



An Analysis of the Meaning of Slang in the Communication of Universitas PGRI Pontianak Students: Semantic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the meaning of slang language used in the communication of students at Universitas PGRI Pontianak and to identify the types of meaning that appear in its usage. Slang language, as one of the language variations, has developed rapidly among students and has become part of their daily social interaction. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through observation and documentation of student conversations in both formal and informal situations. The results show that the slang language used by students undergoes various meaning changes, such as expansion of meaning, narrowing of meaning, and shifts from denotative to connotative meaning. In addition, the use of slang is influenced by social, cultural, and digital media developments. Slang language also functions as a means of creating familiarity and expressing group identity. Thus, slang language plays an important role in the dynamics of student communication and is relevant to semantic studies.

Keywords: slang, student communication, semantics

INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary tool of communication used by humans in daily life and plays a crucial role in fostering social interaction within society. Through language, humans not only convey information but also express thoughts and feelings and build complex social relationships. Over time, language has evolved beyond a mere means of communication to become a marker of social identity, reflecting the background, group affiliation, and cultural dynamics of its speakers. This aligns with modern sociolinguistic perspectives, which posit that language variation arises from social factors such as age, environment, and communi-

cation media. One such form of variation is *bahasa gaul* (slang), which has flourished among university students and the younger generation as a manifestation of linguistic creativity influenced by technology, popular culture, and social interactions in digital spaces.

Research by Putri (2025) indicates that the use of slang among university students is not merely a deviation from the norm but reflects cultural adaptation, digital influence, and social identity. Amalia et al. (2025) further emphasize that slang among Generation Z—particularly on social media platforms like TikTok—serves as a vehicle for

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self-expression and community building. Thus, slang not only enriches vocabulary but also demonstrates the flexibility of language in adapting to the changing times. In a similar vein, Devianty (2017:227) defines language as a system of sound symbols produced by the human speech apparatus, encompassing elements of both sound and meaning. Sound refers to audible vibrations, while meaning constitutes the message contained within them. Consequently, language can be understood as a symbolic system that functions not only as a communication tool but also as a reflection of social identity, a medium for cultural expression, and an indicator of societal evolution.

Within the university environment, the use of slang presents an intriguing phenomenon due to the high frequency of interaction across both formal and informal settings. Slang is used to foster communication that is casual, intimate, and informal, while also serving as a means of self-expression and a marker of group identity. However, its usage can also lead to shifts in meaning—such as semantic expansion, narrowing, or deviation—making it a relevant subject for study from a semantic perspective. This phenomenon demonstrates that language is dynamic, evolving in accordance with the needs and social contexts of its speakers. This aligns with the views of Wiranty, Ramaniyar, and Wulansari (2020), who state that "language is viewed not merely as an individual phenomenon but also as a social one." Furthermore, they explain that "societal changes give rise to specific consequences regarding values and morals, including a shift from polite to impolite language." Thus, the evolution of slang among university students is part of the linguistic dynamics driven by social and cultural changes.

The use of slang is influenced by internal factors—such as age, gender, education, and socioeconomic background—as well as external factors like social environments, popular culture, and digital media. University students, falling into the late-adolescent age group, tend to actively use slang as a marker of generational identity. Social

media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter serve as primary channels for the dissemination of new vocabulary. This aligns with research by Ishak (2018), Rahmawati (2022), and Setiawan (2023), which demonstrates that social interaction and digital media accelerate the evolution and semantic shifts of slang. Thus, slang not only reflects linguistic creativity but also serves as an indicator of social, cultural, and technological changes in youth communication.

Slang meanings often undergo significant transformations, manifesting as semantic expansion, narrowing, or shifting. Words that initially carry denotative meanings can evolve to acquire connotative ones, depending on social context and usage. In practice, a single word may hold different—or even contradictory—meanings, influenced by the speaker's intent, intonation, and the communicative situation. These changes emerge through repeated use in social interactions, eventually establishing an informal consensus among speakers. This illustrates the dynamic nature of language, which evolves in response to the needs and creativity of its users. Consequently, analyzing the semantics of slang is crucial for understanding how university students interpret and employ language across various communicative contexts.

