

Language Diversion: Student's Use of Slang as Everyday Language

Lovna Akter

lovna@hamdarduniversity.edu.bd
Hamdard University Bangladesh

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine how university students feel about the use of slang. Even though slangs almost, always have negative connotations, it can be argued that they are not always used to offend people. Slangs are also used to express all kinds of emotions ranging from joy to grief, happiness to depression, pleasure to frustration. Mixed method was followed and a total number of hundred students from two private universities were selected as samples using the convenience sampling technique. The statistics demonstrated that the use of slang has become indispensable. On a conclusive note, the analysis of the data suggests, despite all the negative connotations, students use slangs inevitably as everyday language.

Keywords: Slang; language; student; expression

Introduction

Despite slangs being such an integral part of our daily language usage, the subject of slangs is unconventional, hence makes individuals uncomfortable due to the negative connotations associated with it. If the use of language is analyzed on a daily basis, it will be evident that slangs are a part of everyday language. As a result, such use of language can be categorized as 'slanguage', which can be defined as speech characterized by excessive use of slang. The act of using slang is commonly shared among all languages of the world. Even though, it may have its negative connotations, it is a vital part of our language.

Even though slangs almost, always have negative connotations, they are not always used to offend people. Slangs are also used to express all kinds of emotions ranging from joy to grief, happiness to depression, pleasure to frustration. By nature, slangs are informal words and expressions and yet are used. This is because of one's sociolinguistic competence. People are conscious of the words they choose as they are aware of the kind of impression they want to attain. Slangs are informal as they are often used with people who share a close relationship with. At the same time, they are also characterized as informal because the use of slang can certainly offend people. On a conclusive note, the analysis of the data suggests, despite all the negative connotations, regarding the use of slangs, the students recognize that slangs are a vital part of language.

Objective

The objective of this study is to find out student's perception about the use of slang as part of everyday language. Even though slangs are widely used in everyday language, people avoid talking about it as they are uncomfortable, due to the negative connotations associated with it. This research suggests that language, especially in regard to slangs, is constantly evolving in culture. This is because; new terms are constantly being added to the language as the world is progressing. It is evident that, majority of the students are aware of the fact that slangs are widely used in everyday language. Essentially, the students believe that, slangs can also be used to express positive feelings hence it is heavily used in daily language regardless of one's age or gender.

Research Question

The research has addressed two major questions:

1. What does student think of the use of slang in everyday language?
2. How slang should be considered as a part of language?

Background of the Study

The question of why the use of slang emerged in the usage of language has been extensively debated. Regardless of these debates, we must keep in mind that there is still lots of scope to explain the existence of slang in languages today by analyzing how and why slangs exist today. Regardless of what brought up the phenomenon of issuing slangs, one thing is for sure: Slangs are here to stay; and its longevity demands attention and explication. (Fox, n.d.).

Cambridge Dictionary describes slang as ‘very informal language that is usually spoken rather than written, used especially by particular group of people’. Slang is a kind of informal language that is applied to a particular group of people or social surrounding. In every language there has some slang words or phrases, regularly used and evolving around the language to make communication smoother. Slangs are the main reason for the development of prescriptive language, in an attempt to slow down the rate of change in both spoken and written language. During the middle ages, writers such as Chaucer, William Caxton, and William of Malmesbury represented the regional differences in pronunciations and dialects. The different dialects and the different pronunciations represented the first meaning for the term “slang.” However, our present-day meaning for slang did not begin forming until the 16th or 17th century. By the end of the 16th century, this new style of speaking was considered to be a language “without reason or order” The only reason the use of slangs is still prevailing today is because, its existence in language is present from as long as language came into existence, and that people do not truly comprehend its integral role in language as we communicate and express ourselves.

Every living thing changes so does language. According to Language Research (2015), a popular blog, numerous slang words or phrases are added in language by the course of time, English is also not exceptional in this regard. Addition of slang in language is considered as the circle of linguistic life. Popularly used words like ‘duckface’, ‘lol’ have been included in the oxford dictionary. Abbreviations such as ‘OMG’, ‘lol’ are now being widely used in everyday language especially by the young generation.

