Investigating the Sociological Use of Slang from a Hearer-Oriented Perspective

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Abstract

Numerous studies have investigated the importance of slang in linguistics in various media, including novels. The dominant works on this subject have focused solely on the structural explanation of slang, leaving out its sociological context and meaning. Given the nature of slang itself as a pure informal language, studies about the semantic meaning of slang must be essential. This research looked into the slang words and expressions in a true-crime novel entitled 'Black Mass' by Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill in 2000. The goal is to discover the semantic meaning of slang words and expressions in the novel using the qualitative method and Mattiello's hearer-oriented (2008) theory as the underlying theory. We applied the documentary method to retrieve the data and further analyzed it using Miles et al. (2014) theory. Heavily influenced by the setting of South Boston and its crimes, Black Mass data indicated that this novel's slang is primarily attributed to freshness and novelty. Subsequently, we found evidence of the novel's use of desire to impress and faddishness, playfulness and humor, and impertinence properties. Color and musicality are this novel's least common categories of slang, with only four occurrences in the entire manuscript. Given that the novel's literature cover is still scarce, it is hoped that these findings are helpful to those who are interested in studying and researching the semantic area.

Keywords: Hearer-oriented, novel, semantics, slang.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Language is a communication system that allows members of various social groups to interact with one another. Language is used in various contexts of daily life to communicate feelings and emotions, express ideas and opinions, and interact with others. According to Santoso (2006), language illustrates the social condition, including the human relations within society. Centuries of civilization have impacted how people live, particularly how they communicate (Fasold & Connor-Linton, 2006). Long had passed the days of scratching on cave stone walls or sending signals to the group about impending prehistoric feral dangers in the form of signs (Danesi, 2007). Humans have survived those tests and developed a complex mode of communication in the form of language. People interact with one another in communication by using words and meaningful symbols, both in formal and informal contexts (Fromkin et al., 2019; Susilawati, 2018).

When communicating, the speakers and the hearers or readers go through the process of getting the information and confirming it. In this regard, mass media comes into play when it is about communicating with a large number of audiences. According to Crystal (2003), the impact of English as a global language has influenced massive media, platforms, and a variety of other critical aspects of human activity, such as literature. Slang is one of the aspects of sociolinguistics that is given special attention due to its dynamism and flexibility. Several analyses of slang have been conducted, but no absolute definition of it has been established, simply because a large number of new words and phrases containing slang are constantly added over time, and its contextual usage also changes (Izmaylova et al., 2017). Many slang words and expressions are no longer as slangy as they once were because they have long been part of human communication.

Some scholars have delved deeply into the various components of slang, such as Mattiello (2008) in her book, which examines slang from a different perspective. Other scholars investigating the use of slang in a novel have enriched the literature debates in this area, albeit from different perspectives. Linn's (2016) study on urban youth slang in contemporary French literature, for example, investigates how slang among multi-ethnic is primarily divided by three different motives. It is based on Jørgensen's (2010) theory of identity formation in a linguistic context. These three motives are 'we code', 'they code', and 'playfulness'. The final one concerns the motivation for recreational use developed by French youths to ease their conversation among their peers.

Umam and Purnianda (2016) conducted the second study, analyzing Jeff Kinney's Diary of a 'Wimpy Kid' novel using Mihalicek and Wilson's (2011) theory. Using Yule's (2006) theory to explain the morphological process of slang, they generate various types of slang and their morphological forms, which they then divide into parts of speech. Their argument presents various methods for people to create new words in society, such as compounding, coinage, etymology, etc. This is made possible by the speakers' ability to alter and reflect on morphemes or the ability to chunk a word into meaningful units that convey information about the complete word (Bian et al., 2022). Bondarenko (2019) also researched the use of slang in famous cartoons such as 'Cars', 'Kung Fu Panda', 'Open Season', 'Shrek', and 'Madagascar 2'. This study sheds light on how slang words and expressions in those cartoons contain some unusual elements, forcing translators to adapt using various techniques. The outcome

indicates that the translators had no major difficulties in bringing and translating the English cartoon films to a new target language, Ukrainian. With omission strategy being used as infrequently as 4.9%, translators are much more likely to use literal translation strategy (44.7%) or even a slightly more stylistic compensation (50.3%). However, cultural equivalence has the lowest recorded strategy, with less than 0.1 percent.

