

**Socio- Pragmatics Study of Arabic Slang among Male and Female
Students at University of Karbala**

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Abstract

Slang language draws the attention of the community due to its idiosyncratic existence. Speakers of a single community use a variety of expressions to refer to different phenomenon. In the present time and as a result of social and economic factors, a new slang vocabulary has begun to appear among young people. Society in particular has accomplished mass transformation in it is adopting of slang vocabularies. Most sociolinguistic studies in spite of the fact they are not focusing on the role of gender in signaling different forms of speaking. These studies have shown that women unlike men are more careful in their choice of the vocabulary.

This study investigates the use of slang expressions among students at University of Karbala. Furthermore, the examples are drawn from the actual use of slang by Iraqi's adolescent. The linguistic choices of slang expressions are then interpreted within the framework of social context of Iraqi's culture.

It is worth noting here that the dominating Slang in Karbala city. The present study is devoted to the investigation of those slangs involved in an ongoing linguistic change. In our study, we assume that, at University men favour to use the slang more than women. This is may be due to the fact that they have more contact with the people from different culture. Men are more influenced by the values of the society to show their need.

The procedures of obtaining casual speech from the informants; the steps that were followed our daily life and my contact with other people. The speakers can be classified according to gender (i.e men and woman). Furthermore; the present work focuses on investigating the slang at Karbala University. It focuses on three departments: English department, Arabic Department and History Department.

Key Words: Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, slang, informants,

1. Introduction

Hudson (1980, pp. 4-5) states that sociolinguistics or micro-linguistics is the study of language in relation to society, whereas 'macro' the sociology of language deals with the relations between society and language as wholes. This means that sociolinguistics is mainly about the effects of society on language. Since its main concern is language, it studies the effects of social changes on language. The sociology of language is mainly concerned with the effects of language on society, so its main concern is society.

Finch (2005, p.191) states that the sociology of language is concerned with sociological rather than linguistic; its objective is sociologically, whereas sociolinguistics is concerned with language, so its objective is linguistically.

According to O'Grady (2005, pp.485-99) sociolinguistics is the study of language in social contexts; it focuses on the relationship between linguistic behaviour and social situations, roles, and function. So its studies are based on empirical studies that have identified relationships between language use and social categories such as class and gender, whereas sociology of language is related to the way language behavior operates as a mark of a speaker's social identity,

2. Literature Review

Wardaugh (2006, p.23) states that language therefore vary and this variety exists whether one is talking about geographical region, social groups or even individuals within that group. Variation in this sense denotes a basic fact of linguistic life.

Wodak (1997, p.4) says not only geographical and social factors that make languages varieties, gender differences cannot be denied, since it has played an important role in signaling variation within languages. Gender is considered as a key component to identity, " it is not a pool of attribute possessed by a person , but something a person does. In such a view gender is something cannot be avoided in studying language variation. It is just a way of ordering societies around us.

According to Trudgill (2000, p.6), the first thing that attract your attention when you meet somebody for the first time is what sex he/she is. He further states that the different ways of speaking we notice in men's and women's speech is a result of using different vocabularies, so they are said to be speaking different varieties of one language rather than different languages.

Wardaugh (2006, p.317) says that women's speech is more prestigious than men's speech, men try to use competitive and challenging vocabularies, they try to insult and tease each other , women on the other hand tend not to do so

According to Halliday (2003, p.119) gender differences are concerned one can draw a conclusion that : slang language is commonly used by men more often than women. Every language varies in response to environmental changes, but language change cannot be seen as an isolated occurrence; rather, it results from the circumstances in which a system exists, allowing for constant changes in the states of individual languages. Systematic language is necessary to keep a conversation going.

Crystal (2008, p.195) regarded slang language along with regionalism, neologism and code mixing as a highly informal language, since it involves a high

range of colloquial expressions, as well as being described with a very loose structure. This makes slang and highly formal language different from one another. Complex syntactic structures and meticulously planned speech are characteristics of highly formal language. Moreover, formal language is closely related to the standard form of language, and which is often sensitive to any perspective judgment.

2.1 Methods and Applications of sociolinguistics

The study depends on some methods and applications of sociolinguistics such as (interviews, observations and questionnaires).

2.1.1 The Sociolinguistic Interview

According to Fasold (1984, p.152) entail the interviewer asking questions and recording the subject's oral responses in written or typewritten form. This kind of interview-style process is utilized to gather various speech patterns. Reading passages, word lists, minimum pairs, or emotionally charged interviews are some of the methods used to elicit examples of speech data.

2.1.2 Observation

Wary and Bloomer (2006, p.168) state that observation data is qualitative, consists of recordings, transcriptions, and notes relating to the researcher's behavior and language spoken or/ and written.

Wardhaugh (1986, p.157) says that observation refers to the recording of peoples activities by the researcher as he watch them. The best-known example of this is Labov's department store survey. His investigation is the pronunciation of /r/ in New York City, Labov, (1966). He believed that *r*- pronunciation after vowels was being reintroduced into New York speech this is was a feature of the speech of young people rather than old people. He set out to test these hypotheses by walking around three New York City department stores (Saks, Macy's, and S. Klein), which are demarcated by

the social class , which they are (high, middle, and low , respectively) and asking the location of department, when the shop answered, Labov would seek a careful repetition of pronunciation the phrase 'fourth floor' by pretending not to hear the response.

