

## Constative An Analysis of Slang Words on Twitter

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### Abstract

Due to the increasing numbers of online activities through social media platforms, the communication style also becomes more informal and open which resulted in slang being used too often among the users of social media. Therefore, this study focuses on whether English major students are also familiar with the use of slang in their communication through their tweets on Twitter. The research was conducted in accordance with Barseghyan's list of types of internet slangs, whereby the objectives of the research are to identify the types of slang used in Twitter, to investigate the functions of using slang words among students in Twitter, and to identify the meaning of slang words used by them in Twitter. This study is qualitative in nature which involved six participants. The data was obtained from tweets on Twitter that contained slang, and semi-structured interviews. The analysis found that these students implemented a variety of slang in their online communication such as shortening, punctuation and capitalizations, acronyms and abbreviations, clipping, compounding and repetition. The functions of slang used are pursuit of self-identity, emotive feeling and achieving politeness. In terms of the meaning, there are direct or indirect meanings depending on the context of the tweets. Thus, this study is likely to add to one's understanding of types of slang, the functions of using it and the meaning of the words.

**Keywords:** *slang words, Twitter*

### Introduction

Researchers have been looking for an answer to question whether men and women lead in the same way Sociolinguistics is the study of the sociological aspects of language that sociolinguists aim to separate the linguistic characteristics employed in specific state of affairs which describe the various social relationships between the participants and the important components of the situation (Britannica, 2008). In society, people will live in a certain group with similar social and economic factors. People will speak a distinct language and use different dialects according to the social groups. A social group is usually identified based on education, occupation, community, and income level. Hence, people from different groups tend to speak different social dialects in terms of words, pronunciation, and grammatical features which only can be understood within the social groups. They also used certain words in communication and sometimes it can only be understood by those people in their group. This is known as slang. Slang is the informal language that is employed by a particular group of people, especially the millennial generation, to communicate with one another. It is usually used in informal situations as the daily language, and it is also popular on social media.

Slang is not only popular on social media, but it also has been used in daily communication. According to Namvar (2014), Malaysian undergraduates of Bachelor of English Language at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) are familiar with slang as it gives them an identity of youth style of expression. It is usually used in informal situations as the daily language, and it is also popular on social media. Internet slangs are words or phrases that are regularly used in online conversations. Coleman (2012) stated that if you use slang, you run the chance of being judged unrefined, uneducated, stupid, or dispiritedly out of date, however the rewards are equally great: used properly, slang can ease your entry into the social circles you wish to get into, increase your attractiveness to the opposite sex, and even save your life.

Social media is used for people to interact socially such as exchanging photos and videos, sharing news stories, expressing their thoughts on blogs, and participating in online discussions. Nowadays, people can easily communicate and express their feelings through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Blogs, WhatsApp, YouTube and more. Besides, it is a trend to use slang in communication whether face-to-face conversation or through short messages posted on social media. Our communication style also becomes more informal and open which resulted in slang being used too often among the users of social media. As slang is known as a more or less uniform “youth language” (Namvar, 2014), this study is conducted to examine the use of slang on Twitter among the youth in UiTM.

## **Problem statement**

Researchers have in line with the increasing numbers of online activities through social media platforms, there are concerns about the ways people interact and communicate with other users in social media. According to Dollarhide (2020), social media is computer-based technology that allows virtual networks and communities to exchange ideas, feelings, and knowledge. Social media is internet-based where users can receive the communication of content easily. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. Social media can be engaged by users through devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones.

According to Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commissions [MCMC] (2020), internet users were mainly adults in their 20's and 30's, where they accounted for 46% and 21%, respectively. Twitter users have risen from 24% in 2018 to 37% in 2020 (MCMC, 2020) and to date, 4.4 million users have been recorded to be registered users in Malaysia. The nature of communication on Twitter is known to be informal and non-standard. The phenomenon of using informal language or slang in the communication of Twitter users could be detected through their tweets. The reasons are due to the increasing usage of the internet, and another reason can be the media itself, which has the most important role in this case. Therefore, this study intends to answer three research questions, which are:

1. What are the types of slang used on Twitter?
2. What are the functions of using slang words among LG240 students on Twitter?
3. What is the meaning of slang words used by LG240 students on Twitter?

