

Sociolinguistic Functions and Perceived Influence of Slang Language on Academic Communication among College Students

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Abstract. This study examined the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication among college students. Specifically, it investigated students' perceptions regarding slang language in terms of grammar, vocabulary, diction, and language usage, and determined whether significant differences existed when grouped according to demographic profile variables. The study employed a quantitative descriptive-survey research design involving forty Bachelor of Arts students from the School of Education, Arts, and Sciences of Universidad de Zamboanga. A structured questionnaire was utilized as the primary data-gathering instrument, while weighted mean, t-test, and one-way analysis of variance were used for statistical analysis. Findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of perception regarding the influence of slang language on academic communication, particularly in diction and language usage. Results further showed no significant differences in students' perceptions when grouped according to sex, age, ethnicity, and monthly income, suggesting that slang language has become a shared communicative practice among college students regardless of demographic background. The study concludes that slang language functions as a socially meaningful linguistic practice shaped through identity formation, peer interaction, and digital communication culture. The findings highlight the importance of promoting sociolinguistic awareness and context-appropriate language use in higher education while recognizing the evolving communication practices of contemporary students. Moreover, the study contributes to sociolinguistic and educational communication research within the Philippine context by providing localized evidence on how informal linguistic practices influence student interaction, expressive communication, and academic discourse in multicultural university environments shaped increasingly by technology-mediated communication and youth culture.

Introduction

The emergence of digital communication technologies and social media platforms has significantly transformed contemporary language practices, particularly among young people and university students. The increasing use of informal linguistic expressions in online interactions has contributed to the rapid expansion of slang language in everyday communication. Slang has become a dynamic linguistic phenomenon shaped through cultural trends, technological advancement, peer interaction, and social identity formation. As communication increasingly occurs through digital platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, X, Instagram, and messaging applications, students continuously adapt their language practices to maintain social belonging and expressive efficiency (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Contemporary digital environments encourage linguistic innovation, allowing students to create abbreviated forms, hybrid expressions, and context-specific slang that reflect rapidly evolving communication patterns (Crystal, 2011). Similarly, language variation in online spaces demonstrates how informal communication practices have become normalized within youth interactions and

educational environments (Drouin & Driver, 2014). Consequently, informal linguistic patterns, abbreviations, code-switching, and slang expressions have become embedded in the communicative behavior of college students across various academic and social contexts.

Research on youth language practices consistently emphasizes that slang functions as an evolving linguistic system shaped through social interaction, generational identity, and communicative innovation. Studies suggest that young people actively construct identity and negotiate social belonging through linguistic choices, making slang language a marker of inclusion, creativity, and social affiliation within peer communities (Bucholtz, 2011; Eckert, 2000). Within university environments, slang operates not only as an informal communicative tool but also as a performative expression of identity and interpersonal connection. Contemporary studies further indicate that digital communication and social media platforms accelerated the diffusion and normalization of slang expressions across educational settings, encouraging the development of hybrid linguistic forms that combine abbreviations, emojis, internet slang, and multilingual expressions (Ge & Herring, 2018; Veszelszki, 2017). Informal communication practices consequently reshaped students' linguistic behavior, particularly in environments where online and offline communication constantly intersect. Scholars additionally argue that slang possesses important communicative and psychological functions among young adults, enabling speakers to express humor, solidarity, emotional nuance, and relational intimacy more effectively than conventional language forms (Adams, 2009; Allan & Burridge, 2006). Recent post-pandemic investigations further revealed that virtual learning environments and digitally mediated communication intensified students' exposure to informal language practices and internet-based slang, influencing both verbal interaction and written communication behaviors among college students (Hendrajat et al., 2023; Sikandar et al., 2022; Akhir et al., 2025). Within multilingual educational contexts, contemporary studies also emphasize that slang language, internet expressions, and hybrid linguistic practices such as Taglish continue to shape communication patterns, sociolinguistic identity, and communicative adaptability among Filipino college students (Salvador et al., 2026; Valdez & Vitorio, 2024; Yap & Saludez, 2022). These studies collectively demonstrate that slang language has become a significant sociolinguistic phenomenon embedded within the communicative realities of contemporary higher education environments.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang language functions not merely as informal vocabulary but as a symbolic marker of identity, solidarity, and group membership. Sociolinguists emphasize that language reflects social positioning and cultural affiliation, allowing speakers to construct and negotiate identity within specific communities (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Among young adults, slang serves as a mechanism for establishing intimacy, creativity, emotional expression, and social distinction. The use of slang expressions enables students to signal belongingness to peer groups while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from institutional or formal linguistic norms (Eble, 2012). Informal language also allows speakers to develop shared meanings that reinforce collective identity and interpersonal connection within social groups (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). In many instances, slang becomes a linguistic resource that strengthens interpersonal relationships and facilitates communicative flexibility in both online and face-to-face interactions.