2.1.3 Questionnaires

Wray and Bloomer (2006, p. 152) mention that questionnaire means a document that is filled out in writing by the informant. It can help the researcher to find out about people linguistic and social behavior attitudes, beliefs.

Such studies are associated with the work of William Labov (1966) whose chief objective is to get a better understanding of linguistic structure through the study of its relation to society.

In the 1960s, William Labov conducted research in this field. In an eminent study conducted in New York, he discovered specific phonetic characteristics that differed throughout communities, such as the way individuals sounded the "r" in terms like "part," which has a high status pronunciation there. He carefully designed the style of in-depth interviews to elicit more open-minded, casual speech from a representative sample of speakers from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Labov noted that in formal speech, speakers from higher social classes not only pronounced the letter "r" more frequently, but also all speakers did so more frequently.

2.2 Contexts of Situation and culture

Context determines the appropriate rules or expressions to be employed.

Shimanoff (1989, p. 57), cited in (Samover , et al , 2007, p.286) states in her seminal work on this topic that rules are "a follow able perception that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred or prohibited in certain context".

An important distinction has to be drawn between "context of culture" as it is also referred as "register " and "context of situation" or "genera".

Register is "a variation according to use" (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p.41). Genera on the other hand is described as "register plus purpose".

(Thompson, 1996, p.36) puts it in another way by saying: "it is something located at a higher level than register ", in addition it is often associated with context of culture rather than context of situation".

The prominent figure who relates context to linguistics is Malionwski (1993, p.307) speech events are said to take place in a context of situation which he wrote:

Sunderland (2006, p.42) states that "Utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words. Exactly as in the reality spoken or written languages, a word without linguistic context is a mere fragment and stands for nothing by itself, so in the reality of a spoken living tongue, the utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation".

2.3 Slang and the expression of reality

Akmajian, et al, (2001, p.303) says that each person in the community can use slang unconsciously or unintentionally, in spite of this, the term is hard to define. Moreover slang language provides a sense of humor. So speakers show a great deal of creativity in using slang expressions. There are some clear features of this form of language:

1. Slang forms an important part of casual or informal styles of language use.
2. Traditionally, the term slang carries with it a negative connotation.
3. Slang can be compared with fashion in clothing and popular music, in the sense of being changed so rapidly. Nevertheless, slang falls out of fashion in the passage of time.

4. it is sometimes referred to as vernacular, in the sense that slang can be associated with a specific social group like the slang of criminals, workers, teenagers, the slang of drug culturesetc. Over the above slang may fall under the term colloquialism, to indicate informal style of conversation. Both terms vernacular and colloquialism do not denote negative connotation, yet the term slang is more suitable for the purpose of this study.

Anderson and Trudge (1990, p.42) state other features of slang, they are:

1. Slang language lies below the stylistic level, where the stylistic scale ranges from colloquial to vulgar and obscene.
2. It is typically used in informal situations i.e swearing.
3. It is restricted to spoken language.
4. Slang is a variation in vocabulary choice, rather than grammar or pronunciation.
5. Slang is not considered as a register, although register may contain slang vocabularies, it is also not a jargon.
6. Slang adds a special kind of meaning to speech, since it is creative, colorful and interesting.

Mesthrine (2001, p.117) states that differences in the choice of the linguistic expressions as well as differences in language use are clearly indicating the fact that language continuously changes. However, the change can be observed through the use of new expressions. In the case of slang, a comparable study shows that although slang exists among members of the community, it is mostly used by younger groups rather than older. This leads to the division of the community into two groups: older age group who shows low use of variant linguistic expressions and the younger group who are characterized by the increasing use of new linguistic expressions. Slang increases

in the real time, yet this increase is not warranted, since younger groups tended to overcome their choices of slang words as they grow in age.

3. Methodology

After a survey conducted on a total group of (50) informants, aged between 18 and 24 years old, through the use of methods of sampling, the primary results are obtained.

The survey included questions on:

How do informants use slang expressions?

What are these expressions?

Why do they prefer to use these expressions?.

Oral questions have been undertaken for this purpose, to show Karbala informants real use of slang expressions in actual situations. Furthermore, the oral method of data collection based primarily on information seeking questions with the goal of getting the answers not only on how the informants use slang expressions, what are these expressions and why do they use them, but also they are questioned on the sources of these slang expressions and the community acceptance/rejection of these expressions as well as the awareness/unawareness of their use.

The slang expressions are classified into groups according to their semantic denotation as (personality/thing descriptive slang, (Dis)agreement Slang and Address oriented tags). After that the expressions are translated into Arabic. They are listed at the end of research as appendix.

The current investigation carries out qualitative analysis. The collected vocabularies are analyzed linguistically and pragmatically.

The statistical results have stressed the surrounding context, within which the study is carried out. The qualitative – quantitative analysis forms a clear picture on the ideological motivation of the usage of slang expressions in Karbala community.

