The Impact Of Slangs On The Academic Writing Of Undergraduate Students In Pakistan

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Abstract

Typically recognized as informal, inaccurate and haphazard, slang, a form of unstructured language that violates the standard rules of English language (Geertsema, Hyman, & Van Deventer, 2011) is gradually seeping into everyday language use. The present study investigates the impact of slangs in the Pakistani context, where students use English as a second language and the main language for their tertiary education. The study is informed by the works of Wardaugh, (2011) centring on the connection between language variation and society. The quantitative study uses an explanatory research design with a purposively selected sample of 70 English major undergraduate students from a government university. The data was collected from students' survey questionnaire which was then analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that the formal language use is impacted due to constant variation in language caused by the society as language and society are interdependent.

Keywords: Slangs; Interdependent; Academic writing; Language variation; Damaging.

1. Introduction

This chapter provides the background of the study, in addition to the statement of the problem. Moreover, it highlights the research objectives and questions, purpose of the study, brief introduction of the theoretical framework, significance, scope and delimitation of the study.

1.1. Background of the Study

Language is always changing as its use varies with time its functions, grammar and style changes among different social groups (Gregory & Carroll, 2018). With the passing of time its pronunciations evolve, new words are taken from other language or developed, the significance of old terms transform, and the morphology expands or dwindles providing many ways of speaking one same thing (Bybee, 2010).

Variationists study the changes in language by closely examining and observing it. It can only be done by looking at the authentic data gathered. For instance, variation can be studied by

observing social and linguistic environments, and then analyzing the data as the change appears. In research programs the variation should be malleable due to the language's nature itself because language is fluid in transition and cannot transfer from one to another state instantaneously (Fought, 2004).

Language contact is another thing that comes into notice when one talks about language variation. It happens when one speaker of a language communicates with other individual belonging to a different community, both the speakers of the language exchanges their different ways of using a language that particularly belongs to their specific communities (Janda, & Joseph, 2003). It happens when people of a society indulge excessively in different social networking sites, they start to disregard the elements of formal language and mix it with the features of informal language that includes colloquialism or slangs (Adedamola, Modupe & Dehinbo 2015).

Hickey, (2004) examined the relationship of language with the society that uses it, saying that it is a mode of communication between different individuals living in a society. The area of language that deals with society is known as sociolinguistics, intending to explore the use of language which is governed by factors like race, gender, class, region etc.

On the other hand, Trudgill, (2002) claims that linguistic distinctiveness can be seen through vocabulary including jargon or slangs, pronunciation, morphological procedures and syntax building. The use of words and expressions also termed as slangs are not considered standard language and is mostly central to the young generation's experience where the expressions are measured as an indicator of the speaker's social identity (Namvar, 2014).

Slang and colloquial expressions have gained popularity among the youth in different societies. These are the words or phrases mostly youngsters use while communicating whether in ignorance of the formal words, or deliberately to cope with the new trends of the environment they live in (Godley, Carpenter & Werner, 2007). A constant use of slang is seen among users of language on social networking sites, text messaging including the use of different emoji to express feelings rather than expressing them in words (Mehmood, 2013).

Slang usage has more to do with internet and gadgets among youth often indulged in making errors in their language delivery, producing jargon, mistake in punctuations, using emoji's in expressing feelings etc. They are emulating language elements which fascinates them from people belonging to different communities that share the same social networking platform to converse about almost everything (Tait, 2019).

In Pakistan, slang language is a frequent occurrence among the university students who have incorporated these utterances in their speech as well as in their writing. It is a matter of great concern as excessive use of slang is now permeating into their academic writing (Khan, & Perwaiz, 2010). Slang almost always transforms the tone of a conversation from formal to colloquial which

contributes to the language variation process (Saeed, 2013). Students are exposed to people coming from different dialects also they are frequently using social media and have started forgetting the differences between informal and formal language whereas in educational institutions a more formal tone is required (Shah, 2018).

It is observed that students have started excessively using text messaging as the main source of interaction and communication between friends and family also it has become a growing apprehension among parents, educators, teachers and researchers because this practice of youth is highly damaging and affecting the standard forms of language use; speaking and writing. The formal writing of university students is seen to be impacted by the frequent use of informal and slang language in their exams, reports, assignments and tests because SMS texting promotes shorter spellings, wrong or no punctuation, poor word choice and easy communication (Imtiaz, 2017).