Within higher education settings, the widespread use of slang language has generated growing scholarly interest due to its influence on students' communicative practices and academic interactions. Several studies indicate that slang contributes positively to conversational fluency, self-expression, and communicative confidence among students (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008). The flexibility and spontaneity associated with slang language allow students to communicate ideas efficiently, particularly within peer-centered discourse communities. Contemporary students frequently perceive slang as a natural extension of digital culture and youth identity, making it an integral component of their everyday linguistic repertoire. Research further suggests that students strategically shift between formal and informal registers depending on social context and communicative purpose, demonstrating linguistic adaptability rather than linguistic deficiency (Coupland, 2007). Informal language practices may therefore function as communicative tools that enhance social engagement and relational interaction among students.

Despite these communicative advantages, the increasing normalization of slang language in academic environments has also generated concerns regarding its potential influence on formal language proficiency and academic communication. Some scholars argue that excessive exposure to informal linguistic patterns may affect grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development, writing conventions, and professional communication skills (Crystal, 2011). Frequent reliance on abbreviated and nonstandard forms may influence students' academic writing behaviors, particularly in formal classroom tasks and scholarly communication (Rafi, 2010). In educational contexts, the habitual use of slang expressions may blur distinctions between formal and informal discourse, especially in writing activities, oral presentations, and institutional communication. At the same time, other scholars contend that students possess the ability to distinguish context-appropriate language use and can competently alternate between informal and formal communication styles (Al-Sa'di & Hamdan, 2005). This ongoing debate positions slang language as both a creative sociolinguistic resource and a potential challenge to conventional academic language standards. Consequently, examining how students perceive the role and influence of slang language within academic communication remains an important area of inquiry in language and education research.

Existing empirical studies examining slang language in educational contexts present mixed findings regarding its influence on academic communication. Some investigations suggest that students who frequently rely on slang and abbreviated digital expressions may unconsciously transfer informal linguistic habits into academic writing tasks, affecting grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, and lexical appropriateness (Cingel & Sundar, 2012). Informal expressions appearing in classroom outputs, essays, and institutional communication have raised concerns among educators regarding the possible erosion of formal writing conventions and academic discourse practices. Rosen et al. (2010) similarly observed that excessive engagement with digital communication platforms may influence students' attention to formal language structures during academic tasks.

Conversely, other scholars contend that students are capable of practicing linguistic compartmentalization, allowing them to distinguish between informal peer communication and formal academic discourse. Research conducted by Aziz, Shamim, Aziz, and Avais (2013) revealed that students often demonstrate awareness regarding context-appropriate language use despite regular exposure to slang and internet language. Rather than indicating language deterioration, the ability to alternate between linguistic registers may reflect communicative competence and sociolinguistic adaptability. Within multilingual contexts, code-switching and informal linguistic practices may even enhance students' expressive flexibility and communicative confidence (Blommaert, 2010). These contrasting perspectives demonstrate the continuing scholarly debate regarding the role of slang language in educational communication and highlight the need for localized empirical investigations within specific cultural and institutional contexts.

Although international studies have extensively explored slang language and youth communication, limited empirical attention has been given to the sociolinguistic functions of slang among Filipino college students, particularly within localized university contexts. Existing Philippine studies on slang often focus on lexical variation, internet language, or code-switching practices, while fewer investigations examine how students themselves perceive the influence of slang language on academic communication and interpersonal interaction in higher education environments. Moreover, localized sociolinguistic investigations remain limited in culturally diverse academic institutions where students navigate multilingual and multidialectal communication settings. The absence of contextualized studies examining slang language within Philippine higher education environments creates a significant gap in understanding how informal linguistic practices shape students' communication experiences and academic interactions.