In the realm of digital semantics, slang meanings shift more rapidly due to the influence of social media. Intense and instantaneous interactions facilitate the emergence of linguistic innovations within a short timeframe. Consistent with Crystal's (2019) observations, digital language is flexible and adaptive, thereby accelerating semantic innovation. Hidayat (2022) further emphasizes that digital platforms not only hasten semantic change but also shape collective meanings that are quickly and widely understood. Thus, slang is not merely a linguistic phenomenon; it reflects social, cultural, and technological developments while demonstrating that linguistic meaning is open, contextual, and constantly evolving. As an academic institution, Universitas



PGRI Pontianak is not immune to the use of slang among its students. Social interactions within lectures, organizations, and casual socializing have made slang an integral part of the campus communication culture. Slang is employed to foster a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, while also serving as an expression of group identity and social solidarity. In this context, slang functions not only as a communication tool but also as a means to build interpersonal closeness and adapt communication patterns to changing times. This study aims to analyze the meanings of slang used by students and to identify specific types of meaning—such as denotative and connotative meanings, as well as semantic shifts. Such analysis is crucial because the meaning of slang often diverges from standard lexical definitions, thereby requiring a contextual understanding.

In line with this, Coupland (2023) asserts that language cannot be separated from the social identity of its speakers, as linguistic variation is linked to communicative contexts and purposes. Slang emerges as a dynamic social practice in which speakers adjust their language based on the situation and the degree of social closeness. This indicates that linguistic meaning is shaped through ongoing social interaction. Furthermore, Pratama (2023) states that the campus environment plays a crucial role in shaping linguistic variation due to the diverse backgrounds of the student body. Consequently, the study of slang within the student community is relevant for understanding the dynamics of meaning, the formation of social identity, and the evolution of communication among the younger generation.

This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the evolution of slang and its contribution to semantic studies, particularly within the context of student communication. The study focuses not only on the forms of slang but also on the meanings attached to them, thereby illustrating their function in students' social lives. Additionally, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for the development of linguistic studies—specifically regarding the dynamics of

meaning and linguistic variation in the modern era, as well as the interplay between language, culture, and technology. In contemporary linguistics, language is viewed as a dynamic system that evolves alongside social and technological changes, with digital media accelerating the formation and shifting of linguistic meanings.

In this regard, Saputra (2022) notes that social media alters patterns of linguistic interaction and accelerates the emergence of new meanings within slang. Kurniawan (2024) further emphasizes that slang serves not merely as a tool for informal communication but also as a means for negotiating identity and representing the culture of the younger generation. Thus, analyzing slang is significant not only from a linguistic perspective but also for understanding the relationships among language, society, technology, and shifting cultural values ??within the dynamics of modern communication. Recent developments in linguistic studies up to 2026 confirm that slang is inextricably linked to the digital communication ecosystem. Research by Faradisa (2025) indicates that slang evolves not only through direct interaction but also via social media algorithms that rapidly popularize terms. This highlights the interconnection between technology, user behavior, and linguistic evolution, wherein new terms can spread and undergo collective shifts in meaning within a short timeframe.

In a similar vein, Rahman and Putra (2026) state that slang in the digital context serves not merely as a communication tool but also as a means of constructing digital identity. From a semantic perspective, meaning is shaped not only by immediate context but also by digital elements such as symbols, trends, and text- or visual-based interactions. Consequently, slang is no longer localized; instead, it has become part of global dynamics. Therefore, studying slang among university students is crucial for understanding the processes of meaning formation, negotiation, and dissemination in modern communication.

From a modern semantic perspective, university student slang can be understood as a

form of linguistic innovation reflecting speakers' adaptability in responding to changing times. Students act not merely as language users but as active agents who create, modify, and disseminate new meanings through both face-to-face and digital interactions. Faradisa (2025) asserts that the evolution of slang is driven by rapid, trend-based digital communication, resulting in constantly shifting semantic variations. This process entails linguistic creativity—such as the use of abbreviations, acronyms, metaphors, and wordplay—as well as language mixing tailored to local contexts.

Furthermore, slang reflects a process of collective meaning negotiation, wherein new terms emerge within small groups and spread widely via social media until they gain general acceptance. Slang meanings are fluid and highly contextual, contingent upon the situation, the interaction, and the social consensus among speakers. Coupland (2025) states that linguistic variation is an active process of meaning construction influenced by social context and speaker identity. Thus, slang is not a deviation but rather part of the natural, dynamic evolution of language; it even holds the potential to be incorporated into formal language in the future.