Slang issues affect users in a much broader context. Due to its complex use across various communities and cultures, slang is found to cause issues in a variety of literary works, including translations. Numerous earlier studies have supported this phenomenon. Blonskytė and Petronienė (2013), for example, confirmed that extra work is required when attempting to render the effect of the original transcript into a usable translation by the target readers of specific culture and language in a novel entitled 'A Clockwork Orange'. In most cases, slang density in translation text is significantly reduced to compensate for reader comprehension. Glewwe (2012) raised similar findings, adding that translators cannot avoid the loss of slang in translation. As a result, they translate standard language into slang to compensate for the unavoidable situation in which they must translate slang to the standard language. Mattiello (2008) proposed the idea of preserving lexical complexity in slang.

As in what has already become the tradition of slang-based research, mostly from these works above, they are emphasizing more the structural level of slang rather than the sociological effect it has on society. It is expected that slang plays such a profound role, impacting society from the slightest touch, such as altering the structure of one's language to a much more significant effect, like cementing an invisible hierarchy in society. With this consideration, we are trying to bring a new perspective of empirical research which attempts to investigate the use of slang in written contexts, where writers often avoid its sociological effect.

'Black Mass' is a novel by Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill in 2000 and published by PublicAffairs™ in the same year. The novel depicts a true story about mafia regimes in South Boston, with the main plot focusing on James 'Whitey' Bulger and his co-worker Stevie Flemmi. Many other exciting characters are involved throughout the novel, some of which is the FBI's most prominent figures and judges who were entangled with the mafia. This novel has won and featured some prestigious stages, such as 'Edgar Award for Best Fact Crime' in 2001, the best crime novel, and the best gangster novel arranged to 'Goodreads'.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Slang

The most common definition of slang is seen in its informal application. According to Walter (2008), slang is a very informal language used by particular groups of people. For this reason, in theory, and practice, slang is nothing new to humans. Green (2015), for instance, assumed that specific terms like the Icelandic *slyngr* and *slunginn* (well-versed I, cunning), Norwegian *sleng* (a slinging, device, an invention), *slengjenamn* (a nickname), *slengjeord* (an insulting word or allusion), and Swedish *slanger* (to gossip) are all connected to the word slang. He might not clearly

establish that slang was first discovered in those languages, but they are probably related.

Furthermore, Yule (2006) recognized slang as an informal language used expressively by low-status people. In contrast, however, Eckert (2000) is more flexible by saying that slang usage is varied among people. Recent trends seem to favor Eckert's (2000) theory about slang more than Yule's (2006), for wealthy global elites and scholars are excited about using slang in communication. Eckert's definition of slang also aligned with his finding in one of the schools in Detroit where students were using slang accordingly.

2.2 Classification of Slang

Mattiello (2008) brought a certain classification on slang by splitting it first into general and specific categories. Adding to this, he went on to classify these two into more specific branches and properties, one of which is the sociological properties of slang which explains the difference in slang based on speaker and hearer's perceptions. This work is directed to only investigate the latter property, the hearer orientation of slang. These properties are listed below:
- Playfulness & humor
- Freshness and novelty
- Desire to impress
- Color and musicality
- Offensiveness and aggressiveness

Each of these properties is made from the hearer's impression when they heard or found slang (words and expressions). Exploring slang using Mattiello's (2008) theory is a complex process as it offers an intriguing issue for a theoretical debate.

