

STUDENT SLANG AS AN ASPECT OF CULTURAL AWARENESS

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The article studies the student slang as a part of general cultural awareness. The article offers several types of classification of British student slang that can help to learn the slang words for better socializing within universities.

Nowadays our Republic of Belarus takes part in many international educational programs. They are ERASMUS, TEMPUS, COMENIUS and a lot of others. And since 14 May, 2015, our republic has been participating in the European Higher Education Area. It means that our students will choose educational programs in other countries and will improve their mental outlook.

When studying in other countries knowledge of cultural background becomes rather crucial. To avoid cultural shock and to overcome successfully disintegration stages during the adaptation period it is necessary to discuss the impact of cultural challenge in another country and to research the peculiarities of the youth slang used in universities. British universities are famous for high educational standards and offer great variety of educational programs. Thus, they will obviously attract our students. Despite the common European culture in both our countries some misunderstanding can appear, because of differences in obvious things such as language and national customs and traditions. One of British traditions is that people who live in the same neighborhood, or share the same interests, or belong to the same circle create a lot of slang words.

British students, as other young people in the world, try very often to stand out by various means, such as clothes, appearance, and, of course, speech. Speaking a language, that other people do not understand, is a usual way to outline some circle. This special language, used by certain people, is called 'slang'. Slang is "a type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people" [1].

The aim of student slang is to create an identity or sense of belonging to some group. It can be defined by the following parameters:

- a) it differs from university to university but some words and phrases can be used throughout all of Britain;
- b) it is changing all the time, as the groups stuffing it are changeable too, some concepts may disappear with naming slang words; but some words are old enough to be looked up in a dictionary;
- c) it is usually non-writable, as it is created only for oral speech, but nowadays the slang of the Internet chats and SMS obtains spelling but the spelling is without established rules.

Thus the cultural background of any student society includes obviously slang as a lot of universities have their own language. The oldest British universities, Oxford [2] and Cambridge [3] give authentic proper names to all colleges, faculties and dormitories, along with a number of subjects and programs. The vocabulary is so copious that can become a subject for a separate research and comparison. Student slang is a vocabulary of a separate academic union. It varies from university to university. Spelling of the slang words either does not exist or there are several variants of it. There are several sources of slang words and phrases:

- a) academic environment (it is the most important way as it involves the main student activity),
- b) new technologies (it is a way of generating the words of common usage, but there is great influence of contracting and abbreviating, caused by means of communication, upon student slang),
- c) social groups (people, who come to study at universities, can be representatives of various social groups and bring their slang words and phrases to the academic groups),
- d) dialects (words and phrases from other languages can be adopted by the host language and, sometimes with some changes in pronunciation, become slang words),
- e) music (words and phrases from popular songs can have meaning different from the common one, also rhyming rap words and phrases can be added to student vocabulary).

Slang to learn for better cultural awareness can be chosen according to the following criteria:

- a) duration of the usage: the chosen words and phrases are in use at least three years, some words and phrases have been used for several decades and can be looked up in Academy dictionaries, e.g. 'freshman',

'sophister' or 'sophomore' (but more frequently used synonymic shorten form 'soph' has not entered dictionaries yet);

- b) frequency of occurrence: the chosen words and phrases can be found on several websites like students' blogs, university sites, sites which offer foreign students some advice on adapting in a new environment;
- c) usefulness of slang words and phrases: this criterion is completely subjective, as the choice reflects the subjective opinion on the practicality of the vocabulary and its utility for exchange students.

Also the words and phrases can be selected on the basis of semantics. In British student slang the following semantic groups seem to be useful for cultural awareness:

1. 'academic year' group consists of the slang used connected to professors, lecturers, teachers, classes, examinations, years of study;
2. 'campus' group contains the slang for dormitories, canteens, university buildings;
3. 'students' society' group includes the words used for socializing (like greeting, addressing)

The first group of slang words – 'academic year' slang – is vast as it describes the principle students' activity. Students give names to their professors, lecturers, teachers, for example, 'mathmo' for a mathematician or 'trinmo' for a mathematician at Trinity College in Cambridge, or Oxfordese word '**dons**' to describe a fellow / tutor at a college who teaches students under the *tutorial* system (in other universities they use 'tutor' or slang shortening 'tut'). A great number of words and word combinations describe preparing and passing examinations, for example, 'to swat up', 'to knuckle down', 'to hit the books', 'to bomb a test', 'to cock-up'. Also this group includes the names the students give to their courses if they are easy, for example, 'a bird course', 'a netflixer', 'a cakewalk', or if they have some difficulties, for example, 'death trap', 'a bomb'. There are names of terms, for example, 'Desmond' or 'Hilary' in this category.

The second group are 'campus' words and phrases. Here the words which students use to describe the buildings in their campuses, for example, 'libe', 'dorm'. Also there are the words for meals within their colleges, for example, 'battles', 'a brekkie'. The words are usually different from university to university, as the buildings are different. The common meal exist only in several old universities like Oxford and Cambridge, so the slang words for meal exist only in these universities.

The third group is group of slang words and phrases which describe members of students' society, for example, 'bnoc', 'lass', 'bloke', 'fandabidozi', 'hench', 'naff'; relations among them, for example, 'a teacher's pet'; various activities, for example, 'to muck around', 'to mooch', 'to faff', 'to hit the hay', 'to kip', 'to sleep like a log', 'to do the marathoning'; or they are used for socializing like greetings, for example, 'Alright?', 'Hiya', 'Howay', 'What about ye?'

As student society is usually a mix of people of various origin and social background, the student slang, besides the slang inspired by academic environment and new technologies, can include:

- a) words and word phrases of different social groups (e.g. 'bare' in the meaning 'a lot of' or 'obviously' was used by hipsters, a derogatory label 'chav' for anti-social young people in Britain, which can also be used broadly to insult, came from British urban youths slang);
- b) some words of possible dialect origin (e.g. north-eastern English 'Howay' in the meaning 'Let's go' / 'Come on'; north English greetings 'Hiya', 'Hey up' or 'Ay-up'; Nigerian 'dub' in the meaning 'to cheat during exams by copying another person's test answers word for word'. American 'wicked' in the meaning 'evil' or 'distasteful', Scottish 'lass' or 'lassy' in the meaning of 'girl');
- c) words of musical origin (e.g. rhythmic rap words like **Dogandbone** = Telephone, **Mince-pies** = Eyes, **Boatrace** = Face which are used to hide real meaning, it can look like an offer to guess a rhythmic riddle; the word 'Dench' is believed to be invented by rapper Lethal Bizzle and means 'good').

Slang can be regarded as a negative phenomenon [4, 5, 6]. But there are a lot of scientists who think that slang helps to refresh any language and enriches it by adding new words [7, 8, 9]. Irrespective of the utility or disutility of slang it exists in languages and is worth studying. Cultural awareness helps to avoid cultural shock almost completely. Period of adaptation in a new country can be shortened and disintegration stages can be reduced if a visitor investigated cultural peculiarities in advance. A part of cultural awareness is the knowledge of the language of the host country. Ability to use slang, as an element of any language, helps to grow accustomed to a new environment faster.

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