Based on the foregoing, existing research has largely focused on slang as a social and communicative phenomenon, without deeply examining semantic aspects—particularly within the context of university students and the influence of digital media. Consequently, this study offers a novel contribution by analyzing slang meanings contextually, classifying the types of meanings that emerge, and investigating the role of digital media in the processes of meaning formation and semantic shift among students, specifically at Universitas PGRI Pontianak.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method with a semantic approach. This approach was selected because the study aims to understand,

describe, and interpret university students' use of slang in daily communication. Afifuddin & Saebani (2002), Razak (2017), Yuliani (2018) describes the qualitative descriptive method as highly effective for research in the social sciences.

The research focuses on the linguistic meanings emerging from student conversations, whether in face-to-face interactions or via digital media. Through this approach, the researcher can understand the use of slang not merely in terms of word forms, but also regarding the meanings that arise within specific social contexts and communicative situations.

The study was conducted at Universitas PGRI Pontianak. The data sources consisted of students' spoken and written utterances. Spoken data were gathered from conversations on campus—such as during discussions, casual chats, and academic interactions—while written data were obtained from digital communications via WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, and other social media platforms featuring the use of slang.

The subject of this study is the use of slang by university students, specifically examining variations in meaning—such as denotative, connotative, and contextual meanings—as well as semantic changes, including meaning expansion, narrowing, and shifting. The study also investigates the functions of slang as a form of social expression and a marker of student group identity in daily communication.

Data collection was carried out using the "listen and record" (*simak dan catat*) method. The researcher observed slang usage in student communication and noted utterances relevant to the study's focus. In addition to this method, documentation techniques were employed to reinforce the collected data; this involved using screenshots of digital conversations, audio recordings, photographs, and archives of student communication related to slang usage.

The primary instrument of this study was the researcher. During the process, the researcher utilized supporting tools such as a smartphone, a note-



book, an audio recorder, and screenshot functions. The researcher was directly involved in every stage, from data collection, categorization, and analysis to the formulation of conclusions.

Data analysis employed an interactive analysis model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the collected data to align with the study's objectives; data unrelated to the study of slang semantics were excluded from the analysis.

The next stage was data presentation. Here, the data were systematically organized and categorized based on the types of meaning identified in the students' slang usage. The data were then explained within their usage contexts to facilitate interpretation. The presentation took the form of descriptive narratives to ensure the findings were easily understood.

The final stage was drawing conclusions. In this stage, the researcher interpreted the meanings of the slang terms based on the communication contexts in which they were used. The analysis takes into account the communication situation, social relationships between speakers, the communication medium employed, and the purpose of the language use within student interactions.

Furthermore, this study employs a contextual semantics approach. This approach is used to understand that the meaning of slang can shift depending on the speakers' situation, conditions, and communication environment. Consequently, the research focuses not merely on general word definitions but also on the meanings that emerge within the context of actual usage among students.

To ensure data validity, the study utilizes a source triangulation technique. This involves comparing data derived from observations, documentation, and field notes to achieve a high level of validity and consistency. Thus, the research findings are expected to provide deeper insight into the usage, meaning, and function of slang in student communication during the digital era.

RESULT

1. The Meaning of Slang in the Communication of Universitas PGRI Pontianak Students

Research findings indicate that the use of slang in the communication of Universitas PGRI Pontianak students exhibits variations in meaning influenced by situational contexts, social relationships, and the communication media employed. The meaning of slang does not always align with its lexical definition; instead, it undergoes adjustments based on communicative needs. The findings obtained are as follows:

1) Denotative Meaning in Slang

The slang used by students sometimes retains its original or literal meaning, consistent with dictionary definitions. This usage is generally found in relatively formal or semi-formal communication situations.

Data:

"Besok aku presentasi jam delapan, jadi malam ini harus belajar dulu." (I have a presentation at eight tomorrow, so I need to study tonight.) The words *presentasi* (presentation) and *belajar* (study) are used according to their literal meanings.

2) Connotative Meaning in Slang

Slang is used to convey additional meanings that are emotional, expressive, or carry specific emotional undertones. These meanings frequently appear in informal communication among students.

Data:

"Wah, dosen itu killer banget kalau soal tugas." (Wow, that lecturer is a real killer when it comes to assignments.)