2.3 Semantic Meanings of Slang

Semantic came from the Greek word *sema*, which means 'sign' or 'symbol'. In a contemporary study, semantics can be explained as a study of meaning in a structural way. Kreidler (2002) elaborated on semantics by stating that it was one of the three systematic studies of meaning, while the other two were psychology and philosophy. Linguistic semantics is a study that investigates how meaning works in a language (Saeed, 2003). Danesi (2007) introduced three ways of interpreting the meaning: reference, sense, and definition. Reference is used when one thing represents another, symbolizing something. Sense, however, is achieved through repetition. This means that words are often referentially the same but contextually different. Danesi (2007) later mentioned one example of a planet, Venus. People refer to a particular planet in our galaxy as Venus because of its beautifully emitting color, just like the figure named after it. Meanwhile, a morning star is also Venus's nickname due to a fact that is innate to it. The definition is best seen as a statement about something, often using words or pictures. Danesi's (2007) account of meaning interpretation helps us define specific symbolic representations in the present study, particularly in terms of slang and verbal expressions.

The following brief discussion is intended to highlight Mattiello's (2008) account of the properties of hearer-orientation of slang in her book as part of the sociological property of the slang language as underlying guidelines to explore further

a variety of slang used in 'Black Mass' (i.e., the expression of 'I'm cookin' up' to refer to the preparation of a drug for use). It is worth mentioning that Mattiello also presents information about other properties, such as speaker-oriented properties. The first of hearer-oriented properties is 'playfulness & humor', which is a property about something the hearer often finds amusing to hear. Many slang words and expressions are being uttered in jest to create a sense of humor among the hearer. Experts like Allan and Burridge (2006) claimed that language is being playful in a communicative act. The second property is 'freshness and novelty', where slang words and expressions are invented into the language world by altering the old meaning. For some reason, a new word could also be considered for this property because, as Mattiello (2008) said in her book, slang language keeps growing. The youth are usually involved in this due to their inevitable role in chasing the new culture and trends (Wang, 2020).

The next one is the 'desire to impress and faddishness', which is short-lived, as its name suggests. This kind of slang is used when a speaker wants to show something of his/her possession as an act of fanciness. Current trends are also heavily involved in the circulation of this slang, acting as one of the many reasons behind the slang's colossal popularity and breakthrough (Amari, 2010). 'Color and musicality' is the property where slang words and expressions often sound strikingly musical, rhyming, and onomatopoeic. This property of slang causes the hearer to visualize the words, picturing their written sounds. Such slangs are essential in many media to help creates an atmospheric setting. Seyyedi and Akhlaghi (2013) said that onomatopoeic words and expressions are a mix of imitation in sound and conditions of natural things.

The last property is 'impertinence, aggressiveness, and offensiveness'. It is such obnoxious slang because these three properties are primarily negative in words and meaning. People often use it to address their nasty temper toward someone's annoyance. Bergen (2016) also called this profanity language, which means it is powerful enough to provoke and cause damage to someone.

3. METHODS

To achieve the goals of this research, a specific methodology called descriptive qualitative by Miles et al. (2014) was applied. This methodology consists of three fundamental steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion. In collecting the data, the documentary process, also suggested by Miles et al. (2014), was used to gather what is necessary to work further and analyze them. By this, we attempted to describe social settings and actions occurring in the novel and conducted detailed explorations into answering questions about why something is done in such a way. Analyzing the data began with an investigation of the essential sections, which may contain the necessary slang both in words and expressions. This was processed by reading the novel and coding different parts. After the essential parts were gathered, all the informal words and expressions were the next part of the analysis. For validity purposes, the data needed to be matched with Mattiello's (2008) hearer-orientation properties before being presented in a designated table or matrix, according to Miles et al. (2014). We used two dictionaries for translation purposes. 'The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English' by Dalzell (2009) is expected to help find the meaning of slang words. Another dictionary, the 'NTC's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions' by Spears (2000), was also

used to help with the process. Of all the collected slang words and expressions, only partially are suited to Mattiello's theory. Those remaining are the slangs that would be analyzed later in the next step and presented in the appendix. The last part is the conclusion, putting all results together in a specified section to give us a better view of the completed work.

