

## **Investigating Degree of Familiarity, Formality and Frequency of Slang Used by Farsi Speakers: A Situation-Based Study**

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### **Abstract**

Despite the high frequency of slang use among speakers of different languages, investigating this significant language phenomenon has been limited to specific areas including the use of slang by adolescents though evidence shows that slang is becoming ubiquitous across a variety of age and social groups. Therefore, the present study was designed to develop current understanding about slang with respect to FFF (triple F), that is, the level of familiarity (with slang), formality (of slang as perceived by its users), and frequency (of slang use) with regard to three situations whereby slang is used: describing people, humiliating people and expressing feelings. The FFF was investigated in light of three variables including age, education level and gender of the participants in the sociocultural context of Iran. The participants were 154 native speakers of Farsi language within 20-50 years of age. A mixed-method research design including both qualitative and quantitative approaches (questionnaire and interview) was utilized to collect data which was then analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results indicated that, the participants, above all, were familiar with slang used to describe people, they perceived slang used for humiliating people as more formal than other slang types, and they used slang more frequently to express feelings. Concerning age, education-level and gender variables, the differences were statistically significant mostly with regard to the frequency of the use of slang. The findings generally suggested that members of a society are roughly familiar with popular slang regardless of their age, gender and education level; otherwise, they cannot obtain legitimacy in the groups or communicate successfully with different members of the community. Thus, slang is a cultural feature of any living language without which the language is impractical and spiritless.

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### **Keywords**

Slang, Situation-based, Farsi speakers

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“Slang is language which takes off its coat, spits on its hands- and goes to work.”

Carl Sandburg

## Introduction

The first question concerning slang is that where it comes from; however, there is uncertainty about the exact origin of it. Once belonging the criminal class of society (Asher, 1994), this variety gradually “came to donate unconventional vocabulary as well as sub-cultural speech” (Membe, 2006: 11) with culture having a strong effect on the use and acceptance of it (Bartolo, 2008). In common sense, slang is typically attributed to informality, imprecision, un-systematicity and illegitimacy (Eckert, 2000; Hudson, 2000; Labov, 1992; Membe, 2006) to the extent that Sornig (1981) describe it as “a stigmatized language variety or deviant variant when compared with the codified standard language”. Slang is also perceived as sociolect because social factors such as homosexuality, drug (Zhou & Fan, 2013), religious and army settings (Skolnik, 2015) would contribute to its development and spread, and it has a variety of social dynamics (Danesi, 2010). However, there has traditionally been a minority group who have taken a positive approach towards slang (De Klerk, 1990; Hayakawa, 1941; Mojela, 2002) by taking into consideration the importance of user’s intention and contribution of slang to language enrichment as aspects frequently neglected by scholars holding a negative stance towards it. Hayakawa (1941), for instance, believed that slang “vividly expresses people’s feelings about life and about the things they encounter in life” (p. 195). Reflecting on the work of Michael Adams (2009), the well-known expert on slang and linguistic variation, Danesi (2010) calls slang a type of basic poetry “revealing the presence of a creative impulse in humans in the ways they create and use language” (p. 507). Taking a critical stance towards previous studies, Agha (2015) introduces a new way of looking at slang and stresses that it is not simply a speech variety but “is a term whose usage indexes relationships between discourses and their speakers” (p. 308).

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As evident in the aforementioned descriptions, despite attempts made to offer a comprehensive definition of slang, it has remained frustratingly complicated to describe since there is no consensus about what it entails; hence, linguists usually set some criteria to realize whether or not a given utterance can be considered as slang. Dumas and Lighter (1978) argue that presence of a true slang diminishes the dignity of formal written or spoken communication, is a taboo term for some people, implies the acquaintance of the speaker and the listener, and is used in place of the well-known conventional term to avoid the discomfort of using it. Labov (1992) also remarks that the use of slang suggests that its users approximately share the same world and are familiar with each other. However, it should not escape from our mind that even in situations where interacting individuals do not have a common interest, they may intentionally adopt features of each other’s speech in order to reduce the social distance and to smoothen communication. This is one of the core assumption of Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) referred to as ‘downward convergence’ which reflects “a move toward more stigmatized or less socially valued forms of communication” (Shepard, Giles, & LePoire, 2001, p. 37).

Overall, whether taken as a positive or negative feature of a language, slang is an essential ingredient which adds flavor to any language. As discussed by Skolnik (2015), perhaps the best example showing the value of the presence of slang for vitality of a language is that of the

Hebrew language which was revitalized in 1980s. Though the created language appeared stiff in its primary stages, the inclusion of more slang made spoken Hebrew a smoother language to use. Given the interactivity of different languages, many of the colloquial phrase entered this language had roots in other languages specifically Arabic (e.g., *ahalan* (hi)), Yiddish (e.g., *foyleshtik* (monkey business)), and English (e.g., homo, hippie, job, joker, killer, lunch) roots. Since its early revitalization of Hebrew language to date, the number of slang has considerably grown, reaching over 10,000 entries in *Millon ha-Sleng ha-Makif* (Ruvik Rosenthal, 2005). Thanks to slang “Hebrew has thus become a living language in the most modern sense, its vitality reflecting the vitality of the country, which despite increasing social malaise remains its most attractive feature” (p. 173).

