’t just a modification; this is a full engine teardown	Having sex with higher intensity
(i)	<i>yang penting sering ganti oli bro</i>	The important thing is to change the oil often , bro	Frequent sexual intercourse
(j)	<i>mau modif juga tapi gaada motor</i>	Wanna do some modification too, but don’t have a motorbike	Want to have sex, but have no partner

According to the data in Table 3, terminology related to mechanics and automobiles also serves as a source domain for sexual metaphors in Indonesian slang. According to example (3a), the source domain in the form of “mekanik” (mechanic) is associated with a man who is a woman’s sexual partner. The word “mekanik” in this metaphorical expression is usually attached to a man who is able to satisfy his partner. The man is positioned as the subject, the “mekanik” who can fix his partner (a woman) to make her fuller and sexier. The sexual act performed by this man is referred to as “modif” (from modify) (3b). The word “modif” in its actual meaning refers to “modify” and is usually attached to a noun. However, in this metaphor, the target domain is “the act of transforming a woman’s body to appear sexier and fuller.”

“Modifying” is explained more deeply through a number of findings from vehicle maintenance actions, which are also used as metaphors, such as “bore up” in example (3d). In mechanical terms, “bore up” refers to “increasing the size of the vehicle cylinder,” but in slang it means “increasing the size of a woman’s body.” In addition, example (3e) shows two slang words, “std” and “porting.” In mechanical terms, “std” (which refers to the “standard” or “stock” part) on a motorbike refers to “a stock motorbike, has not been customized.” However, it becomes a metaphor for a “virgin woman,” implying that she is still in her “original” or untouched state. Moreover, “porting” in mechanical terms refers to “the process of smoothing the inlet hole on the motorbike engine.” This is metaphorically interpreted as “having sex” in slang because the “porting” technique also goes through the process of “inserting the tool into the hole,” mirroring “inserting the penis into the vagina.” In addition, example (3h), “unloading the machine,” refers to “a woman who has changed drastically after having sex with her partner.” The meanings of example (3h) and (3b) are slightly different, with the difference that (3h) “*bongkar mesin*” (engine teardown) refers to sexual intercourse with higher intensity than (3b) “*modif*” (modify). Moreover, in (3i), “*ganti oli*” (oil change) refers to “having sex,” shifting from its original meaning of “the process of changing oil.” This shift refers to the process of “*ganti oli*,” which is analogous to the process of “inserting new sperm fluid into the vagina.” However, “*ganti oli*” can also carry a secondary meaning; it can also refer to “mutual introspection between partners to resolve conflicts.”

There are also sexual metaphors more commonly used by women, such as in example (3c) “*full servis*” (full service), which refers to “having sex.” In the original meaning, “*full servis*” is “full service to repair a vehicle,” but this meaning has shifted to “having sex with a partner.” The term “full service” is commonly used by women to offer sex, so the term mostly connotes sex workers, although it is also often used with couples. In addition, in example (3f), “*spek*” (specification) refers to the “female body.” The term “*spek*” is a shortening of “*spesifikasi*” and refers to “the details of something.” However, it has shifted to “female body” and is usually attached to the phrases “*spek yalili yalala*,” “*spek sekop-sekop*,” “*spek tobrut*,” and so on. The example (3j), “*motor*” (motorbike), refers to “woman.” The exposure of example (3a–3i) that refer to men as subjects in the form of “mekanik” (mechanic), “modif” (modify), results in the source domain of “motor” as an object, “woman.” This is also corroborated by the presence of example (3g), “Kilometer,” which refers to a “high frequency of sexual intercourse in women.” The word “kilometer” is not attached to men, but to women in relation to their sexual relationships.

4.2.4 Sex as agriculture

Table 4: Sex as agriculture

Sexual metaphor	Literal meaning
<i>Wanita ibarat ladang untuk bercocok tanam</i>	Women are like fields to grow crops
<i>maka pria datang menjadi petaninya</i>	then men come to be the farmers
<i>ingat ya mas datang wanita</i>	remember, bro, come to woman
<i>masih banyak ladang yang subur kok</i>	there are still many fertile fields

The data in Table 4 shows the metaphor of the social activity of “*bercocok tanam*” (literal: “cultivating crops”) as an intimate relationship. As an agricultural activity, “cultivating crops” is closely related to how sexual acts are performed as if “seeds” are being planted in “fields” or “rice fields.” As in agricultural activities, this sexual metaphor uses the “seed” metaphorically, referring to male sperm planted by the “farmer” or man into the “field” or woman. If the planted “seed” (sperm) grows (develops into a baby), then the “field” (woman) means “fertile” (can give offspring). The use of agricultural activity metaphors in slang, where agrarian life remains a significant part of people’s daily practices and community professions.

