

The Meaning and Function of Slang

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"Slang is the poetry of everyday life and it vividly expresses people's feelings about life, and about the things they encounter" (Hayakawa, 1941)

Abstract

As we all know everyday English mostly consists of non-standard or informal features of the language, especially slang and idiom which are popularly adopted in United Kingdom, in the United States and other English speaking countries. The rapid development of human society has a great influence on the most important tool of the communication - language. Slang seems to be one of the most important language formations having a great influence on the development of language.

Slang will always come up in the language learning process. Its popularity can be gauged by the rush of journalists, politicians and purveyors of popular culture to embrace the latest word or phrase to spice up a newspaper headline, stump speech, advertisement or television script. They are realized by a specific group of people whose members are connected with some particular link, such as territory, age, subculture, and mainly occur in the spoken form of the language. Youth is the most powerful stimulus for the creation and distribution of slang. They use slang as their main language in their "neighbour hoods", and tend to forget how to communicate correctly with the rest of the society when needed.

Our study researches slang and aspires to reach a definition of what slang is, who uses it, how it is used and what it is used for. We've illustrated some situations where slang can appear. We've included lots of examples. We talk about the function of slang as well. It is determined that the function of slang is to establish group relations and identity, to separate one group of people from another, to rebel against standard language through the use of terms that are not defined in standard language, to lead a conversation towards informality, to suggest 'insider-knowledge' with the people listeners and to show the speaker's attitude.

Keywords: meaning, function, slung

The aim of our paper is to increase the study about slang, its exact meaning, and function. We think that slang is a very actual theme and it should be investigated more carefully, because slang is changing rapidly. Slang is the most exciting part of lexicography. It has always been difficult to locate, to explain and to grasp it as a unitary phenomenon. Slang is a controversial topic nowadays, and the debate on its definitions, classification and linguistic relevance is still heated. It is obvious that even existing researches are not enough in the sphere of slang investigation. Therefore, additional researches should be carried out and at the same time, it should be seriously studied by linguists and other social scientists as a revealing index to the culture that produces and uses it. We do agree with the idea that we cannot ignore slang, as much as we cannot ignore how we perceive slang. Linguist Michael Adams explains that "When we hear a word or sentence pattern, it undergoes scrutiny, whether we're conscious of it or not: we judge its acceptability according to a certain set of standards; the standards vary according to the vocabulary against which the newer item is measured." [1] Slang is unavoidable, no matter what language one is speaking. Slang will always come up in the language learning process.

The question of why slang develops within a language has been hotly debated. Most agree that the question is still unanswered, or perhaps it has many answers. There are different attitudes about slang among people. Some people think that slang does not interrupt standard language. Slang just adds another expression of it. In fact, the words which people often use do not change. Some people think slang helps them to communicate with other people easily and more closely.

It's a well-known fact, that English is an international language. Therefore, there is no denying that acquiring good command in English is beneficial to one's career and self-development. Language has an important function in society's life. "Language itself is a system of arbitrary vocal symbol used by a social group for cooperation, communication and identification", [2] as said by Djoko Kentjono. The rapid development of human society has a great influence on the most important tool of the communication - language. The modern way of living goes faster and new trends are also reflected in the development of language in a form of various new words and expressions as well as the improvement and facilitation of grammar structure. Comparison of those two linguistic areas shows that vocabulary grows so rapidly that the communicative function of language claims more novel and concise expressions in the language terminology in order to keep pace with modern trends in human

life. Slang seems to be one of the most important language formations having a great influence on the development of language. Everyday English mostly consists of non-standard of informal features of the language, especially slang and idiom. Informal sentence is another uniqueness of everyday English. There is non-standard language which has been known as slang language. Slang language has very informal expression which is more common in spoken language. Slang is a language that is vivid, humorous and witty.