The word *killer* does not mean a murderer; rather, it refers to a lecturer who is strict and assigns a heavy workload.

3) Contextual Meaning in Slang Usage

The meaning of a word in slang depends heavily on the context of use—such as the communication situation, the relationship between speakers, and the medium employed (whether face-to-face or digital).

Data:

“Nanti malam kita gas kerjain tugas kelompok, ya!” (Let’s *gas* [get started on] the group assignment tonight!)

In this context, the word *gas* means “let’s start” or “get right to work,” rather than referring to gas as a physical substance.

4) Expressive Meaning as a Form of Social Identity

Slang serves as a means to demonstrate group identity, social closeness, and solidarity among students during daily interactions.

Data:

“Santai aja, bro, kita pasti bisa lulus bareng.” (Relax, *bro*, we’ll definitely graduate together.)

The use of the word *bro* signifies social closeness and solidarity among students.

2. Types of Semantic Change in University Student Slang

Research findings indicate that the slang used by university students undergoes various forms of semantic change, occurring dynamically within social and digital interactions.

The types of semantic changes identified are as follows:

1) Semantic Expansion (Generalization)

A word in slang undergoes an expansion of meaning, resulting in a scope of usage that is broader than its original meaning.

Data:

“My laptop is lagging again during the online class.”

The word *ngelag* (lag) was originally used in the gaming world to refer to a slow connection, but it is now used more broadly to describe various conditions where a device is slow or malfunctioning.

2) Semantic Narrowing (Specialization)

The word’s meaning becomes more restricted compared to its original sense and is used only in specific contexts among university students.

Data:

“That campus hangout group is doing a *mabar* session tonight.”

The word *mabar* is an abbreviation of *main bareng* (playing together), which is now specifically used to refer to playing games together online.

3) Semantic Shift

A change occurs from the original meaning to a new, different meaning—sometimes even one that is the exact opposite of the previous meaning.

Data:

“My grade plummeted yesterday; the lecturer was so savage”

In English, the word *savage* means wild or ferocious, but in student slang, its meaning has shifted to describe someone who is very firm or “scathing” in their speech.

4) Change from Denotative to Connotative Meaning

A word that originally held a literal meaning shifts to a figurative meaning, influenced by the communication situation and the speakers’ social relationships.

Data:

“He was the bintang (star) of the class during the presentation earlier.”

The word *bintang* (star) does not refer to a celestial body here; instead, it is a metaphor for the most outstanding or brilliant student.

5) Collective Meaning within the Student Community

The meaning of slang terms is formed through informal consensus within student groups and is mutually understood within a specific community.

Data:

“If the text says ‘OTW’, it means they are definitely still at their boarding house.”

Within the student community, OTW (on the way) is often collectively understood as a sign that the person has not actually departed yet.

3. Factors Influencing the Use and Meaning of Slang

Research findings also indicate that the use and semantic shifts of slang are influenced by



several interconnected factors. These factors are as follows:

- 1) **Social Factors**
Relationships among university students, levels of familiarity, and group membership influence the use of slang.
- 2) **Popular Culture Factors**
Cultural trends, entertainment, and the lifestyles of the younger generation contribute to the emergence of new slang vocabulary.
- 3) **Digital Media Factors**
Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok accelerate the spread and evolution of slang meanings.
- 4) **Campus Environment Factors**
Intense interaction within the academic setting and student organizations creates an environment where slang flourishes.

DISCUSSION

The research results indicate that the slang used by university students carries diverse meanings: denotative, connotative, contextual, and expressive. These findings can be understood from two perspectives.

First, from a semantic perspective, this variation in meaning demonstrates that language is dynamic and heavily dependent on the context of use. The persistence of denotative meanings indicates that not all slang undergoes semantic change; some terms retain their original lexical definitions. This aligns with Karlya (2022), who states that slang can possess both fixed meanings and specialized meanings that evolve within specific groups. Furthermore, the emergence of connotative and contextual meanings underscores that interpreting slang cannot be separated from the communication situation, social relationships, and the medium of communication employed.

Second, from a sociolinguistic perspective, slang serves as a means for students to construct their social identities. The use of expressive meanings demonstrates that language is not merely a tool for conveying information but also a way to signal closeness, solidarity, and group membership.