5. DISCUSSIONS

There are two main roles in conceptualizing metaphor theory: the source domain, the conceptual domain depicted as a metaphorical element, and the target domain, the conceptual domain that the source

domain aims to understand/refer to, which provides metaphorical imagery or structure. To understand a conceptual metaphor is to understand the mapping that occurs between the source and target domains. A similar notion of mapping between source and target domains is also used to describe analogical reasoning and inference, the conceptual idea we aim to understand (Kövecses, 2006). On the basis of the data collected, the majority of slang used as sexual metaphors is derived from the sociocultural environment borrowed from urban culture and youth culture, as well as the culture held by the community in general.

The results above show that women are often the targets who act as objects in the variety of sexually charged slang vocabularies that appear. This is shown in many variations of metaphors in slang vocabulary related to the shape of the female body, ranging from body parts such as thighs, breasts, and body shape to sexual organs such as the vagina and clitoris. In some sexual metaphor communication among certain communities, such as the Nigerian and British English, metaphors often target women's body movements and features (Mensah & Nkamigbo, 2016; Pederson, 2007), which show the use of target domains in the form of body shapes of women's body movements as target domains. In Indonesian culture, the female body has long been idealized and regulated. The male gaze is a common topic of discussion in feminist studies, and traditional Indonesian narratives are no exception; various studies on Indonesian folktales and Javanese legends show that women are often portrayed as inferior, passive, or objectified (Fariha & Chiron, 2017). In *Kitab Kakawin Arjunawiwaha*, a literary text from the reign of Prabu Airlangga in 1030 AD, beauty standards have been compiled in the depiction of goddesses (Sunardi, 1993). Similar evidence is found in *Serat Candraning Wanita*, such as the term that women *dedeg pideksa* or a well-proportioned body, *pawakan gilig* or a slim body, and *kencet ramping* or slender calves (Fachrani, 2015). Moreover, in Javanese metaphorical expressions, there are also expressions containing metaphors of female beauty (Andajani et al., 2023), which further confirms the existence of certain sexual metaphors regarding women as objects in Indonesian community culture. The objectification of women by men is not merely a past event; even today, where people are becoming even more connected due to the internet, it is easy to notice that objectification persists, though it may take on different forms (Poerwandari et al., 2021).

In addition, sexual metaphors in slang, which refer to sexual activities, often associate women as objects and men as subjects, consistently depicting women as passive recipients. This can be seen in the food-eating relation, which uses "food" as the source domain and women. Similarly, sexual metaphors in slang with sexual activities on the theme of agriculture also position women as passive parties (fields) and men as active (seed planters). The same situation is also observed in sexual metaphors in slang with automotive-themed sexual activities. In this situation, women are also positioned as passive (motorbike), and men are positioned as active (mechanic). Through this established set of ontological correspondences (Emanatian, 1996; Lakoff & Johnson, 1981), we can characterize the mapping between agricultural and automotive knowledge and their relationship to sex and sexual activity.

Importantly, the metaphors analyzed in this study reinforce gendered power relations. Women are frequently positioned as objects of consumption (e.g., food metaphors, such as "milk," "boba," "chicken breast") or as passive recipients (e.g., fields to be planted, bottles to be filled). In contrast, men are associated with agency and control, reflected through metaphors such as "mechanic," "bore-up kit," and "engine," suggesting technical mastery and penetrative power. These binary representations echo broader patriarchal norms in Indonesian society, where masculine dominance and feminine passivity are normalized through everyday language practices.

Some metaphors, particularly those using food or toys, soften the sexual content through humor or cuteness, allowing adolescents to engage with taboo topics without explicit confrontation. This euphemistic creativity reveals a form of negotiation between expression and restraint, visibility and discretion, and desire and decorum. It illustrates how language serves not only as a reflection of cultural values but also as a site for navigating them.