A living language such as English is a dynamic flow of spoken and written terms, eternally evolving. Term “slang” reflects the dynamics of the language and therefore is very obscure and ambiguous. Slang is spread so much that now it can be easily found practically in all kinds of contemporary literary works, sources such as newspapers, magazines, comic books, novels and works of non-fiction. Other secondary sources of slang are TV and radio programmes, films and song lyrics. In fact, some films invent slang words and expressions which are then transferred into ‘the real world’. So slang is a variety of words that is used widely in every language, especially in English. When one watches English movie, listens to English song or reads English magazine, one is supposed to see a lot of “slang” in them. The usage of slang is often a problem to both native and non-native people. That is because slang is used by a specific group of people, so some confusion and misuse often occur. Before using slang, one is supposed to know the function and the meaning of it; otherwise it may cause mistaken communication, especially among non-native speakers. It is not hard to notice that people frequently use slang expressions in their everyday speeches, conversations, and visual signs as well.

Slang can be found very often in the conversations of the teenagers and young children. Young people are the most creative. They always want a refresher language. They create their own language structure that is different from the existing structure of language. They can create a new vocabulary and renew the words. It must be pointed out that every slang item has its own reasons for popularity and currency.

Non-standard language pattern, slang which is lack of accurate grammatical structure is considered to be a part of informal language. Informal language [or colloquial language] is the language of private conversation, of personal letters, etc. It is the first form of language that a native speaking child becomes familiar with. It keeps the language from getting stale. Because it is generally easier to understand than formal English, it is often used nowadays in public communication of a popular kind, for example, advertisements and popular newspapers mainly employ colloquial or informal style [Leech and Svartik 3]. It is obviously

regarded that slang, a special informal vocabulary usage, is a part of the culture which people in every class of the society admittedly employ.

Most of us think that we recognize slang when we hear it or see it, but exactly how slang is defined and which terms should or should not be listed under that heading continue to be the subject of debate. The characteristics distinguishing slang from other forms of vocabulary are fundamentally social. Different kinds of slang are used in everyday conversation; however they are not considered formal speech. Using slang does not mean you are uneducated, but it is very informal language. An educated person might use slang sometimes but would never use it in a job interview or other more formal situations. An uneducated/lesser-educated person might not be able to stop from using it in every situation. As for Coleman “Slang’s not necessarily new, or linguistically unusual, or associated with uneducated people, or necessarily vulgar. It’s not just colloquial language taken to an extreme. It doesn’t include dialect or jargon, though local and professional slang do occur. It doesn’t include swearing, though some swearing is slang. Neither is it restricted to the spoken language to the extent that it once was”.

The definition of slang continues to prove problematic. The description of the form and function of slang has been left largely to lexicographers. In addition, most linguists have not given adequate thought and attention to slang. Many take interest or pleasure in slang as a curious and lively part of language; however, they do not take slang seriously enough as a significant component of ordinary language use or as a field of study. Thus, to this end, slang is merely an object which may convey curiosity and novelty, or background information about the social status of the user, but it does not necessarily affect its function in communication. There are many discussions about the accurate definition of “slang” and how it is used. People seem not to be able to distinguish slang from other sorts of words. Sometimes slang is recognized wrongly as idioms or proverbs and it is also mistranslated. In this article we do offer the diverse definitions, meanings, and description of slang in order to help the readers comprehend and be able to use slang correctly.

A concise definition of the term 'slang' is: a dynamic variety of language that is used to show solidarity and claim in-group membership, and as suggested by Gibbs (1994). Slang is also one of the most important 'mechanisms' or devices for showing social awareness. This variety of language often occurs around 'taboo' subjects such as sex, drugs, alcohol, homosexuality, etc. [4]

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Compass Dictionary [2007-10], "slang is very informal words and expressions that are more common in spoken language, especially used by a particular group of people". The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang states: "slang is a colorful, alternative vocabulary. It bristles with humor, virtue, prejudice, informality".