1.2. Problem Statement

In Pakistan, slang usage is a popular occurrence trending among university students, who frequently use these expressions, creating a growing concern that these expressions are permeating into their academic writing (Aziz et. al., 2013). Academic writing demands appropriate language choice to communicate ideas without leaving a disagreeable effect on the reader (Shahraki, & Rasekh, 2011).

1.3. Research Objectives

- To examine the use of slang language in the academic writing of students in Pakistan.
- To explore the factors contributing to the use of slang language in the academic writing of undergraduate students.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What is the use of slang language in student's academic writing in Pakistan?
2. What are the factors contributing to the use of slang language in the academic writing of undergraduate students?

1.5. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the factors that are contributing to the language change that involves several slang words or sentences by highlighting the effects of language change on the academic writing of students studying at the undergraduate level. In addition to investigating the influence of slangs in the formal writing of university students.

1.8. Scope of the Study

This research focused at the undergraduate students' use of slang in their academic writing. Moreover, this study will contribute positively for the student body enrolled in Pakistani universities by making them aware of the impact that the use of slang language imposes to their overall academic performance. It will also benefit the researchers in order to formulate further studies on similar topic.

2. Literature Review

This chapter aims to review a number of studies carried out to explore the impacts of slang language on the academic writing of students. The chapter has been presented in three phases: Language variation and society, slang and its use and the factors affecting language with application of informal language in Pakistan as its sub heading.

2.1. Language Variation and Society

Language is an important source of communication, it can be done through any language by which one can transfer ideas, information, emotion etc. It is a tool by which people express themselves in everyday communication. It is also used to negotiate events, actions and relationships as it plays a vital purpose socially mainly dealing with linguistic communication (Richards & Schmidt, 2014).

Social life is pervaded through language because it is the main vehicle to transmit cultural knowledge by gaining access to the ideas of other's minds. It is also implicated in most phenomena's of social perception, attitude change, personal identity, social interaction, attribution etc. Just as social life is pervaded through language, social life also constitutes importance in the way language is used because language use varies among different societies (Krauss & Chiu, 1998).

Variation in language is a natural phenomenon as it happens among speakers or group of speakers having a notable criteria of change that may occur in pronunciation, word choice or preference for particular grammatical preferences. Variation mainly can be regional, social, linguistic or contextual providing differences in a way language is used. Linguistic variation can be administered from one place to another, from one situation to another and from one social group to another (Tagliamonte, 2006).

2.2. Slang and its Use

Language variation which is developed within societies enables people to use different words and sentences that they prefer and feel comfortable with also it allows them to express their view points more accurately. These are considered to be informal in nature i.e. slangs, colloquialism etc. These informal words or phrases are usually created according to a society's own interest and habits. Slangs are generally a subset of the language that is used by a particular person or group belonging to a society. It consist of expressions, words or sentences which does not belongs to any dictionary and are distortions of words or terms, existing or invented which are used in informal settings and are not considerably appropriate for formal situations (Partridge, 2006).

Slangs can also be the words people pick from different communities which they find captivating as Matteilo, (2005) stated about slang that it is a language which constitutes of words or phrases which are regarded as informal and are common in both speech and writing also these words or sentences are generally restricted to a particular group of people. But it can also be transferred to societies through different modes of communication and interaction.

Slang and the excessive usage of other informal words is seen among students belonging to different institutions. But the alarming situation is that students have started using slang or colloquialism while writing an academic piece of text. This is a rising issue because academic writing demands a formal tone and a good word choice which gets neglected by the use of these informal words i.e. jargons, cants and vernacular language etc. (Melikian, 2002).

2.3. Factors Affecting Language

There are different factors that progressively effects the formal language of youngsters by giving them exposure to the improper language. Their formal language can be effected by the excessive usage of social networking sites which gives them subjection to the informal or colloquial language that is used by different communities on the same platform also it is affected by frequent text messaging among people who belong to different societies. Chasombat, (2014) declared these networking sites to be harmful for people because it develops undesirable communication skills among them making them use smaller words or phrases to instant the conversing process which damages their vocabulary by its constant and uninterrupted usage.

