



Register and Slang: Distinct Forms of Language Variation in Communities

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Abstract

This study investigates the differences between slang and register as forms of language used within communities. Register is language tied to specific groups, interests, or situations. Slang, a part of vocabulary, often reflects age and marks informal communication, particularly among younger generations (Holmes, 2013). This research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to identify, evaluate, and interpret existing research results. Data were drawn from two studies on slang and register. The research reveals that slang is characterized by trendy, sometimes ungrammatical, vocabulary used primarily by youth in informal settings. Register, while also occasionally deviating from standard grammar, uses vocabulary tied to specific situations and occupations.

Keywords: *slang, register, language variation, communities*

Introduction

Language is a living, breathing entity, constantly evolving and adapting to the needs and identities of its speakers. Nowhere is this dynamism more apparent than in the use of slang and register, which serve as powerful markers of social groups, shared experiences, and evolving cultural norms. This study delves into the fascinating world of slang and register within youth, exploring how these linguistic variations are used to construct identities, foster belonging, and navigate social interactions.

From the subtle nuances of professional jargon to the vibrant expressions of youth culture, slang and register play a crucial role in shaping and reflecting social identity. They allow individuals to signal their affiliation with particular groups, express solidarity, and even assert their individuality. This research investigates the use of slang and register within youth and certain community, examining how

these linguistic choices contribute to the formation and maintenance of social boundaries and group cohesion.

While the study of slang and register has a rich history in sociolinguistics, there remains a need for further research exploring the specific dynamics of these linguistic phenomena within diverse communities. This study addresses this gap by examining the use of slang and register in community. By focusing on this particular community, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how these linguistic variations function in real-world social contexts.

Holmes (2013) defines "register" as the language used by groups with shared interests or occupations, or language tied to specific situations. Using sports announcer commentary as an example, he illustrates how distinct linguistic features differentiate registers. These features include syntactic reduction and inverted word order, both of which contribute to conveying the excitement of the event. Inverted syntax highlights the action, giving the announcer time to clarify the subject—crucial information for listeners. Heavy noun modification, often both before and after the noun, emphasizes the subject of interest. Finally, the use of routines and formulas helps the speaker by reducing cognitive load.

Holmes (2013) also stated that slang is considered a part of a person's vocabulary area and primarily reflects their age, meaning that slang usage is often heavily associated with younger generations and is considered a marker of informal, casual speech within a specific social group; essentially, people use different slang depending on their social context and the group they are interacting with, and this can be influenced by age, social status, and other factors.

Based on the theories, slang and register are almost have similarity in understanding and examples since both of them are spoken in a limited community but can be understood by others. Slang refers to informal words or phrases that are typically used within specific social groups or subcultures. These groups can be based on age (e.g., teenage slang), interests (e.g., gamer slang), or shared experiences (e.g., workplace slang). It often serves to create a sense of belonging and exclusivity within a group. It can also be used to express identity, challenge authority, or simply to be playful and creative with language. It can be recognized based on some features such as is often short-lived, with words and phrases constantly being coined and falling out of use. It can be highly creative and expressive, often using metaphors, humor, and wordplay. Examples: "Lit," "sus," "salty," "ghosting" are examples of slang terms that have been popular in recent years.

While register refers to the different ways we use language in different situations. It's about adapting our language to suit the context, whether it's formal or informal, public or private, professional or casual. It helps us communicate effectively and appropriately in various settings. It allows us to signal our relationship with the person we're talking to and to convey the right level of

formality or informality. Register can vary in terms of vocabulary, grammar, tone, and even pronunciation. Formal register might involve complex sentence structures and technical jargon, while informal register might be more relaxed and conversational. Examples: You would use a different register when giving a presentation at work compared to chatting with friends at a party. Similarly, you might use a different register when writing an email to your boss compared to texting a family member.

While numerous studies on language variation have explored either register or slang, there's a relative scarcity of research directly comparing the two. Existing work often focuses on each phenomenon in isolation, examining slang as a marker of social group identity or register as a reflection of situational context. This compartmentalized approach, while valuable, overlooks the potential for interplay and overlap between these two aspects of language. Therefore, a comparative analysis of data typically collected in slang and register studies could be highly insightful. Although the theoretical frameworks guiding research on slang and register differ, there may be instances where the data collected appears similar. This potential overlap warrants further investigation, as it could reveal deeper connections between social group affiliation (reflected in slang) and situational appropriateness (reflected in register). A comparative study could illuminate how these two forces interact to shape language use in real-world contexts, moving beyond the current tendency to treat them as separate, independent variables.