## **Literature review**

### **Slang**

The origin of the word slang itself is not well-known; it initially appeared around 1800, applied to the speech of discreditable and criminal categories in London (Maurer, 2020). However, this term might be used much earlier. According to Merriam-Webster, slang is an informal non-standard vocabulary composed typically of coinages, arbitrarily changed words forced, or facetious figures of speech. Slang has a different meaning from standard English because sometimes they are borrowed from another language and are formed by abbreviation (Donal et al., 2019). It means every word has its own meaning and is restricted to a specific context or group of people. Maurer (2020) stated that the utilization of metaphor, simile, etymology, sound distortion of words, generalization, specialization, clipping, the use of acronyms, elevation and degeneration, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, foreign language borrowings, and also the play of expression against taboo is slang. Historically, the word slang has been used in a much wider context, including slangs connected to specific social groups and professions (Agha, 2015).

### **Twitter**

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>) is an online platform where people can communicate and exchange real-time information. Twitter is for quick reading of information with limited word per tweet (Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). It only allows people to communicate in short messages or known as tweets up to 280 characters. Twitter users can follow other users and you can see their tweets in your twitter "timeline". Besides that, Twitter users can retweet other users' tweets. Retweet means sharing the information quickly and efficiently. According to (Izazi and Tengku-Sepora, 2020), they did not only share more personal information, but also communicate with a larger audience. Our communication style also becomes more informal and open.

### **Internet Slang**

Based on the past study focused on internet slang among Malaysians, Namvar (2014) reported that Malaysian university students are familiar with English-based slang words in their communication on social media. Barseghyan (2013) listed some types of internet slangs that included letter homophones, punctuation, capi-

talizations and other symbols, onomatopoeic spellings, keyboard-generated icons and smileys, leet (leetspeak), flaming (act of bashing), shortening (acronyms and abbreviation), clipping and compounding.

### **Social Functions of Slang**

Zhou and Fan (2013) listed three functions of slang which are pursuit of self-identity, emotive feeling of the slang users and achieving politeness.

#### **1- Pursuit of Self-Identity**

Because different slang has been used by various social and professional groups, it is therefore known as a distinction between professional groups in society. If someone uses the words and expressions within a certain social group or professional group, that person can mingle with the members of that group. In other words, if someone says a word which contains the slang used in a certain group, that person surely wants to get the result of showing and strengthening the emotion that they belong to that group.

#### **2- Emotive Feeling of the Slang Users**

The emotive subject reveals the speakers' attitude towards their subject. The emotional role is one of the strong uses of language because it is important for or against someone or something in the changes in an audience's emotional status. It also helps in getting rid of the nervous energy when someone is stressed. Psychologically, slang can help people to express their feelings. It means when someone uses slang, they want to go against the reality and set them psychologically free.

#### **3- Achieving Politeness**

The notion of register needs to be mentioned where reference is made to a way of speaking or writing that is specific to a selected function, that is, characteristic of a particular domain of communication. Three factors that influence the selection of register are occasions (formal or informal), receiver (age, gender, occupation, the degree of familiarity) and the content of the conversation. The employment of slang is also influenced by three factors; the use of slang in improper occasions or the use of slang to not the proper receiver, or the improper content in one's speech could ruin the friendship and good relationship with your interlocutors.