Lastly, slang is the tongue of mass people. People ranging from highly educated officials to uneducated daily laborers use slang. Its necessity in language is indispensable like basic needs. Slang enriches language and help smooth communication at places. Erray (n.d.) states that slang words and phrases often, with time, becomes more and more popular. Eventually, it becomes the mainstream way of saying something.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research paper is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods which is known as mixed method. Mixed methods research is a research design where researchers collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to answer the research question. Data have been collected through a questionnaire survey and structured interview.

Population, Instrument and Sample

Private university students in Bangladesh are the population of this research. From all the existing private universities, two were chosen for data collection: North South University (NSU) and Hamdard University Bangladesh (HUB) because, the researcher has easy access to these universities, as an ex-student and as a teacher, respectively. The study used two instruments to collect data: questionnaire and interview.

The research is based on primary data and for this, a survey was conducted on eighty students and an interview was taken on twenty students. The rationale of using two instruments for data collection is to meet triangulation. To get a range of useful data, convenience sampling was used in survey which helped to answer the research question. There were nine close ended questions in the questionnaire.

The research followed convenience sampling in face to face interview for data collection, which is one type of non-probability sampling. Six pre-decided questions were asked in the interview. To carry out the research, the researcher interviewed twenty students.

All the participants were the students of the Department of English at NSU and HUB studying in undergraduate and graduate level. The participants who took part in the survey and interview were not personally known to the researcher.

Data Analyzing Process

Collected qualitative underdone data were analyzed statistically. The charts were made using Microsoft Excel and descriptive statistical analysis was done for analyzing the data. The qualitative data have been descriptively analyzed based on the answers provided by the participants' interviews.

Limitations of the Study

This research has some limitations. The study was conducted only on one hundred students of two private universities. Although, there are about one hundred and three private universities in Bangladesh with about four lacks students, it was not possible to contact with the rest of the students because of time constraints and accessibility. Beside, non-probability convenience sampling was used instead of probability random sampling. Moreover, for qualitative data, only twenty students were interviewed. As students were not interested, it was not possible to take interviews of more students.

Data Analysis and Results

Analysis of Participants' Questionnaire

As the purpose of the research was to find out what the students thought of the usage of slangs, it was essential that the sample included students who have been a part of student community. In total, 80 people filled out the survey and the answers have been presented as percentages throughout this report. Even though, one can argue that 80 people is too small of a number to represent all students, it does not have a huge impact on findings given the nature of the topic. Since, the research is dealing with language; it is very likely that the gathered data includes a variation in people's usage and thoughts regarding the usage of slangs.

As mentioned earlier, despite slangs being such an integral part of our daily language usage, the subject of slangs is unconventional, hence makes individuals uncomfortable due to the negative connotations associated with it. Slang is a part of everyday language however people do not consciously think of the subject in concern.

