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**Spectrum Journal of Innovation, Reforms and Development**

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**Volume 12, Feb., 2023**

**ISSN (E): 2751-1731**

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**Website: [www.sjird.journalspark.org](http://www.sjird.journalspark.org)**

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**SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE USE AND MEANING  
OF SLANG IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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Kemalatdinova Jakhangul Polatbayevna  
Master's Student of the Uzbek State World Languages University

Alimova Gulnazkhon Yuldashaliyevna  
Teacher of the Uzbek State World Languages University

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**Abstract**

Slang is an informal language that reflects the attitudes, beliefs, and values of particular groups of people, and can be shaped by historical events, regional differences, social class, and the influence of popular culture. Understanding these factors can help us to better understand the use and meaning of slang, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. While slang can be a fun and expressive way to communicate, it's important to be aware of its impact and to use it in a respectful and inclusive way.

**Keywords:** slang, social class, cultural context, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, entertainment, political and social issues, technology.

Slang is a type of informal language that is often used among friends, family, and members of a particular subculture or community. It is an important aspect of the English language, and can provide insight into the attitudes, beliefs, and values of different groups of people. The use and meaning of slang is influenced by a variety of sociocultural factors, including historical events, regional differences, social class, and the influence of popular culture. One influential theoretical framework for studying slang is the concept of "linguistic variation" developed by sociolinguist William Labov (1966). According to Labov, language is not a uniform and static system, but rather a dynamic and evolving process that reflects the social and cultural diversity of its speakers. This theory has been applied to the study of slang, which is seen as a form of linguistic variation that is shaped by a range of social and cultural factors. In this article, we will explore these factors in more detail, and discuss how they shape the use and meaning of slang in the English language. We will also discuss the impact of slang on communication and culture, and consider how to use slang in a respectful and inclusive way.

In recent years, slang has become more prevalent and widespread, due in part to the rise of social media and digital communication. Slang terms and expressions can spread quickly and easily across different social networks and online communities, and can help people to connect and communicate in new and creative ways.

Despite its many benefits, slang can also present challenges for those who are not familiar with it. Slang terms can be difficult to understand for non-native speakers of English, and can also



perpetuate negative stereotypes and contribute to discrimination and inequality if used in a harmful or derogatory way.

One of the key factors that influences the use and meaning of slang is historical events. For example, the use of slang terms related to drugs and alcohol may be more prevalent in communities that have been impacted by substance abuse, while slang terms related to sex and sexuality may be more prevalent in communities that have been historically marginalized or excluded.

Regional differences are another important factor in the use and meaning of slang. Different regions may have their own unique slang terms and expressions, which reflect the local culture and identity. For example, in the United States, people in the South may use different slang terms than people in the Northeast, while people in the United Kingdom may use different slang terms than people in Australia. So, slang terms can be specific to certain regions, such as "y'all" in the Southern United States. Moreover, different regions can have different meanings for the same slang term. For example, in the United Kingdom, "fanny" is a slang term for female genitalia, whereas in the United States, it refers to the buttocks.

Social class is also a significant factor in the use and meaning of slang. Slang terms and expressions can reflect the social and economic status of different groups of people, and can be used to signal membership in a particular social group or community. For example, upper-class slang may be more refined and subtle, while working-class slang may be more direct and straightforward.

The influence of popular culture is the next important factor in the use and meaning of slang. Slang terms can often originate from movies, TV shows, music, and other forms of popular culture, and can spread quickly through social networks and other forms of media. The use of slang in popular culture can help to shape the language and attitudes of different groups of people, and can also contribute to the evolution of the English language over time.

Socioeconomic status can significantly influence the use and meaning of slang. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds may use slang to identify with their peers, whereas those from higher socio-economic backgrounds may use slang to sound cool or alternative. For example, the use of the word "bling" originated in the African American community and was associated with hip-hop culture. However, it has now become a mainstream term used to refer to flashy, expensive jewelry.

Slang can also be influenced by ethnicity and culture. For example, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has had a significant impact on mainstream American English, with words like "lit" and "woke" gaining popularity. Similarly, British slang, such as "bloke" and "mate", have become part of the wider English language. The use of slang can serve as a marker of belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group.

Technology and the internet have created new opportunities for the development and spread of slang. Social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram have popularized terms like "FOMO" (fear of missing out) and "GOAT" (greatest of all time). Online forums and chat rooms have also given rise to new slang, such as "LOL" (laugh out loud) and "OMG" (oh my god). Linguists like John McWhorter (2014) have argued that the internet and social media



have facilitated the rapid spread of new slang terms and phrases, which can quickly become part of mainstream English usage.

Age is another factor that can influence the use and meaning of slang. Younger generations tend to use and create new slang more frequently than older generations. For example, the term "lit" was originally used by teenagers and young adults in the African American community. However, it has since gained mainstream popularity among young people across different backgrounds. Sociologists like Stuart Hall (1997) have argued that slang is closely tied to the cultural identity and social practices of young people, who use it to create a sense of belonging and resistance against mainstream values. This perspective has been supported by studies of slang in different contexts, such as the use of hip-hop slang in African American communities (Alim, 2004) or the slang used by skateboarders (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

Gender can also influence the use and meaning of slang. Women and men may use different slang terms or use them in different ways. For example, the use of the word "bitch" can be seen as empowering or derogatory depending on the context and the gender of the person using it. Moreover, slang can also be influenced by political and social issues. For example, during the civil rights movement, the Black Panther Party developed a specific language that was used to promote their political ideology. This language, known as "panther speak," was used to convey a sense of unity and resistance against the white-dominated establishment.

The other factor that should be noted is entertainment and media. They can play a significant role in the spread and adoption of slang. Popular television shows and movies can introduce new slang terms and phrases to a wider audience. For example, the show "Stranger Things" popularized the use of the slang term "eggo" to refer to waffles.

Education can also play a role in the use and meaning of slang. Certain types of slang may be considered informal or non-standard English and may be discouraged in academic or professional settings. On the other hand, some academic and professional fields have their own jargon and slang that is specific to the field. For example, medical professionals may use terms like "STAT" to indicate the urgency of a patient's condition, while lawyers may use the term "amicus curiae" to refer to a third party that provides information to a court. The use of these terms can indicate a level of expertise and professionalism within the field.

Finally, the historical and cultural contexts in which slang terms originate and evolve can also shape their use and meaning. For example, the use of the term "cool" in the 1950s was associated with the rise of youth culture and rebellion against mainstream values. The same term used today may carry different connotations depending on the context and the cultural associations that have been built around it over time.

In conclusion, the use and meaning of slang in the English language is shaped by a variety of sociocultural factors, including historical events, regional differences, social class, the influence of popular culture, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and culture, technology and the internet, age, gender, political and social issues, entertainment and media, education, historical and cultural contexts. Understanding these factors can help us to better understand the use and meaning of slang, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. While slang can be a fun and expressive way to communicate, it's important to be aware of its impact and to use it in a respectful and inclusive way.

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