Check This One out: Analyzing Slang Usage among Iranian Male and Female Teenagers

Sara Hashemi Shahraki (corresponding author),
Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Isfahan, Iran,
22, Apt. 222, Mir St., Isfahan, Iran, P.O. Box: 8164984778
E-mail:sara_m_hashemi@yahoo.com

Abbass Eslami Rasekh
Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Isfahan, Iran,
E-mail:abbasseslamirasekh@yahoo.com

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Abstract
Slang usage in modern age Iran is a popular phenomenon among most male and female teenagers. How pervasive this variation of language use is among various age and sex groups in Iran has been a question of debate given the significance of religion in a theological system of social structure. The work presented in this study aims to investigate the effect of age and sex on variability of slang usage. Sixty Iranian participants were selected, and then were divided into three age groups (i.e. primary school, high school, and senior university students) each group consisting of ten males and ten females. A self-made questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) describing nine situations of friendly conversations was given to the participants. They were asked to make their choice on the responses, which ranged from formal to very informal style (common teenage slang expressions), or to write down what they wish to say under each circumstance. The results of the chi–square tests indicated that slang usage among high school students is more frequent as compared with other age groups. Unlike the popular belief suggesting that slang is used by boys rather than girls, the findings suggested that young Iranians both male and female use slang as a badge of identity showing their attachment to the social group they wish to be identified with.

Keywords: Slang expressions and terms, Age, Sex, Adolescents

1. Introduction
Slang refers to speech expressions used by a speech community (e.g. teenagers, criminals, etc.) that wishes to show its attachment to a favorable social identity; a usage which is not often approved of by other social groups. It is a style of usage that is not acceptable in situations outside the group and is unfavorable to the general population. Hudson (2000) believes that slang starts out as clever alternative ways of saying things which could otherwise be expressed in polite ways. On the other hand, Allan and Burridge (2009) argue that the politeness of this category of language is wedded to context, time and place. It has even been stated by Brown and Levinson (1978) that the use of slang (known as in-group language) is a positive politeness strategy that shows high involvement in a particular group. Slang also illustrates various generative processes through which language system intakes new words and usages including: neologisms, meaning extensions, derivations, clippings, borrowings, etc.

One particular type of slang is the teenage slang, a language style used by adolescents or in other words a generation-specific use of language. An important function of this type of slang is to create an identity which is distinct from the general adult world. Adolescents usually make themselves distinct from children and adults by using a style of language which demonstrates their belonging to their own age group and their distinction from other age groups (Chambers, 1995). Teenagers usually do not use such expressions in their interactions with other generations whom they generally claim to be outsiders and do not approve of their usage. Teenage slang changes rapidly because people are teenagers for a limited period of time, when adults, they become outsiders and gradually forget the group words and the developments happening in the course of time to the old expressions and meanings.

Before the 1990s, the analysis of age and generation-specific use of language was seen relatively straightforward. A series of studies during the last two decades have problematised this area of research and questioned some issues that had previously been taken for granted (e.g. Cheshire, 2005; Coupland, 1997; Giles et al., 2000; Ota et al., 2000). Most of the early research in this area considered adult language as the target; thus, children’s language was conceptualized.
in developmental terms, while the language of the elderly was analyzed as a degeneration and decline from the middle-aged adult norm (Eckert, 1997; Cheshire, 2005). Recently, there is a move to analyzing the speech of members of a given age group as fully appropriate to that life stage rather than comparing it either implicitly or explicitly to the language of the middle years.

During the second half of the twentieth century, a number of studies were done on the language of adolescents and it was thought to be a culturally salient life stage. Andersson and Trudgill (1990) and Labov’s (1992) studies focused on the slang vocabulary of adolescents. Clyne (1984) found that German speaking teenagers tend to use English phrases and English-influenced phrases in their communication with their peers. His finding shows the association between belonging to the youth culture and the use of English. The same phenomenon was discovered among young Danes by Preisler (1999) and Høgsbro (1995). Edwards (1979) documented the association between the use of nonstandard linguistic features of the youth and stereotypes of laziness, carelessness and other negative characteristics.