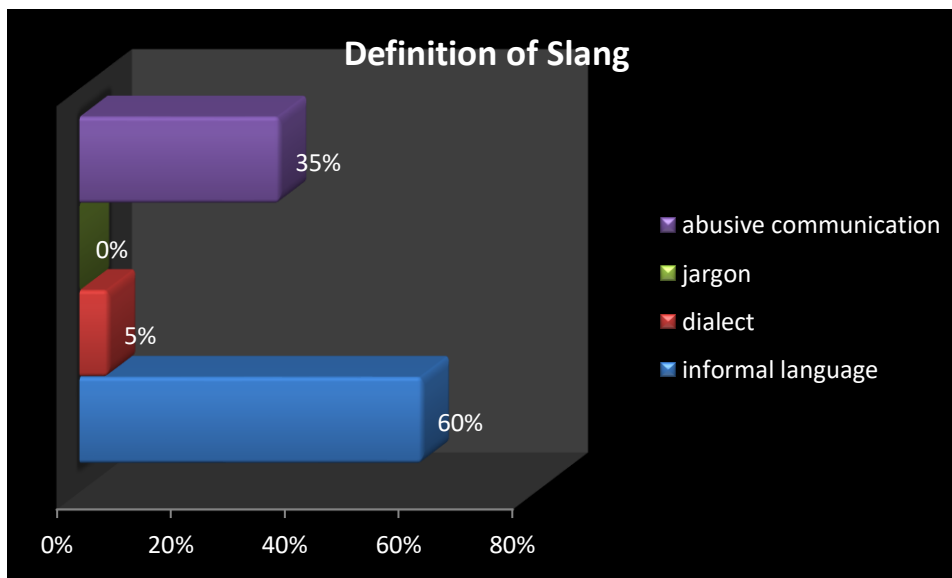


Figure 1

The term 'slang' can mean differently to different people; and since the aim was to find what the students think of the usage of slangs, participants were directly asked (please refer to figure 1). Majority of the students 35% thought 'best described the definition of slang' as 'informal language'. This demonstrates that majority of students do not possess abundant negative connotations associated with slang because, they understand that it is a part of language which is used in informal context and is not always used to offend people. A big portion of the sample defined the term 'slang' as 'abusive communication' establishing that there are a many students who associates the term 'slang' negatively and is offended by its negative connotation to large extent. Only 5%, which was just 5 persons among the 80 people, who defined the term 'slang' and a 'dialect' signifying, how many people perceive certain groups of people to have a different dialect simply because of their usage of slangs. None of the respondents defined the term slang as 'jargon', which is defined as meaningless talk.

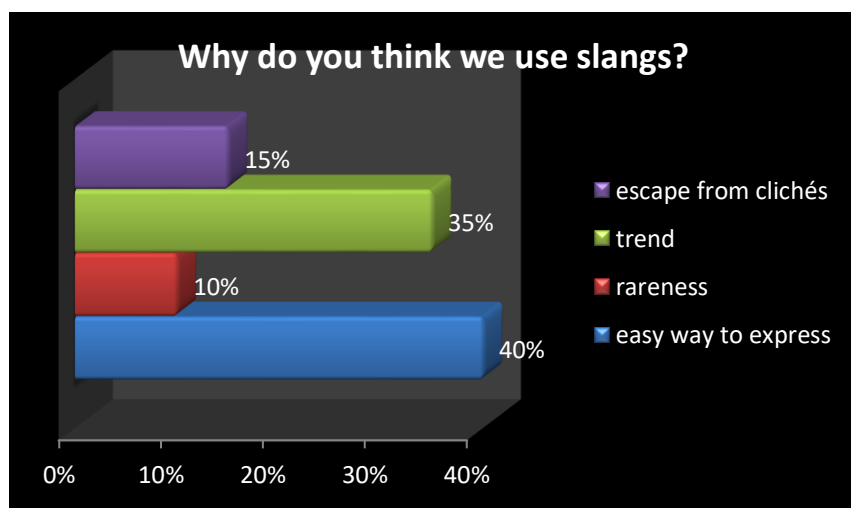


Figure 2

When the respondents were asked, 'Why do you think we use slangs?' 40% of the students claimed, 'it is an easy way to express yourself' (Please refer to the figure 2). This demonstrates that the majority of respondents understand that slangs are used in informal situations where people use it simply because it is an easy way to express oneself, because slangs are not only used to mean things negatively. Often people use slangs even when people are expressing feelings associated with happiness or fondness. 35% of the respondents think people use slang because 'it is just a trend'. The fact that, a large percentage of students feel that the use of slangs is a trend, demonstrates how common the practice is. Additionally, it is also evident that slangs are not only use to bring a negative effect, but is also used to fit in with the trend. However, only 10% of the people think people use slang to stand out (rareness) among other people. 15% of the people say people use slangs to escape from clichés demonstrating that only a small number of people feel that slangs are used for standing out in a crowd because it is ultimately unconventional.