Slang is frequently described as a feature of youth talk or teenage speech, or in other words, as an area of vocabulary which is an indication of the speaker’s age (Holmes, 2013) since most slang users are adolescents and it sounds unusual if it is uttered by elderly people given the fact that “a sense of belonging is important to the average insecure teenager” (De Klerk, 1990, p. 5). Results of some studies are in corroboration with this idea. As a case in point, Eric’s (2009) study showed that Rwandan students *often* used slang at school when talking with fellow students and in informal social gatherings, *sometimes* used it when talking with people or intimate relatives of their age group, but *never* used it when talking with their parents, lecturers and in formal situations. Nevertheless, more recently, voices can be heard claiming that slang is not peculiar to adolescents and people in different age groups may consciously take on slang from lower social groups (Holmes, 2013; Pederson, 2007). This idea is supported by Danesi (2010) who argues that “People use slang more often than they realize” (p. 507), and even the so-called standard language is replete with many words such as ‘jazz’ and expressions such as ‘Deal with it!’ that once had been recognized as slang, therefore slang can be a language feature used by all its speakers regardless of their age. Besides age as one of the main markers of slang frequently addressed in slang studies, there is a large body of research addressing gender differences in the use of slang. Most of these studies have shown that the frequency of slang use is higher among males (Anderson, 2000; Karlsson, 2007; Lakoff, 1975; Pederson, 2007; Salma, 2013; Spender, 1980; Stenstrom, 2002) that is why slang is characterized as male domain. Yet, there are a couple of scholars questioning this fact. De Klerk (1990) argues that the stereotype of males being the primary slang users was questionable. In their study, Hashemi Shahraki and Eslami Rasekh (2011) found that the use of slang was more common among Iranian high school students than primary school and senior university students thereby, it was one of the main features of adolescents’ talk; however, gender differences in the use of slang were not significant. One reason why slang is usually featured as a male domain is due to males’ membership in more sub-groups; men persistently get involved in political, business, sport sub-groups, to name a few whereas women typically stay in their own neighborhood and family circles and majorly use slang related to clothing, hairstyle and home, (Zhou & Fan, 2013). But a more significant gender difference in the use of slang can be related to domains of slang use by males and females than the frequency of its usage by them.

Slang has a variety of functions and realizing them contributes to better understanding of his language phenomenon. In an early study, Partridge (1935: 6-7) outlined 15 potential reasons for using slang which are summarized in what follows: 1) just for the fun of the thing, in playfulness or waggishness; 2) as an exercise either in wit and ingenuity or in humor; 3) to be ‘different’, to be novel; 4) to be picturesque (either positively or negatively); 5) to be unmistakably arresting,

even startling; 6) to escape from clichés, or to be brief and concise; 7) to enrich the language; 8) to lend an air of solidity, concreteness to the abstract; 9a) to lessen the sting of, or on the other hand to give additional point to, a refusal, a rejection, a recantation; 9b) to reduce, perhaps also to disperse, the solemnity, the pomposity, the excessive seriousness of a conversation (or of a piece of writing); 9c) to soften the tragedy, and/or thus to enable the speaker or his auditor or both to endure, to ‘carry on’; 10) to speak or write down to an inferior, or to amuse a superior public; 11) for ease of social intercourse; 12) to induce either friendliness or intimacy of a deep or a durable kind; 13) to show that one belongs to a certain school, or social class; in brief, to be ‘in the swim’ 14) to show or prove that someone is not ‘in the swim’; and 15) to be secret - not understood by those around one. To date, several studies have tried to identify the reasons underlying the use of slang. Eble (1996) found that slang is usually used to fulfill social functions and the main objective of people’s conversations is not to gain new information about different things suggesting that slang occurs in certain situations specifically to address people or talk about them. Almost a decade later, Pederson (2007) studied the use of slang in British English in a TV show and a movie to identify the situations in which slang occurred while the gender of the slang users was also considered. The results of the study showed the situations or areas of slang use among men in the TV show as following: talking to or about someone (17%), talking about drugs and alcohol (11%), mood (11%), sex and other taboo areas (10%), violence (10%), ethnicity (4%), and miscellaneous (37%), whereas the situations in which slang was used by women were limited to talking to or about someone (100%). In Namavar and Ibrahim’s (2014) study, the Malaysian ESL students (85% of them were females) were mainly familiar with movie, internet and abbreviation slang. Adopting Partridge’s reasons for using slang, Rwasamanzi (2009) investigated the use of slang by students in a higher institute in North of Rwanda and found that they used slang to be fun, humorous, secretive, creative, establish group identity, imitate other students, and communicate more easily, respectively. Facilitating social interaction, establishing friendliness, taking a distinctive identity, achieving politeness, expressing emotion, indicating attachment to a particular social, its aesthetic appeal, and its ability to fill in cognitive gaps with new linguistic signs, among other things, are reasons why people use slang as informed by more recent studies (Adams, 2009; Dalzell & Victor, 2008a; Danesi, 2010; Hashemi Shahraki & Eslami Rasekh, 2011; Membe, 2006; Pederson, 2007; Zhou & Fan, 2013), some of which had already been acknowledged by Partridge (1935).

Although these studies have offered invaluable insights into slang use, there are still some aspects of this evolving phenomenon that have not received sufficient attention in Iran as well as in other contexts. A major underinvestigated problems is the use of slang by people other than adolescence and the results of few studies available are a good indication of the ubiquity of this subcultural language among people across different educational classes in a society. The results of the study by Mazer and Hunt (2008), for instance, indicated that unlike common belief that teachers should not typically use colloquial language, the teacher’s use of positive slang such as ‘cool’ used with the purpose of establishing or reinforcing social approval in the classroom community was appreciated by the students and did not degrade the status of the teacher and his credibility in the eyes of the students. Findings of this type shed light on potential benefits of slang.

Overall, once depicted as an illegitimate form of communication, slang continues to be an insightful and legitimate variation with its root growing in all age, gender, and educational groups

within a community and this requires slang to be revisited by empirical studies which provide evidence of its changing role and usage in contemporary era. The many features of slang doubtlessly makes it worth of academic investigation (Labov, 1992), and studying it is also a way of knowing more about the culture and society in which slang is embedded (Zhou & Fan, 2013). Therefore, some gaps evolving around the use of slang were investigated in this study as discussed in what follows.