Miles et al. (2014) used the matrix to calculate the occurrences rate for each category within the 'Black Mass' novel. To achieve 100% in total, the number must be an integer, and no fractional component should be included in the calculation. In the calculation process, the total number of occurrences for each property of slang must be divided by 85 (the recorded total frequency of occurrences). This applies to the entire property displayed in the matrix. The result should be multiplied by 100 to get the exact percentage for each property.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through the process, 85 slang words and expressions have been found in the novel. As mentioned earlier, they have been categorized into five properties suggested by Mattiello (2008). Specifically, we used two dictionaries to look at the slang's meaning and classify them into the appropriate category. As previously mentioned, the calculation of slang occurrences taken has been classified according to each type of slang, and a percentage can represent its frequency of occurrence. Details for this are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency of slang occurrences.

No	Type of slang	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Playfulness and humor	13	15%
2.	Freshness and novelty	36	42%
3.	Desire to impress and faddishness	18	21%
4.	Color and musicality	4	5%
5.	Impertinence, offensiveness, and aggressiveness.	15	18%
	Total occurrences	85	100%

As illustrated in Table 1, the result shows that most slang words and expressions belong to the 'freshness and novelty' property, nearly half of the total occurrences. Meanwhile, the least belong to the 'color and musicality' property, with only four occurrences in total, giving it only 5% of the share. The occurrences of the other three properties seem to be insignificantly different. The subsequent section discusses each property in detail to follow up with these findings. The five categories of slang in the 'Black Mass' novel are explained separately in the following discussion. Each section is accompanied by the relevant excerpt(s) from the novel containing the corresponding slang being discussed in bolded words.

4.1 Playfulness and Humor

The slangs that belong to this property are metaphorical because the context to which they are applied is amusing and funny—some of the slang found in the novel sound a little off from its original meaning. The given context is simply not justified by the literal meaning; it had to be something else. Green (2017) agreed that such slang

is often confusing in its literal meaning as the speaker intentionally uses them to deliver jokes and humor with a slight twist to reality. The following extracts illustrate this:

> Extract 1:
> Bailey said later, remembering a young Cardinale. "He's got good-sized balls."
> (Lehr & O'Neill, 2000. p. 280)

The two people in the excerpt are Bailey and the author. Bailey was a famed defense lawyer (1933-2021), working with Cardinale as a junior attorney for criminal cases. Bailey praised Cardinale for his guts in a court battle with the mobs and their representatives. The novel was awarded in 2001 for its true crime story, not for its slang or sociolinguistics-related feature. This book delivers a very spot-on way of its story and characters' portrayal.

Conversely, the "good-sized balls" is a comical slang that only fits with a male traits, like courage and boldness. The "good-sized balls" part makes the sentence more comical to understand. As we have previously discussed, the meaning of such a slang expression has nothing to do with the round, bouncy object known as a ball. Instead, it symbolizes the masculinity and bravery of a man (Dalzell, 2009). Young Cardinale, one of the characters in this novel, is a brave lawyer who often goes against the opponent's argument. Because the word "ball" is often associated with courage, a person with "balls" should be considered brave.

> Extract 2:
> Partly with help from Bulger and, especially, from Flemmi, the top Mafia bosses were long gone by the 1990s, replaced by a lineup of forgettable benchwarmers with memorable nicknames.
> (Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, Intro.)

The word "benchwarmers" in Extract 2 is a slang word, and it sounds a little playful because it is a common term in sports. This term addresses second-class players whose performance is not bright enough to make it to an elite team. In the context of the novel, the term "benchwarmers" refers to the forgettable lineup of gangsters who cannot even cause enough havoc in the district, let alone South Boston. Indeed, this is a metaphorical use of slang that is applied slightly outside of its original context. Let us review the following example for further understanding.

> Extract 3:
> Bulger told Connolly: "Nick Femia had nothing to do with the hit of Patsy Fabiano."
> (Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 46)

According to Dalzell (2009), the word "patsy" in Extract 3 has no literal meaning as it was invented for a specific context around 1903. This slang word means 'a person to blame' in a compromised situation. In other words, it is frequently used to refer to a person who is easily taken advantage of. Spears (2000) described this as 'a victim of scam', just like an individual who can be easily cheated or blamed for something. In the sentence above, a person named Fabiano was regarded by Bulger as a setup for any downfall among the gangsters, and the term "patsy" is ideally suited to his situation.

