

# The Use of Slang on EFL Students' Instagram Statuses:

## Do They Perceive It Essential?

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**Abstract**—Slangs are commonly associated with informal ways of communication and used both in direct and indirect conversations, such as to communicate and express emotions on social media like Instagram. The question is how the use of slang may support and help improve students' EFL learning through social media like Instagram. The purpose of this study was to investigate the types, social functions, and whether the use of slang on the students' Instagram statuses contributed to their English language learning. This study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative design by employing 20 students who regularly posted statuses on Instagram at least once a week from January to March 2020 as participants. The data were collected through documentation and interview with the participants. The study found that the most widely used type of slang was an acronym constituted approximately 30%, and the pursuit of self-identity was the most dominantly used social function of slang. The participants also perceived that they gained advantages through the use of slang on their Instagram statuses. Posting statuses and engaging in communication online through Instagram enabled the students to practice vocabularies they have learned and improved their writing skills. These findings show the usefulness of slang and social media in facilitating students' EFL learning that needs to be considered by teachers for teaching English.

**Keywords**—*slang, instagram statuses, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Slangs are very common and close to speakers of any language, although they are used mostly in informal communication [1]. Zhou and Fan [2] said, "slang is highly informal and is often used in colloquial speech" (p.2209). In reality, slangs are commonly used by teenagers and adolescents alike in casual or daily communication, particularly on social media such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. However, it does not close the possibility that slang also can be used as a way to support the learning of a foreign language. The fact that slangs are used mostly for informal or casual communication purposes such as to post statuses and to

exchange comments on social media might encourage English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, for example, to use and practice the learned language more intensively and communicatively in a relaxed and non-burdensome situation. In other words, the teaching and learning of EFL, in general, can be enhanced through the use of slangs. Besides, limited awareness of English slang hinders EFL learners from engaging in effective communication with native speakers of English because people often use slang as part of their culture, especially in real and natural communication contexts [3-6].

Despite this potential, only a few studies [e.g., 3,4,7] were reported about the use of slangs by learners in facilitating their foreign language learning, particularly within Indonesian EFL contexts. Considering the popularity of internet-based social media use, particularly among Indonesian young people and EFL students, the study on the use of slang on social media and its contribution to the students' English language learning is worth pursuing. Since advanced computer technology and the Internet become the dominant characteristics of the present and future generation [8] including in Indonesia, English teachers could start considering the benefits of slangs and social media use among their students in enhancing their EFL learning by providing reasons, resources, and encouragement to achieve their learning objectives [4].

Previous studies have been done concerning the topic of the present research. Neshkovska [4], for example, investigates the familiarity of Macedonian learners majoring in English toward English slangs and their perception of the use of slangs. The data were obtained using a questionnaire and a quiz eliciting their opinions and measuring the students' understanding of English slangs. The results of the study generally show that the students' familiarity with English slangs was relatively low due to the assumption that slangs were less important, and the participants were more focused on learning and mastering the standard variety of English. Another study was also done by Boylu and Kardaş [3]. The main purpose of this research is to understand the perception of teachers and students about the teaching and learning of slang in Turkish as a foreign language. Data were collected using two different questionnaires

distributed to the teachers and students with different levels of Turkish language proficiency. The results show that, in general, both teachers and students had a positive view of the teaching and learning of slang in Turkish as it mainly enabled the students to communicate with native Turkish speakers better and avoid miscommunication. The participants also argued that explicit teaching and learning of slangs in Turkish should be provided, with swearwords as an exception.

The other study about the use of slang was also conducted by Korolyova, Voyakina and Melekhova [6]. The purpose was to explore and understand students' opinions and attitudes towards the use of metaphors and slang by involving 50 first-year EFL learners at a Russian university. The data were collected by distributing questionnaires and doing interviews with the participants. The results showed that the majority of the participants were aware about the importance of understanding and using metaphors and slang and that learning other language was not only about grammar rules, word formation, etc. but also the imagery aspects of the language such as metaphors, idioms, phraseology, standard expressions, and slang. The participants believed that understanding extra-linguistic factors such as the use of metaphors and slang was relevant because it related directly to the culture behind a foreign language. From the results of the study, the researchers recommended techniques or steps in integrating metaphors and slang in foreign language learning.

From the previous studies, it can be inferred that slang is an essential part of foreign language learning that can help students to communicate better in the language. However, these studies focus more on how foreign language learners understand and use slangs and not yet on how these students use slangs and make use of social media as a way to support their English learning in general. For these reasons, the purpose of the present research was to investigate the types, social functions, and whether the use of slang on the students' Instagram statuses may contribute to their English language learning. The results of this research will be essential as they provide insights on how and in what ways slang can be integrated into EFL teaching and learning processes.

