



## THE IMPACT OF SLANG FROM POP SONGS IN MODERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE: WITH REFERENCE TO EMINEM'S SONG STAN

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### Abstract

This paper aims to identify the impact of slang from pop songs on the modern English language. Slang developed out of convenience or influence from songs, movies, literature, etc. and is defined as words or phrases that are of an informal register. Similarly, the word "Stan" becomes globally accepted and enters the lexicon of popular dictionaries such as the Oxford English Dictionary after the song of the same name by an American rapper, Eminem, becomes a major success worldwide. Stan basically refers to an overly enthusiastic fan, especially towards a celebrity. This paper aims to find out the meaning and origin of "stan," along with its usage and impact in everyday communication.

**Keywords:** stan, obsession, dictionary, language, Eminem, lexicon.

### INTRODUCTION

What happens when a person becomes incredibly obsessed with another person? What if this obsession becomes so extreme that it begins to project negativity, or worse, toxicity? The word *stan* originally implied cases like this. While the real meaning of the term has become relaxed in popular usage, the Cambridge dictionary says *stan* is "someone who greatly admires a singer or other famous person, to an extent that is unusual". Dictionary.com defines *stan* as "an overly enthusiastic fan, especially of a celebrity," as does Merriam-Webster. An example of the word in a sentence may include "Messi has a powerful stan following", "I will never stop stanning Justin Bieber", etc. The word originated from a song released in 2000, titled 'Stan', which was a massive hit by an American rapper, Eminem, and where 'Stan', short for Stanley, is the name of a lead character in the

song. The song basically portrays Stan as an obsessive fan who, because of his aggressive intentions of getting attention from Eminem, tragically fell to his doom in the end. While some believe the word to be a combination of the words 'stalker' and 'fan', it has never been proven otherwise. This paper aims to identify the impact of slang words from pop songs, "Stan" in particular, in modern English usage.

### ORIGIN AND DEFINITION OF SLANG

Although the origin of the term "slang" is unknown, some have proposed a Scandinavian origin where it shares a root word with that of *sling* which means "to throw" ("Origin and Meaning of Slang"). Also, it may be noted that there is no clear-cut definition of the term "slang". It may be suggested that people have come up with new ideas to define the experiences that have emerged as a

result of time and modernity. According to Bethany K. Dumas and Jonathan Lighter, an expression is "true slang" if it replaces "a well-known conventional synonym," to avoid the discomfort caused by the conventional synonym or if it "implies the user's special familiarity" with a "less responsible class of people who have such special familiarity and use the term" (Dumas and Lighter 14–15).

#### REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Paul Dickinson mentions in *Slang: The Dictionary of Americanisms* (2010) that the general test for determining whether a word is slang or not is to see whether it is accepted in an academic or legal setting or is accepted in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Michael Adams states in *Slang: The People's Poetry* (2012) that people use slang in order to achieve social dynamics with the people they are speaking to and that slang helps to identify and construct social groups and identities.

In a 2016 online article by the BBC titled "10 words from pop music culture that made it into the dictionary", words such as 'YOLO', 'bling', 'twerk', 'diss', 'bootylicious', etc. were highlighted. Although it did not include *stan*, the article gave a wide perspective on how mainstream songs have impacted language use in our evolving culture.

Then in 2017, the BBC covered the word in an article titled "Stan, an Eminem song from 2000, is now in the Oxford English Dictionary", stating that *stan* can be used both as a noun and a verb. It comes to light that music enthusiasts have picked up slang words from the songs they listen to in their everyday vocabularies, wherein Eminem's 'Stan' can be seen as impactful as such.

Similarly, a 2018 article on the Oxford English Dictionary website covered the same topic with the headline, "Eminem-inspired 'stan' included in the Oxford English Dictionary".

*Rolling Stone*, a popular music journal, covered the topic in an online article in 2019 mentioning how Eminem-inspired use of 'stan' has been added to Merriam-Webster's dictionary.

Such coverage of the word and its backdrop in reputed journals may imply its 'undeniable' impact on popular culture.

#### STAN STANS EMINEM

The plot of the story in the song revolves around an individual named Stanley, or, in short, Stan. In the beginning scene of the music video, a basement fully layered with posters of Eminem on its walls is shown. Stan enters. He wears a typical Eminem outfit and starts to scribble a letter for Eminem. In his first letter, Stan tells Eminem that he had sent several letters to him in the previous months and presumed there must be a problem at the post office as he did not get a reply. He then tells him about his pregnant girlfriend and how he is going to name her child 'Bonnie' if she is a girl. He further tells him that he is his "biggest fan" and ends the letter with an RSVP (Eminem, 2:42). In the second part of the song, Stan writes another letter to Eminem, saying that he is annoyed with him because he "does not answer his fans" (3:27). He talks about how he and his little brother waited for Eminem in the "blistering cold for four hours" and that he could have given his little brother an autograph instead of a blunt "No" (3:37-39). Stan writes how his girlfriend is jealous because he "talks about Eminem for twenty-four hours a day" (4:18-21). He further writes how he knows about Eminem more than anyone else, saying people "don't know what it was like for people like us growin' up" (4:24-26). He ends the letter with an RSVP, saying they "should be together" and that Eminem must call him (4:32). In the third part of the rap verse, Stan angrily addresses Eminem as "Dear Mister, I'm Too Good To Call Or Write My Fans" and now records his voice on a tape recorder instead of a letter (4:58-5:00). He says that it is his last message to him and asks if he does not deserve a reply. He drives a car "doing 90 on a freeway" and drinks "a fifth of vodka" (5:14-18). Stan says that Eminem could have "rescued him from drowning", but now "it is too late" (5:29-31). He tells him that he ripped all of his pictures off the wall, had "loved him," and that they "could have been together" (5:40-41). He then curses him (Stan's girlfriend's muffled voice can be heard in the background). Stan reveals to Eminem that he tied up his girlfriend in the car's trunk and plans to commit

suicide. The car then drives off the freeway and plunges into a river with both of them still inside.