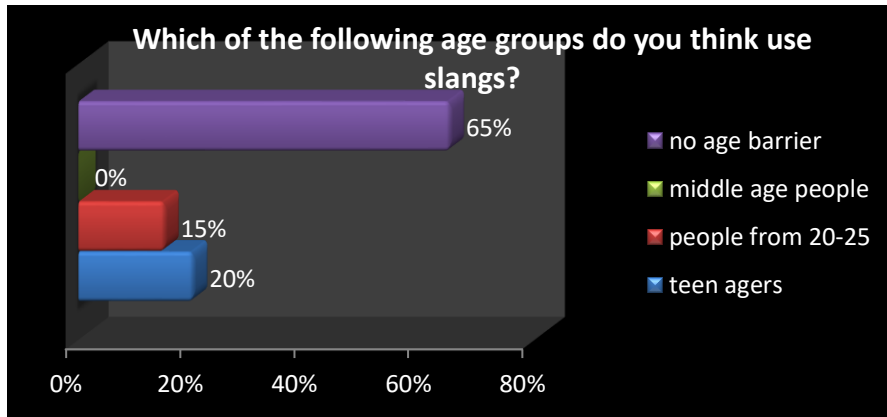


Figure 3

Since the use of slangs is such a big part of daily language it is natural to wonder who (specifically which age group) uses slang (please refer to figure 3). From the data gathered from the questionnaires, it is evident that the majority of students (65%) think ‘there is no such age barrier’ in regard to the usage of slang. Because, slangs are used for various purposes, it is evident why a large percentage of people think this. Also, the use of informal language has increase due to the scope provided by the internet, as discussed earlier. 20% of the respondents think that teenagers use slangs because they are young and are more likely to use informal language. Also as previous data suggests, people use slangs because it is a ‘trend’. Teenagers are more likely to use slangs because it is in that age group that people have the most desire to fit it. Only 15% of the people think that people aged 20-25 because they are young adults. This demonstrates that a small percentage of people think that only young adult use slangs.

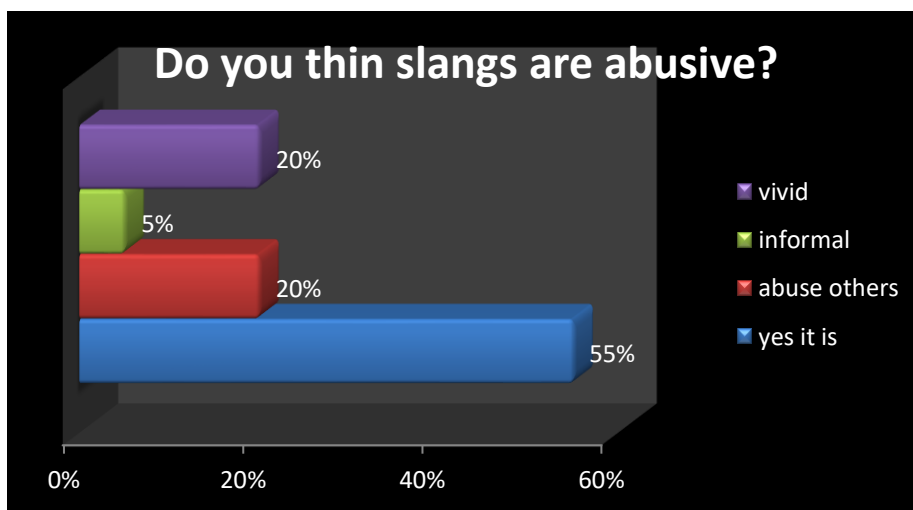


Figure 4

As evident from secondary data, slangs have a negative connotation, because many people think slangs are abusive. Figure 4 suggests that majority, 55% of the people think that slangs are abusive. A sharp contrast can be seen here, as only 5% of the people think slangs are used by people to offend people.