### **Methodology**

The design of this study is primarily qualitative in nature. This study utilizes content analysis and interview as it seeks to identify the types of slang, to investigate the functions of using slang words among LG240 students in Twitter and the meaning of slang words used by LG240 students in Twitter. This study was con-

ducted at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Shah Alam, Selangor. Convenience sampling was applied for data collection. Six LG240 students from Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Shah Alam who are fluent in English and have their own Twitter accounts were selected to become the participants for the study. A total of nineteen tweets containing slang words were found and have been analyzed to identify the types of slang used by the students in their tweets. Then, the types of slang were classified into nine categories listed by Barseghyan which are shortening, punctuations and capitalizations, acronyms and abbreviations, clipping and compounding. The data collected from the tweet were analysed based on the categories listed. Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify the meaning of the slang words and the functions of using slang words. The type of questions used for the interview was six open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted to gain deeper understanding of the meaning of slang words used by the students as they are popular on social media and among teenagers.

## Findings

### Research Question 1

The data revealed that the students on Twitter used variations of internet slang. The study also showed that most Twitter users applied code-mixing and code-switching in their tweets, between Malay and English. After thorough analysis, there are five types of slang listed by Barseghyan (2013) mainly used by LG240 students in their tweets. Namely, shortening, punctuation and capitalizations, acronyms and abbreviations, clipping and compounding. Besides that, another variation of slang is reported in this study which is repetition.

#### Shortenings

No.	Shortenings	
i.	<i>u play games n buy lots of foods w friends i</i>	<i>you, and, with</i>
ii.	<i>just suddenly feel sad fr the school kids</i>	<i>for</i>
iii.	<i>i don't want to hurt yr feelings so heres yr gift</i>	<i>your</i>
iv.	<i>y kno hw they said yr man only looks good in your eyes</i>	<i>you, know, how, your</i>

This category of slang is seen to be useful in simplifying the words since Twitter only allows 280 characters per tweet. The most frequently shortened words used in the data are “n” which stands for “and” with the occurrences of 7 times, followed by “yr” which stands for “your” (5 times) and “fr” which stands for “for” (4 times). According to Craig (2003, as cited in Izazi and Tengku-Sepora, 2020), both vowels and consonants being eliminated from the words were categorized as drastic forms of shortening which refer to “n” and “w” in sample (i). Meanwhile, “fr”, “yr”, “y” and “hw” in sample (ii), (iii), and (iv) were vowel-

drop shortened English words. The shortening occurred through eliminations of all vowels, leaving only the first, third and last consonants (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020). Removal of the vowels and consonants which resulted in the forming of shortening words seems to help LG240 students save their typing times.

*Punctuations and Capitalizations*

No.	Punctuations and Capitalizations
i.	i should ve become an athlete, have you seen the olympic village????
ii.	done with negotiation simulation!!
iii	it's 10pm and im already so sleepy, i cant do late night movie anymore,i barely pass 10 these days, am i.....old?!
iv	I wish i..
v	All The Bright Places. This movie is dedicated to those who are struggling with mental health concerns. Such an impactful movie. We should explore things more, go outside, know places and people. Don't be pushy. And <b>STAY AWAKE!</b>

Punctuations and capitalizations are commonly used for emphasis or stress (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020). It is another way for people to express their feelings too. Periods or exclamation marks may be used repeatedly for emphasis.

Samples (i), (ii) and (iii) display the use of question mark and exclamation mark repeatedly. In samples (i) and (ii), the context of the tweet shows that the user is expressing the strong emotion by including multiple question marks and exclamation marks. In sample (iii) and (iv), the context of the expressing emotion of furious and wondering by adding the multiple periods. In sample (v), the use of capital letters or caps lock and exclamation mark show that the user as what Izazi and Tengku-Sepora (2020) said, the use of caps expressing screaming or yelling, and have the tendency to make the words seem 'louder'.

