


A Study of Vietnamese Slang Used by Students in Daily Conversations

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ABSTRACT

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Slang is unofficial language and is typically used by specific social groups in casual situations. The young generation widely uses slang, but it may cause a struggle for many people. Therefore, studies on slang may be useful for linguists who want to discover new language trends and non-linguists who want to better understand the youth. This study investigates the use of Vietnamese slang among students at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. It aims to identify the frequency of using slang in the students' daily conversations, the most common types of slang used, and factors that affect the students' use of slang. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire with a sample of 300 students. The findings reveal that students use slang in their daily lives. The study also came up with a list of the most commonly used slang of the participants and explored the ways these expressions are formed. The researcher aims to find out factors affecting the students' use of slang. On that basis, some suggestions relating to the use of slang have been made.

Introduction

Language varies from one social group to another social group, from one situation to another situation, and from one place to another place. Variation shows that every speaker does not always speak the same way. Language varieties indicate that the speakers are distinct from members of other groups (Finegan, 2008). The millennial generation commonly uses slang, and it has become an integral part of teenage communication. Finegan (2008) suggests that slang is particularly common among teenagers and college students in general. Due to this reason, research on the students' use of Vietnamese slang in daily conversations has received substantial interest. This study aimed to identify whether first-year students at Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU) use Vietnamese slang frequently in their daily conversations, what the most common types of slang they use, and what factors affect their use of slang.

Literature review

Definition of slang

The Oxford Dictionary defines slang as a type of language that is considered to be extremely casual, is more frequently used in speech than in writing, and is typically restricted to a particular setting or group of people. According to Rezeki & Sagala (2019), slang is an informal register of language (words, phrases, and usages) used by members of special groups such as teenagers, musicians, or criminals to establish group identity. Kastrati (2017) defines slang as the language of a specific community, such as a youth subculture that uses slang in rap music to sound unique and different. Coleman (2012) notes that slang is usually short-lived and often belongs to a specific age or social clique.

Classification of slang

Slang can be categorized in a variety of ways based on morphological, lexical, and semantic factors. Eble (1996) discusses several techniques for producing slang, such as compounding, affixation, functional shift, shortening, and mixing. Eble continues by saying that these word formation processes contribute to the constructive emergence of both slang and broad vocabulary. Slang uses existing words and their current meanings in a variety of ways, frequently combining resources from the sound system, word-building processes, paradigms, and the speaker's cultural knowledge. Adams (2009) categorizes slang based on their word forms: compound words, single words, noun + noun, verb + noun, etc. Coleman (2012) categorizes slang according to where the words came from acquired terms, native words, etc. Partridge (2017) categorizes slang according to the methods used to produce them: adding new meanings, incorporating other languages, generating new words, substituting one or more components of phrases, etc. Khodjayeva (2022) identifies six main lexical mechanisms for the formation of slang units: affixation, abbreviation, compounding, conversion, and reduplication.

In this study, we combine the ideas suggested by Coleman (2012) and Khodjayeva (2022) in order to categorize the most commonly used slang collected from the survey.

Previous studies on the use of slang

Several studies have been carried out around the world on the use of slang among students, mostly in English. Hasanah (2022) conducts a study of English slang words used by 8th-semester students in daily conversations through a social network at the English study program of FKIPUIR, Universitas Islam Riau. Muhartoyo & Wijaya (2014) study the use of English slang words in informal communication among 8th-semester students of the English Department at Binus University by exploring the reason for using English slang, how students acquire English slang, and what kind of slang they mostly use. Namvar (2014) uses a pilot test in the research to show the amount of familiarity with slang, particularly American slang, among Malaysian undergraduate students of a public university. Burdova (2009) conducts research on the slang vocabulary of Czech and American students.

In Vietnam, several studies have been conducted on the language of the youth in general and of students in particular. Ly (2022) had a study on the use of social networking language by students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Hanoi Metropolitan University. Andreeva

(2021) conducts research to analyze lexical and semantic features of the phraseological subsystem of Vietnamese youth. Chuyên et al. (2020) explore students' social networking language characteristics from the structure dimension (through some forums under the Facebook social network). Hằng (2020) writes about the chat language of the 9X generation on Facebook. Thuận (2013) studies linguistic and cultural characteristics of the chat language of the youth in her MA thesis. Investigation into the language use of university students has been a topic of interest for many researchers in the past few years, such as Nguyen et al. (2022) and Nguyen et al. (2024).