This discussion underscores that metaphorical slang is not merely playful or subcultural but ideologically charged. In the context of TikTok, a platform saturated with visuality, trend culture, and algorithmic amplification, these linguistic patterns gain power as they are repeatedly reproduced, reshared, and normalized. Thus, understanding these metaphors is essential for interpreting how Indonesian youth construct, perform, and circulate sexuality through digital discourse. In addition to its theoretical contributions to metaphor studies and youth language research, this study provides empirical insights into the circulation and normalization of metaphorical sexual discourse on digital platforms such as TikTok. The findings underscore the significance of perceiving youth language not as deviant or problematic but as a domain of signification wherein cultural norms, taboos, and identities are contested and negotiated. In this regard, the study also contributes to ongoing discussions in media literacy by suggesting greater awareness among educators, parents, and policymakers of the evolving linguistic strategies young people use online.

6. CONCLUSIONS

TikTok has become a popular platform for interaction and socialization among youth, as evidenced by the variety of slang used to mark young people's identities. In practice, the slang vocabulary that emerges uses a form of metaphor to reveal terms that contain sexuality toward the opposite sex. These metaphors are formed through processes such as blending, compounding, clipping, reduplication, acronyming, and affixation, all of which enrich linguistic creativity in slang, particularly by obscuring or softening the real meaning of words. The formation indicates that slang is rich in linguistic processes, especially to disguise the true meaning of the form used.

At the semantic and discursive level, the study reveals a consistent pattern in which metaphorical mappings reproduce gendered asymmetries. Women are predominantly conceptualized as passive objects, akin to food, fields, or mechanical objects. Conversely, men are often conceptualized as active agents, such as consumers, farmers, or mechanics. This asymmetrical depiction is indicative of and reinforces broad heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies embedded within Indonesian sociocultural contexts. Consequently, the study makes a significant contribution to the fields of sociolinguistics and discourse studies by demonstrating that slang, frequently regarded as merely playful or subcultural, is, in fact, ideologically loaded and plays a substantial role in the construction and normalization of gendered power relations in digital spaces.

The use of metaphors indicates the existence of creative capacity within a particular speech community. These metaphorical expressions allow sexual content to circulate widely among young audiences without immediate recognition by adults. It suggests that educators and parents understand the evolving linguistic strategies adolescents use. While the intention of this study is not to pathologize youth slang, it intends to promote awareness of how language mediates sexual knowledge and identity in digital spaces. In doing so, this study contributes not only to sociolinguistic theory and metaphor analysis but also to broader cultural and educational dialogues about sexuality, agency, and digital exposure in contemporary youth culture.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations of this approach. First, this study relies primarily on qualitative analysis of a relatively limited dataset (45 expressions from 37 accounts), which may not completely capture the variability of sexual slang across different regions, social groups, or digital platforms in Indonesia. Secondly, the limited number of informants imposes constraints on the generalizability of the interpretive findings. Thirdly, the study employs a predominantly qualitative approach, which does not permit systematic measurement of frequency, distribution, or audience reception of these metaphors. Future research could address these limitations by integrating quantitative methods with qualitative approaches. For instance, corpus-based analysis, large-scale surveys, or computational linguistic techniques could be used to examine patterns of usage, frequency, and diffusion across digital networks. A mixed-methods design would enable researchers to triangulate findings and provide a more robust account of how sexual metaphors function within broader discourse ecosystems. Furthermore, additional studies could employ comparative perspectives, including cross-regional, cross-platform, or cross-cultural analyses, to enhance our comprehension of how local cultural contexts influence metaphorical constructions of sexuality. Extending the present research by investigating audience reception, gendered interpretation, and the role of algorithmic amplification on platforms such as TikTok would also offer an interesting position in linguistics studies.

DECLARATION

1. Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The authors acknowledge the use of DeepL as an assistive tool to improve the grammar, clarity, and academic tone of the manuscript. Additionally, the authors acknowledge the use of ChatGPT in producing some elements of the Graphical Abstract. All intellectual content, scientific interpretations, and conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

3. Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Mendeley Data at DOI:10.17632/jzwxy5w5yy.1

4. Ethics statement

This study has been submitted and declared ethically feasible through a decision from the Research Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga, with approval number 02/117/05/26.

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6. Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT)

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