In response to these gaps, the present study examines the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication among college students. Specifically, the study investigates how students perceive slang language in relation to grammar, vocabulary, diction, and language usage within academic and social communication contexts. It also explores whether significant differences exist in students' perceptions when grouped according to selected demographic variables. Situating slang language within sociolinguistic and educational communication frameworks contributes to a deeper understanding of how informal linguistic practices shape communication behavior among contemporary college students. The findings of this study may provide valuable insights for language educators, communication scholars, and academic institutions seeking to understand the evolving linguistic realities of students in the digital age.

The present study is anchored on the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), Communication Accommodation Theory developed by Giles (1973), and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory introduced by Labov (1972). These theories collectively explain how slang language functions as a socially meaningful communicative practice among college students. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals construct and maintain group membership and interpersonal belongingness through shared linguistic behaviors, making slang language a marker of peer solidarity and social affiliation within student communities. Communication Accommodation Theory further explains that individuals adjust their communication styles depending on social interaction and communicative context, suggesting that students use slang language to establish familiarity, acceptance, and relational connection with peers while simultaneously shifting between formal and informal language depending on audience and setting. Meanwhile, Sociolinguistic Variation Theory emphasizes that language naturally varies according to social environment, cultural interaction, and generational context, viewing slang language as a legitimate linguistic variation shaped through evolving communication practices rather than a deviation from standard language norms. Collectively, these theories support the assumption that slang language among college students reflects identity construction, communicative adaptation, and sociocultural interaction, thereby providing a relevant theoretical foundation for examining the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication among college students.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-survey research design to examine the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication among college students. Descriptive research design was considered appropriate because it allows the systematic description, analysis, and interpretation of participants' perceptions, communicative behaviors, and language practices within a specific educational context. The design also enabled the researchers to determine differences in students' perceptions when grouped according to selected demographic variables. Through this approach, the study generated empirical insights regarding the role of slang language in students' academic and social communication experiences.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Universidad de Zamboanga, particularly within the School of Education, Arts, and Sciences. The institution was selected because it accommodates students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, making it an appropriate setting for sociolinguistic investigation. As a multicultural academic environment, the university provides a relevant context for examining how slang language functions within students' interpersonal and academic communication practices. The locale also reflects the multilingual communication environment commonly observed in Philippine higher education institutions.

Population and Sampling

The respondents of the study consisted of forty (40) college students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program of the School of Education, Arts, and Sciences. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who were considered appropriate sources of information regarding slang language use and academic communication. Specifically, total enumeration sampling was utilized to include all identified participants within the target group. The selected respondents were deemed suitable for the study because of their active engagement in academic and peer communication where slang expressions are commonly observed and utilized.

Research Instrument

The researchers utilized a structured survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument of the study. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part gathered the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, and monthly income, while the second part measured students' perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication in terms of grammar, vocabulary, diction, and language usage. The instrument was adapted and modified from related sociolinguistic and communication studies to ensure relevance to the objectives of the present investigation. A Likert-scale format was employed to measure the degree of respondents' agreement with each statement.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researchers secured formal permission from the appropriate university authorities and department administrators. Upon approval, the researchers personally distributed the survey questionnaires to the identified respondents within the School of Education, Arts, and Sciences. The purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study were explained clearly to the participants before the administration of the instrument. Respondents were given adequate time to accomplish the questionnaire, after which the accomplished forms were retrieved, checked for completeness, organized systematically, and prepared for statistical analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis

The collected data were encoded, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using appropriate statistical tools. Frequency count and percentage distribution were utilized to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. Weighted mean was employed to determine the level of students' perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication. Furthermore, independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine whether significant differences existed in respondents' perceptions when grouped according to their demographic profile variables. These statistical treatments enabled the researchers to generate objective interpretations and empirical conclusions based on the gathered data.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly observed ethical principles throughout the research process to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of the participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was secured from all respondents after explaining the purpose, procedures, and significance of the study. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty or consequence. The researchers also ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of participants by excluding personal identifiers from the data-gathering instrument and research records. All collected information was treated with strict confidentiality and was utilized solely for academic and research purposes.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the level of students' perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication in terms of grammar, vocabulary, diction, and language usage?