American slang, in general, is considered as funny for its humorous effect. Our findings in this category are consistent with Zhou and Fan's (2013) findings suggesting similar results. They mentioned that the purpose of having such a feature is to be understood and remembered. For this reason, slang also carries phonetic methods such

as rhyme, the purpose of which is to have a sense of rhythm in sound. This property is discussed later in a different section of this article.

4.2   Freshness and Novelty

In the previous part, it has been addressed that some slang was added to the language world through meaning alteration and new inventions. Still, the same word, but with a slight difference in meaning, gave the newcomer a hard time understanding. Later on, as the frequency of people using this slang increased, it became more common and acceptable. The part of this property that matters is the invention part and how it is mostly positive as it contains novelty. According to Mattiello (2008), the invention part of slang keeps on growing, constantly adding a new index to the slang's glossary. The following examples further depict the property in this classification.

Extract 4:
"The roving bug is probably the most dangerous government intrusion," he said.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 277)

Extract 5:
Tight-lipped and intense, the John Morris of 1985 was still enjoying the glow of having overseen the successful bugging of Mafia headquarters in early 1981.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 193)

There are two slang words found in Extracts 4 and 5, "bug" and "bugging". Our investigation had returned some information that the first use of this terminology dates back to as early as the mid-1800 when engineers referred it to some mechanical faults. However, as mechanical engineering expanded to the use of computers, the first use of this term in such a context could be referred to some malfunctions in the analytical engines of that era, which could be traced back to the early 1930s or 1940s, and when the law enforcement started addressing this term for 'a spying device' (McFadden, 2020). "Bugging" means a covert operation launched by the officers or agents, usually accompanied by a delicate device, "a bugging device," to spy on their target. An additional example can be seen below.

Extract 6:
By late 1973 the thirty-year-old hustler had made the mistake of hoodwinking bookmakers controlled by Howie Winter.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 57)

The slang word "hustler" is derived from "hustle", which means moving in a hurry (Polsky, 2017). The informal meaning of such a word was established around 1840; some even date back to earlier days in the United States to describe 'a gambler' and 'male prostitute'. Today, even though such activity of 'shaking money' is almost disappearing as people are starting to gamble on electronic devices, this word is even becoming more common, not as restricted as it was back in the original days.

4.3   Desire to Impress

The speaker uses some slang words and expressions to amaze others. People usually pair it with another word to create a slang expression in which something of

their possession stands out in the talk, ensuring it draws enough attention from other people. This sort of slang trend also lives short, faddish. When people use it more often, the slang quickly loses its charm and becomes more common. Izmaylova et al. (2017) asserted that people wanted to participate in such fashion by imitating popular slang, grasping that ongoing trend. Examples of such properties is presented in the following extract.

Extract 7:
Later on, agents at work in the field saw that informant handlers were regarded as rain-makers.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 45)

"Rain-makers" within the sentence has nothing to do with the weather reporter explaining the climate, or at least not contextually like that. A specific group of people using it could be a key factor that it may be considered slang, not an idiom. The sentence talks about how several so-called "informant handlers" manage to tame clients to get the critical information flow. The "informal handlers" in the sentence is John Connolly. Such a role is essential in the covert operation enrolled by the FBI to monitor the progress of their mission. A rain-maker, in this context, means someone who is influential or has exceptional ability. A person of this ability is considered to have some values to impress. In a slightly different context, the use of an expression in this property can be seen in the following example.

Extract 8:
Wheeler was a "big damn guy" in his town who hired hundreds of people and gave money to good causes. Something's wrong here, he thought.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 153)

The author uses the phrase "big damn guy" to express how a person named Wheeler, held with such tremendous regard to his status by people in town, went missing one day because he had gone the wrong way with gangsters in town. The word "big" in this context signifies his well-known and influential figure, so bigger than anybody else that the author decided to stress it with the word "damn", which is commonly used to emphasize or impress. Similar findings to this have also been reported by Meinawati et al. (2019). For a comparative purpose, let us look at the use of another expression for the present context in the following excerpt.