## II. METHODS

This study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative design by employing 20 students majoring in English education in a private university in Malang, who regularly posted statuses on their Instagram at least once a week from January to March 2020 as participants. The data were collected by documenting the participants' Instagram statuses (with their permission) during the three months, reading and understanding the participants' Instagram statuses, scrutinizing the data by choosing Instagram statuses which contain slangs, interviewing the participants to explore the social functions and understand whether the use of slangs on the students' Instagram statuses contributes to their English language learning, and transcribing the interview data. The data were in the forms of screenshot statuses, photos and videos posted by the participants, and their interview transcripts. In this research, the researchers acted as a human instrument by building research focus, choosing information as a source of data, conducting data collection,

assessing data quality, analyzing and interpreting data, and concluding the findings.

To identify and classify the types of slangs used on the participants' Instagram statuses, Allan and Burrige [9] theory of slang types was used as a guideline which comprises of five types: *fresh and creative*, *flippant*, *acronym*, *imitative*, and *clipping* [cf. 10]. Meanwhile, the concept of the social function of slang use from Zhou and Fan [2] was used to understand and classify the participants' various motives or purposes of using slangs on their Instagram statuses. The theory consists of three social functions of slang: *the pursuit of self-identity*, *the emotive feeling of the slang users*, and *achieving politeness*. Furthermore, interview transcripts with the participants were scrutinized by developing, classifying, and theming the codes to understand the possible contributions of slang use on the participants' EFL learning.

This study adopted the framework of data analysis procedures developed by Miles and Huberman [11] and Sugiyono [12] comprising of three concurrent processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction was done through three steps of coding processes, i.e., open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, and was based on the research questions. The results of the analysis done in the previous step (data reduction) were displayed in the forms of percentage and detailed description by elaborating direct quotations from the participants' documents and interview transcripts. The conclusion was taken by summarizing the core findings and answering the research questions as formulated before. The researchers employed an expert validator to verify the trustworthiness of the data and to avoid the subjectivity of the findings. The suggestions from the validator were used as improvements.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the analysis of the data shows that all the five types of slangs, as theorized by Allan and Burrige [9], were apparent in the participants' Instagram statuses. Table 1 below lists the frequency and percentage of types of slangs used on the participants' Instagram statuses.

TABLE I. FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF TYPES OF SLANG USED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' INSTAGRAM STATUSES

No	Types of slang	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Fresh and Creative (FC)	7	12.7
2.	Flippant (F)	8	14.5
3.	Imitative (I)	16	29.0
4.	Acronym (A)	17	30.9
5.	Clipping (C)	7	12.7
Total		55	100

In total, 55 slang words were identified from the 212 Instagram statuses which were posted regularly at least once a week from January to March 2020. *Acronym* and *imitative* became the most dominantly used types of slang by the participants with 29 and 24 percent respectively. Meanwhile, the rarely used types of slang were *clipping* and *fresh and creative*. Some examples of Acronym slangs used by the participants on their Instagram statuses are *TIL* (Totally in Love) "*Trynna be yourself to TIL yourself*", *YOLO* (Living

Only Once) “YOLO, don't waste ur life and go on vacation”, OMG (Oh My God) “OMG, don't have kittens when look at me”. Some examples of imitative slangs used are *Gotta* (got to) “When I was just mom and daddy's little girl, now I gotta be a proud girl for them”, *Wanna* (want to) “I wish I could escape, I don't wanna fake it”, *Whatcha* (what are you) “Whatcha gonna do”. The examples of clipping slangs used are *Bout* (about) “all bout my sweetheart”, *2me* (to me) “2me, flowers are happiness...trendy style”, and *Ur* (you are) “...don't waste ur life and go on vacation”. The examples of fresh and creative slangs include *Awesome* “Lemme tell you somethin that the awesome chick is waiting for you...”, *Buddy* “Hanging out with my buddy”, and *Dudes* “I trynna down to earth, dudes”.

Concerning the social functions of slang, the study was also able to identify the three types of social functions of slang use as theorized by Zhou and Fan [2]. *The pursuit of self-identity* became the most dominant motive for using slang on the participants' Instagram statuses, which is subsequently followed by *emotive feelings* and *achieving politeness*. *The pursuit of self-identity* became the most widely used social function of slang because the participants generally wanted to follow the language styles of their friends. For example, participant NN wrote “we musta purpose of our life. Always grateful.” on her Instagram status. The slang *musta* stands for *must have*. During the interview, she stated that she used this slang because she followed the language style of her community as the word was used frequently among her friends.