## **1. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions**

The above discussion clarified that there is no consensus on what slang exactly is. People react to slang differently; whereas it is considered as taboo by some people, others consider it as a creative language. Therefore, to understand what slang really is, it is important to know who uses it and in what situations. Studies have investigated slang in different languages (Hashemi Shahraki & Eslami Rasekh, 2011; Sau-Ling, 2005; Skolnik, 2015; Namavar & Ibrahim, 2014; Pederson, 2007; Reyes, 2005) and have yielded different findings; these inconsistent findings accordingly necessitate more investigation of this issue so that a more shared understanding of this phenomenon can be obtained. The available have mainly dealt with slang used by adolescents (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990; Eble, 1996; Labov, 1992; Reyes, 2005; Salma, 2013; Stenstrom, 2002), thus leaving adult's slang usage underinvestigated. Moreover, despite the high frequency of slang by Farsi-speakers, slang studies have been rare in the Iranian context.

Though slang is becoming ubiquitous across different age groups, there is a serious lack of investigation on slang use by people who have already passed their teenagehood. The current study was, therefore, designed to develop the current knowledge about slang with respect to FFF (triple F): the level of familiarity (with slang), formality (of slang as perceived by its users), and frequency (of slang use) with regard to three situations whereby slang is used, that is, describing people, humiliating people and expressing feelings. The FFF was investigated in light of three variables including age, education level and gender of the participants in the sociocultural context of Iran. In simple words, the present study sought answer to the following questions:

1. Is the level of familiarity with slang determined by age, education level and gender of people across different situations in which slang is used?
2. Is perception about formality of slang affected by age, education level and gender of people across different situations in which slang is used?
3. Is the frequency of slang usage affected by age, education level and gender of the participants across different situations in which slang is used?

The present study is significant because it is an addition to the limited available literature on slang studies. Moreover, unlike most studies investigating slang among adolescents, it addressed this understudied topic among different age groups from young to middle-aged. Gender differences were also taken into account and, above all, the less-frequently studied variable of education level and its association with slang use was investigated. A rather novel aspect of this study, to the best of the author's knowledge, is that it used a situation-based framework and instead of presenting a bulk of slang used in Farsi language, it explored slang used by Farsi speakers in three specific situations.



## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were Iranian families living in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus, who were recruited from a meeting held for celebrating a religious event (thus, selected through convenience sampling). Of the 79 people present at the meeting, 14 were excluded because they were not willing to participate but 65 voluntarily accepted to participate in the study. In an attempt to collect more data, the soft copy of the questionnaire was emailed to the researchers' colleagues and friends in Iran and thus 89 more questionnaires were collected. Therefore, a total of 154 questionnaires were collected. The inclusion criteria were to be between 20-50 years of age and to be native speaker of Farsi language. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

As shown in Table 1, the male/female ratio was almost equal (51.9% & 48.1%, respectively). The participants were divided according to their age into three categories with a ten-year interval. Most of the participants were between 21-30 (42.9%), and 31-40 (39.0%) years of age, with the last group, 41-50, being the smallest in number (18.1%). The participants were also divided according to their education level into four groups. An equal proportion of participants had either high school diploma or were PhD candidates (5.85%), and likewise, similar proportion of the participants held either bachelor or master's degree (44.15%).

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All the participants were native speakers of Farsi and at the time of the study were living either in Iran or contemporarily in Mağusa, Northern Cyprus for education or visiting purposes.

**Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants**

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Gender			1.48	.50
Female	80	51.9		
Male	74	48.1		
Age			1.75	.75
21-30	66	42.9		
31-40	60	39.0		
41-50	28	18.1		
Education			2.50	.88
High school diploma	18	5.85		
BA/BS	68	44.15		
MA/MS	68	44.15		
PhD (candidates)	7	5.85		
Total	154	100		

## **2.2. Instruments**

Data was collected through a close-ended questionnaire developed by the researcher. The English translation and transliteration of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix A. The questionnaire has four sections; whereas section A elicits background information about the participants, the three next sections represent situations whereby slang is utilized in speech: B) slang used to describe people, C) slang used to humiliate people, and D) slang used to express feelings (abbreviated as DP, HP, & EF). A list of slang (N = 40) used in this study were selected from the online Contemporary Dictionary of Persian Slang due to their high frequency of usage in the sociocultural context of Iran. The participants were required to rate the FFF with respect to three variables of age, gender and educational status. Familiarity with the slang was assessed through Yes/No responses to the items, formality was assessed on a 3-point Likert type scale (informal, colloquial, formal), and the frequency of usage was rated on a 5-point Likert type scale (from never to always). For ease of answering, all the scales were merged to form only one questionnaire (Appendix A).

A semi-structured interview was also administered to eight participants on a voluntary basis as a secondary and qualitative source of data to be triangulated with the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire. The interview questions centered on FFF and also the situations whereby slang was used by the participants.

## **2.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was collected during the 2016-2017 second academic semester. A mixed-method research design including both qualitative and quantitative approaches (questionnaire and interview) was applied in this study (Teddlie & Tashakori, 2009). The participants were briefed about how to fill out the questionnaire and it took approximately 15 minutes to complete it. In order to analyze the data, SPSS software (19.0) was used. Descriptive statistics was run and the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of responses to the items of the questionnaire were computed with respect to three situations whereby slang is used in order to answer the three research questions. The participants' mean score was used to determine the level of FFF. To elaborate, the questionnaire has 40 items and as far as Familiarity is concerned there are two choices which are rated as either 1 to signify Yes or 2 to signify No, so the highest score that could be obtained is 80 and half of this score is 40 with the mean of 1 which is the middle score and thus all the obtained means are analyzed with respect to this mean which is representative of the normal distribution.

In this paper, data was not analyzed in details by referring to the frequency and percentage of responses to every single item of the questionnaire (though this information is provided in Appendix B); rather, to shed more light on the extent to which FFF were affected by the three variables (age, education level, and gender) across the three situations, ANOVA test was performed to compare the means between the categories of each variable, for example between different age groups, to identify potential relationships between the use of slang and the age of the speakers. Therefore, a total of 27 ANOVA tests were performed.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of the study are presented in three sub-sections, each answering one of the research questions.