Therefore, this article makes a significant contribution by providing insights and practical guidance for future research seeking to investigate the intertwined nature of slang and register. It offers a framework for data collection that considers both the social group affiliations reflected in slang use and the situational contexts that shape register variation.

By highlighting potential overlaps and methodological challenges, this article paves the way for more comprehensive and nuanced studies of language variation. Moreover, it is also crucial for advancing our theoretical understanding of language variation. It provides a foundation for future research to explore the complex interplay between slang and register, moving beyond isolated analyses of each phenomenon. The comparative approach advocated here will allow researchers to investigate how these two forces interact to shape communicative practices, potentially leading to new theoretical models that account for the dynamic and multifaceted nature of language use.

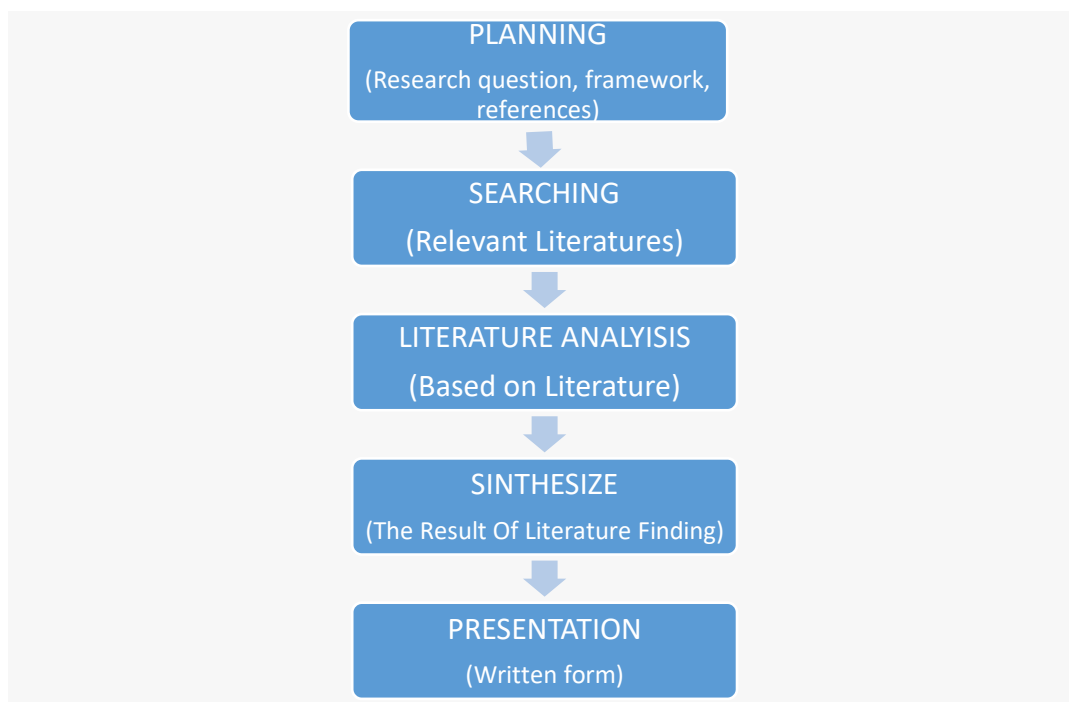
Based on the previous explanation, the researcher formulated the research question as follows: 1) How is the use of slang among societies based on theories, 2) How is the use of register among societies based on theory? By addressing these questions, the research compared data derived from studies of slang and register.

Method

The research uses Systematic Literature Review (SLR) which is used to identify, evaluate and interpret the research results. In addition, it also used to clarify specifically the research questions. There are some procedures which are used in applying SLR such as below:

1. Planning is conducted by determining research questions, formulating framework of research and determining references.
2. Searching Literature that relevant to research question.
3. Sorting literature which is appropriate to research questions.
4. Literature analysis based on research questions.
5. Synthesizing the result of literature finding
6. Presenting the research by in written form.

Although LSR consists of some steps, the current research only used or simplified some steps as in describe in the following figure:



SLR is also can used to find out main problem, produce research framework, identify research gap, answer research question and to present more comprehensive, conclusive and balanced facts both in qualitative and quantitative research.

The data were taken from Google Scholar which was accessed on 8 February 2025. To compare the theory and the results, the data consist of the study on slang and register to analyze the difference among them.