*Acronyms and abbreviations*

No.	Acronyms and Abbreviations
i.	<b>Ngl</b> , <i>lawa gila</i> celebration #SaudiArabianGP. <i>Dengan dron</i> , light show <i>lampu lgbt lagi</i> <b>Not gonna lie, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender</b>
ii.	i had a feeling that im gonna get extra homesick next week since I've been at home since first <b>odl</b> last year... sigh <b>Online distance learning</b>

- iii. crazy how arief just send me off to work this morning, and now we're back to our normal **ldr** routine **Long distance relationship**
- iv. *Nak jadi pejuang Islam tapi memfitnah.* How is that even possible **smh** **Shaking my head**
- v. **Idk** why. Memang fyp proposal or fyp itself *aku memang tak ada hati langsung nak buat. Tak ada minat. Aku tak tau kenapa degree kalini.* **I don't know**
- vi. I wish im not wrecked and still a naïve-in-certain-things person. What happened to me throughout the past years, have taken a toll on me right now. **Atm**, I wish it didn't happen. **At the moment**
- vii. *Aku tak rasa kena brainwash pasal politik pun sepanjang jadi mahasiswa dekat UiTM.* Guess **idgaf** to join any event. **I don't give a f**

**`Ngl, lgbt, idk, smh, ldr, odl, atm** and **idgaf** were all English abbreviations found in the data. All these abbreviations were all the combination of the first letters of common phrases such as [I don't know], [shaking my head] and [not gonna lie].

### Clipping

No.	Clipping
i.	my sleep is more important than anything else, those who knows me know <i>la assgmt ke exam ke</i> , i can't never give up on my sleep, i dont stay up fr my study, it's a bad trait but nah i don care this is all dunya after all <b>examination</b>
ii.	Most of YouTube <b>ads</b> are about annoying mobile games with choke full of <b>ads</b> in it & forex trading. So yeah. I rather watch 30 minutes of movie trailers <b>advertisement</b>

Clipping is an act of reducing or shortening words without changing their meaning (Barseghyan, 2013). There are two clipping words found in the data which are **exam** [examination] and **ads** [advertisement]. These two words are commonly used by people. Besides that, including clipping words in the tweets can easily help the users to save their typing time, and also cope with Twitter's character limitation.

*Compounding*

No.	Compounding	
i.	i had a feeling that im gonna get extra <b>homesick</b> next week since I've been at home since first odl last year... sigh	<b>homesick</b>
ii.	<i>Aku tak rasa kena <b>brainwash</b> pasal politik pun sepanjang jadi mahasiswa dekat UiTM.</i> Guess idgaf to join any event.	<b>brainwash</b>
iii.	Imagine being <b>headhunt</b> for putting a white flag to ask for help. The politicians really don't mind being murderers having blood on their hands as long as they are in power.	<b>headhunt</b>
iv.	<i>Nak level up <b>gameplay</b> tapi pengurusan setiap kelab masih suam<sup>2</sup> kuku. Kecuali JDT lah. Tahun bila agaknya dapat tengok Malaysia menerobos ke peringkat lebih tinggi, standing Jepun dan Korea. At least setaraf dengan Vietnam atau Thailand.</i>	<b>gameplay</b>
v.	Tell this to Fast 9 <b>screenwriters</b>	<b>screenwriters</b>

According to Nordquist (2019), compounding is the combination of two words (free morphemes) to create a new word (noun, verb, or adjective). Sometimes it can be in one word or two words. Some compounding words found in the data are **homesick**, **brainwash**, **headhunt**, **gameplay**, and **screenwriters**. Sample (i) is a combination of noun and adjective [homesick]. In sample (ii), (iii) and (iv), [brainwash], [headhunt] and [gameplay] are the combination of noun and verb. For sample (v), it is the combination of noun and noun [screenwriters].