#### 3.1. Familiarity with Slang

In order to examine the degree to which the participants were familiar with slang, descriptive statistics was run and the mean and SD was computed across the three DP, HP, and EF situations as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Familiarity with Slang**

Situations	Mean	SD
Describing people	1.25	.67
Humiliating people	1.20	.31
Expressing feelings	1.14	.22
Total	1.20	.24

As can be seen in Table 2, the total mean score (M: 1.20) as well as the mean of slang across the three situations is more than half of the possible average response ( $1.20 > 2.00/2$ ) suggesting that Farsi speakers are not familiar with all the slang presented to them and this is true in relation to all the DP, HP & EF situations (M: 1.25, 1.20, & 1.14, respectively). However, the mean is closer to 1 suggesting that the participants are familiar with most of the slang.

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A more in-depth analysis shows the level of familiarity with slang with respect to three variables addressed in this study the result of which was obtained by performing ANOVA as shown in Table 3. According to the results, the mean difference between the three age groups was not significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) in any of DP, HP, and EF situations (M: .569, .807, & .412, respectively) suggesting that the degree of familiarity with slang specific to a given situation is not affected by the age of the speakers. However, these results are in contradiction with those of Namavar and Ibrahim's (2014) study which indicated high familiarity with slang among teenagers, 2014).

The same results were observed concerning the education level and gender variables. In fact, there was not a significant mean difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the four education level groups (M: .718, .862, & .210, respectively), nor between the two gender groups (M: .894, .319, & .354, respectively) in any of the situations meaning that, similar to age, the level of familiarity with slang used in different situations is not influenced by the education level and gender of the speakers. Confirming this finding, interviewee 1, a 25-year old female, explained that:

Slang usage has nothing to do your age or education level, in my idea. The more you are involved in society and intermingle with different groups, the more slang you will learn and if you do not learn and use them, they (its users) treat you hum... like you do not belong to their community.

In fact, the above quotation denotes that speakers, though not familiar with all slang, believe that it is essential to understand slang because it is used by speakers “to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or with a trend or fashion in society at large” (Eble, 1996: 11). The presence of slang as an important requirement for acquiring legitimacy in a given community, and establishing stronger cultural bond necessitates any member of the society to be



more or less familiar with it even if they resist to use them. For instance, there may be many slang peculiar to men that is understood but never uttered by women (Kramer, 1973). Namavar and Ibrahim's (2014) study maintaining that people are familiar with movie slang but the important point here is that, slang are becoming such frequent and significant feature of a language that without sufficient familiarity with them, complete understanding of the speakers' speech would not be possible.

**Table 3. ANOVA for Familiarity with Slang across Different Situations**

Situations for slang use		Mean	SD	Mean Square	Sig.
Describing people					
Age	20-30	1.25	.21	.016	.569
	30-40	1.23	.13		
	40-50	1.30	.11		
Education	High school diploma	1.23	.15	.013	.718
	BA/BS	1.28	.20		
	MA/MS	1.25	.13		
	PhD	1.20	.13		
Gender	Male	1.25	.14	.001	.894
	Female	1.26	.19		
Humiliating people					
Age	20-30	1.27	.43	.022	.807
	30-40	1.27	.18		
	40-50	1.25	.20		
Education	High school diploma	1.23	.18	.026	.862
	BA/BS	1.25	.46		
	MA/MS	1.17	.19		
	PhD	1.17	.17		
Gender	Male	1.25	.18	.100	.319
	Female	1.16	.41		
Expressing feelings					
Age	20-30	1.13	.27	.045	.412
	30-40	1.12	.16		
	40-50	1.25	.17		
Education	High school diploma	1.13	.17	.076	.210
	BA/BS	1.22	.31		
	MA/MS	1.10	.12		
	PhD	1.05	.07		
Gender	Male	1.17	.18	.044	.354
	Female	1.11	.26		

\*p < 0.05

Consistent with the findings of the present study, a few previous studies have acknowledge the importance of familiarity with slang. Investigating slang usage in African indigenous languages, Mojela (2002) found that the presence of slang dos not contaminate the language; rather it enriches the language in the sense that it is adopted as loan words in the vocabulary of the

indigenous languages, such as Northern Sotho, and contributes more to the expansion of their lexicon and bridges the gap between spoken and written language.

When asked about how one may become familiar with slang, interviewee 2, a 35-year old man, mentioned that:

It's not difficult to learn them. Of course, there are some slang that you do not hear frequently, uh... I have learnt most of them from TV. We have some famous actors and actresses in movie industry, most of whom are comedians, who use slang and people enjoy imitating them.

In line with the above quotation, Pederson (2007) also confirms that TV-programs have boosted the spread of slang. Additionally, by the advent of social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.), slang is becoming progressively more common and keeping up with these terms is a way of keeping oneself current.

### 3.2. Level of Formality of Slang

In order to examine the degree to which slang was perceived as formal, colloquial or informal across different situations, descriptive statistics was run the result of which is represented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the Participants' Perception about Formality of Slang**

Situations of slang	Mean	SD
Describing people	1.51	.38
Humiliating people	1.53	.47
Expressing feelings	1.51	.42
Total	1.52	.44

As seen in Table 4, the total mean score (M: 1.52) as well as the means of the three situations are almost the same as the possible average response ( $1.52 > 3.00/2$ ) suggesting that Farsi speakers have a middle stance towards slang across all the situations and consider it neither formal and informal but rather as colloquial. In other words, Farsi speakers, overall, perceive slang which is used to describe people, to humiliate people, and to express feelings as colloquial.

The result of ANOVA run to investigate the participants' perception about formality of slang across the three situations with respect to participants' age, education level, and gender variables is presented in Table 5.