Also, Mehmood, and Taswir, (2013) determined the impacts of social networking sites on the formal writing of students which is gradually affecting their standards of formal language usage in their institutions while writing an academic piece of text because students have been seen using these networking sites excessively as a major part of their everyday lives and therefore making changes in the traditional features of their language. Students get attracted towards these informal words and hence tend to use them in their academic works as well.

Social sites have become a major mode of communication among youngsters hence bringing impact on several areas of learning by developing different emerging words or sentences of language. These social networking sites (SNSs) have provided youngsters a pathway to develop their own Meta language which is probing and altering the traditional rules and features of English language making it different and adulterated (Thurairaj, Hoon, Roy & Fong, 2015).

2.3.1. Application of Informal language in Pakistan

In Pakistan, students are inclined towards the use of informal language because they are constantly interacted with people belonging to different regions conversing on a vast platform like social media which gives them access to develop regional and language variations among each other. These type of variations causes a prominent effect on their language choice and use which then promotes the tradition of employing informal or colloquial language outside and even inside their academic institutions (Khodier, 2016).

Similarly, Mahmood and Parveen, (2015) in examining the role of mass media and its influence in changing the linguistic habits of children, opined that language and media plays a significant role in their everyday lives as both are connected to the use of one another. Whereas, Television, internet and social networking sites are undoubtedly the wrongdoers in the formation of formal language usage among children because they promotes regional irrelevancy and hinders the formal language usage process. Moreover, Hafeez and Qadir (2018) claimed mobile text

messaging to be offenders of normal language usage among students because it is considered to be a source of instant messaging which promotes reductions and omissions in spellings of words, shortening of sentences and usage of abbreviations.

3. Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology of the research under study, it employed a quantitative approach in order to fulfil the requirement of the objectives discussed in the research. It includes the details of the research strategy, the research method, the research approach, the method of data collection, the selection of the sample, the research procedure, data analysis type and the ethical considerations.

3.1. Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was developed keeping in view the theoretical framework and objectives of the research that were considered relevant to examine the use of slang language in the academic writing of undergraduate students studying in a government university. In addition to it, Likert scale type was used to gather the data from the same student population, because it requires less time, cost and effort also it allows the researchers to compare the data effectively as the responses are subjective and easily quantifiable (Brown, 2011).

The questionnaire used in the research was the primary instrument for gathering the required information from the students. The questionnaire consisted of a total of fifteen statements using a five point Likert type scale containing Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Not sure =3, Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree =5 so that the respondents could choose the option which best supports their opinion as this scale is used to calculate the attitudes by measuring the extent to which they agree or disagree upon a statement (Bertram, 2007). The questionnaire involved the statements based on the objectives of the study and the features taken from the theoretical framework; language and society and language variation so as to achieve all the aspects that needs to be covered to carry out the respective study. Furthermore, the statements were divided into three sections covering the aspects of the features carried from the framework and the topic under study. The first category was language and society, the second category was language variation and the third category was about the use of slang language having five statements each.

Likert scale survey questionnaire was administered to the sample of 70 undergraduate students studying English major in a government university. It was preferred in order to allow the students to express their views, attitudes and beliefs towards the certain issue of using slang language while writing formal or academic texts as it is considered to be a more reliable, effective and most commonly used instrument for research purposes because it efficiently measures the targeted data (Nemoto, & Beglar, 2014).

3.7. Data Collection Procedure

A survey questionnaire was constructed using point 5 Likert scale to be filled by the same students asking question on the basis of the data gathered from the student sample and the features of the

theoretical framework considered essential to conduct the research; language variation and the relation between language and society in particular along with the general questions about using slang words or phrases by the students in their academic setting. The students were informed about the questionnaire and the aim of the research beforehand and afterwards the questionnaire was distributed to them in hard copies.

3.8. Data Analysis

The data was collected and then processed to gather the responses of the participants on the objectives that were discussed in the study. A quantitative approach was adopted to analyse the results of the study, the responses of the survey questionnaire were analysed descriptively, moreover the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values of the survey questionnaire were analysed to identify the questions which the polarity of answers was high.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

The research scholar kept in consideration the most important issues which were confidentiality and respect of the participants. For this purpose the research's intervention was proceeded by gathering the consent of each participant. The participants were given a choice to remain unanimous and were ensured that their information would not be used for any other purpose at any time in the future. All the participants participated on their own will and were not forced to collaborate for the research understudy. Research ethics were considered an important part of the research which ensured that it is conducted without any kind of falsification or fabrication of the data.

