



## A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS ANALYSIS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN SLANGS

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### ABSTRACT

*In general, comparative linguistics deals with the comparative and contrastive examination between languages in terms of its linguistic aspects. The purpose of this research is to analyze the differences and similarities of British and American slangs based on the theory of slang classification by Allan and Burridge (2006) and its linguistic meaning concepts by Leech (1981). This comparative linguistics study utilizes qualitative descriptive methods as the research methodology through semantic theories of slang and dialect in the scope of sociolinguistics. The data is collected through random sampling of mentioned American and British slang words in a Youtube video and selected words that have the same meaning in two articles that contain the 100+ list of British and American slangs. The result of the research pointed out the more apparent similarities than differences in both dialects depicted by the Fresh and Creative, Clipping, and Imitative slang classification and the four types of linguistic meaning found in the analysis, which are conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, and affective meaning.*

**Keyword:** comparative linguistics, slang, dialect, British, American

### INTRODUCTION

Language is the most significant aspect of human interaction that is inseparable from daily life. Language as an object of linguistic study is a system of arbitrary sound symbols used by members of a social group to work together, communicate, and identify (Effendi, 2012). A language is intended to have the following characteristics or properties: language is a system, language is a symbol, language is a sound, language is meaningful, and language is arbitrary. Talking about language, of course we will not be far from linguistics.

According to the Linguistic Society of America or LSA (n.d.), linguistics is the scientific study to conduct formal studies of grammatical structures, speech sounds and gestures, and meaning across 6,000+ languages in the world. Within linguistics itself, there is a subdivision called comparative linguistics. This discipline is previously known as 'comparative grammar' or 'comparative philology' that is used to study the relationships between two or more languages in order to reveal whether or not the languages have a common ancestor (Britannica, n.d.). Comparative linguistics is mostly used during the 19th century in Europe as it was



firstly initiated in 1786 by Sir William Jones who discovered that Sanskrit was related to Latin, German, and Greek.

Robins (1975) wrote that comparative linguistics has a very important role in contributing to the understanding of the nature of how language works and the development (change) of languages in the world. In this regard, the main task of comparative linguistics is to analyze and provide an explanation of the nature of language change. In general, the nature of language (i) has a structure (synchronic dimension) and (ii) is always changing (diachronic dimension).

Changes from the language itself cannot be separated from the culture that exists in a place. The reason is that both language and culture are two things that are interrelated and inseparable. Sibarani (1992) revealed that language plays a role as a tool or means of culture. Without language, culture cannot be developed since language is a medium for culture's development. Soemarsono (2008) said language can also be considered as a social product because language can be a forum for social aspirations, community's activities and behavior, and a cultural disclosure platform. One proof that language is a part of culture is the creation of slang.

In the discipline of sociolinguistics, humans are no longer seen as individuals when using a language, but as part of society. When an individual in a social group creates a slang, this later will be passed on to another, so that there is a language relationship in communication and social interaction between members of one social group (Ulandari, 2018).

Slang itself is a form of language that is used by certain communities and not everyone knows about the meaning behind it (Soeparno, 2002). Slang is made to show differences between groups, familiarize members within the group, as well as to insinuate within the community. As time goes by, slang in a particular community can be known by the wider community. This is because members of a certain community communicate using slang with members of their non-communities. Slang is not only formed when you change the words, phonemes, or add a prefix. According to Kartini (2014), slang can also be in the form of derivative words, phrases, clauses and sentences in the non-standard variety language used by a particular community.

From the concept described above, this research aims to analyze the differences and similarities in slang. The main focus is to compare British and American slangs based on its slang classification (Allan and Burridge, 2006) and its linguistic meaning (Leech, 1981).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW/KAJIAN TEORI**

### **Classification of Slang**

Allan and Burridge (2006) categorized slangs in five types which are Fresh and Creative, Imitative, Acronym, Clipping, and Flippant. Fresh and Creative classifies a slang that has a totally distinctive word formation with the actual meaning that is specifically used in casual settings. In contrast, imitative slang derives from a word that has close meaning or related meaning with the slang itself.



Then the acronym type may be the most familiar one as it indicates a slang constructed by the initials of the combined words that denote one meaning such as the slang *OMG* that means *Oh My God*. Similarly, Clipping is the slang categorization of a word that is shortened. The last one involves two or more words that is in complete opposite to the actual meaning such as the meaning of phrasal idioms.