In the final part of the song, Eminem, unaware of Stan's death, writes a reply letter to him. Eminem says he meant to write sooner but has been busy with his music and tours lately. He mentions Stan's pregnant girlfriend and is flattered by Stan's attempt to name his daughter-to-be as 'Bonnie'. Eminem then says he has an autograph ready for his little brother and apologizes that he must have missed them at the show and that it was not intentional. Eminem further says that Stan has an issue and needs counseling. He tells Stan that he and his girlfriend need each other and tells him to treat her better. And also that Eminem wishes Stan to read his letter before he hurts himself; that he is glad "he inspired him," but questions why he is "so mad?" (7:36-38); and that he should try to understand that he wants him "as a fan", but not him doing "crazy things" because of it (7:39-41). In the ending part of the final verse, Eminem brings up an incident he heard on the news that happened a couple of weeks ago. That some drunk guy (Stan) drove his car over a bridge with his pregnant girlfriend in the trunk of the car. The police found a tape in the car, and when Eminem recalls who it was addressed to, he finds out it is Stan's, concluding the song that the letter never reaches Stan and it is too late.

#### INFLUENCE OF SLANG IN POPULAR CULTURE

Social networks such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. play a huge role in the development of slang. For instance, Twitter's 280-character limit for "tweets" may give rise to the formation of new concise words other than inappropriate or lengthy conventional synonyms. Other forms of media, which include music, movies, books, etc., also play a major role in the creation of slang. For example, a rapper or a singer may use slang in the lyrics of their songs to express their feelings or characteristics. Since the song(s) in turn can have drastic mental effects, such as an element of attachment, on its listeners, there is a likelihood that the listeners will contract the slang and use it in their everyday communication.

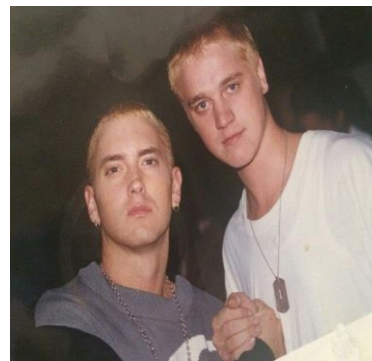


Figure: Eminem (left) and Stan (Right)

In the case of "Stan", a real-life Stan is very much a possibility. Fans hero-worship their music idols and would dare to do the uncommon to get their idol's attention. Furthermore, the level of success of a particular song does influence its impact on the general public. For instance, *stan* entered the lexicon only after 'Stan' became a global hit and received worldwide acclaim. Also, it may seem that people reflect on the Stan character in terms of how he idolized Eminem to the point he went to the extreme for mere attention. It became 'appropriately convenient' for people to label an overly zealous fan as a Stan character, or simply 'stan'. This is how the use of the word 'stan' came into being. Now let's see an example use of the word from some extracts:

*Stan* as a noun: (plural *stans*); first known use in 2000

1. "Albus Dumbledore's sexual orientation was discussed by J.K. Rowling in a 2007 interview, and she affirmed that the Hogwarts headmaster is, in fact, gay. For years, the revelation has served as fodder for Potter *stans*." - Christopher Rosa.
2. "Even the most die-hard Westeros *stans* seemed unenthusiastic about the drama Game of Thrones, which returns after a year off for a condensed season." - Alan Sepinwall.

*Stan* as a verb: (*stanned, stanning, stans*); first known use in 2008

1. "I *stanned* pretty hard for Alan Jackson as a teen; I remember begging my mom for tickets to his concert, and even from our nosebleed seats, Jackson's voice was stunning." - Abel Vanlallawm

2. "The screaming white girl has historically been the face of pop fandom. Nonetheless, the increase in queer men "stanning" for pop divas demonstrates the expanding influence of fan perspectives that deviate from the straight, white norm." - Michael Vanlalrem

Also, there are notable accounts where the use of *stan* occurred without the user knowing its etymology, implying its widespread usage whether or not coming from an Eminem fan. Actress Kathryn Newton admitted not knowing the song "Stan," although she was absolutely familiar with the concept when discussed in an interview with actress Evangeline Lilly in March 2023.

### CONCLUSION

The conventional synonym or idea to convey the meaning of "stan" as mentioned here may include "an overly enthusiastic fan", "superfan", "megafan", etc. It may be said that using the word "stan" in place of these conventional synonyms seems mildly appropriate and convenient. The said word is short, concise, and directly conveys the idea without causing confusion. Also, "stan" carries along an emotional attachment to the character of Stan in the song "Stan". That listeners and fans of the song will opt to use the said word or slang in place of the others as it represents familiarity, identity, and recognition within the user and a responsible class of people. There is also the finding that large groups of people on a global scale have used the word "stan" in their common vocabulary, with or without knowing its origin. Finally, it may be said that the word "Stan" entered the lexicon after the song became a major hit worldwide. At the time of this writing, the song has amassed more than 600 million views on YouTube and a similar number on other platforms. As pointed out above, this slang born out of the song has been used in everyday communication, especially that of new generations, and its use has been approved in legal settings. It can be rightfully said that people have used the slang in their daily vocabulary whether they have heard the song or not, implying its massive impact.

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