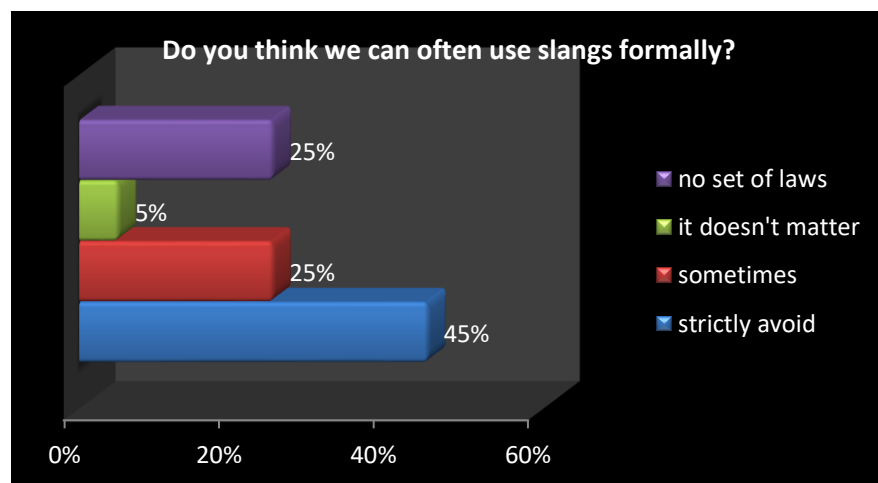


Figure 5

The quantitative research already provides evidence to the fact that slang is not only used to bring upon a negative impact. When students were asked whether ‘we can use slangs formally’ we get further evidence, that this is true. Figure 5 demonstrates that, a total of 50% of students have this view in general, because, 25% believe that slangs can be used formally ‘if the circumstance is friendly’. Another 25% says that ‘nowadays it does not really matter’ because the use of slangs is accepted because people understand that it can be used to express various positive feelings and attitudes. On the other hand, 45% of the respondents think that ‘we should strictly avoid using slangs for formal use’. This demonstrates that a large percent of people in today’s society feel the necessity to separate slangs from formals contexts due to its negative connotations. Finally, only 5% of the respondents think that it does not matter whether or not we use slang in formal contexts.

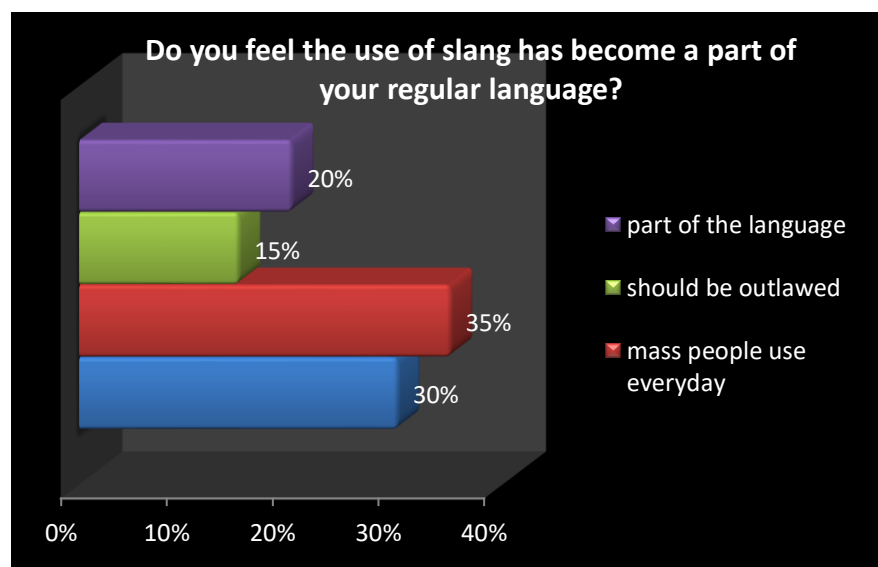


Figure 6

The data collected from this research also suggests that slangs are a ‘part of our language’ (20%), it is ‘used by the mass people every day’ (35%) and ‘constantly evolving’ (30%) (Please refer to figure 6). This suggests that the students are conscious and aware of the fact that the use of slang is a part of our language even if it is not a widely discussed topic. However, it is evident that the prevailing view that slangs are bad still exists because, 15% of the respondents, even if little, want the use of slangs to be ‘outlawed’.