The second most used social function of slang was *emotive feelings*. There were some slang expressions such as *feeling so blue*, *down to earth*, *break a leg* used by the participants to express their feelings. For example, participant MBK posted “I'm feeling so blue :)” on her Instagram status. During the interview, she acknowledged that she purposely posted the slang as a way to express her feeling about something.

The least used social function of slang revealed from the participants' Instagram statuses was *achieving politeness*. An example of the use of this was the one posted by participant HS, “HBD for my older brother... Stay humble bro”. The slang *bro* was used to achieve politeness because participant HS used it to address her brother but still in a polite way.

The analysis of the interview transcripts yielded that the use of slang on the participants' Instagram statuses contributed to their EFL learning. The majority of the students perceived that they obtained some advantages by the use of slangs on Instagram toward their English language learning. The first benefit, according to the participants, is it provided a chance for them to apply the slangs that they have learned before. For example, participant MM (a second-semester student) stated during the interview, “I think yes, but I did not learn and know very much about slang words. I used the slang that I have learned and knew before, then I posted it on my Instagram status and I was happy”. Participant MM also mentioned in the interview that she learned slang words from her social community, the Internet, and social media.

The participant also perceived that by using slang on Instagram, they could practice and improved their vocabulary. Based on the result of the interview, most of the participants mentioned that using slang on Instagram helped them

remember the slangs more easily as it was a relaxed and joyful activity for them. As an example, participant MBK said during the interview “of course, my vocabulary has increased. Furthermore, I used the slangs in my Instagram statuses because I used what I want, so, I was happy”. This statement shows that a relaxed and joyful atmosphere enables the student to practice and engage more productively with their vocabulary learning.

The other contribution from the use of slangs on Instagram, according to the participants, was it could improve the students' writing skills. Based on the result of the interview, the participants perceived that the activity of posting statuses on Instagram and using slang enabled the students to improve their English writing skills. The participants mentioned that they were happy to write statuses by using slangs on their Instagram. Moreover, they could express their feeling in writing these statuses by using slangs. It corresponds with the statement given by participant OL, who said “For me, by writing Instagram statuses, it can express my feeling, and of course, my writing skill has also improved”. This statement indicates that the use of slang on the students' Instagram statuses provides the students not only a better understanding of the meaning and use of the slang but also a medium for them to write and improve their English writing skills as well.

These findings generally confirm Boylu and Kardaş [3], although their study was about the use of slang in Turkish as a foreign language. Similar to Boylu and Kardaş, the findings also indicate that slang should not be regarded only as an informal aspect of language and thus should be distanced or ignored from the formal process of teaching and learning of a foreign language. Rather, slangs should be elaborated proportionately in the teaching and learning process as an aspect that will enhance both the acquisition of the language learned and collective or mutual communication with both native and non-native speakers in various contexts [cf. 4, 6, 8]. As revealed in the interview, the participants mostly learned English slangs from the Internet and online communication with friends and other people. This probably because they rarely receive instructions about English slang in their formal teaching and learning of English. If they do, the English teachers perhaps do not provide proper encouragement and media such as Instagram on how the students can use English slang appropriately.

Further, the results of the present research also essentially correspond to the findings of a study conducted by Gonulal [13]. The study surveyed the participants from 42 different countries to reveal their perception and attitudes towards the use of Instagram as a mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Gonulal [13] found that Instagram has the potential to be used as a learning tool to improve learners' general language skills, particularly vocabulary and communication skills. Besides, the majority of the participants also had a positive view about the use of Instagram as an informal language learning tool. Teachers should utilize social media such as Instagram as a tool to encourage students to practice the learned language and as a source to gain extra input and feedback concerning the acceptability of the language use outside the classroom. Besides, the use of Instagram enables

language learning activities more enjoyable so that it will make language learners more motivated in learning [14].

It should be noted, however, that this research was explorative and perception-based. The main objective was to gain insights into how the participants used English slangs on Instagram and how this online communication activity contributed to their EFL learning in general. Therefore, extension studies are required in the future by employing experiment-based methods to get a more comprehensive understanding of the possible effects of the use of slang on social media on EFL students' English proficiency.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

All types of slang, as theorized by Allan and Burrige [9], were identified on the participants' Instagram statuses. Among the five types, *acronym* and *imitative* became the most dominantly used slangs, which accounted for about 30 and 25 percent respectively. The English slangs were written and posted by the participants on their Instagram mostly for the purpose of pursuing self-identity and emotive feelings. The participants believed that they gained advantages through the use of English slangs on their Instagram which includes practicing and improving their vocabulary and writing skills. These findings show the usefulness of social media along with slang in facilitating students' EFL learning that needs to be considered by teachers for teaching English.

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