

Fleek Meaning Origin and Linguistic Evolution

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Fleek and the Origins of a New Slang Expression

Fleek was not a word until 2003 when it was added to the urban dictionary for the first time. Then it meant “smooth, nice or sweet.” It was not even popular among the youth or the old. Even after adding another meaning, “awesome” (in 2009, the word did not help the word to become famous, but the internet did help the word in 2014.

It popularized the word among the youth. Technology, especially the internet and social media, plays a role in spreading the word, like other messages or words online (Heigl; Kutner). In the world of social media and the internet, words and messages are misinterpreted and wrongly used. The meaning of a word or a phrase changes as it is overly used on the internet with a different meaning. Sometimes, the overuse of the word makes it extinct from society altogether as its various meanings attached to it make it complex and confusing for people. In addition, it becomes difficult to control the change in meaning as the internet is accessible to most people in the US, and the true meaning cannot be taught to all the people in society (Scocca). Moreover, the “true” meaning becomes a difficult subject to bring up. Internet users use words and phrases according to their liking, caring less about the exact use of the word if it is related to the real meaning remotely. It was the same phenomenon in the word fleek, and the phrase fleek became famous on the internet. Now it covers most of the things from fleek eyebrows to fleek dance or style. It also means “amazing, perfect or most suited, highly stylized and perfected.” The earlier meanings of the words “smooth, awesome, and nice,” as well as the popularized meaning of the words “on point, perfect, and amazing,” all have died at the abuse or overuse of the word, making it complex for the users.

The words fleek and on fleek became famous online, and the meaning was changed. The meaning has changed and distorted, but the popularity of the word has increased greatly in the past four years. The word became famous in 2014 when Peaches Monroe used it in her Vine but used it as “eyebrows on fleek,” making it a fashion term. Hence, it got the attention of popular culture, and social media became famous (Smith). It was so famous that the American Dialect Society nominated it as the word of the year in 2015.

Changing Meanings and the Linguistic Spread of

On Fleek

Today, the word fleek or on fleek has four meanings. First is the original meaning that Urban Dictionary wrote in 2003, the “smooth, nice and sweet.” This meaning of the word fleek is less popular, but one can argue that Monroe used it to point out her “smooth” eyebrows. She might have used those terms, but the original meaning since that usage has changed (Sonnad). The original meaning of the word nice and sweet has lost its way into the fashion industry, and more exaggerated terms such as perfect and amazing have taken over the nice or smooth. I have never heard someone use it as nice or smooth, and many of the older people, such as my uncle, do not even understand the word smooth as he cannot find the word in the dictionaries that he has had for more than 20 years.

The second meaning of the word fleek is to the point or at the right moment. Everyone has used on fleek instead of on point since its initiation. Even celebrities and popular brands used it, but the meaning of using it was not the same as on point. Everything became on fleek after 2014 and well into 2016. The on-fleek is seen on Twitter or Facebook and is used by many users daily. The word on point was taken over fully. It was a cool and trendy term for on po, and due to that, it was used regularly (Smith). For instance, on Twitter, someone wrote, “Everything is on Fleek.” Even though it was a famous new word among the youth, some of the adults used it. For instance, o my grandmother told me that she loves responses that are on fleek.”

The third and one of the most famously used meanings of the word is perfect or amazing, commonly used for fashion (Oxford Dictionary). Celebrities were also the reason that its popularity paced up among the youth and internet users. Kim Kardashian, Ariana Grande, and Nicki Minaj, alongside many brands such as Taco Bell and IHOP, used the phrase. Moreover, many YouTubers made their own versions of the rap using the phrase “on Fleek.” It became part of the vocabulary and the conversation immediately after its first use (Dachille). Popular culture is used to present their hairstyle, eyebrows, makeup, or anything that goes with fashion. For instance, “Every Brow on Fleek” by Kim Kardashian. Although the term fleek is used frequently on several occasions, it is not popular with the older generations. For example, my aunt scolded me and told me to use proper English language when she heard me complimenting my sister that “her style was on fleek” (Dachille). Therefore, even though it is understandable and widely used, the older generations do not like it as it takes away the sophistication of the language.

Brand Adoption, Youth Culture, and the Commercial Life of Slang

It was a promotional term for many brands as it was popular with the youth. It was printed on teaching, and it was used to promote pancakes and tacos. It was easy to sell, as it was famous. And the meaning attached to it added value to the material that the company intended to sell. Therefore, it got the attention of the big companies and celebrities. The original meaning of the word was related

to eyebrows or ha, but people and companies started using it out of context (Sonnad). They use it to promote their products, presenting them as tasty or delicious or presentable, in the case of pancakes and tacos.

However, the fame was short-lived, as the word cannot be seen as widely used today. The overuse of the word made it confusing for the people. As initially, everything was on fleek, the term and its use became confusing. Some people did not focus on the original meaning, due to which it started losing its sensibility, and a post on Twitter by Zayn Malik spoke for many in 2015: "What does on Fleek mean? Like seriously." The widely used context of the word had started confusing people. It had started raising questions about the real meaning and how to use it. Then, people started omitting it from using as it became overused and untrendy (Smith; Sontag). The overuse and out-of-context use of the word On Fleek killed the trend, and it became nonexistent online after two years of constant focus.

To conclude, a word can become viral online today on the internet as most people use some form of social media, but the overuse modifies the meaning. It sometimes affects the word negatively, as it did in the case of On Fleek by popularizing it, attaching various meanings to it, and, in the end, making it senseless. The word became famous as it was used to describe perfect, amazing, delicious, nice, sweet, and awesome, but it lost its momentum soon as it was overused and misused by companies and people. Moreover, the older generation did not recognize the worth of its popularity and trend as they preferred their old, sophisticated languages.

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