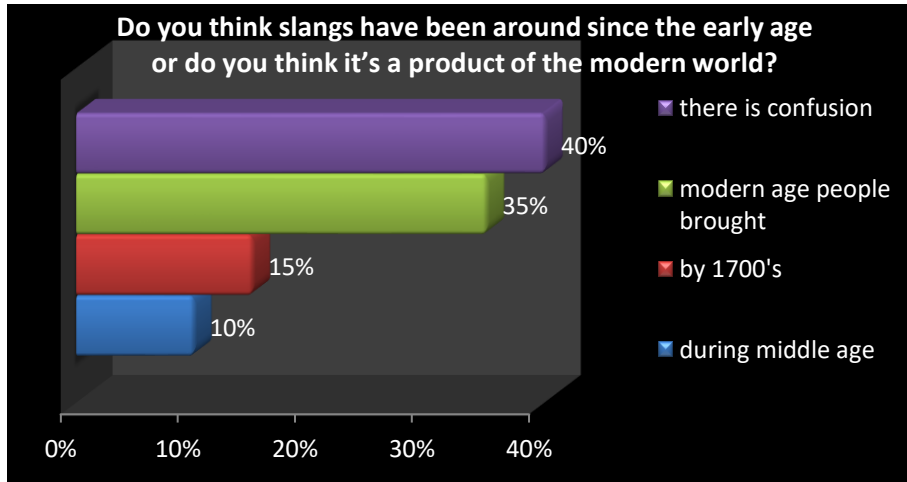


Figure 7

The survey result also suggests that most respondents did not know about the history regarding the origin of slang (please refer to the figure 7). When asked, ‘Do you think slangs have been around since the early age or do you think it’s a product of the modern world?’ 40% of the participants voted for the option, ‘There is confusion whether it is a modern age invention or an early age’. However there is striking evidence that the respondents have the misunderstanding that the modern age people brought slang into common practice. Only 10% people knew that slang was invented during Middle Ages, and that it has been a part of language since a long time.

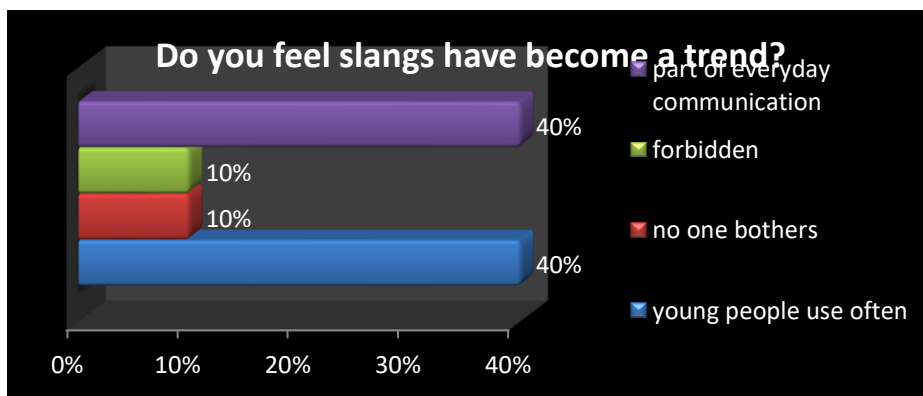


Figure 8

According to Figure 8, it is apparent that when asked ‘whether slangs have become a trend’, majority of the students claimed that ‘it is a part of everyday communication’ (40%), and ‘young people use it often’ (40%), which is a total of 80%. This demonstrates that more than the majority of people accept the usage of slang in language. In contrary, only 10% of the respondents feel that slangs are forbidden, implying how the society holds a negative connotation towards it. The remaining 10% feel that ‘no one bothers’ about the usage of slangs, implying that it has become such an integral part of language that it is almost acceptable to a small majority of people.