Compton's Encyclopedia [1994] mentions that slang is very significant as it are the most common constituent of a language's vocabulary after standard and informal words. It is considered as the use of wordplay. There are many approaches to create new terms of slang: changing the definitions of daily used words, halving or shortening some syllables to remain merely a syllable, making abbreviations and acronyms, combining words in one's own way and coining new words. A number of slang is euphemized to soften the genuine meaning of words, such as "Hawk" is used as slang to replace "Warmonger". Some slang expressions occur due to technical terms. Whilst the definition of the expressions is not much different from its origin, the sense of metaphor or figure of speech is also emphasized. Frequently, slang originates in society's subgroups. It is known as an insider language –specialized words used in a particular subgroup [i.e. college students, African-Americans, soldiers, finance professionals]. This language implies association and understanding that a group of people share together. However, a large number of slang has been generalized to the public.

The Columbia Encyclopedia notes that slang is often "well developed in the speaking vocabularies of cultured, sophisticated, linguistically rich languages." Whereas slang was once considered as the lowest form of communication, many now consider slang to be an intelligent and insightful variation to the blandness of the standard language. Gerald Parshall, in a 1994 article for U.S. News & World Report, describes this as "proletarian poetry." The Oxford English Dictionary points out that George Eliot's character in Middlemarch, written in 1871, says that "Correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays." For some, it is enough that Shakespeare often used slang.

"A variety of speech characterized by newly coined and rapidly changed vocabulary, used by the young or by social and professional groups for 'in group' communication and thus tending to prevent understand by the rest of speech community" [5]

Slang as a significant part of our speech is an important element of culture as well. Emmitt and Pollock [6] describe culture as the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools which characterize a given group of people in a given period of time. Language is a part of all this.

As we see slang today isn't what it was before the age of mass communications, the consumerist society and the Internet. "Slang was once considered a sign of poor breeding or

poor taste,” Coleman writes, “but now it indicates that the speaker is fun-loving, youthful, and in touch with the latest trends. Although some adults try to discourage teenagers from using slang, plenty of others want to understand and adopt it.” This can lead to foolishness and self-parody - an adult using teen slang often merely underscores how old and out of touch he or she is - but it also is incontrovertible proof that slang is here to stay, not as the enemy of Standard English but as its partner. [7] Slang is now socially acceptable because, when used with skill and discrimination, it adds a new and exciting dimension to language. What most of us do not realize is how much slang we use in our daily conversation. We simply consider it a part of our normal accepted language.

Slang is expressed spontaneously and is not bound by a lot of grammatical norms. Slang is said to be short-lived. This, of course, is not true for all slang words. Some were created a very long time ago and are still defined as slang. For example **Booze** for alcoholic drink which has been around since the seventeenth century. Many slang words are replaced, as speakers get bored of them. It must be added that some slang words are essential because there are no words in the standard language expressing exactly the same meaning: words such as **Geek, Nerd, Soap opera, freak-out, barn-storm, rubberneck**, and the noun **creep** have no standard equivalents in the English language.

Slang is a key to a certain language speaking world. As we have already mentioned earlier, slang that differs significantly from the standard language in both vocabulary and grammatical structure is used not only in everyday conversation but it has also penetrated into popular media. Knowing slang is necessary in order to fully understand newspaper articles and TV programs. One reason for studying slang is that language and culture cannot be separated from one another. There have always been arguments regarding the use of slang in teaching. We can come to the conclusion that slang as an integral part of culture cannot be ignored in teaching a second language. The more we learn slang the more we get familiar with a given culture.

In conclusion we would like to say that slang studies deserve a more serious place in the agenda. Slang seems to be one of the most important language formations having a great influence on the development of language. Slang is regarded as a result of the rapid growth of the new words that is happening as a creative way of expression by people to make more simplified words easy to be uttered. Due to rapid development of language, the occurrence of slang words is more frequent even in the field of literary language. Slang expressions penetrate into public speeches, scientific language and break up the strict limits between

literary and non-literary language. The spreading of slang also goes fast, especially among young people because the influence of media. The role of slang in the language highlights how language changes over time.

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