Moreover, a significant outcome of the focus on youth language has been the recognition of the important role of adolescents in language change, especially in the grammaticalization of features that may originate in slang vocabulary (Androutsopoulos, 1999; Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999).

Adolescents use a higher proportion of stigmatized variants than speakers of other ages do. Teachers and parents may react negatively if they perceive a heavy use of stigmatized features and do not realize that this is likely to be a temporary phase. However, it is essential to the self-respect of an adolescent to be different from other generations, but to be in step with other ‘relevant’ adolescents, identified in terms of alternative life-style models and speech styles (Hudson, 1996). Maybe this typical use of language of the youth is a preparation for the complexities of adult life.

Farsi is a language with a written form dramatically different from its spoken form. This language is rich in colloquial and slang expressions that are never used in formal writings and speech. The present study aims to investigate the effect of age and sex on teenage slang usage among Iranians. The question is how restricted slang usage is as a result of age factor, and how sex of the speakers influences the use of such expressions.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Out of the pool of potential participants who were invited to take part in this study voluntarily, 60 participants were chosen non-randomly (convenience sampling) from among primary school, high school (lower and higher), and undergraduate senior students to form three age groups. Each age group (primary school, high school, and senior university students) consisted of ten males and ten females. The mean age of each group is given in Table 1. The reason for choosing participants from these three levels of education was to study slang usage among children, teenagers, and adults.

2.2 Materials

A self-made questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used in this study, which described nine short imaginary conversations the participants may have with their ‘best friends’ of the same sex in which they were asked about the responses they may give under each circumstance. The responses ranging from formal style to very informal style leading to slang (i.e. the most common slang expressions used) were stated in the questionnaire, while space was also provided for any different response the participants may wish to use beyond the choices given (see appendix). The slang words and expressions used in the questionnaire were searched for and collected by examining natural data such as listening to the teenagers’ conversations with their peers and tape-recording the expressions that they use in their conversations. Since it was not possible to monitor and trace the language that was used in the friendly conversations among adults and children, a DCT was used to elicit data from these two age groups, which can be seen as a limitation to this study (eliciting spoken language in written form). The nine slang expressions accompanied with their English translations used for the nine situations of the study are listed in Table 2.

An example of one imaginary conversation is given below:

1. If you wanted to invite your best friend to the cinema what would you say?
   a) Paye-ie be-ri-m sinama? (slang expression)
      column- 2nd sing subj-go-we cinema? (transliteration)
   b) Aya shoma mayel-id ba man be sinama bi-ya-id? (formal style)
      ques-marker you interested-3rd pl with I to cinema subj-come-3rd pl? (transliteration)
   c) Mi-ya-ie be-ri-im sinama? (informal style)
      pres-come-2nd sing subj-go-we cinema? (transliteration)
   d) Any other thing you would say:
At the end of the questionnaire the participants were asked if they were familiar with these expressions before; if so, they were asked to mention the way they got familiar with these expressions.

2.3 Procedure

Initially, the questionnaires were handed out to the sixty participants. Then, they were told to read the instructions of the questionnaire carefully and answer the questions. They were asked to write their age, sex and level of education before starting to answer the questions and were told to keep it in their minds that the conversations were between them and one of their close friends of the same sex. In other words, when the females are talking to one of their close friends who is a female (i.e. a female to female conversation) and when the males are talking to one of their close friends who is a male (i.e. a male to male conversation). Fifteen minutes time was allotted to fill out the questionnaires, but more time was also given on demand. The design of the study included three variables: two social variables which were age and sex, and a linguistic variable that was slang usage.

3. Results

After the questionnaire data were collected, the formal, colloquial and very informal answers (i.e. the most common slang expressions used) were counted and tabulated (See Tables 3 – 5). Figure 1 illustrates the answers given by the three age groups.

Eleven chi-square tests were run to see whether the frequency of slang usage differs in the three age groups and whether males and females differ in using slang expressions. The results of six chi-square tests indicated that the three age groups significantly differed in the frequency of the formal, colloquial and slang expressions they provided: primary school (males, $\chi^2 = 13.06, p < 0.05$; females, $\chi^2 = 17.27, p < 0.00$); high school (males, $\chi^2 = 35.27, p < 0.00$; females, $\chi^2 = 20.87, p < 0.00$); and senior undergraduates (males, $\chi^2 = 16.46, p < 0.00$; females $\chi^2 = 24.27, p < 0.00$).