In general, most authors have researched the linguistic features of the language used by a specific group of youngsters. There has been little research on the use of slang among youngsters, specifically on how often they use slang, what slang words are commonly used, and what factors affect their use. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap and investigate the use of Vietnamese slang among first-year students at Vietnam National University, Hanoi.

Research questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. How often do first-year students at VNU use slang?
2. What are the most common types of slang used by first-year students at VNU?
3. What factors affect the students' use of slang?

Methods

Pedagogical setting & participants

This study seeks to explore the use of Vietnamese slang amongst first-year students at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. By examining their habit of using Vietnamese slang in daily conversations, our aim is to help adults and non-slang users understand the youth more easily and improve communication with them. The participants in this study include 300 first-year students, both male and female, coming from various regions nationwide and majoring in various undergraduate programs at Vietnam National University, Hanoi, such as the English language (45%), information technology (24%), finance (27%) and logistics (4%). The participants are between 18 and 20 years old.

Design of the study

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the habit of first-year students at VNU using Vietnamese slang. The researcher then makes a list of the most commonly used slang and analyzes them to identify their type and formation. The survey questionnaire is constructed with both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions so that the participants can fill in their answers.

Data collection & analysis

The electronic delivery of survey questionnaires by Google Forms facilitated effective data collection from 300 students. We provided instructions in Vietnamese to ensure the uniformity and validity of the answers. The data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the frequency, percentage, and list of slang words that are most commonly used.

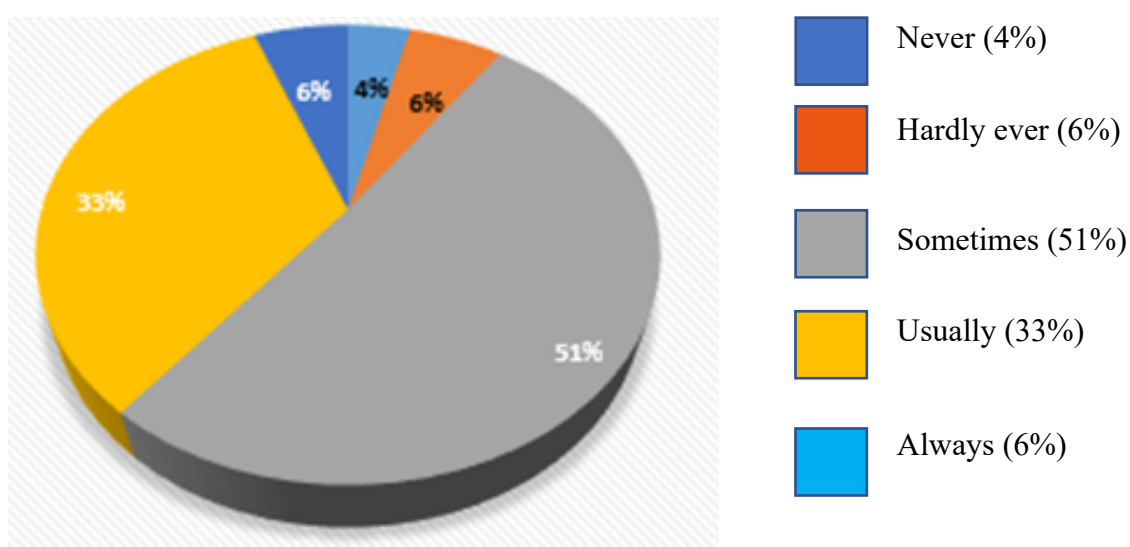
Results/Findings and discussion

The study reveals information about the habit of using slang in students' daily conversations, including how often they use slang, what slang words are commonly used, and what factors affect their use of slang.

The frequency of using slang among first-year students at VNU

Figure 1

Frequency of slang usage among students



As can be seen, the pie chart shows that more than half (51%) of participants sometimes use slang, while about one-third (33%) usually use Vietnamese slang in their daily lives. The minority of participants use “hardly” and “never” to describe their answers, and “always” accounts for the least (4%). It can be concluded that the majority of students use slang in their daily conversations, and the usage frequency is rather high. Kartina (2019) states, "Slang is a kind of code or secret language that some people or community group in society uses." In fact, slang is the language of GenZ - the generation of people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Oxford Dictionary) or the code of teenagers. Therefore, it is understandable why slang is so commonly used in students' daily conversations. This finding is in accordance with previous studies relating to the frequency of slang use among the younger generation.