Results

Slang

Before analysing the data related to slang and register, it is necessary to show the theories that were used to identify the data. Firstly, the 1st datum taken from Robin's study (2020) which is entitled "*Slangs as Registers: A study of Academic Slang Register use by Undergraduates*". Based on the title, he analyzed slang and register as language variety used by 230 undergraduates' students as the respondents from 8 universities in Nigeria. However, despite acknowledging the potential interrelation between slang and register, the data collected appeared to be primarily focused on register, likely due to the influence of Halliday's (1989) theory.

Halliday defines registers as language choices determined by context, participants, and purpose. This discussion, however, centers not on Halliday's specific definition, but rather on his view of registers as use-based language varieties, exploring the connections between slang, specific usage, user groups, and communicative functions. Essentially, a register is a language variety employed in a particular communicative setting (Halliday, 1989). While some scholars, like Wardhaugh (1986), advocate for a strict definition of register, research demonstrates the interconnectedness of registers with slang, jargon, and argot. Argot is often considered a coded language initially intended for exclusive understanding within a specific group. However, as its use expands, argot can evolve into slang.

Given the interconnectedness of slang and register, particularly concerning factors like age, social groups, class, and activities, slang can be effectively analysed based on these criteria. Burdová (2009) categorized slang according to students' in-school and out-of-school activities, while Terna-Abah (2016) identified slang related to various activities, including descriptions of women, sex, university staff, and school-related matters. This study focuses on undergraduate slang used to describe academic activities, specifically examining the academic slang register and the motivations behind its use. While undergraduate slang has been extensively studied, this research aims to develop a corpus of academic slang register employed by undergraduates.

The research posed three questions: 1) Do undergraduates use slang during academic activities? 2) What slang do undergraduates use in this context? and 3) What are their motivations for using slang during academic activities? This current study, aiming to analyze the similarities between slang and register data as predicted by existing theories, finds that the second research question, concerning the specific slang used in academic settings, is particularly relevant. Identifying the slang terms employed by undergraduates in academic contexts allows for a

detailed description of the characteristics of that slang, providing crucial data for comparison with register data. This analysis will not only reveal the specific vocabulary used but also offer insights into the social and cultural meanings embedded within that vocabulary, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between slang, register, and academic identity. Furthermore, examining the specific slang used can illuminate the functions it serves within the academic environment (formal domain), such as creating in-group solidarity, expressing attitudes towards academic work, or facilitating communication about complex concepts in a more informal and accessible way.

The data analysis revealed that the slang used by respondents, which the researcher categorized as a type of register, often blended English and Nigerian languages. For example, terms like "Marlian," "Churchy," "Saudi," and "NFA" (No Future Ambition) are used to describe students' moral conduct. "Churchy" and "Saudi" denote outwardly religious Christian and Muslim students, respectively. "Marlian" refers to students perceived as irresponsible or exhibiting poor behavior, while "NFA" describes students who are not serious about their academic pursuits.

The next data are slang terms related to getting caught cheating include "Get questions wrong" and "Loose guard." Humorous slang for cheaters includes "spiderman" or "a giraffe," while the acts of getting questions wrong and losing one's focus (and thus getting caught) are also described using slang.

The findings indicate that this slang is commonly used by undergraduates during academic activities. This academic slang register encompasses various aspects of student life, including academic ability, study habits and techniques, examination malpractice, absenteeism, enrolment status, moral conduct, and other daily activities both inside and outside the classroom.

The 2nd source taken from Zhou and Yan Hong Fan (2013), in their study "A Sociolinguistic Study of American Slang," explored American slang and the factors influencing its use. They cited Chen Linhua (2006, p.260), who defines slang as language outside standard usage, encompassing newly coined words and phrases, as well as established terms with new or extended meanings. Slang is considered a speech or language variety—any distinct form of speech used by an individual or group. These varieties can exhibit linguistic features at the lexical, phonological, morphological, or syntactic levels (Dai & He, 2010, p.111). The term "variety" is preferred for its neutrality compared to terms like "standard" or "non-standard" language and "dialect."

They revealed some features of American slangs such as:

Humor

Americans often view slang as humorous, with this humor frequently stemming from its sound. Many slang terms use euphony, making them easy to understand, remember, and vivid. Rhyme is a common phonetic device used in American slang to create a sense of rhythm and humor, as seen in examples like "the bee's knees," "fender-bender," and "razzle-dazzle."

Conciseness

While not its defining characteristic, conciseness is a major feature of American slang. This brevity is achieved through techniques like apocope (shortening words, as in "vamp" for vampire) or by replacing longer words or descriptions with short, expressive words or compounds (e.g., "simp," "veep," "classy"). These shortened forms are easier to say and remember.