*Repetition*

No.	Repetition	
i.	i should have become an athlete, have you <b>seenn</b> the olympic village???	<b>seenn</b>
ii.	so <b>hungryyyy</b> can the dinner prepare itself	<b>hungryyyy</b>
iii.	like <b>whyyy</b> is it <b>sooo</b> wrong to take 5 n sit down fr a moment? we're not even paid enough money?? wtf	<b>whyyy, sooo</b>

Repetition that occurs through word elongation was found in the data. It mostly occurred in the last letter of each word, or in some cases, the middle letters (Izazi and Tengku- Sepora, 2020). O'Connor (2013) mentioned that there were reasons behind word elongation or repetition like these, such as acting as the kindness of word-stretchers. O'Conner listed subcategories such as 'Apologetic Os' which has been portrayed in sample (iii) through the repetition of the word why – whyyy and so – sooo. Another example of the



kindness of word-stretcher under the subcategory ‘Pleading’ can be seen in sample (ii) through the elongation of the word hungry – hungryyyy. Sample (i) signals being amazed as an example of the playfulness of repetition which falls under subcategory ‘Gleeful Es’.

## **Research Question 2**

### *Sample 1*

“Slang can be used as short form and also kind of set a new trend”.

The extract above is a transcription of the interview with the interviewee. In this context, the interviewee said that slang is used as a short form, and it also set a new trend for a particular time.

### *Sample 2*

“It is used to simplify the way you communicate but only for informal communication courses”.

“Other than that, I just think slangs can differentiate you and other people in terms of culture because although there are many English-speaking countries, all have different slangs. For example, the British called fries "chips" and we say "fries" same with Americans”.

“Slang also is a form of expression that only the people who are familiar with it will understand. Like the word "yeet" it represents excitement. It wasn't in the dictionary, but I believe younger generations are more familiar with that and if you say that to a millennial, they probably won't understand”.

For sample 2, the interviewee said the function of slang is to simplify informal communication. Besides that, slang also can differentiate people in terms of culture. Slang also functions as a form of expressions for people who are familiar with the words. Therefore, only a certain group of people could understand the slang.

### *Sample 3*

“I can write whatever I want without stressing about the English syntax stuff”.

“I think the function of slang is to close the gap when having a conversation with people”.

“Another one is, by using slang, we can learn and understand a culture pretty well”.

“Thus, by using slang, we can know how social media works, and how the current generation has conversations online. We can fit in and understand the trend”.

Sample 3 described slang is used to express emotions by writing whatever they want. Slang also functions to close the gap between people while having conversation. Also, slang can help people to learn and understand the culture. Thus, slang can expose people about the way of online communication of the current generation.

#### *Sample 4*

“I think slang is used to create a sense of belonging and help create a community”.

“For example, if you're talking in a group of adolescents or teenagers, and you speak formally to them. I think that it would make a gap between you and them. There's a block that hinders you and another group from communicating better”.

The extract above explained slang functions as to create a sense of belonging and create a community. It means, slang can differentiate the group of people; a group that could understand the words that were used in the communication, and a group that couldn't find out the meaning of the words.

#### *Sample 5*

“Based on my knowledge, the function of slang is to fit in the conversation on Twitter”.

“It also makes me more creative when using slang in my tweets”.

In sample 5, the interviewee described the function of slang is to fit in the conversation on Twitter. Besides that, slang could help people be more creative if it is included in the tweets.

#### *Sample 6*

“I think slangs are often used to give direct meanings to sentences without confusing readers or listeners”.

For the data above, the interviewee said the function of slang is to give direct meanings to ensure that the readers or listeners won't be confused.

After thorough analysis, the samples from six LG240 students are correlated with the three functions of slang listed by Zhou and Fan (2013) which are pursuit of self-identity, emotive feeling of the slang users and achieving politeness. Most of the data found mentioned how slang can differentiate people and groups in society. Slang also functions in helping people to fit in certain groups and be more comfortable since the slang words used by them can be understood by those people. Therefore, they could close the gap between other people when having the conversation. They are also aware how the slang words belong to distinct groups or cultures.

