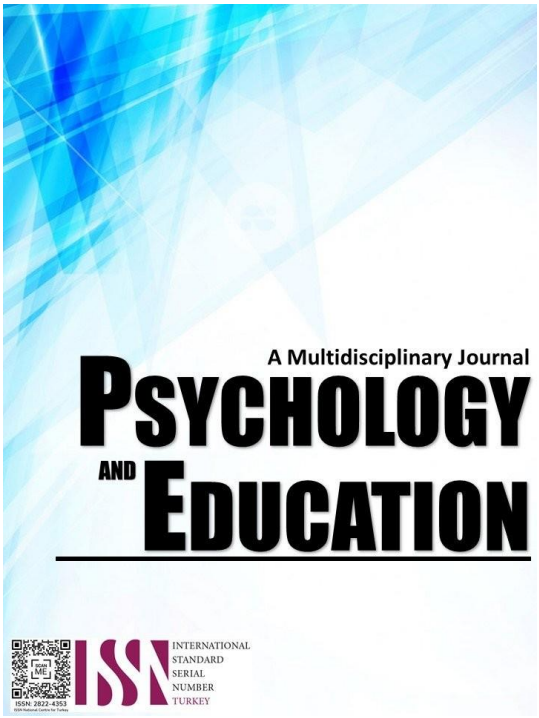
SLANGUAGE PRACTICE: EXAMINING ITS IMPLICATIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING



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Research Article

Slanguage Practice: Examining its Implications in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Language constantly evolves, and slang plays a crucial role in shaping students' communication patterns. This study examines the impact of slanguage on junior high school students in a private secondary school in Tacurong City, focusing on its influence on social interactions, identity formation, and academic communication. Using a qualitative multiple case study design, the research explores how students integrate slanguage into their daily discourse inside and outside the classroom. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected Grades 7 to 9 students and key informants such as canteen staff and hallway observers, ensuring a diverse perspective on slanguage practices. The findings revealed that dominant slang terms, often influenced by social media, shape peer interactions and contribute to students' sense of belonging. Furthermore, the study highlights the students' ability to code-switch between slang and formal language in academic settings, demonstrating their linguistic adaptability. While slanguage fosters social bonding, it can also present challenges in maintaining focus during formal educational activities. Additionally, the research identifies distinctions between spoken and written communication, emphasizing that students consciously limit slang usage in academic writing while freely incorporating it into everyday conversations. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary language practices among Filipino youth, offering implications for educators and policymakers. The study suggests that integrating elements of slanguage into English Language Teaching (ELT) may enhance student engagement while maintaining academic rigor. Future research may explore the long-term effects of slanguage on literacy skills, formal writing, and social identity development.

Keywords: *Slanguage, student communication, code-switching, academic language, social identity*

Introduction

Language is a dynamic and evolving entity, continuously shaped by cultural, social, and technological influences. One of the most prominent linguistic phenomena among contemporary youth is slang, or "slanguage," a blend of informal expressions and localized vocabulary that reflects their identity, social belonging, and communication preferences (Androutsopoulos, 2021). This study explores the role of slanguage in a private secondary school in Tacurong City, analyzing its impact on student interactions, identity formation, and academic language use.

Slang is deeply embedded in social structures and peer dynamics, serving as a linguistic marker that distinguishes groups and fosters inclusivity (Eckert, 2000). With the rise of social media, new slang terms rapidly emerge, influencing student discourse and reshaping communication patterns in both informal and formal settings (Murphy & Lee, 2019).

Within educational contexts, slanguage is often perceived as either a barrier or an asset in English language acquisition. Some researchers argue that it hinders linguistic proficiency and formal writing skills (Santos, 2018), while others highlight its role in enhancing engagement and cultural relevance in the classroom (Gonzalez & Almario, 2022).

This study employed a multiple-case study design to investigate slanguage use among junior high school students from Grades 7 to 9. It comprehensively analyzed how slang is utilized in daily conversations by conducting semi-structured interviews with students and key informants such as canteen staff and hallway observers.

The findings can contribute to the ongoing discourse on language variation, supporting the integration of contemporary linguistic trends in English Language Teaching (Wei, 2022).