Originality

Slang arises from the playful manipulation of language, particularly among young people. It involves creating new words, altering existing ones, or applying old words in new ways, driven by a desire for novelty and trendiness. For instance, "live wire," "smoker eater," and "flying coffin" are slang terms for "living man," "fireman," and "plane," respectively.

Instability

Core vocabulary remains generally stable, but slang terms rarely last more than a few years. However, some useful slang eventually becomes standard language. "Flapper" and "gay" (homosexual) are examples of slang terms that originated in the late 19th and 1930s, respectively, and are now considered standard usage.

Moreover, the research also mentioned individual factors influencing the use of slang

American Slang and Gender

While much American slang originates from and is used by men, this gender gap is decreasing. Many slang terms, especially those related to traditionally male interests (sex, work, sports, etc.), are primarily masculine. Women's slang is less prevalent, and even terms related to traditionally female domains are often coined by men. This may be partly due to women's historically more limited social interaction outside of male-dominated spaces.

American Slang and Occupation

In general, acceptance of slang decreases as the level of education and training required for a job increases. Occupation is thus a strong discriminating factor. However, professionals tend to be slightly more tolerant of slang than non-professionals.

American Slang and Age

Age is a key factor in American slang use. Teenagers and college students are the primary users and creators of slang, often adopting terms from popular culture. They are more experimental with language, driven by curiosity and a desire for independence, and readily challenge conventions. Adults use slang less frequently, typically in informal settings with close friends and family, where it serves as a concise and friendly form of communication.

After presenting the research results, the researcher described the features of American slang, noting its conciseness and humour. These characteristics are typical of American slang, which is commonly used in informal interactions. Furthermore, its use is particularly widespread among youth in close relationships, contributing to the development and maintenance of social bonds. Some slang words are shortened for ease of use, such as 'vamp' from 'vampire,' 'simp,' 'veep,' and 'classy.' Slang also evolves through the creation of entirely new words, modifications of existing terms, or the use of established words in novel contexts, often driven by a pursuit of originality and current trends. For instance, "live wire for living man, smoker eater for fireman, and flying coffin for plane.

A comparison of the first and second studies reveals a shared understanding of slang as a language variety distinct from the standard language, typically employed in informal contexts for ease of communication. Although both researches used different theories of slang, but basically, they have the similar concept of slang. Therefore, the data were taken based on their definition of slang although the first study's participants were university students, their use of slang was observed even within academic settings, demonstrating the integration of certain slang terms into their academic vocabulary. Furthermore, slang is not uniform; it varies depending on location, reflecting the influence of local culture and language

Register

Thus, this research analyses studies on register to determine the distinguishing features between slang and register. Here, the research analyzed register written by Puspita Sari's et. al. (2023) entitled "A Sociolinguistics Analysis of Register Used on Grand Final Master Chef Season 9 Episode Duplicate Dish by Chef Arnold".

(<https://ijolida.denpasarinstitute.com/index.php/ijolida/article/view/86>).

Register is a language variety used by a specific group of people at a particular time. Therefore, its use is dependent on the occasion and context. This research draws upon Hudson's theory (1996:46), which defines register as a linguistic feature that reveals an individual's activity. Registers are typically understood only by those who use them, often related to specific occupations and their related vocabulary. It is also supported by Holmes (1992) who defined registers as specialized forms of language employed by groups with a common function or profession. This aligns with Holmes's (1992) definition of registers as specialized forms of language employed by groups with a common function or profession. Hudson and Holmes appear to share a similar understanding of register, both emphasizing that this language variation arises from an individual's occupation or professional role.

Sari et al.'s study aimed to investigate the linguistic forms and motivations behind register use. The data were analyzed according to grammatical category, function, and unit. Initially, they identified several words as registers, including: mascarpone, mousse, speed, garnish, crema, station, sabayon, plating, blowtorch, ladyfinger is categorized as nouns and functioning as object. Blowtorch and ladyfinger are combination of two words so they are classified as compound nouns. While split and caramelize were classified as verb and functioning as predicate.

This research also investigated speakers' motives for choosing specific words, known as registers. Hockett's theory (1958) was used to define motive, which he categorized into two types: prestige-filling and need-filling. The results indicated that the use of words and compound words was primarily driven by need-filling motives, as the speakers' situation necessitated borrowing terms without Indonesian equivalents. For instance, the chef used "mascarpone" instead of describing it as a soft Italian cream cheese used in tiramisu. Prestige-filling motives were also observed, with speakers using certain terms to project status. For example, while "whisk" refers to the process of beating or stirring a substance, especially cream or eggs, the speaker preferred this term over the Indonesian equivalent, "mengocok".