As it is shown in Table 3, the subjects in the first age group (primary school students) tended to use the informal style more frequently when communicating with their friends, and slang expressions was not favorable to this age group. Therefore, we can infer that slang usage is less popular among the children below the age of twelve. However, the results of the chi-square test indicated that among those boys and girls who were familiar with slang expressions in this age group, boys significantly differed with girls and used more slang expressions than girls ($\chi^2 = 5.00, p < 0.05$).

Table 4 illustrates that the participants in the second age group (high school students) used slang expressions much more in their conversations with their peers. According to the data obtained, there was a slight difference between the females and males in slang usage in this age group; however, the result of the chi-square test showed the difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.49, p > 0.05$).

The data in Table 5 indicate that the slang usage among the third age group (senior university students) was less than the second age group. When comparing the results obtained for these two age groups, it can be seen that the males belonging to the third age group still continue to use slang expressions; however, the females of this group used these expressions less than the females of the second age group. Therefore, we can suggest that females entering in the adult age group tend to change their choice of words when talking with their peers and they use less slang terms. In this age group, it was also seen that males use slang expressions much more than females ($\chi^2 = 8.9, p < 0.05$), which shows the difference between males and females in their language use.

Two other chi-square tests were run to see whether the frequency of the slang usage was the same among the females and males of the three age groups. The results obtained depicted that there was a change in the slang usage pattern of these three age groups (males $\chi^2 = 6.49, p < 0.05$ and females $\chi^2 = 22.20, p < 0.00$). Figure 2 demonstrates the changing pattern of the slang usage among children, teenagers and adults.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, it appears that in Iran like other countries age is a determining factor in slang usage. The primary school participants (mean age 8.7) are not familiar with the entire slang expressions used by teenage groups and do not know the meanings of most of the slang expressions. They consider it as inappropriate language and believe that the students who use this kind of language are impolite. However, teenage slang usage has been seen more often among high school students. It can be concluded that Iranian adolescents like most of the speakers of various other languages use slang as a badge of identity showing their attachment to the social group they wish to be identified with. This finding is interesting considering the emphasis the educational system places on religious and ethical norms to be followed by the youngsters. The pattern of use did reveal that adolescents in Iran are more influenced by their peers rather than by the training system sponsored by the Government and families. Regarding the age effect our data support Chambers (1995) and Hudson's (1996) claim concerning adolescents' preferences in their speech with their peers resulting in rich variation in language use.
The frequency of teenage slang usage of the participants who had left their teenagehood and entered their adult-life (the third age group), displayed a decreasing slope, indicating that they no longer tend to reveal their membership to the social group of their teenage time; the change from a free liberal style towards a radically constrained style which followed the social norms could demonstrate how motivation for conformity increased as reflected in their speech preferences. In the first and third age groups, males used slang words and expressions more than females. Males display, by using these expressions, their toughness, representing their masculinity, their society requires of them; in contrast, females usually are more cautious than males in their choices of style, which is in line with Tannen's (1990) belief about the difference between males and females in their language use. However, it seems that male and female differences in speech are not significantly obvious in the speech of adolescence.

References


Table 1. The mean age of the three age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary school students</th>
<th>High school students</th>
<th>Senior university students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The slang expressions used in the questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>N. Farsi slang expressions and their English transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paye-ie? Column 2nd sing</td>
<td>Are you in the mood to do sth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>sootti Dad-ie, kard-ie, whistle gaye-2nd sing spoiled</td>
<td>You shouldn't have said that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>khafan-e awesome-is</td>
<td>It's very exciting and has a lot of action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>rele-e Set-is</td>
<td>It's ok.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>kaf mi-kon-ie bubble pres-do-2nd sing</td>
<td>It's really excellent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Golabi-e Pear-is</td>
<td>It's really easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sare kar-esh gozasht-am On work-him/her put-1st sing</td>
<td>I got rid of her/him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pichond-am-es turn-1st sing- her/him</td>
<td>I fooled her/him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bache maye-dar-e Child liquid-have-is</td>
<td>She/he is very rich.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Answers given by the first age group (primary school students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males %</th>
<th>Females %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Answers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquial Answers</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slang Expressions</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Answers given by the second age group (high school students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males %</th>
<th>Females %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Answers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquial Answers</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slang Expressions</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Answers given by the third age group (senior university students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males %</th>
<th>Females %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Answers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquial Answers</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slang Expressions</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. The answers of the three age groups (%)