This is consistent with the findings of Hijrah et al. (2024), who note that slang in student communication functions as an expression of identity and a form of social practice. Thus, the meaning of slang is not solely linguistic but also social and cultural in nature.

However, the excessive use of slang can also lead to ambiguity, particularly in formal communication settings. Therefore, students need to possess the linguistic awareness to adapt their language use according to the context.

The research findings reveal various forms of semantic change, such as broadening, narrowing, and shifting of meaning, as well as transitions from denotative to connotative meanings. This phenomenon can be analyzed from two perspectives.

First, from a semantic standpoint, semantic change is a natural process in the evolution of language. Semantic expansion indicates that a word is used within a broader scope, whereas semantic narrowing signifies a specification of usage within a particular context. Semantic shifts can even represent significant changes, resulting in meanings that differ entirely from the original. This supports the view of Permata et al. (2023) that slang is dynamic and constantly undergoes semantic transformation to meet communication needs.

Secondly, from the perspective of digital communication, semantic changes occur more rapidly due to the influence of social media. Rapid and massive interactions allow terms to go viral and undergo collective shifts in meaning. These findings align with Hidayat (2022), who asserts that digital media not only disseminates language but also collaboratively shapes new meanings. Thus, semantic changes in slang are influenced not only by linguistic factors but also by communication technology.

The implication is that while these semantic changes can enrich the Indonesian vocabulary, they also have the potential to cause misunderstandings if not interpreted within their proper context.

The research results indicate that the use of slang is influenced by social factors, popular

culture, digital media, and the campus environment. These findings can be explained through two perspectives.

First, from a social perspective, the use of slang is heavily influenced by the relationships between speakers. Levels of familiarity and group membership determine the choice of language used. This aligns with the view of Pratama (2023), who states that social environments—particularly university campuses—serve as spaces where language variations emerge.

Second, from cultural and technological perspectives, digital media plays a dominant role in the spread of slang. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok accelerate the emergence of new vocabulary and shifts in meaning. Saputra (2022) also notes that social media contributes to changing communication patterns and accelerating linguistic innovation. Furthermore, popular culture influences the creation of new terms that are subsequently adopted by university students.

Based on these two perspectives, it can be concluded that slang is the product of the interaction between social factors and technological developments. Therefore, understanding slang requires considering both aspects simultaneously.

This study offers several strengths. First, regarding analysis, the study examines not only the forms of slang but also their contextual meanings, thereby providing deeper insight into the dynamics of meaning within student communication. Second, regarding data, the study utilizes both spoken and written data, resulting in more comprehensive findings compared to studies that focus on only one type of data.

However, the study also has limitations. First, regarding data scope, the research was conducted solely among students at Universitas PGRI Pontianak; thus, the findings cannot yet be generalized to the entire student population in Indonesia. Second, regarding analysis, the study is limited to semantics and does not deeply integrate pragmatic analysis, even though the

context of slang usage is closely linked to pragmatic aspects.

Based on the results and discussion, it is suggested that students need to increase their awareness of using language appropriate to the context, particularly in academic situations. Furthermore, future research is encouraged to expand the scope of the study and examine slang from other perspectives—such as pragmatics or discourse analysis—to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the use of slang in communication among Universitas PGRI Pontianak students exhibits a diverse range of meanings, including denotative, connotative, contextual, and expressive meanings. These meanings do not always align with lexical definitions; rather, they are heavily influenced by situational contexts, social relationships between speakers, and the communication media employed. Slang functions not merely as a tool for conveying information but also as a means of self-expression and a way for students to shape their social identities during daily interactions.

Furthermore, the slang used by students undergoes various forms of semantic change—such as semantic expansion, narrowing, shifting, and transitions from denotative to connotative meanings. These changes occur dynamically through repeated use in social interactions and are influenced by the evolution of digital media. This demonstrates that slang meanings are flexible and continuously evolve in response to communication needs and the social conventions established among speakers.

Moreover, the use and evolution of slang are shaped by various factors, including social dynamics, popular culture, digital media, and the campus environment. Intense interaction among students, combined with the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, accelerates the spread of new vocabulary and shifts



in slang meanings. Thus, slang can be understood as a linguistic phenomenon that is dynamic, contextual, and adaptive to changing times, playing a significant role in shaping students' communication patterns and social identities in the digital era.

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