### **Linguistic Meaning**

Leech (1981) as stated in Mwiwaki (2004) establishes an approach to classify linguistic meaning into seven types: conceptual, connotative, collocative, social, affective, reflected and thematic. Conceptual meaning is another term for denotation that describes the word as it is in the logical sense, which then it is known as the most basic component. As opposed to that, connotative meaning is correlated to an expression of a concrete value, or simply a figurative way to describe a meaning. Collocative meaning is a co-occurrence between words that produce a single meaning. Moreover, social meaning is associated with language use in social communication that fixates on the linguistic practices in society to form a social relationship. Affective meaning reflects the speakers' private opinion towards the person or the thing that they targeted in their utterances. Furthermore, a word is classified to have a reflected meaning if it has multi-interpretation meanings according to the sense of the word and the context in which it occurs. The last one is thematic meaning that organizes the message of a word in regards to its emphasis and structure.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative descriptive method is utilized to study the data presented in this research. It aims to analyze each datum in terms of its distinctiveness in an objective manner. After that, the result of the research is organized in logical constructions that depict a direct explanation about information found in the concerned investigation. In this case, the qualitative descriptive method is incorporated to find the similarities and differences between British and American slang words in the form of nouns and adjectives by classifying them into five slang classifications by Allan and Burridge (2006) and investigate their meanings using the theory of linguistic meaning by Leech (1981). The data is collected through random sampling of British and American slangs mentioned in "BRITISH vs AMERICAN SLANG 101" Youtube Video by Eat Sleep Dream English published in 2019 and the selected slangs that have the same meaning in Standard English from "100+ British slang words and expressions to knock your socks off" article in SmartCat website and "100+ American Slang words list and meaning" uploaded in englishgrammarpdf website. The researcher only used pairs of slang words that fall into the category of noun and adjective forms, which then narrowed down into 7



pairs of British and American slangs in Noun Form and another 7 pairs of British and American slangs in Adjective Form.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From “BRITISH vs AMERICAN SLANG 101” Youtube Video by Eat Sleep Dream English, the data were classified into noun and adjective slang words as shown in Table 1 and 2.

No.	SLANG WORDS (NOUN)		
1	British	American	Meaning in Standard English
2	cakehole	piehole	A mouth
3	quid	buck	A single unit of money
4	gaff	crib	A house
5	mate / fam / bro	homie / bro	A friend
6	manor / endz	hood	An area (a neighborhood)
7	copper / bobby	cop	A police officer

Table 1 Noun Slang Words

No.	SLANG WORDS (ADJECTIVE)		
1	British	American	Meaning in Standard English
2	Knackered / shattered	Beat	Very tired
3	buzzed / pumped	hyped / amped	Excited
4	pissed off	Pissed	Angry
5	chuffed	Stoked	Pleased
6	hammered / battered	wasted / trashed	Drunk
7	dodgy	Shady	Suspicious

Table 2 Adjective Slang Words



## A. Classification of Slang

From the five classification of slangs according to Allan and Burrige (2006), it is suggested that there are three categories that can be analyzed from the list of words, which are Fresh and Creative, Clipping, and Imitative.

### 1. Fresh and Creative

In Table 1, it can be seen that most of the British and American slang words in noun form are classified into fresh and creative. There are 9 words in both dialects' slangs in total that fall into this category. First, the British slang *quid* that equals *buck* in American slang has the meaning of 'a single unit of money' as to refer to each country's currency, which is pound sterling in the U.K. and dollar in the U.S. respectively. According to the Oxford Languages dictionary, both terms are used in informal situations. Additionally, both have totally different word formations from the formal word form of the same meaning. The second pair of fresh and creative slang is *gaff* from British slang and *crib* from American slang that stands for 'a house'. Both slangs do not represent the actual meaning or related to a house at all. After that, there is *mate* or *fam* in British dialect and *homie* in American dialect that is the slang to refer to a friend. Again, these slangs do not depict the referred meaning as they form brand new words. The last pair is the slang word to give a nickname for 'a police officer', which is *copper* or *bobby* in British dialect and only *cop* in American dialect. In addition, there is a difference in the slang classification for the pair of slangs that denote the meaning of 'an area or a neighborhood'. The British slang falls into the fresh and creative category because the word *manor* or *endz* has no correlation to the actual meaning in standard English. However, it is not the case for the American one as it falls into the other category.

If we compare it to the list of words in Table 2, there is no significant difference in the total of this type of slang. All of the 7 pairs of British and American slangs in the adjective form are classified to this category because all of them do not denote the referred meaning that entails each slang. Therefore, from the list of British and American slang words above, it is clear that this type of slang is the most common one.

### 2. Clipping

There is only one sample of a slang that is in the form of the shorter version of the standard English word. It is the outlier of this research, which can be found in the American slang *hood* to describe 'an area or a neighborhood'. It is apparent that it derives from the shorter form of the word 'neighborhood'.

### 3. Imitative



Another slang to define ‘a friend’ that is in the same exact word from British and American dialects is the word *bro*. This is an imitative example as it is the shorter form to refer to ‘brother’ which means a male relative or a man that has biological or familial relation to another son or daughter of the same parents. Although the word ‘brother’ has a different meaning with ‘friend’, both words share the similarity of depicting a close relationship between individuals.

## B. Linguistic Meaning

From the seven types of linguistic meaning coined by Leech (1981), it is revealed that only four types are recognized in this analysis.