Table 1 presents the level of students' perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication in terms of grammar, vocabulary, diction, and language usage. The findings revealed a grand mean of 3.29 interpreted as high, indicating that students perceive slang language as significantly present in their communicative practices. Among the indicators, diction obtained the highest mean (M = 3.33), followed by language usage (M = 3.29), grammar (M = 3.27), and vocabulary (M = 3.25). The findings suggest that slang language influences the way students' express ideas, interact socially, and communicate within academic and peer environments.

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Grammar	3.27	High
Vocabulary	3.25	High
Diction	3.33	High
Language Usage	3.29	High
Grand Mean	3.29	High

Legend: 3.26–4.00 = High; 2.51–3.25 = Moderate; 1.76–2.50 = Low; 1.00–1.75 = Very Low.

Table 1: Students' Perceptions of Slang Language in Academic Communication

The findings imply that students view slang language as a communicative resource that promotes conversational flexibility, creativity, and interpersonal connection. The high perception in diction and language usage suggests that students often rely on informal expressions to communicate ideas more naturally and efficiently during social interaction. Adams (2009) explained that slang enables speakers to express identity, humor, solidarity, and emotional nuance, while Allan and Burrige (2006) argued that informal language practices may reflect linguistic creativity rather than communicative deficiency. These perspectives support the idea that slang language functions as a socially meaningful aspect of student communication.

The results also align with sociolinguistic studies emphasizing that youth language practices are shaped through identity formation, peer interaction, and digital communication environments. Bucholtz (2011) noted that young people actively construct social belonging through linguistic choices, while Ge and Herring (2018) observed that online communication platforms accelerate the spread of internet slang and hybrid linguistic forms among students. Frequent exposure to informal digital discourse may therefore contribute to the normalization of slang expressions within students' everyday communication practices, including academic interaction. The findings of the study are supported by the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), which explains that individuals use language practices to establish social belongingness and group identity. The high level of students' perceptions regarding slang language suggests that informal linguistic expressions function as markers of peer affiliation, shared experiences, and interpersonal connection within academic and social environments. The frequent use of slang language among college students therefore reflects how language becomes a tool for identity construction and social interaction within contemporary student communities.

The findings carry important implications for language education and academic communication. The growing integration of slang language among students suggests the need for educational approaches that strengthen awareness of context-appropriate language use without disregarding the sociolinguistic realities of contemporary communication. Rather than viewing slang solely as a threat to formal language, educators may recognize it as part of students' evolving linguistic identity while guiding learners in distinguishing informal communication from formal academic discourse.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the students' perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication when grouped according to demographic profile variables?

Table 2 presents the significant difference in the students' perceptions regarding the sociolinguistic functions and perceived influence of slang language on academic communication when grouped according to demographic profile variables. The findings revealed no significant difference across sex ($p = .891$), age ($p = .913$), ethnicity ($p = .210$), and monthly income ($p = .808$), since all computed p-values were higher than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted. The findings suggest that students generally share similar perceptions regarding the influence and communicative functions of slang language regardless of demographic classification.

Variable	Categories	Mean	Statistical Test	p-value	Interpretation
Sex	Male	3.180	$t = .138$.891	Not Significant
	Female	3.160			
Age	18–21 years old	3.149	$F = .175$.913	Not Significant
	22–25 years old	3.171			
	26–30 years old	3.142			
	31 years old and above	3.363			
Ethnicity	Tausug	3.130	$F = 1.520$.210	Not Significant
	Bisaya	3.170			
	Yakan	3.563			
	Samal	3.481			
	Tagalog	3.013			
	Others	2.915			
Monthly Income	P21,000 and above	3.500	$F = .323$.808	Not Significant
	P16,000–P20,000	3.188			
	P11,000–P15,000	3.113			
	P10,000 and below	3.180			

Significance alpha – 0.05

Table 2: Differences in Students' Perceptions of Slang Language Across Demographic Variables

The results imply that slang language has become a normalized communicative practice among college students that transcends differences in gender, age group, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. The widespread use of digital communication platforms and social media may have contributed to the development of shared linguistic behaviors among students, resulting in relatively uniform perceptions toward slang language use. Zhou (2013) similarly observed that contemporary slang usage among young people increasingly reflects collective youth culture rather than distinctions based on demographic categories. Likewise, Salvador et al. (2026) emphasized that slang language among Filipino college students functions as a common communicative resource for social interaction, identity performance, and peer connection across diverse student groups.