According to the results presented in Table 5, as far as age is concerned, the mean difference is not significant across the DP, HP, & EF situations (M: .925, .618, & .626, respectively). On the other hand, the mean difference between the four education level groups was significant ( $0.007 < 0.05$ ) with people holding a master's degree being more familiar with slang used to describe people (M: 1.45) compared to those used to humiliate people, and express feelings (M: .151 & .653, respectively). This finding suggests that education level might have an impact on perception about the style or degree of formality with slang used in a certain situation.

With regard to the gender variable, a significant difference was observed between males and females ( $0.045 < 0.05$ ), with males perceiving slang related to humiliating people as more formal than females (M: 1.55 vs. 1.47, respectively). This finding suggests that gender may be a factor determining one's perception about formality of slang. The present finding can be justified in light of the example given by Lakoff in 1975, maintaining that almost everybody knows that the word *shit* is part of male vocabulary whereas *oh dear!* is part of female vocabulary. In other words, due to higher prevalence of slang in men's speech, it appears more common or even more formal to men compared to women who may perceive some of these words as less formal or even as taboo terms. Yet, given that the mean difference is not significant with respect to different situations of slang use in the majority of the categories of the age, education level and gender variables, there is not high certainty about the extent to which the degree of formality of slang is influenced by education level and gender.

**Table 5. ANOVA for Degree of Formality of Slang across Different Situations for Slang Use**

Situations for slang use		Mean	SD	Mean Square	Sig.
Describing people					
Age	20-30	1.48	.40	.012	.925
	30-40	1.52	.39		
	40-50	1.54	.37		
Education	High school	1.20	.25	.557	.007*
	diploma	1.17	.35		
	BA/BS	1.45	.38		
	MA/MS PhD	1.39	.32		
Gender	Female	1.44	.29	.250	.198
	Male	1.58	.46		
Humiliating people					
Age	20-30	1.56	.51	.047	.816
	30-40	1.54	.47		
	40-50	1.45	.37		
Education	High school	1.26	.42	.395	.151
	diploma	1.68	.48		
	BA/BS	1.53	.49		
	MA/MS PhD	1.35	.28		
Gender	Female	1.41	.33	.894	.045*
	Male	1.66	.56		
Expressing feelings					
Age	20-30	1.57	.47	.085	.626
	30-40	1.47	.40		
	40-50	1.44	.33		
Education	High school	1.39	.45	.099	.653
	diploma	1.55	.38		
	BA/BS	1.55	.47		
	MA/MS	1.38	.34		

PhD

Gender	Female	1.47	.34	.089	.484
	Male	1.55	.49		

\*p &lt; 0.05

The interview data was also consistent with these findings. As a case in point, interviewee 3, a 22-year old male student asserted that:

In my opinion, you cannot assess how formal slang is simply by one’s education level or age, for example, hum... people usually think that an informal expression is also less polite, and nobody prefers to appear impolite in our society... I mean, people use them because they don’t think these expressions are impolite or informal at all... hum... they are not formal either, I mean they are just normal.

The above quotation clarified that politeness is another important issue that sparks to mind when dealing with formality of a given speech or language. In this regard, Allan and Burrige (2009) argue that time, place and context determine if slang is polite. So, in a context like Iran where slang is frequently utilized in conversation of people with varying age, gender and education levels, it is not surprising that the speakers may recognize them as colloquial. However, Bartolo (2008) who studied a slang word (bogan) in Australian English, points to the fact that slang can be used both negatively as impolite projection of a social identity and positively, as a sign of compliment amongst members of the same group depending on the cultural stereotype attributed to it by the users. Therefore, “If the person does not classify him or herself as a part of this in-group than offence can be taken whereas if the person sees him or herself as part of the in-group then the comment will be seen more like a compliment” (p. 11).

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### 3.3. Frequency of Slang Use

In order to examine the frequency at which slang is employed across different situations, the mean and SD were computed as represented in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that the total mean score is 2.26. The mean of all the three situations is a little lower than half of the possible average response ( $2.26 > 5.00/2$ ) suggesting that Farsi speakers less often use slang.

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Frequency of Using Slang across Different Situations**

Situations for slang use	Mean	SD
Describing people	2.10	.71
Humiliating people	2.33	.85
Expressing feelings	2.35	.84
Total	2.26	.80

Table 7 shows the result of ANOVA run to study the participants' frequency of slang use across the three situations with respect to age, education level, and gender variables.

According to the results, as far as age is concerned, the mean difference is significant across all the DP, HP, & EF situations (M: 0.49, 0.001, & 0.002 < 0.05, respectively). The mean was the highest in 20-30 year old category and the lowest in 40-50 category showing a descending trend in the use of slang as people get older.

**Table 7. ANOVA for Frequency of Slang Use**

Situations of slang		Mean	SD	Mean Square	Sig.
Describing people					
Age	20-30	2.36	.78	1.49	.049*
	30-40	2.00	.67		
	40-50	1.75	.40		
Education	High school diploma	1.63	.42	1.43	.032*
	BA/BS	2.35	.80		
	MA/MS	2.18	.63		
	PhD	1.65	.49		
Gender	Female	2.00	.56	.564	.296
	Male	2.21	.84		
Humiliating people					
Age	20-30	2.72	.77	4.41	.001*
	30-40	2.23	.84		
	40-50	1.62	.55		
Education	High school diploma	1.71	.53	2.01	.037*
	BA/BS	2.35	.88		
	MA/MS	2.51	.86		
	PhD	1.82	.59		
Gender	Female	2.18	.75	1.27	.191
	Male	2.49	.95		
Expressing feelings					
Age	20-30	2.73	.80	3.68	.002*
	30-40	2.23	.76		
	40-50	1.74	.43		
Education	High school diploma	1.94	.72	1.75	.043*
	BA/BS	2.37	.78		
	MA/MS	2.67	.79		
	PhD	1.82	.69		
Gender	Female	2.27	.71	.384	.452
	Male	2.44	.91		

\*p < 0.05

This finding was consistent with those of some previous studies indicating that young people use slang more frequently than their older counterparts (Hashemi Shahraki & Eslami Rasekh, 2011; Namavar & Ibrahim, 2014; Labov, 1992; Sau-Ling, 2005). Stenstrom (2002) also confirmed that



from 20 years of age onwards, slang use will decline. It is an undeniable fact; yet, slang, though not very frequently, is used by older generations in the contemporary Iran compared to the past as a 44-year old, male interviewee (No. 4) explained:

In fact, I didn't use these expressions in the past because if you utter those expressions people would consider you, especially if you are a woman, as an illiterate or impolite person or as someone behaving much younger than his age. But as we moved on, uh... today, you see, uh..., for example everybody, even old people may say “it's cool” and it's not considered as impolite anymore or peculiar to youth.