The most commonly used types of slang

Having answered the question about the frequency of using slang, the respondents were asked

to list 3 to 5 slang words/phrases that they commonly use in their daily lives, together with examples of the slang used. After collecting the answers from all of the participants, the researchers came up with the list of 100 most commonly used slang among first-year VNU students, arranged in the order of frequency as follows.

Table 1

The most commonly used slang

1. <i>Sương sương</i>	26. <i>Fourk</i>	51. <i>Học ăn học nói học gói mang về</i>	76. <i>Bing Chilling</i>
2. <i>Vãi</i>	27. <i>Otp</i>	52. <i>Biết chết liền</i>	77. <i>Anti</i>
3. <i>Vãi chưởng</i>	28. <i>Cpink</i>	53. <i>Tém tém lại</i>	78. <i>Gato</i>
4. <i>Keo</i>	29. <i>No star where</i>	54. <i>Sang xịn mịn</i>	79. <i>Gấu</i>
5. <i>Mặn</i>	30. <i>Btw</i>	55. <i>Độc lạ Bình Dương</i>	80. <i>Ghê</i>
6. <i>Ét ô ét</i>	31. <i>Simp</i>	56. <i>Tám chiếu mới</i>	81. <i>Trầu</i>
7. <i>Xu cà na</i>	32. <i>Sorry</i>	57. <i>Cột sống</i>	82. <i>Chảnh</i>
8. <i>Gét gô</i>	33. <i>Drama</i>	58. <i>Chém gió</i>	83. <i>Áo</i>
9. <i>Xà lơ</i>	34. <i>Deadline</i>	59. <i>Cảm lạnh</i>	84. <i>Nóng</i>
10. <i>Nhức nách</i>	35. <i>Cute</i>	60. <i>Mi ngon</i>	85. <i>Hòny</i>
11. <i>Zì zậy trời</i>	36. <i>OMG</i>	61. <i>Ngon</i>	86. <i>Tâm hồn</i>
12. <i>Khum</i>	37. <i>Body samsung</i>	62. <i>Đào</i>	87. <i>Cháy</i>
13. <i>Ổ dề</i>	38. <i>Mai đệt ti ni</i>	63. <i>Hàng</i>	88. <i>Oách xà lách</i>
14. <i>Mlem mlem</i>	39. <i>Ơ mây zing</i>	64. <i>Luật hoa quả</i>	89. <i>Lít</i>
15. <i>Hong bé oi</i>	40. <i>Gút chóp</i>	65. <i>Quả táo nhãn lồng</i>	90. <i>Săn sale</i>
16. <i>Luật hoa quả</i>	41. <i>Đỉnh của chóp</i>	66. <i>Tỉnh tò</i>	91. <i>Nhây</i>
17. <i>Báo</i>	42. <i>Big c</i>	67. <i>Thả thính</i>	92. <i>Hơn nì</i>
18. <i>Cột sống</i>	43. <i>Trầm zn</i>	68. <i>Bồ kết</i>	93. <i>Trà xanh</i>
19. <i>Cảm lạnh</i>	44. <i>U là trời</i>	69. <i>Quẩy</i>	94. <i>Ao trình</i>
20. <i>Cái nịt</i>	45. <i>Toang rồi ông giáo ạ</i>	70. <i>Đu đưa</i>	95. <i>Chém gió</i>
21. <i>Xin lũi</i>	46. <i>Nước ngập lên nã</i>	71. <i>Rụng trứng</i>	96. <i>Đội quần</i>
22. <i>Màu mờ</i>	47. <i>Lốp du chu cà mo</i>	72. <i>Mét</i>	97. <i>Cua</i>
23. <i>Fishu</i>	48. <i>Đã quá Pepsi oi</i>	73. <i>Ấm IC</i>	98. <i>Xì tin</i>
24. <i>Lémon</i>	49. <i>Chu pa pi mu nha nhỏ</i>	74. <i>Meme</i>	99. <i>Trong cái khó nó ló cái khăn</i>
25. <i>Thật chân</i>	50. <i>Chát</i>	51. <i>Anh hùng bàn ghế</i>	100. <i>Slay</i>

The list of most commonly used slang words is a key focus of this research, which not many previous studies could do. This can help non-slang users deepen their understanding of slang in

particular and the young generation in general.