4. Results and Findings

The survey questionnaire was administered to 70 undergraduate students of a government university. The questionnaire comprised of 15 statements related to the relationship of language and society, language variation and use of slang language by students. The students were instructed to mark each statement according to five point Likert scale where Strongly Disagree was assigned as 1, Disagree as 2, Not sure as 3, Agree as 4 and Strongly Agree as 5. The aim of the survey questionnaire was to acquire the responses of the students about the relationship of language and society, language variation and the use of slang in order to determine the factors and influence of the use of slang language in academic works. Mean and standard deviation of the responses gathered by the students, was calculated using descriptive statistics in SPSS software. The results of the questionnaire were calculated according to each category and its statements, the description of the results is given below;

Table 1 Language and Society

Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Language is a major part of any society	70	1.00	5.00	4.357	.91740

Language and its users are interdependent	70	1.00	5.00	4.200	1.0158
Speakers determine the language change	70	1.00	5.00	4.129	.97685
Differing social factors affects language use	70	1.00	5.00	4.300	.89037
Language of speakers vary in their use of grammar	70	1.00	5.00	4.300	.92235

In the category of language and society, the results in table 1 shows that the mean of the first statement (Language is a major part of any society) is 4.357 suggesting that the average of the students answered to this statement was 4 agreeing that language is a major part of any society, the mean of the second statement (Language and its users are interdependent) is 4.200 and the standard deviation is 1.0158 meaning that the results are somewhat spread out but mostly people agreed that the users and the language are interdependent as the average of the mean value is 4, the mean of the third statement (Speakers determine the language change) is 4.129 resulting that speakers do determine the language change, the mean of fourth and fifth statement (Differing social factors affects language use, Language of speakers vary in their use of grammar) is 4.300 determining that differing social factors affects the use of language and that the language of the speakers do vary in their use of grammar.

Table 2 Language Variation

Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Language changes with time	70	1.00	5.00	4.400	.93870
Formal words are often replaced with informal ones	70	1.00	5.00	4.385	.87299
Language variation is a social issue	70	1.00	5.00	4.357	.86871
Each speaker uses language differently	70	1.00	5.00	4.385	.85623
Variation can be social, regional and/or contextual	70	1.00	5.00	4.185	1.0114

In the table 2, the results of the statements concerning language variation are provided. The mean of the first statement is 4.400 indicating that the average of the data agrees that language do

change with the passage of time whereas the standard deviation is .93870 which is quite low meaning that the numbers of the answers were close to the mean. The mean of the second statement which is about replacing the formal words of language with the informal ones is 4.385. The mean of the statement on language variation is a social issue is 4.357 indicating that language variation is considered to be a social enigma whereas the mean value of fourth and fifth statement is 4.385 and 4.185 respectively, assenting to the use of language is different by every individual and that language variation can vary depending on the type.

Table 3 Use of Slang Language

Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Young people are frequent users of slangs	70	2	5	4.486	0.8967
Slang use should not be allowed in formal settings of the classroom	70	1	5	3.514	1.4620
Slangs are generated according to one's own interests	70	1	5	4.257	1.0170
Slang words make communication easier	70	1	5	4.343	0.9150
I use slangs in my academic work	70	1	5	3.271	0.9313

In table 3, the statements are about the use of slang language in general and academic contexts. The mean of the statement on young people are the frequent users of slang is 4.486 and the standard deviation is low illustrating that the average of the students agreed to it determining that the young generation frequently use the slang language whereas the mean of the statement on allowing slang language use in the classrooms is 3.514 which examines that mostly students were not sure whether the use of slang language should be allowed in formal settings of classrooms or not while the standard deviation is 1.4620 which means there was a dispersion of data points indicating that the data was spread out over a large range of value. The statement about generating slangs according to individual's interests demonstrated a mean of 4.257 accepting that slang words are originated according to the own interests and likes of people. The mean of the statement on slangs making the conversational process easier is 4.343 which determines that the average of the students agreed to the fact that the use of slang language do make the conversations easier whereas the mean of the last statement is 3.271 which means that majority of the students were not sure about whether they use slang language in their academic work or not.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The main objectives of the study were to explore the use of slangs in the formal writing of students, to investigate their influence on student's writings and the factors that are responsible for the use of slangs. A quantitative explanatory study design was used to underpin the theoretical framework of Wardhaugh (2011) in the field of sociolinguistics. The literature review concentrated on language change, language contact, language distinctiveness and language variation in Pakistan.