Research Questions

This study investigated how students in a private secondary school utilize slanguage. It answered the following sub-questions:

1. What are the dominant slanguage terms and expressions used among JHS students?
2. What factors influence students to use slanguage in their interactions?
3. How do the functions of slanguage differ inside and outside the classroom, including aspects of identity, social interaction, speaking, and writing?
4. What are the implications of slanguage practices for students' academic performance and social relationships?

Literature Review

The study of slanguage is deeply rooted in linguistic, sociolinguistic, and educational research. This section explores existing literature on youth language practices, code-switching, and the influence of informal language on formal education.

Youth Language and Identity Formation

Language is a primary marker of identity, especially among adolescents. Research suggests that youth develop linguistic styles to express individuality and social belonging (Eckert, 2000). As a subset of youth language, slanguage is influenced by cultural trends, digital interactions, and peer-group dynamics (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The emergence of new slang reflects the evolving nature of communication within youth communities.

Code-switching and Linguistic Adaptability

Code-switching, or alternating between languages or language varieties in conversation, is a well-documented phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual societies (Ayeomoni, 2006). Depending on social contexts, Filipino students often code-switch between English, Filipino, and slanguage. Research highlights that while code-switching can facilitate communication, excessive reliance on informal registers may hinder the mastery of formal language structures (Schneider, 2007).

Role of Digital Media in Slanguage Proliferation

Digital communication platforms, including social media, online forums, and messaging applications, contribute significantly to the rapid spread of slanguage (Androutsopoulos, 2021). The accessibility of global media exposes students to diverse linguistic influences, resulting in the continuous evolution of the youth language. Studies indicate that digital exposure accelerates the adoption of informal expressions but may also impact students' ability to differentiate between casual and academic writing styles (Wei, 2022).

Implications of Slanguage in English Language Learning

The increasing use of slanguage in student discourse raises questions about its effects on academic performance and language proficiency. Some researchers argue that incorporating informal linguistic elements into ELT can enhance student engagement and comprehension (Gonzalez & Almario, 2022). However, others caution that excessive use of slanguage may lead to difficulties in adhering to grammatical norms and academic writing conventions. Studies on linguistic competence emphasize the need for structured instruction that balances informal and formal language exposure (Schneider, 2007).

Need for Pedagogical Adaptation

Educators are crucial in guiding students on appropriate language use across different contexts. Research suggests that integrating discussions on slanguage within the curriculum can help students become more conscious of linguistic appropriateness (Wei, 2022). Strategies such as contrastive analysis, where students compare informal and formal language structures, have improved language awareness and proficiency (Ayeomoni, 2006). Additionally, fostering a language-inclusive classroom environment enables students to navigate multiple registers effectively while maintaining academic integrity.

Research Gaps and Study Contribution

While extensive research exists on slang and code-switching, few studies specifically examine the functions of slanguage inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, limited empirical data explore how slanguage impacts academic performance and social interactions among Filipino junior high school students. This study aims to bridge these gaps by analyzing slanguage practices, identifying key influences, and providing insights for ELT strategies that accommodate linguistic diversity while reinforcing formal language skills.

The next section details the methodology employed in this study, including data collection techniques and analytical frameworks used to examine slanguage practices among students.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a multiple-case study to explore slanguage use among junior high school students. According to Yin (2014), a case study is suitable for investigating complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts. By focusing on multiple cases across different grade levels, this research aims to capture the diversity of slanguage usage and its implications in social and academic settings.

The study utilized semi-structured interviews and participant observations to collect data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how slanguage is employed among students.

Respondents

The participants were junior high school students from Grades 7 to 9 enrolled in a private secondary school in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines. Purposive sampling was used to select three students from each grade level to ensure a diverse representation of linguistic practices (Creswell, 2013). Key informants, such as canteen staff and utility personnel, were also included to provide additional insights into slanguage use in non-classroom settings. This selection criterion aligns with Maxwell's (1996) emphasis on strategic participant selection.

Instrument

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary research instrument, allowing participants to freely discuss their experiences with slanguage while ensuring consistency across interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A validated interview guide was developed to explore the meanings, functions, and influences of slanguage among students. Field observations and audio recordings were also utilized to capture real-time language interactions, ensuring data accuracy and contextual richness (Taherdoost, 2016).