The same example can be found in American English as described by Danesi (2010); the word ‘cool’ which was a shibboleth for the lifestyle of *the golden era of rock* in 1950s in adolescent speech, entered the mainstream language where, to date, it is used to mean following the latest trends. Examples of this kind denote that, when particular slang is used by all members of the society regardless of their age, the slang, in fact, has established its stance as a standard word in a given language.

The fifth interviewee, a former 43-year old female teacher also remarked that:

I used to teach sociology at female high schools. You know, girls of that age enjoy using that informal expressions... as if they want to say we are different from you...I was learning many new expressions from them and once I realized that I am using a few of those expressions when I'm with them.

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The above statement highlights that effective communication between different members of society occurs only when members of the society try to understand each other's language and taking on features of each other's speech. Elderly people may also use slang terms as an “efficient shorthand ways to express their ideas and concepts” (Zhou & Fan, 2013, p. 2211).

Concerning education level, the mean difference between the four groups was significant across all DP, HP, and EF situations (M: .032, .037, & .043 < 0.05, respectively) with people holding a bachelors or master's employing more slang during their talk. This may suggest that more educated people have a more tendency to use slang but the fact that PhD students did not use them as much frequently is still questionable. One justification might be the age of this group. People start their doctoral education usually in their 30s whereas bachelor's and master's education often occurs in 20s and as the results of this study showed younger people used slang more frequently. However, unlike age and education level variables, gender was not a determining factor affecting the frequency of slang use among people regarding the three situations of slang use (M: .296, .191, & .452 > 0.05). This finding rejects those of many other studies which indicated that males were more frequent users of slang (Salma, 2013; Pederson, 2007) but is consistent with De Klerk's (1990) argument and Hashemi Shahraki and Eslami Rasekh's (2011) results which indicated no significant difference.

## Conclusion

Today, slang is a common feature of all languages across a variety of contexts. Since the advent of the internet, the boundary between formal and informal language styles has become more blurred and people, regardless of their age, gender, educational level as well as other variables not addressed in this study, have more exposure to informal styles. However, the question of what slang is, is highly determined by how people perceive and use it. As Reyes (2005: 513) argues “there is no precise formula for knowing if a particular term or phrase qualifies as slang”; nevertheless, studies of this type contribute to our current information and understanding about slang.

A significant outcome of this study was to show that all people living in a society are more or less familiar with common slang regardless of their age, gender and education level; otherwise, they cannot communicate successfully with different members of the society. Unlike dominant beliefs about informality or illegitimacy (Eckert, 2000; Hudson, 2000; Labov, 1992) of slang, it appears that this subcultural language is gaining more legitimacy in the modern era to the extent that the participants of this study majorly considered slang as colloquial and an indispensable part of everyday language, and numerous colloquial expressions used in informal mainstream speech, finally pass into mainstream formal speech as people try to attain a desired social distance between them and their interacting interlocutors (Giles, 1973). More importantly, according to Adams (2009), tracing the history of slang terms shows that it is in fact “the history of culture” (cited in Danesi, 2010: 513), and the spread of slang once used by adolescence at a given time in history of language but later used even by elderly people as a more standard form can “symbolize a break with tradition” (p. 513).

Lack of any gender differences in neither of FFF investigations also confirmed that slang, once a feature of male language, has gained its way to female’s language territory. However, it is noteworthy that the present study addressed slang used in three situations only (describing people, humiliating people, and expressing feelings) and there are certainly areas, such as sport, in which gender differences in the use of slang comes to the surface. A broader justification of this finding might be that due to languages change, it is now the time to think differently about languages, in general, and slang, in particular, hence, “The word shit and the expression oh dear! may have another meaning today compared with their meaning when Lakoff made the statement in 1975” (Karlsson, 2007: 10). It is now the ripe time to pay heed to more important functions of slang and its influence in contemporary societies. Slang is not simply a language variety used by a particular age or gender group or specific to lower social class anymore; it rather is a ‘poetic solution to human problems which is created whenever necessary “regardless of situation, time, and place” (Danesi, 2010: 516). Slang is such an essential element of language that without its presence a language may appear artificial and spiritless (Skolnik, 2015).

This study shed more light on Iranian people’s perception of and use of slang among different age, gender, and education level groups but the results might have implications across different languages because slang is a ubiquitous feature of all languages. Due to the small sample size of the study and investigating aspects that had rarely been addressed both in Iran and other contexts, future studies are recommended to follow this line of research and explore slang across different situations to verify the findings suggested by this study and provide a more comprehensive picture of this language phenomenon.

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**Appendix A****A) Background information****Gender:** male female**Education:** High school diploma BA/BS MA/MS PhD**Age:**

Instruction: please select the correct choice and put ✓ in appropriate box.