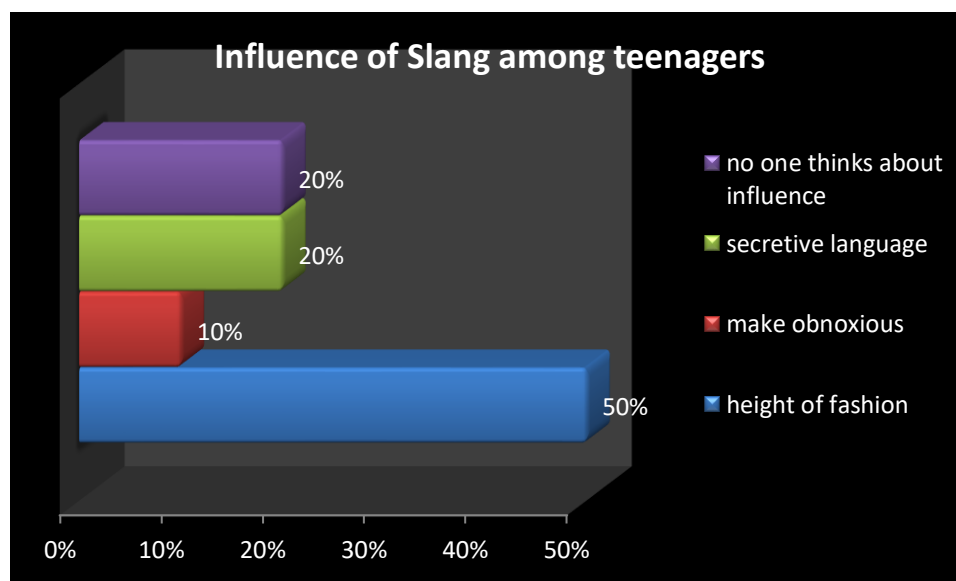


Figure 9

Teenagers are often the ones who make a huge effort to fit in with their peers, the data from the survey (please refer to Figure 9) largely supports this claim. Majority (50%) of the students feel that, slang influence teenagers because they feel obligated to use it to fit in (height of fashion) because it is so commonly used in language by their peers.

Analysis of Interviews

Twenty participants were interviewed for this study. There were total six questions, and here emphasize is given on five important questions.

Question 1: What is slang to you and why do you use slang?

Among the twenty participants, twelve responded that they use slang to mock or humiliate other. Three of the participants replied that sometimes they become confused with formal words and somehow find way with slang that gives flexible way of expression. Students sometimes do not recognize slangs like I am down, no worries, cool, sweet, same here, hang out, what’s up, I feel

you etc. As one student said ‘I use many slang in general. I use them as my way of expression not for humiliating others.’

Question 2: Can we use slang in general speaking?

All the participants stated that slangs can be abusive, but not always. Though not formally, using slang in casual situation with close friends may not be identified objectionable rather, they can turn a general topic into an interesting one. One participant mentioned that ‘*I feel the same as you* instead of *same here* may sound formal but have been boring now a days’.

Question 3: Do you think slangs are always abusive?

All the twenty participants responded that they do not think that slangs are always abusive. Moreover, they feel comfortable using slang with friends and family members. Slangs are not bad words always. Where slangs are used should be considered. In many cases, students use slang to become friendly with friends. For them, it is important to express themselves in a proper way. Where slang is used should be considered before considering how it is used.

Question 4: Do you feel slang has become a trend?

Most of the participants (17 out of 20) said that the usage of slangs has become a trend to young generation. To show the trendiness, students use words like ‘cool’, ‘chill’, ‘damn’ etc. Gradually, the usage is influencing everyday language as one of the students were saying, ‘people are being called ‘child’, ‘priest’, ‘abnormal’ who do not know the meaning and use of slang’.