The findings are further supported by the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), which explains that individuals develop shared linguistic behaviors to establish social belongingness and group affiliation. The absence of significant differences among demographic variables suggests that students may collectively identify with contemporary youth communication practices shaped through digital culture and peer interaction. Slang language therefore functions as a unifying linguistic marker within student communities rather than a communication practice limited to specific demographic groups.

The findings highlight the growing influence of contemporary digital culture in shaping students' communication behavior across diverse social backgrounds. Educational institutions may therefore recognize that slang language use is increasingly embedded within the broader communicative experiences of college students regardless of demographic variation. The study further suggests the importance of promoting sociolinguistic awareness and context-appropriate language use in academic environments while acknowledging the evolving nature of youth communication practices in higher education.

Research Question 3: Which dimension of slang language is most dominant in students' academic communication?

Table 3 presents the dominant dimensions of slang language in students' academic communication. Among the identified dimensions, diction obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.33$), followed by language usage ($M = 3.29$), grammar ($M = 3.27$), and vocabulary ($M = 3.25$). The findings indicate that students primarily associate slang language with their manner of expression, style of speaking, and communicative delivery rather than merely vocabulary development or grammatical structure. This suggests that slang language functions more strongly as an expressive and interactional communicative tool among college students.

Dimensions	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Diction	3.33	High	1
Language Usage	3.29	High	2
Grammar	3.27	High	3
Vocabulary	3.25	High	4

Legend: 3.26–4.00 = High; 2.51–3.25 = Moderate; 1.76–2.50 = Low; 1.00–1.75 = Very Low.

Table 3: Dimensions of Slang Language

The dominance of diction implies that students use slang language to enhance conversational creativity, relatability, and interpersonal engagement within peer interaction. Informal expressions may allow students to communicate thoughts more naturally and comfortably while reflecting shared cultural experiences and social belongingness. Adams (2009) emphasized that slang language enables speakers to project identity, humor, and emotional nuance, while Eble (2012) explained that slang among college students often functions as a marker of peer solidarity and social intimacy. The findings therefore suggest that students perceive slang language as an important component of expressive communication within contemporary academic and social environments.

The findings are further supported by the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), which explains that language practices contribute to identity construction and group affiliation. The prominence of diction in the study suggests that students intentionally adopt informal linguistic styles to strengthen social connection and establish shared communicative identity within peer groups. Slang language therefore operates not only as a linguistic variation but also as a symbolic expression of belongingness and interaction among college students.

The findings imply that contemporary student communication increasingly prioritizes expressiveness, adaptability, and relational interaction shaped through digital culture and youth discourse practices. Educational institutions may therefore recognize that students' linguistic choices are influenced not only by academic requirements but also by evolving sociocultural communication patterns. Understanding the dominant role of diction in slang language use may help educators promote balanced communicative competence by guiding students in distinguishing expressive informal communication from context-appropriate academic discourse.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that slang language has become a significant sociolinguistic component of contemporary student communication, functioning not only as an informal linguistic practice but also as a medium of identity expression, interpersonal connection, and communicative adaptability among college students. The findings revealed that students generally perceive slang language as highly influential in their academic communication, particularly in terms of diction and language usage, indicating that informal expressions shape how students construct meaning, interact socially, and express themselves within academic and peer environments. Furthermore, the absence of significant differences across demographic variables suggests that slang language has become a shared communicative practice that transcends differences in age, sex, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. The study therefore highlights how digital culture, peer interaction, and evolving communication environments contribute to the normalization of slang language within higher education settings. Rather than viewing slang language solely as a threat to formal communication, the findings suggest that it reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of contemporary student discourse shaped through sociolinguistic and technological transformations.

The findings of the study provide important implications for language education, sociolinguistic research, and academic communication practices. Educational institutions and language educators may consider integrating sociolinguistic awareness into communication instruction to help students understand the appropriate use of informal and formal language across different communicative contexts. The study also suggests the need for balanced pedagogical approaches that recognize students' evolving linguistic realities while strengthening academic writing and professional communication skills. For sociolinguistic research, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature examining the influence of digital communication and youth language practices within higher education environments, particularly in the Philippine context. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of recognizing slang language as a socially meaningful communicative phenomenon shaped through identity formation, peer interaction, and technological engagement among contemporary college students.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that there are no competing interests related to this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendices

No appendices available.