Having analyzed the research results, it was observed that the researchers identified the data based on Hudson's (1996) and Holmes's (1992) theories. The chef's spoken words were classified as registers, reflecting their profession. This aligns with register theory, which posits that language variation arises from occasion, common function, and profession. This analysis highlights how occupational context significantly influences language use, with individuals adopting specialized vocabulary to effectively communicate within their

professional domain. Furthermore, the identified registers demonstrate the dynamic nature of language, adapting to specific social and occupational settings.

The next study is entitled "A Sociolinguistic Study of Register Mobile Legend's Caster on Final Mpl Season 6" conducted by Hanafi and Temmy (2022) (<https://ejurnal.bunghatta.ac.id/index.php/JFIB/article/view/20210>). This research also drew upon Holmes's theory (2017:280), which defines register as the language used by groups of people with common interests or jobs, or language associated with specific situations. Additionally, Biber and Conrad's theory (2009:37-39) was utilized, which states that register use is tied to situational descriptions based on four types of information, including the analyst's personal experiences and observations. Caster's classification of registers includes Profession, Information, Event, Invitation, and Place.

They identified the following words spoken by the Mobile Legends caster, Caster, as registers: Tyrant's Revenge, Searing Torrent, Dragon Tail, Flicker, and Wolf Transformation. The data were then classified, revealing 258 instances of Information, 48 of Place, 18 of Event, 9 of Profession, and 8 of Invitation. The Profession classification denotes the jobs or roles of the heroes in Mobile Legends. The Information classification encompasses factual statements used by the caster to provide details about the match. The Event classification refers to significant occurrences that impact the match. The Place classification describes where the action or clash takes place. The Invitation classification involves requests or suggestions directed at the audience.

The research revealed a limited number of words related to Mobile Legends gameplay. It appears they focused solely on specialized game terminology, such as character abilities and items, omitting common words frequently used during gameplay. This narrow focus potentially overlooks a significant portion of the language actually used by players. For example, while terms like "Tyrant's Revenge" or "Searing Torrent" might be included, more common verbs and adjectives like shoot, lose, win, attack, and surrender, which players frequently use to describe actions and outcomes, were not considered. This omission could provide an incomplete picture of the actual language used within the Mobile Legends gaming community.

A comparison of the two research studies reveals that, while they employed different theoretical frameworks for analyzing register, the core definitions of register provided by Hudson (1996:46), Holmes (1992), and Biber and Conrad (2009:37-39) share similar conceptions about what constitutes a register. Although the specific lenses through which they examined register may have varied, these foundational definitions offered clear guidance for both sets of researchers, enabling them to identify and categorize data that aligned with the fundamental understanding of register as a variety of language used in specific contexts and associated with particular groups or activities. This suggests a

common ground in the understanding of register, even if the methodologies for studying it differ.

Based on an analysis of research on slang and register, although both are language variations spoken by specific groups of people and may seem similar at first glance, they are distinct phenomena. Some studies consider slang a subcategory of register, while others treat them as separate entities. Theories of slang are less prevalent than theories of register, which are more clearly defined by linguists. However, the previous researches reveal some differences between slang and register. The studies on slang presented data from university students and youth, aligning with the theory that slang is part of vocabulary, typically reflecting a speaker's age and often associated with younger generations and informal settings. Register differs slightly, as it is often tied to individuals within specific social groups or occupations. Therefore, its use is generally limited to those within that community. Slang is about trendy vocabulary used by a group, often changing quickly. Register is about language choices (vocabulary, grammar, style) appropriate for a specific situation. Slang can be part of a register, but register is the broader concept.

Conclusions

The research found that slang and register have distinct features. Slang tends to use more trendy, and sometimes ungrammatical, words, primarily spoken by youth and usually in informal situation. They create this vocabulary simply to communicate within their social groups. While register also sometimes deviates from grammatical rules, it is generally understood, even though the vocabulary is used in specific situations and occupations.

In conclusion, this research highlights the distinct nature of slang and register, despite their shared characteristic of language variation. Further research could explore the interplay between these two phenomena, particularly in overlapping social and professional contexts. Understanding these differences is crucial for comprehending the complex ways in which language is used to construct and express social and professional identities. Understanding these differences is crucial for comprehending the complex ways in which language is used to construct and express social and professional identities

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