Question 5: How slang should be treated as a part of language?

The answers to this question revealed that slang has become a part of language. Some slang word carry negative meaning that humiliate others. But, some words like ‘what’s up’, ‘no worries’, ‘oh my god’, ‘same here’ can be used in a positive way in formal situation. To the students formal words are ‘boring’ for this time. Saying ‘what’s up?’ is more flexible than saying ‘how are you?’ This generation is experiencing slang as a part of language.

Summary of Research Findings

After the analysis of the survey and interview, it is apparent that the term ‘slang’ is familiar to the students. Both the primary and secondary research suggests that language, especially in regard to slangs, is constantly evolving in language hence culture. This is because; new terms are constantly being added to the language as the world is progressing. Regardless of this fact, the issue of slangs is not something people consciously think of or even talk about. Even though slangs are widely used in everyday language, people avoid talking about it as they are uncomfortable, due to the negative connotations associated with it.

It is strongly evident that, majority of the students are aware of the fact that slangs are widely used in everyday language. This is because people know how and in which context to use it in - they know who to use it with, and when it is appropriate to use. Slangs are undeniably categorized as

informal language and are only to be used in informal context. Essentially, the students believe that, slangs can also be used to express positive feelings and hence it is so heavily used in daily language regardless of one's age or gender. Another reason to why such a large percentage of people use slangs is because, people use it by the influence of others in the society; this could be due to peer pressure or simply because it is so widely used. People get into the habit of using it themselves, either consciously and unconsciously. Slangs can also be used simply because it is an easy way to express oneself.

The research is suggestive of the fact that slang has been a part of society from a very long time and it is here to stay. Slangs are unconventional and often, abusive. However, like everything there is a good side to it, as evident from research – slangs are also used to express positive thoughts, perceptions and feelings. As a result, it gives depth, new dimension and variety to language.

Conclusion and Implication

On a conclusive note, the analysis of the data suggests, despite all the negative connotations, misconception and dilemmas regarding the use of slangs, people must recognize that slangs are a vital part of language. The prevailing view that slangs are unconventional or even a taboo still exists. However, the data analysis demonstrates that a large percentage of the students have accepted the usage of slangs in language because, a large percentage of students recognize that slangs are not only used to bring upon a negative effect, rather, used to express positive feelings, such as appreciation or fondness. Though slangs are so heavily used in everyday language, it is advised that one evaluates the context before using slangs.

Even though it is widely accepted that slangs are a common part of the language, they cannot be used in formal contexts. That being said, the thought of even discussing the issue of slangs aloud should be discarded. This is because slangs give the language we use dimension, and a variation, consequently, enriching our language. The usage of slangs is a means of communication and expression hence it should not only be viewed as a taboo, instead, its usage should be appreciated for the way it allows us to express ourselves.

However, the present research has been conducted with a relatively small size sample. A larger sample size could help to generalize the findings more vigorously. Thus, further research can explore the issue more.

References

- Answerbag (nd) 'Start a Conversation. Have Some Fun'
Retrieved November 22, 2022, from http://www.answerbag.com/q_view/415403
- Answerbag (nd) 'What is History of Slang'
Retrieved November 22, 2022, from
http://www.answerbag.com/q_view/415403#ixzz1UFEfIltG
- Cambridge Dictionary (nd) 'Slang'

Retrieved December 12, 2022, from
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/slang>
English Slang Around The World. (nd).
Retrieved December 12, 2022, from http://www.anglik.net/slang_online.htm
Fox, K. (n.d.). What is Slang.
Retrieved December 12, 2022, from http://www.anglik.net/slang_online.html
Language Reach (2015) 'The Impact of Slang on Language'
Retrieved November 20, 2022, from <https://www.languagereach.com/slang-changing-language/>
Your Dictionary (nd) 'How Slang Affects the English Language'
Retrieved November 20, 2022 from <https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/slang/how-slang-affects-the-english-language.html>