



THE PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN SLANGS IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

This study explores the pragmatic features of British and American slang within the context of modern linguistics. Drawing on sociolinguistic and pragmatic theories, it investigates how slang functions in communication to express identity, establish group membership, and convey attitude. Using examples from social media, pop culture, and spoken discourse, the study highlights key differences and similarities between British and American slang usage. The findings reveal that while both varieties serve similar pragmatic functions, they differ in form, tone, and socio-cultural associate.

Keywords: slang, cultural relevance, identity marking, pragmatic category, expressivity & emotional stance.

Introduction

Slang, a highly informal and dynamic component of language, plays a crucial role in pragmatic and sociolinguistic contexts. It is commonly used to express identity, create in-group solidarity, and signal cultural affiliations. In modern linguistics, slang is increasingly recognized for its ability to reflect shifting social norms and language innovation. The pragmatic use of slang differs between regions, particularly between British and American English. While both varieties perform similar communicative functions, they differ significantly in terms of lexical choice, social context, and speaker intent. This article aims to compare the pragmatic features of British and American slangs by analyzing their use in everyday speech and digital communication.



Methods

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design, incorporating discourse analysis and pragmatic theory to examine the usage of slang in British and American English. The goal was to identify and compare the pragmatic functions of slang terms as they appear in both spoken and digital communication contexts.

Data Collection. Data were collected from three primary sources to ensure a diverse and representative sample of modern slang usage: Authentic spoken discourse was sourced from a range of multimedia formats, including dialogues from contemporary British and American TV shows, YouTube videos, interviews, and podcasts. These sources were selected to capture naturalistic and spontaneous uses of slang in everyday communication. The materials reflect informal, conversational English as spoken by native speakers, providing rich contextual data for pragmatic analysis.

Social media platforms, including **Twitter**, **TikTok**, and **Instagram**, were examined as dynamic sources of contemporary slang usage. These platforms were chosen for their high volume of informal, user-generated content, where slang emerges and evolves rapidly. The spontaneous nature of communication in these digital spaces provides valuable insights into the pragmatic functions of slang in real-time social interaction and identity construction. Online slang dictionaries, particularly *Urban Dictionary* and *Green's Dictionary of Slang*, were consulted to supplement the analysis with definitions, usage examples, and etymological insights. *Urban Dictionary* provided crowd-sourced, real-time definitions reflecting popular and emergent slang meanings, while *Green's Dictionary of Slang* offered more structured, historically-informed entries. These resources were instrumental in contextualizing the pragmatic functions of each term and tracing their cultural relevance

Slang expressions were selected based on the following criteria:

Frequency of use: Terms were chosen based on their high frequency and recurrence across digital media platforms and online slang dictionaries, indicating widespread and active usage.

Cultural relevance: Selected slang reflected current linguistic trends, particularly within youth culture and popular discourse, ensuring that the expressions analyzed were timely and socially significant.



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Clarity of regional usage: Each term was clearly identifiable as either British or American in origin and usage, allowing for accurate categorization and meaningful cross-varietal comparison.

Each slang term was examined through a pragmatic lens, with attention to its communicative function and social significance. The analysis focused on the following core pragmatic categories: **Identity marking:** Including expressions of group membership, regional affiliation, or cultural belonging. **Humor and irony:** Investigating how slang is used to create comedic or sarcastic effects in interaction. **Politeness and impoliteness strategies:** Analyzing how slang mitigates or intensifies face-threatening acts. **Expressivity and emotional stance:** Exploring how slang reflects speakers' attitudes, emotions, or intensity. Context was treated as a central variable, with close attention paid to the speaker's intent, the relationship between interlocutors, and the mode of communication—whether spoken or digital. This analytical approach enabled a comparative evaluation of how British and American slang operate pragmatically and how each is shaped by its unique sociolinguistic environment.

Results

The analysis of 30 slang terms—15 from British English and 15 from American English—revealed distinct and overlapping pragmatic features between the two varieties. Below, the findings are organized according to the four core pragmatic categories: **identity marking, humor and irony, politeness and impoliteness strategies, and expressivity and emotional stance.** The context of use (spoken vs. digital) also played a significant role in shaping the pragmatic functions of the slang terms.

Pragmatic Category	British Examples	Slang American Examples	Slang Key Insights
Identity Marking	- Informal, peer relationship	"Mate": peer - "Fam": Close friends or family	Both varieties use slang to signal group membership, but British slang is more regionally specific, while American slang reflects broader youth and cultural trends.