The findings from the survey questionnaires demonstrated that slang language was used by students and they were well aware of language variation process, the role of society on language change and the use of slang language in academic contexts. The study showed the insights of their responses towards questionnaires about the use of misdirected words while writing a formal text. Therefore, it was crucial to analyze the influence of slang language in the written works of students and to identify the factors that were responsible behind this concern.

5.2 Discussion and Major Findings

The study intended to explore the impact of slangs on the academic writing of undergraduate students in Pakistan. In response to the objectives of the study to determine the use of slangs in the formal writing of university students at the undergraduate level and the factors that contributes to the use of slangs in the formal writing based on the two strands of the theoretical framework (Language and society and Language variation) and use of slang language by youngsters. The results from the survey questionnaire unfolded the major factors that could account for the language change and the excessive presence of informal/slang language by students in academic writing.

The first category of the questionnaire was language and society. The results determined that language has plays a major role in any society, the language and their speakers are interdependent because language is a mode through which individuals can convey their ideas and can use it according to their own choice, speakers of any language determines it to change, different social factors also affects the use of language as the speakers vary in their use of grammar. The means of the statements were above 4.100 claiming that mostly students agreed upon the provided statements. Hence, language is affected by the societal factors and the speakers that are using.

For the second category on language variation, the results showed high mean values indicating that language changes with the passage of time, the formal words of any language are replaced by the speakers with the formation of new words, language variation is considered as a social issue because variation usually affects the standard rules and vocabulary of any language, the use of language is different by every speaker and that language variation can be of three types; social, regional and contextual. In consequence, it is determined that change occurs in a language because of the people who ignore the standard rules of language and when speakers of a language uses it differently according to their society, region or context in which they are communicating.

The third category of the survey questionnaire was about the use of slang language. The results presented a high mean value signifying that youth is the frequent user of slang language.

When students were asked about allowing slangs use in the formal settings they were not sure whether slangs should be allowed in an academic or formal setting or not and hence provided a low mean value of 3.514. The findings also revealed that students agreed upon the concept of generating slangs according to the speaker's own needs, choices or interests. Students also agreed that the use of slang language makes the conversation easier as it allows the speaker to deliver thoughts or ideas in their own preferable language making them communicate in a more comprehensive yet informal manner, confirming the findings of another study, that youngsters generally use informal/slang words and sentences that they feel comfortable with in order to convey their views more precisely (Partridge, 2006).

Students were also asked in the questionnaire that whether they use slangs in their formal or academic works or not. The diverse answers of the students determined a low mean count examining that they were unsure and doubtful about whether they use slang language while academic writing or not, this might be because most of the students use slangs in ignorance or because they do not really recognize them to be informal or slang words making them more unaware of its outcomes.

5.3 Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate the impact of slang language on the academic writing of undergraduate students in Pakistan. The objective of the study was to examine the factors which are responsible for their use of slang language establishing that constant variation of language and exposure to the society they live in or interact with determines their informal/sub-standard use of language. The findings from student's survey questionnaires also declared youngsters to be the frequent and often ignorant users of slangs and that they generate new slang terms and adopt the old ones depending on their interests to make the communication process easier. The analysis from the survey also disclosed that there was quite a bit of ignorance among the participants concerning whether they used slang words while writing academic texts. Suggesting that the learners are unaware of the variation having become used to the slang terms so much so that they do not recognize them to be slang and consider them to be a part of their vocabulary.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The present study was limited to the undergraduate students of a government university, hence the results of the study cannot be generalized for the students of other colleges and universities. Another limitation is that the study was based on the results which were carried out from only seventy language students.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

The study investigated the impacts of slang language use on students' academic writing. Therefore, the study presents research proposals for future research on the subject. Since this particular study focused on the undergraduate study of a government university, future researchers can expand the scope and generalize the hypothesis for the majority of students in Pakistan. Moreover, similar

research can also be done with larger samples collected from different settings to generalize the results.

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