Procedure

The data collection process began with obtaining informed consent from participants and their guardians. After securing approval from the school administration, individual interviews were conducted in a designated, non-disruptive environment within the school premises. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed for thematic analysis (Smith & Brown, 2020). To enhance data validity, a pilot study was conducted with a separate group of students not included in the main study (Jones, 2019). Member checking was also employed, allowing participants to review their transcribed responses to ensure accuracy (Johnson, 2019).

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis following the guidelines of Brauna and Clarke (2021). This method involved transcribing interview data, coding significant phrases, and identifying recurring themes related to slanguage practices. The thematic analysis was also employed in local studies in the Philippines (Bugnos et al., 2022; Tacogue et al., 2022; Felongco et al., 2022; Bingco et al., 2022; Gasan et al., 2023; Sanda et al., 2023). Thematic clustering was then performed to organize findings into broader categories, such as peer influence, social identity, and code-switching. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher engaged in continuous reflection and triangulation by cross-referencing interview responses with observational data (Cope, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participant rights and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their guardians before data collection. Anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms in all transcripts and reports (Smith, 2020). Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. Furthermore, all collected data, including audio recordings and transcripts, were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher, following best practices in research ethics (Merriam, 2009). The study also adhered to the ethical standards outlined by the Department of Education (DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019), ensuring that the research was conducted with integrity and respect for student welfare.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's findings, focusing on the patterns of slanguage use among junior high school students. The results highlight the dominant slang expressions, factors influencing their usage, functions in different contexts, and implications for academic performance and social relationships.

Dominant Slanguage Terms and Expressions

Findings indicate that junior high school students frequently use slanguage terms, many of which evolve through social media, peer interactions, and popular culture (Wei, 2022). Expressions such as "lowkey," "bet," and "flex" are commonly used to convey emotions, opinions, or social status. These terms demonstrate the dynamic nature of youth language and highlight the influence of digital platforms on linguistic development (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Factors Influencing Slanguage Use

Slanguage usage is primarily shaped by peer influence, social identity, and digital engagement (Eckert, 2000). Students adopt slanguage as a means of belonging to specific social groups and to reinforce camaraderie. Additionally, the accessibility of online content, including memes and viral trends, contributes to the continuous evolution of slanguage (Schneider, 2007). Educators noted that students tend to use slanguage more frequently in informal settings and among friends, while maintaining a more formal tone in structured academic environments (Gonzalez & Almario, 2022).

Functions of Slanguage Inside and Outside the Classroom

Inside the classroom, slanguage is an informal communication tool that enhances peer interaction and engagement (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). However, excessive reliance on slanguage may lead to difficulties in formal writing and oral presentation (Schneider, 2007). Outside the classroom, slanguage strengthens social bonds and facilitates self-expression. Students use slanguage to establish identity, demonstrate group belonging, and navigate social interactions in digital and face-to-face settings (Wei, 2022).

Implications for Academic Performance and Social Relationships

While slanguage fosters inclusivity and creativity, its overuse in academic contexts can hinder formal language development (Ayeomoni, 2006). Teachers observed that students who frequently use slanguage in writing struggle with grammar, coherence, and academic tone (Schneider, 2007). Conversely, slanguage enhances peer relationships by allowing students to communicate in ways

that feel authentic and relatable (Eckert, 2000). The balance between informal and formal language use remains crucial to language learning and social integration (Gonzalez & Almario, 2022).

Slang language practices are deeply embedded in students' social interactions and evolve rapidly due to peer influence and social media trends. The study explored the use of slang among Grade 7 to 9 students and how it affects their communication, identity, and interaction within the school environment.

This qualitative research employed a multiple-case study approach to examine the slanguage practices of Grade 7 to 9 students. This design provided a deep exploration into how students use slang terms, how slang influences communication in academic settings, and the varied functions of slang inside and outside the classroom. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, capturing detailed insights into students' experiences and perspectives. Using thematic analysis as the primary analytical method, key patterns and themes emerged across cases, illuminating the social dynamics of slang among students.

