A Study on Social Media’s Influence Upon the Evolution of Slang

Mary Kate Sturgeon
College of Humanities and Social Sciences

INTRODUCTION

Slang is an incredibly prevalent aspect of our society; it is constantly evolving according to the intersectionalities of those groups or individuals who use it, and it also changes according to which modes of communication are used. Concretely, as social media platforms, texting, and online messaging have become more popular, the ways in which people communicate with each other have changed. As these methods of communication change, our society’s language is also transformed. As a result, slang has evolved drastically due to the influence of texting and other forms of online communication. Particularly intriguing is the fact that social media has influenced language to the point where the connotations of certain words have been changed so that they are now considered slang terms.

This research ultimately seeks to describe why slang is prevalent in our society, as well as how it has evolved over the past few decades. It also seeks to examine the role that social media platforms and texting have played in the adaptation of slang terms. Because social media and slang are both significant societal factors that are constantly evolving, this information is incredibly relevant.

METHODOLOGY

For this project I conducted a textual analysis of numerous peer-reviewed articles. I also conducted a textual analysis of two books. One of these specifically addressed slang, its prevalence society, and its evolution, while the other contained more general material regarding sociolinguistics. In order to compile sources of diverse forms, I also examined two TED Talk videos. One of these talks dealt specifically with text-speak and its effect on day-to-day language, while the other focused primarily on language and how it has evolved due to the influence of different modes of communication. Using these sources, I was able to compile information regarding slang, its prevalence, and its evolution, as well as information on how the use of social media platforms has affected that evolution.

FINDINGS

Slang is prevalent because:

- it challenges the norm/Standard English
- it is a more casual, fun, sometimes even offensive way of speaking
- serves exclusionary purposes for certain groups, especially online
- relies more upon context than dictionary definitions or literal meaning
- it often changes; the same terms rarely stay relevant for more than a few years
- it appears in music, movies, television, social media platforms, and other forms of media

![Graph showing how to acquire English slang words](Figure 5: Bar Chart of Question Number 5 Analysis)

The effect social media/texting has had on slang:

- introduced abbreviated terms and shortened words in order to reduce time spent typing
- certain groups use certain slang; communities form that use specific terms and identity outliers by their inability to understand the jargon
- size of phone screens affects amount/length of words people are able to view
- some social media platforms influence the use of abbreviations or text-speak by restricting characters
- social media forums expose more people to slang; information is more widely available

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, slang is prevalent for a myriad of reasons. Concretely, it is popular for one of the same reasons it is sometimes frowned upon; it is considered an informal, casual way of speaking. Part of the reason it is inherently informal is due to the fact that it relies more upon context rather than the concrete definition of words. While some slang terms become standard language, slang typically goes out of style every few years. Social media likely contributes to this, as texting and social media expose people to more slang terms, while allowing people to view new terms through abbreviations or other methods. Indeed, many different communities have created their own slang and jargon on Internet forums.

It cannot be argued that social media has had an increasingly significant impact on slang, as well as language in general. Not only has it made slang terms available to a larger audience, but it has given people the means to create and share their own terms and jargon. Additionally, the size of technological devices, as well as the character limitations of certain social media sites, has affected the length of the words we choose to type. This in turn contributes to our increased use of abbreviations and acronyms, which many people have begun to use outside of texting or social media. Social media and texting have impacted our language immensely, and I believe that as technology progresses and social media develops further, our language will also continue to evolve.

SOURCES I CONSULTED

In “A Sociolinguistic Study of American Slang” (2013) Yanchun, Zhou and Yaping, Pan acknowledge that slang is prone to change, and that slang terms typically do not stay current for longer than several years. They also examine the influence of the Child-Parent Relationship Gap via the Parent Self-Education and Interpersonal Education on Internet Slang (2009) by Vizigardite, Jurgita, and “The Use of English Slang Words in Informal Communication Among 8th Semester Students” (2014) by Muhartooyo and Wijaya Batur. Samantha both examine how social media has affected slang, as well as how slang has become integral to exclusive online communities. John McWhorter’s “The Language of American Slang” explains why people use slang, and why it is a legitimate aspect of American language. Carmen Lee’s talk “Should we worry about our language in the digital age?” (2016) examines the effect of social media platforms upon our language. James Paul Gee’s “Social Justice and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses” (2013) explains the words are often interpreted depending on the contexts in which they are used. "Intriguing" (2007) by Jonathan Green locates the development of text-speak, and demonstrates how online communities adopt specific slang terms and jargon.