### Research Question 3

#### *Slang Words and the Definition*

No.	Slang Words	Definition
i.	<b>Ldr</b> [Long distance relationship]	Two people live far enough apart that they cannot see each other often.
ii.	<b>Smh</b> [Shaking my head]	An expression to express disbelief.
iii.	<b>Atm</b> [At the moment]	It describes the feeling or situations dealt by the user at that specific time.
iv.	<b>Idgaf</b> [I don't give a f]	It can be described as "I don't really care"
v.	<b>Lgbt</b> [Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender]	Rgb lights which stand for red, green and blue.
vi.	<b>Homesick</b>	Feeling of sad, or stress from longing for home, family or loved ones while stay from them for a long time.
vii.	<b>Headhunt</b>	Being chased or being judged by others.
viii.	<b>STAY AWAKE!</b>	Live your fullest and don't just live inside your bubble.
ix.	<b>Tea</b>	A gossip.
x.	<b>Shook</b>	Incredibly surprised.
xi.	<b>Lowkey</b>	A way of saying that you liked or did something secretly.
xii.	<b>24/7</b>	Something is continuous or non-stop.
xiii.	<b>Shoot</b>	An approval for someone to ask you something.

After thorough analysis, most of the slang words found in the data have a direct meaning where it can be understood without depending on the context of the tweets. Meanwhile some of the slang words have an indirect meaning which can only be understood depending on the context of the tweets. In sample (v), **Lgbt** means lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. However, in this context of the tweet “**Ngl**, *lawa gila* celebration #SaudiArabianGP. *Dengan dron*, light show *lampu lgbt lagi*”, **lgbt** is a meme for a pc gamer which means rgb lights. Rgb stands for red, green, and blue which is the primary colour that can be mixed to create a new colour. For sample (viii), **STAY AWAKE!** is part of a quote from the movie, *All the Bright Places*. In this context of the tweet, “*All The Bright Places*. This movie is dedicated to those who are struggling with mental health concerns. Such an impactful movie. We should explore things more, go outside, know places and people. Don’t be pushy. And **STAY AWAKE!**”, the user tried to give a message about “Don’t just live inside your bubble, your comfort zone. Live your life fullest, have fun going places before you kick the bucket. There’s so much more to discover than ever when we stay awake”. For this context, the message could be understood right away by someone who's watched the movie. **Tea** in sample (ix) described as gossip. It is commonly used when someone wants to gossip about something by writing or saying, “spill the tea”.

## Conclusions

The findings have shown that the students were familiar with slang since most of their tweets include the slang words. Even though they were students who study English for professional communication and people expect them to use formal English, it did not stop them from using slang or informal English in their tweets since it helps them to prove themselves as younger generations.

The slang helps the users to express themselves better by using punctuation and capitalizations. To convey messages in short text and quickly, shortening or abbreviations or acronyms have come into use. These slangs help users to save typing time, and also to cope with Twitter’s word limitation. By using repetition which mostly occurred in the last letter of each word, it could portray someone being apologetic, pleading, or gleeful. Therefore, it provides room for self-expression which also helps them to convey their emotional nuances accurately. The slang also functions in helping people to fit in certain groups by using certain words that only can be understood by the youth. Thus, the younger generations are more familiar with that word compared to the millennial.

Lastly, the students seem to be more creative by including slang words in their tweets in order to express themselves. The slang words found in the data have a direct meaning where it can be understood without depending on the context of the tweets. Meanwhile some of the slang words have an indirect meaning which can only be understood depending on the context of the tweets. Those slang words might be weird or

do not make sense at first, however they have their own meanings and purpose which is to ease communication among those people who understand the words, namely the youth. Sometimes it is also used to create a friendly atmosphere or make fun of someone among their social circles.

This study is likely to assist one's understanding of slang. The findings show variations of slang, the functions of slang and the meaning of the slang words. By including Barseghyan's list of types of slang and the functions of slang by Zhou and Fan as part of the analysis, this study could benefit those in the field of linguistics and society as well.

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