The analytical process began with coding, wherein forty (40) formulated meanings were identified from the interview data. These meanings were organized into twenty-four (24) initial themes and later synthesized into eighteen (18) clustered themes to reflect the most salient patterns in students' language practices. These synthesized themes reveal how slang influences social interactions, identity formation, peer dynamics, and communication strategies within formal and informal school settings.

Firstly, concerning dominant slang terms used by students, six (6) relevant themes were identified: (1) Dominance and evolution of slang in the school environment; (2) Social media as a catalyst for slang; (3) Peer influence on slang acquisition; (4) Adaptation of slang based on local culture; (5) Slang as a dynamic, evolving language form, and (6) Slang's role in social hierarchies. Together, these themes capture how specific slang terms gain prominence, are shaped by digital culture, and are reinforced by peer influences within REII. Social media platforms introduce new slang, which students adapt to fit their social and cultural context, ultimately embedding these terms within their daily interactions.

Secondly, regarding slang's influence on communication in academic settings, six (6) themes emerged: (1) Code-switching between slang and formal language; (2) Engagement through relatability; (3) Slang's role in informal learning spaces; (4) Boundaries between academic and social language; (5) Slang as a distraction in learning; and (6) Peer collaboration through slang. These themes reflect the challenges and benefits students experience in balancing social language with academic communication. While slang fosters peer connection and relatability, clear boundaries are necessary to maintain focus and respect in formal educational contexts.

Finally, in exploring the functions of slang inside and outside the classroom, six (6) additional themes were identified: (1) Identity expression through slang inside and outside the classroom; (2) social interaction and group bonding through slang; (3) flexibility of speaking style inside and outside the classroom; (4) slang in written vs. spoken communication; (5) Slang as a tool for humor and relatability outside the classroom; and (6) slang as a social language tool that differs by context. These themes showcase students' strategic use of slang based on context and purpose, allowing them to express identity, build social bonds, and navigate various social interactions inside and outside academic settings.

Collectively, the eighteen (18) relevant themes provide a comprehensive view of students' experiences with slang, revealing its impact on their communication practices, identity, and social dynamics in a private school environment. This study highlights slang as both a social tool and a flexible linguistic resource, allowing students to navigate diverse interactions and foster community within the school setting.

Conclusions

The widespread use of slanguage among junior high school students is linked to language learning and social interactions. While slanguage plays a vital role in self-expression and group identity, its influence on academic communication presents challenges that educators must address. Students' ability to navigate multiple linguistic registers highlights the need for structured language instruction that incorporates awareness of both informal and formal language use.

While slanguage enhances peer interaction and digital literacy, it may also limit students' proficiency in formal English. One advantage of this study is that it provides valuable insights into students' linguistic behavior, helping educators develop strategies to balance informal and academic language use. However, a key limitation is that the study was conducted in a specific school context, which may not fully represent broader linguistic trends. Future studies could explore how slanguage affects long-term language acquisition and whether similar patterns exist in educational settings.

The study's implications focus on enhancing English language teaching by integrating slanguage awareness into the curriculum. Educators can leverage these insights to refine instructional methods that encourage students to develop linguistic flexibility while upholding formal writing and speaking standards. Additionally, understanding the role of digital media in language evolution can assist schools in designing relevant programs that foster media literacy and effective communication skills. By incorporating slanguage awareness into teaching practices, educators can create a more inclusive and adaptive learning environment where students recognize the importance of context-appropriate language use. Furthermore, promoting media literacy programs will empower students to critically evaluate the influence of digital language trends, enhancing their ability to transition seamlessly between informal and

academic communication.

Encouraging students to develop proficiency in code-switching is essential for ensuring their adaptability in various social and academic settings. Schools may implement structured activities that allow students to explore language registers through comparative analysis, strengthening their command of both informal and formal communication. Future research may investigate the longitudinal impact of slanguage use on academic success and explore pedagogical strategies that enhance students' ability to effectively navigate evolving linguistic landscapes. These findings provide a foundation for ongoing discourse on how educators and policymakers can bridge the gap between informal and academic language use, ensuring that students possess the necessary skills for future linguistic competence.

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