Using the ideas suggested by Coleman (2012) and by Khodjayeva (2022), the slang in the list is classified under the three categories based on their formation: adding new meanings to original language units, using foreign languages, and creating new language units. In combination with the examples provided by the participants, the result of classification is as follows:

Table 2

Classification of the most commonly used slang

No.	Formation	Percent (%)	Slang	Example
1	Adding new meanings to original language units	61%	<i>swong swong, vãi, vãi chường, keo, mận, xu cà na, nhúc nách, xà lơ, ố dề, hong bé oi, luật hoa quả, báo, cột sống, cảm lạnh, cái nịt, màu mỡ...</i>	- Tối nay mặc swong swong thôi, đừng ố dề quá nha! - Ăn cơm khum ? - Mặc váy keo quá zậy !
2	Using foreign languages	22%	<i>fishu, lèmon, fourk, OTP, Cpink, No star where, btw, simp, sorry, drama, deadline, cute, OMG, body samsung, mai đệt ti ni, ơ mây zing gút chóp,...</i>	- Nhìn mặt thẳng kia là biết lèmon rồi - OTP của tao mới ra phim mới đấy, xem không - OMG!! Biết drama gì chưa?
3	Creating new language units	17%	<i>BigC, trảm zn, u là trời, toang rồi ông giáo ạ, nước ngập lên não, lớp du chu cà mo, đã quá pepsi ơi, chu pa pi mu nha nhỏ, biết chết liền, tem tém lại nha, sang xịn mịn, độc lạ Bình Dương, tám chiếu mới...</i>	- Bài tập cuối kì làm tao trảm zn . - BigC thật đấy! - Mai nghỉ lễ rồi, đã quá pepsi ơi. - Quần áo tui sang xịn mịn phải biết.
	Total	100%		

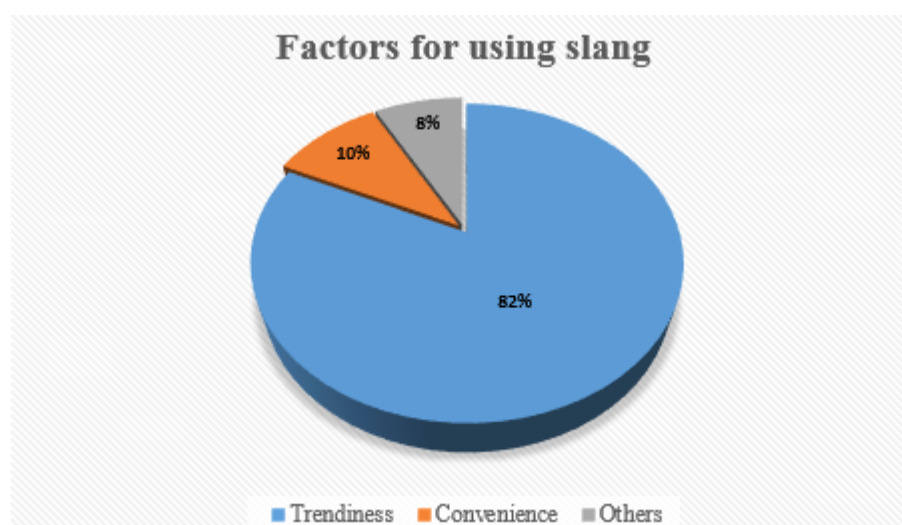
As can be seen from Table 2, slang, which is formed by adding new meanings to original language units, is the most popular type that VNU students are fond of, followed by using foreign languages and creating new language units. VNU students in the survey mostly use slang words with meanings different from their original meanings. This may cause miscommunication when these students talk to other people who do not understand the “hidden” meanings of the words. Their second choice is to use foreign languages, especially English, in their talks, sometimes with no change in form and meaning, sometimes with minor or major modifications that can show their own styles and characteristics. Current youngsters have formed a lot of slang by creating new language units from the known ones, and some students favour this trend. Outsiders may find this trend weird, but there are certain reasons for this, which will be explained in the following part.