		Familiarity		Formality			Frequency				
Slang		Yes	No	Informal	Colloquial	Formal	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<b>A) Slang used to describe people</b>											
1	Jævat i.e., villager, low class										
2	Golabi (pear) i.e., lazy, stupid, gawky										
3	Shirin asal (a sweet cookie) i.e., flatterer										
4	ʃasi boland (high chassis) i.e., a tall person										
5	Chalghüz i.e., absent-minded										
6	GAgül i.e., stupid, absent-minded										
7	Hapalı i.e., untidy, messy										
8	BΛ etiket (a person with etiquette) i.e., prestigious, respected										
9	KhAlı band i.e., liar										
10	IQ i.e., shrewd, smart										
11	Λvizün (hanging) i.e., a person you can hardly get rid of										
12	Bache mosbat (positive child) i.e., a person who does not bad things.										
13	KhıyAr ʃür (salty cucumber, pickle) i.e., an uninteresting person										
14	FazΛ navard (astronaut) i.e., a person addicted to drugs										
15	Λdam kolangı (dilapidated) i.e., old, elderly										
16	BΛtrı ghalamı (slim battery) i.e., very thin										



17	Khar Khün (to read like a donkey) i.e., a person who studies a lot																		
18	Pastorize (pasteurized) i.e., a clean and tidy person																		
19	EvA (referred only to men behaving like women) i.e., pampered, spoil																		
20	PANASONIC (Panasonic, a brand) i.e., a beautiful well-curved girl																		
C) Slang used to humiliate people																			
21	Püz zadan (to hit someone's chin) i.e., to make someone feel ashamed!																		
22	ZAYê shodan (to rot) i.e., to feel ashamed in front of others by telling something that should not have been said!																		
23	pichündan (to twist someone) i.e., to get rid of someone by telling them a lie!																		
24	Albalü (sour cherry) i.e., (uttered) to tease people																		
25	Oskol shodan (to make sb. Oskol (a bird's name)) i.e., to fool someone																		
26	Sütr dıdan i.e., to tell something that should not have been told!																		
27	Süsk kardan (to make someone a cockroach) i.e., to humiliate someone																		
28	Rız dıdan (to see someone small) i.e., to degrade/underestimate someone																		
D) Slang used to express feeling																			
29	Hesef nıst (I don't have its feeling) i.e., I'm not in the mood for doing it!																		
30	Sarı pesar khAl-e mishe (He quickly becomes my causin!) i.e., he quickly feels too intimate!																		
31	Hame chi rele hast. (Everything is relay.) i.e., everything's fine!																		
32	Raftim safA siti! (We went to pleasant city) i.e., we had a great time!																		
33	Kheyli bAlAl-e! Kaf mikoni. (It's with joy!) i.e., it is very cool, you'd exhilarate!																		
34	AâsAbef Khatkhatiy-e (His nerve is doodled!)																		

	i.e., he is nervous!												
35	Terekündım! (We exploded (there)) i.e., to humiliate someone												
36	Züd ghat mızane! (He quickly becomes ) i.e., he quickly gets angry.												
37	Jav zad-e shod! (he got atmosphere-stricken) i.e., he was affected by the atmosphere.												
38	Fakef zamm khord! (His gums fell down!) i.e., he surprised.												
39	Tirip lav hastan! (They are love trip) i.e., they love each other.												
40	Sürakh-e jürabetım! (I am the hole of your socks!) i.e., to show so much sincerity to someone.												

## Appendix B

Frequency and percentage of responses o items of the FFF questionnaire  
Familiarity

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Situations	Items	Yes	No
		No & %	No & %
Describing people	1	49 (90.7)	5 (9.3)
	2	48 (88.9)	6 (10.1)
	3	31 (57.4)	23 (42.6)
	4	45 (83.3)	9 (16.7)
	5	42 (77.8)	12 (22.2)
	6	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
	7	39 (72.2)	15 (27.8)
	8	37 (68.5)	17 (31.5)
	9	53 (98.1)	1 (1.9)
	10	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
	11	50 (92.6)	3 (5.6)
	12	53 (98.1)	1 (1.9)
	13	28 (51.9)	25 (46.3)
	14	14 (25.9)	39 (72.2)
	15	25 (46.3)	29 (53.7)
	16	30 (55.6)	24 (44.4)
	17	50 (92.6)	4 (7.4)
	18	53 (98.1)	1 (1.9)
	19	47 (87.0)	7 (13.0)
	20	12 (22.2)	42 (77.8)

Humiliating  
people

21	45 (83.3)	9 (15.7)
22	49 (90.7)	5 (9.3)
23	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
24	19 (35.2)	35 (64.8)
25	47 (87.0)	5 (73.0)
26	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
27	38 (70.4)	16 (29.6)
28	48 (88.9)	6 (11.1)

Describing  
feelings

29	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
30	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
31	43 (79.6)	11 (20.4)
32	47 (87.0)	7 (13.0)
33	49 (90.7)	4 (7.4)
34	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
35	51 (94.4)	3 (6.6)
36	50 (92.6)	4 (7.4)
37	52 (96.3)	2 (3.7)
38	41 (75.9)	13 (24.1)
39	41 (75.9)	13 (24.1)
40	28 (51.9)	26 (48.1)

Formality

Situations	Items	Informal No & %	Colloquial No & %	Formal No & %
Describing people	1	37 (68.5)	16 (26.9)	1 (1.9)
	2	32 (59.3)	19 (35.2)	3 (5.6)
	3	34 (63.0)	18 (33.3)	2 (3.7)
	4	35 (69.8)	16 (29.6)	3 (5.6)
	5	41 (75.9)	11 (20.4)	2 (3.7)
	6	38 (70.4)	12 (22.2)	4 (7.4)
	7	32 (59.3)	19 (35.2)	3 (5.6)
	8	24 (44.4)	21 (38.9)	9 (16.7)
	9	19 (35.2)	25 (46.3)	10 (18.5)
	10	21 (38.9)	16 (29.6)	17 (13.5)
	11	31 (57.4)	17 (31.5)	6 (11.1)
	12	17 (31.5)	24 (44.4)	13 (24.1)
	13	42 (77.8)	12 (22.2)	-----
	14	36 (66.7)	17 (31.5)	1 (1.9)
	15	33 (61.1)	18 (33.3)	3 (5.6)
	16	36 (66.7)	18 (33.3)	-----
	17	24 (44.4)	23 (42.6)	7 (13.0)
	18	21 (38.9)	23 (42.6)	10 (18.5)
	19	33 (61.1)	18 (33.3)	3 (5.6)
	20	43 (79.6)	8 (14.8)	3 (5.6)