### 1. Conceptual Meaning

Leech (1981) defines conceptual meaning to denote the word as it is in the logical sense, which then it is known as the most basic component. In this analysis, conceptual meaning can be found in several cases in Table 1.0. First, it is apparent in the various words of British and American slang for ‘a friend’ and the American slang that means ‘a neighborhood’. The slangs *mate*, *fam*, and *bro* in British and *homie* and *bro* in American denote the meaning of ‘a friend’ that share the features of [+ human] and [+ male]. Similarly, the British slang *copper* or *bobby* that stands for ‘a police officer’ also denotes the same features as the aforementioned case because *copper* and *bobby* are commonly used as human names that have male gender, while the American slang *cop* is considered to possess the feature of [+ human] and [¬ male]. Lastly, the sems, or the alternative term for the distinctive feature in conceptual meaning, for the British slang *quid* and the American slang *buck* is [money].

### 2. Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning is the opposite of conceptual meaning as it is correlated to an expression of a concrete value (Mwihaki, 2004). In other words, slangs that fall into this category express the meaning of a word figuratively. The pairs of British and American slangs above mostly have connotative meanings. There are two examples found in the British and American noun slangs. The first one is the pair of noun slang that stands for ‘mouth’, which is *cakehole* and *piehole*. Taking a closer look at the denotative definition of a mouth itself, which is ‘the opening in the lower part of the human face’ according to the Oxford Language dictionary, it is similar to the meaning of *cakehole* and *piehole* themselves. If it is analyzed in denotative meaning, *cakehole* and *piehole* basically mean ‘a hole of a cake’ and ‘a hole of a pie’. Therefore, these slangs represent the form of a mouth that is like a hole in a cake or a pie. Another example is the American slang *crib* to call ‘a house’. In its denotative definition, *crib* means a baby’s



bed that is surrounded by high bars. *Crib* has a sense of safety that is similar to the value of a house, which then appropriate the reason behind the choice of the word itself to become slang.

Furthermore, the samples of connotative meaning are more visible in the list of British and American slangs in adjective form. First, the British-American pairs to describe the feeling of extreme tiredness by *knackered* or *shattered* and *beat*. Those three words have a similar meaning of getting damaged or struck acutely, which relates to how it feels to become very tired. The next connotative slang is to say 'excited' in *buzzed / pumped* (British) and *hyped / amped* (American). The denotative meaning of the word 'excited' itself is feeling a burst of happiness or extreme enthusiasm. Therefore, it is expressed adequately by *buzzed*, *pumped*, *hyped*, and *amped* as all of them give the same sense of something that is extravagant or in a higher state. The last example of connotative meaning is the British and American slang pairings of 'drunk' in *hammered / battered* and *wasted / trashed*. In this particular case, both slangs do not have any close relation within each other in terms of its meaning attribution as the other previous pairs. In British English, *hammered* or *battered* attributes to the same painful feeling of getting hit by a hammer or getting injured repeatedly. In conclusion, the feeling of being drunk is connoted in a painful manner. Meanwhile, getting drunk is associated with discarded matter or things that define *wasted* and *trashed*.

### 3. Social Meaning

Living up to its term, social meaning is associated with language use in social communication. It focuses on the linguistic practices in society to form a social relationship. There is only one case that represents this type of linguistic meaning. It is found in the British and American slang for 'a friend'. The words *mate*, *fam*, *homie*, and *bro* are usually used in social settings as a nickname to call an acquaintance.

### 4. Affective Meaning

Affective meaning reflects the speakers' private opinion towards the person or the thing that they targeted in their utterances. The sample of affective meaning can be seen in the British and American slang of the adjective 'suspicious'. The word *dodgy* and *shady* has the sense of avoiding something, which leads to the definition of suspicious itself to refer to a person's tendency to hide something. In a social interaction, someone is able to accuse another person that indicates the characteristic of being suspicious as *suspicious*. Furthermore, the American and British slang to describe this adjective can also be used in similar manner.





## CONCLUSION

From the analysis using the slang classification theory (Allan and Burridge, 2006) and the linguistic meaning theory (Leech, 1981), there are indeed some interesting cases that represent the differences and similarities of British and American slangs in noun and adjective form. Although each word in both dialects almost has a whole distinct word formation, the meanings crypted behind those words are intertwined to each other more than we can see from the surface. In the theory of slang classification, it occurred that the 14 pairings of British and American slangs fall into three categories out of five, namely Fresh and Creative, Clipping, and Imitative. From these categories, the pairs of slang mostly can be classified into one category altogether, with only a slight difference in terms of the componential features of the British slang that refers to male only and the American slang in a neutral form for 'police officer', and an outlier in the American slang *hood* for the meaning of 'a neighborhood' that cannot be paired with its British slang as it is categorized in the other category, which is Clipping.

Moreover, it becomes clearer that British and American slangs have more similarities than differences based on the analysis using linguistic meaning theory coined by Leech (1981). Similar to the previous analysis, the linguistic meaning approach reveals that each of the chosen words to become slang in both dialects is driven or motivated by a particular meaning that denotes the same sense or attribution. This statement does not apply to only one example of the connotative meaning of British and American slang pairs to define the adjective 'drunk'.

All in all, this research gives concrete evidence that British and American dialects share many similarities in terms of the slang through the comparative linguistic analysis using semantics in the sociolinguistics field. It can be considered a newfound knowledge that not everyone could be aware of. Therefore, this research opens a new perspective in the scope of English dialects, particularly the most prevalent ones that come from the biggest English speaking countries, which are the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

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