3.1 Results

After the careful examination of the subjects, a number of findings have been uncovered. Slang as it is previously mentioned is a social process that people use in their daily life to maintain the ongoing sense of their face to face interaction.

This process has a special support from the social media and broadcast media. After all this process becomes part of the linguistic competence of Karbala society. Some of the informants reveal the fact that these expressions are unconsciously used by them, however others say that they intentionally use these expression to create identity to themselves.

The most common slang expressions used by the informants are part of the domains of: personal/thing description, (dis)agreement and address oriented tags.

Let's take an example most of the time on descriptive slang expressions: concerning the first slang expression (عربانة), it is derived from the inanimate object (wagon) to describe a person who can easily be agitated, (صاكة & صاك) both denote the same expression, yet one is used for male (صاك) and the other for female (صاكة & يحمة) is a person who is most of the time telling lies, (اشرد / الة بشدة) are slang expression that are used to describe nice entities yet each word carries a degree of description different from the other, (يفصل) is an expression that describes a person who in one topic of a conversation spilt his/her mind to another topic, that is not associated with the original topic of the conversation, (مضغوط) is an expression with a special meaning, a speaker often used this expression to refer to a person who keep criticizing the speaker, so in order to neglect them he/she says (مضغوط).

The finally expressions (يقطني) and (تزحف / زاحف) are also commonly used, the former is used by Karbala informants to refer to someone who for instance when he/she goes to a restaurant or a shop and eat or buy something would make others pay money instead of him/her, the later is a single expression that carries a lot of meaning, it refers to someone who most of the time keep looking for girls, bothering them and throwing them words to become closer.

Slang expression in the above table are of two groups, the first group include those slang words that indicate agreement, and the other group denote slang words that indicate disagreement. The semantic formation process of slang expression of the words is something interesting to discuss. Starting with (ادعبل منا) this group of words have in addition to disagreement function, another denotation associated with them, they have insult indication too.

To this end, it is important to note that these words have a special kind of meaning related to them, arises not from the literal meaning but from their pragmatics functions. Karbala informants confess that they prefer to use slang expression when they address each other, they do not usually use names of persons being talked to, girls used the term (ولج) either to address or to call her friends, this word has gender association, so it will become (ولك), when it is used for the similar purpose.

3.2 Societal Perception of Youth Slang

Iraq is an Arabic speaking diglossic country, this means that there are two varieties: the high variety and low variety, speakers choose one variety rather than another according to the situation. Al- Badawiyy (1973) mentions classifies these varieties into:

(1) Classical Arabic is the language of Qura'n, mosques and preaches.

(2) Modern Standard Arabic that is used in news and education.

(3) Colloquial Arabic associated with educated people.

(4) Colloquial of uneducated people.

Each of the previous varieties serve to reflect the social, cultural and educational background of its user. This study investigates the degree to which the societies accept / refuse the existence of slang of the Karbala Iraqi youth. Karbala people have certain restriction in their use of slang expression this is because Karbala is a holy city, for this reason those informants who use slang expressions are criticized of being users of "street language".

In Karbala most of the informants spend most of the time on internet, chatting, commenting, maintaining friendship with others , so during their harmony with others , they would adopt their words and use these words in their real life.

4. Conclusions

In many aspects of their life, Karbala youth make use of slang expressions , so they become part of their social standing. Young informants show their creativity and interest in their use of slang. The expressions analyzed so far shows that informants are using these words for different purposes: to show degrees of intimacy, separate themselves from old generations who some of them refuse this phenomenon, they would also prefer to show their identity and separate themselves from other groups by their special slang words.

Slang expressions are in their way of increasing and wide spreading, either in face to face interaction or on the social media, yet young informants specially girls face problems in the sense that Karbala society would normally do not accept such expressions. This does not mean that those young informants will reduce their use of these words, instead they consider them as part of their identity or their linguistic repertoire. In other words as a medium of maintaining social relations with other youth and a means of spreading the resulting group from other subgroups. To sum up slang

expressions are unusual vocabularies that enable young people to strengthen their bonds and mark their co-existence.

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Appendix

Arabic Slang Expression	English Meaning	Socio- pragmatic meaning
اشطح	Go away	Disagreement
اكل تبين	Eat grass	Disagreement
اكل عسل	Eat honey	Disagreement
امين	Ameen	Agreement
انجب	Shut up	Don't think of it at all
ايون	Yeah	tentatively yes
ترة ذبحتني	You kill me	Agreement
ترة كرعت راسي	Your speech repeated again	Disagreement
تمام	Ok	excellent
جيد	Good	Agreement
خالي / خالة	My uncle	indicating intimacy between friends
خوش	Ok	not good and not bad
د طير	fly off	Ignore it
د ولي	You go away	Strongly disagreement
شطح شيشة	Go away here	Strongly disagreement
عزة	Without meaning	disagreement with a shock
لاع	No	No of course no
لج	Hey you	serious intensity
لك	Hey you	acute intensity
لك ياول	Hey you	serious intensity
ممتاز	Excellent	Strongly agreement
ورد	Flower	Agreement with praise
ولي	Go away	Strongly disagreement
يابة	My dad	Strong intimacy