Factors affecting the use of slang

To find out what factors affect the students' use of slang, participants were asked to write down their answers in a Google Form. The collected data is then summarized and illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Factors affecting the use of slang



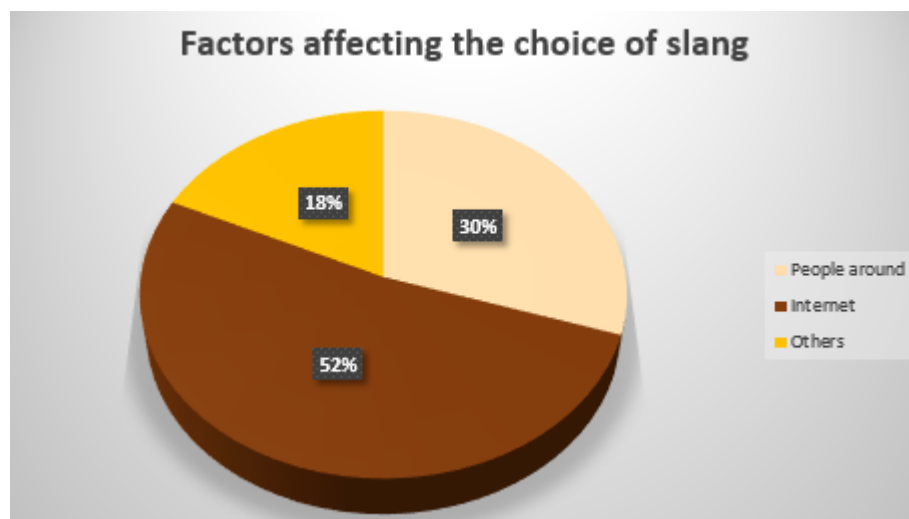
What can be concluded from Figure 2 is that the majority (82%) of participants use slang in their daily conversations because they want to be trendy. They want to be up-to-date with people around, as using specific slang for teenagers has become an increasingly popular trend nowadays. The number of slang words has increased notably, and those who do not use slang may be considered to be laid back. The other reasons for their use of slang include convenience (10%), possibly due to the popularity of slang; the students think they will not need to spend time expressing ideas if they use slang. Using slang may help them communicate both the message and the emotion in a convenient way. There are some other reasons for the students' use of slang, but they are not typical. For example, slang is funny and strange and makes them friendly.

The factors affecting the use of slang among the research participants are consistent with those

in previous studies, and trendiness is the key point.

Figure 3

Factors affecting the choice of slang



Another objective of this research is to explore the sources of slang that VNU first-year students use in their daily conversations, i.e., what factors affect the use of slang. The participants in the survey gave answers, as illustrated in Figure 3 above. The survey results reveal that more than half of (52%) participants use slang originating from the Internet, nearly a third (30%) use slang that they imitate from people around them, and 18% use slang from other sources. This result is completely understandable because the Internet has become increasingly popular in the current era of 4.0. The time span in which students are online is extremely long, and they may encounter slang without notice. Besides, slang used on the Internet is likely to be viral. That is the reason why the Internet is the most significant source of slang.

The factors affecting the choice of slang among the research participants are consistent with those in previous studies. However, in other research, television was mentioned as one source for students to acquire slang, but in this research, participants did not refer to television.

Conclusion

This study shows that first-year students at VNU frequently use slang in their daily conversations; the most common types of slang they use are formed by adding new meanings to original language units, using foreign languages, or creating new language units. The outstanding factor that makes them use slang so frequently in their daily lives is that slang is trendy, and they mostly use slang, which they learn from the Internet and people around them. The research also comes up with a list of the most commonly used slang words/phrases that are used by students in their daily conversations with the hope that individuals who do not have the habit of using slang may gain insight into the language of the youth nowadays.

However, the study has certain limitations, such as focusing on a specific educational institution, namely VNU, with students majoring in limited fields. Due to this reason, there

might be potential bias in the data. Moreover, simple data analysis by descriptive statistics mainly focuses on frequency and percentage. More complex analysis with more comparisons and more variants may provide deeper insights into students' use of slang. Overall, these limitations do not undermine the contribution of the findings. However, they highlight the need for more extensive research to fully understand the dynamics of slang used by contemporary students in particular and the youth in general.

Some recommendations can be made to improve the study, including choosing a wider range of participants from other institutions with various demographic features. Another way to further this research is to conduct a deeper and more comprehensive analysis by examining various slang categories used for various communication purposes in daily life.

The research helps to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students at Vietnam National University, Hanoi use slang. Nevertheless, additional research is required to transcend the mentioned limitations and make the research result more comprehensive.

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Biodata

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