Humiliating people

21	34 (63.0)	16 (29.6)	4 (7.4)
22	21 (38.9)	23 (42.6)	10 (18.5)
23	25 (46.3)	18 (33.3)	3 (5.6)
24	50 (92.6)	3 (5.6)	1 (1.9)
25	36 (66.7)	14 (25.9)	4 (7.4)
26	17 (31.5)	25 (46.3)	12 (22.2)
27	43 (79.6)	10 (18.5)	1 (1.9)
28	23 (42.6)	26 (48.1)	5 (9.3)

Describing feelings

29	17 (31.5)	24 (44.4)	13 (24.1)
30	24 (44.4)	25 (46.3)	5 (9.3)
31	34 (63.0)	15 (27.8)	5 (9.3)
32	36 (66.7)	17 (31.5)	1 (1.9)
33	30 (66.6)	23 (42.6)	1 (1.9)
34	23 (42.6)	24 (44.4)	7 (13.0)
35	28 (51.9)	21 (38.9)	5 (9.3)
36	28 (51.9)	20 (37.0)	6 (11.1)
37	23 (42.6)	22 (40.7)	9 (16.7)
38	46 (85.2)	7 (13.0)	1 (1.9)
39	35 (64.8)	17 (31.5)	2 (3.7)
40	47 (87.9)	7 (13.0)	-----

Frequency

Situations	Items	Informal N & %	Colloquial N & %	Formal N & %	Formal N & %	Formal N & %
Describing people	1	25 (46.3)	18 (33.3)	7 (13.0)	3 (5.6)	1 (1.9)
	2	26 (48.1)	14 (25.9)	9 (16.7)	3 (5.6)	2 (3.7)
	3	35 (64.8)	14 (25.9)	3 (5.6)	4 (7.4)	-----
	4	25 (46.3)	9 (16.7)	14 (25.9)	4 (7.4)	2 (3.7)
	5	34 (63.0)	9 (16.7)	6 (11.1)	3 (5.6)	2 (3.7)
	6	21 (38.9)	16 (29.6)	12 (22.2)	3 (5.6)	2 (3.7)
	7	28 (51.9)	8 (14.8)	14 (25.9)	2 (3.7)	2 (3.7)
	8	30 (55.6)	8 (14.8)	9 (16.7)	3 (5.6)	4 (7.4)
	9	10 (18.5)	11 (20.4)	44 (25.9)	11 (20.4)	8 (14.8)
	10	14 (25.9)	6 (11.1)	13 (24.1)	11 (20.4)	5 (18.5)
	11	13 (24.1)	17 (31.5)	14 (25.9)	3 (5.6)	7 (13.0)
	12	7 (13.0)	9 (16.7)	16 (29.6)	8 (14.8)	14 (25.9)
	13	38 (70.4)	12 (22.2)	2 (3.7)	1 (1.9)	1 (1.9)
	14	47 (87.0)	5 (9.3)	1 (1.9)	-----	1 (1.9)
	15	44 (81.5)	7 (13.0)	1 (1.9)	2 (3.7)	-----
	16	37 (68.5)	9 (16.7)	4 (7.4)	3 (5.6)	1 (1.9)
	17	7 (13.0)	7 (13.0)	17 (31.5)	9 (16.7)	14 (25.9)
	18	10 (18.5)	12 (22.2)	14 (25.9)	7 (13.0)	11

						(20.4)
	19	23 (42.6)	12 (22.2)	11 (20.4)	3 (5.6)	5 (9.3)
	20	48 (88.9)	4 (7.8)	-----	1 (1.9)	1 (1.9)
Humiliating people						
	21	22 (40.7)	14 (25.9)	10 (18.5)	6 (11.1)	2 (3.7)
	22	9 (16.7)	10 (18.5)	14 (25.9)	13 (24.1)	8 (14.8)
	23	6 (11.1)	12 (22.2)	15 (27.8)	11 (20.4)	10 (18.5)
	24	43 (79.6)	7 (13.0)	2 (3.7)	-----	2 (3.7)
	25	16 (29.6)	19 (35.2)	10 (18.5)	3 (5.6)	6 (4.1)
	26	7 (13.0)	10 (18.5)	15 (27.8)	14 (25.9)	8 (14.8)
	27	32 (59.3)	13 (24.1)	6 (11.1)	3 (5.6)	-----
	28	25 (46.3)	13 (24.1)	11 (20.4)	3 (5.6)	2 (3.7)
Describing feelings						
	29	7 (13.0)	5 (9.3)	14 (25.9)	15 (27.8)	13 (24.1)
	30	13 (24.1)	6 (11.1)	19 (35.2)	10 (18.5)	6 (11.1)
	31	22 (40.7)	10 (18.5)	15 (27.8)	1 (1.9)	6 (11.1)
	32	27 (50.0)	8 (14.8)	12 (22.2)	6 (11.1)	1 (1.9)
	33	14 (25.9)	14 (25.9)	17 (31.5)	4 (7.4)	1 (1.9)
	34	13 (24.1)	16 (29.6)	19 (35.2)	4 (7.4)	2 (3.7)
	35	15 (27.8)	8 (14.8)	15 (27.8)	9 (16.7)	7 (13.0)
	36	13 (51.9)	14 (25.9)	18 (33.3)	5 (9.3)	4 (7.4)
	37	7 (13.0)	9 (16.7)	23 (42.6)	10 (18.5)	5 (9.3)
	38	28 (51.9)	19 (35.2)	5 (9.3)	2 (3.3)	-----
	39	29 (48.1)	14 (25.9)	8 (14.8)	5 (9.3)	1 (1.9)
	40	42 (77.8)	11 (20.4)	-----	1 (1.9)	-----