Figure 2. The slang usage of the three age groups (%)
6. Appendix:

Please fill out this section:

Name:...................................   Sex:..........................   Level of education:..........................

Please answer the following questions:
(Note that these conversations are made between you and one of your best friends)

1. If you wanted to invite your best friend to come with you to the cinema what would you say?
   a) Paye-ie be-ri-m sinama? (slang expression)
   b) Aya shoma mayel-id ba man be sinama bi-ya-id? (formal style)
   c) Mi-ya-ie be-ri-im sinama? (informal style)
   d) Any other thing you would say:

2. If you wanted to tell your best friend she/he has said the wrong thing at the wrong time, how would you tell her/him?
   a) Ei baba sootí dad-ie, zaye kard-ie. (slang expression)
   b) Kash in harf-o ne-mizad-ie. (informal style)
   c) Behtar an bod ke in chenin sohbat nemikardid (formal style)
   d) Any other thing you would say:

3. If you wanted to tell your best friend that you have seen a very exciting movie with a lot of action, what would you say?
   a) Ye film-i did-am kheili khatan bud. (slang expression)
   b) Ye film por hayejan va jalebi didam (formal style)
   c) Ye film bezan-bezan did-am (informal style)
   d) Any other thing you would say:

4. If you wanted to tell your best friend that everything is set and okay regarding an issue, what would you say?
   a) Hame chiz rele-ast (slang expression)
   b) Hame chiz moratab ast (formal style)
   c) Hame chiz seri-e (informal style)
   d) Any other thing you would say:

5. If you wanted to tell your best friend that something is excellent and without any faults, what would you say?
   a) Kheili bahal-e kaf mikon-ie be-bin-ish (slang expression)
   b) Bi-nazir ast (formal style)
   c) Harf na-dar-e (informal style)
   d) Any other thing you would say:

6. If you wanted to tell your best friend that something is very easy, what would you say?
   a) Kheili golabi-e (slang expression)
   b) Kheli sade ast (formal style)
very simple is (transliteration)
c) ab khordan-e (informal style)
water eating-is
d) Any other thing you would say:

7. If you wanted to tell your best friend that you wanted to get rid of a person and sent him to do a useless thing, what would you say?
a) sare kar-esh gozashtam. (slang expression)
   On work-him/her put-1st sing (transliteration)
b) Ou ra donbale kar bihude-ie ferestad-am. (formal style)
   she/he obj-marker after work useless-det past-send-1st sing (transliteration)
c) ferestad-am-esh donbale nokhod siyah (informal style)
   past-send-1st sing-him/her after pea black. (transliteration)
d) Any other thing you would say:

8. If you wanted to tell your best friend that you have given a nonsense reply to person since you didn’t want to tell him/her the truth, what would you say?
a) Pichond-am-esh (slang expression)
   past-turn-1st sing-him/her (transliteration)
b) Javab-e bi-sar-o tah be ishan dad-am (formal style)
   answer without-head-and bottom to he/her past-give-1st sing (transliteration)
c) Ye cherto-pert-i javabesh dadam (informal style)
   One nonsense-det answer-him/her past-give-1st sing (transliteration)
d) Any other thing you would say:

9. If you wanted to tell your best friend that somebody is very rich and has never had any problems, what would you say?
a) bache maye-dar-e (slang expression)
   child liquid-have-3rd sing (transliteration)
b) Laye pare ghu bozorg shode ast. (formal style)
   inside feather swan big become is (transliteration)
c) bache pol-dar-e (informal style)
   child money-have-3rd sing (transliteration)
d) Any other thing you would say:

10. Have you heard these expressions before if yes, explain where and how?