Pragmatic Category	British Examples	Slang American Examples	Slang Key Insights
	- <i>"Bruv"</i> : London, working-class use	- <i>"Lit"</i> : Excitement, fun, youth culture	
	- <i>"Peng"</i> : Attractive, urban youth culture	- <i>"Woke"</i> : Social justice awareness	
Humor and Irony	- <i>"Taking the piss"</i> : Mockery, sarcasm	- <i>"Clowning"</i> : Exaggeration, humor	Humor in British slang is often more understated and sarcastic, while American slang tends to involve more exaggerated, comedic effects.
	- <i>"Bants"</i> : Playful teasing	- <i>"Savage"</i> : Bold, ruthless admiration	
Politeness & Impoliteness	- <i>"Muppet"</i> : Playful insult	- <i>"Tool"</i> : Insult, impolite	British slang often mitigates insult (playful tone), while American slang can range from impolite to humorous, with varying intensity.
	- <i>"Cheers"</i> : Gratitude, politeness	- <i>"No cap"</i> : Honesty, sincerity	
Expressivity & Emotional Stance	- <i>"Dead"</i> : Boring, unimpressive	- <i>"Salty"</i> : Bitter, upset	British slang often conveys emotional states more subtly, while American slang amplifies emotional expression.
	- <i>"Gutted"</i> :		

Discussion. The findings from this study reveal several key similarities and differences in the pragmatic functions of British and American slang. While both varieties of slang serve important social functions, such as identity marking, humor, and emotional expression, they do so in culturally specific ways. This section explores the implications of these results, drawing attention to how the pragmatic functions of slang are shaped by regional, cultural, and social factors in each variety. Both British and American slang use linguistic markers to signify group membership, regional identity, and cultural affiliation. In British English, slang



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terms like “*mate*” and “*bruv*” are deeply rooted in specific social and regional contexts. [Kerswill, P. (2003)] For example, “*bruv*”, used predominantly in London, signals working-class identity, while “*peng*”, used in urban youth culture, reflects a blend of regional and multicultural influences. In contrast, American slang demonstrates a more fluid and less regionally specific approach to identity marking. While terms like “*fam*” and “*lit*” are undeniably connected to youth culture and trends, they are not geographically anchored in the same way British slang terms often are. Instead, American slang terms are often shaped by media, social movements, and globalization, making them more universally accessible across different regions and groups. Terms like “*woke*” serve as markers of social awareness rather than regional or local identity, indicating a broader cultural shift toward collective social consciousness. This demonstrates how American slang is more often tied to cultural movements (e.g., political activism, pop culture) than to specific regions. This study highlights the role of slang in language evolution, emphasizing how it functions as a tool for cultural expression, social identity, and emotional modulation. Slang evolves dynamically in response to social change, and its pragmatic functions serve as a reflection of the values and norms of the societies in which it is used. As language continues to adapt to new contexts, particularly in digital communication, the study of slang offers valuable insights into the interplay between language, culture, and technology.

Conclusion

Slang in both British and American English serves as a significant pragmatic tool for communication, deeply rooted in social identity, emotional expression, and cultural alignment. While there is considerable overlap and influence between the two varieties due to globalization, each retains unique characteristics that are shaped by local social norms, regional influences, and the pervasive effects of media. British slang, for instance, is often characterized by subtlety, indirectness, and regional specificity, with terms like “*mate*” and “*bruv*” signaling localized social ties and identities within specific communities or areas. In contrast, American slang, though also influenced by regional factors, is more often shaped by broader cultural trends, youth movements, and globalized media, with expressions like “*lit*” or “*fam*”



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reflecting more universal cultural themes and social movements. Despite the rise of digital platforms that have facilitated the rapid spread and adaptation of slang across borders, the distinct sociolinguistic environments in Britain and the U.S. continue to shape the way slang is used pragmatically. For example, humor and irony in British slang tend to be more understated and sarcastic, whereas American slang often embraces more direct and exaggerated forms of humor, reflecting different cultural values surrounding communication. Similarly, the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies differs, with British slang often softening the impact of insults or criticisms through playful terms like "muppet," while American slang can be more direct, as seen with terms like "no cap." The emotional expressiveness in both varieties also varies, with British slang often using more restrained expressions of dissatisfaction (e.g., "gutted"), while American slang tends to amplify emotional responses (e.g., "fire" for something impressive or exciting).

Given these distinctions, future research into slang should explore its role in multilingual contexts, where interactions between different linguistic communities may influence the adoption and modification of slang terms. Additionally, the ongoing impact of globalization on language use provides an exciting avenue for study. As English varieties worldwide continue to interact through digital media, the boundaries of regional slang are becoming increasingly blurred, and the pragmatics of slang in different varieties may shift. Understanding how globalization reshapes pragmatic norms in slang usage, particularly how it alters identity markers, humor, politeness strategies, and emotional expression, will provide a deeper insight into how modern language functions in an interconnected world. This shift may lead to the emergence of new forms of slang or the blending of British, American, and other varieties, making the study of contemporary slang a dynamic and evolving field.

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