Extract 9:
These were the "techies"—this was a military operation now. The three techies hit the ground running, lugging heavy satchels of equipment and looking like paratroopers taking a beachhead.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 111)

The use of the slang 'tech' + '-ie', dates back to the early 1940s when American technical college students used the term to denote a technician (Awati, 2021). The term means 'technical object, skill, or technical student'. From there, the use of this term proliferated to different areas but still with technology-related contexts. In this novel, the author uses slang to refer to a group of soldiers capable of dealing with essential technology for their mission. It is clear that there is a desire to impress, particularly when referring to a group of soldiers who are experts in or enthusiastic about technology, which in the present day may closely be associated with computing. Even in today's mass media, the use of slag has become a favorite choice (Mattiello, 2013).

4.4   Color and Musicality

Moving on to arguably the least common slang of all, only four instances of this property have been found in the novel. According to Mattiello (2008), this property belongs to the slang that improves the novel's setting due to its onomatopoeic and reduplicative rhyming sound, as heard in the sound of tools hitting each other, doors slamming, guns popping, and so on. The similar sound in syllables could also belong to this property of slang, specifically for musicality (Meinawati et al., 2019). When used in verbal communication, such intentional uses of 'organs of the vocal apparatus' produces sounds and words that point to specific meaning (Danesi, 2007). Kauffmann (2015) highlighted the reduplicative process of words, including partial and complete, and later addressed it as a colorful way of communication. For further details, the following examples are perhaps worth reviewing.

Extract 10:
Not every visit was so lovey-dovey, though.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 81)

This is an example of a similar sound in a syllable that creates a rhyme when pronounced by the speaker. This slang means 'a very affectionate situation, peaceful', just like some situations depicted in the novel. In a much more romantic context of use, the term usually applies when two people share a romantic relationship so peacefully that they may share their romantic intercourse in public. The excerpt above is an opposite depiction of "lovey-dovey". The slang expression was dated back around 1886 in the US. Another example of color and musicality property is shown in the example below:

Extract 11:
In the mornings, the bays might be filled with the clanging and banging of mechanics' tools, but by early afternoon the tone of the place would change markedly.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 75)

The original use of "clang and bang" originated in a gym where men usually practice their workouts (Landau & Bogus, 1987). The sound comes from a sudden percussive noise when some metal objects come in contact or strike each other. This onomatopoeic slang expression represents a similar sound produced by a set of tools in one of the car's garages in the novel. Like the earlier explanation, the tools, in reality, do sound like that "clang and bang" because of their metallic properties. However, the use of this slang could bring such vivid imagination to the reader, causing them to visualize the exact condition of a busy day in the bay. Our findings in this regard have been consistent with Meinawati et al.'s (2019) hearer-oriented property of 'color'. They argued that a speaker chooses specific slang words of this sociological feature to make speech more interesting. A slightly similar context to this is shown in the following example.

Extract 12:
He realized that the dirty money he had taken amounted to chump change compared to Mitrione's eye-popping $850,000.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 197)

This slang expression also has a similar sound, making it a little rhyming. The slang combines two different words, "chump" and "change." Not the oldest of its kind, probably around 1968 in the US, this slang was first used. "Chump" means foolish while "change" means to replace. "Chump change" is defined as a very small or insignificant amount of money. The context of the above example says it all when the author compares the little money the man (He) received with a whopping prize of $850,000 received by Mitrione. The context clue here helps readers identify the semantic meaning of the slang easily.

Our findings in this regard support Zhou and Fan's (2013) claim about specific features of American slang to a certain extent. Mattiello (2008) proposed that the musicality property is in line with Zhou and Fan's phonetic feature of slang, which they view as carrying readability and understandability purposes. In a more recent publication, Mattiello (2013) added that the initial goal of producing humorous effects with slang had recently evolved to the day-to-day use of language with peers in ordinary life.

4.5   Offensiveness and Aggressiveness

This section explicitly discusses a relatively undesirable side of the hearer-orientation property, as Mattiello (2008) arranged. Perhaps when Yule (2006) claimed that slang mostly came from low-status communities, it was because most of the slang they used sounded too aggressive and insulting to the hearers. In reality, slang is probably more effective when the speakers use words with negative connotations. Razavi et al. (2010) elaborated on how some slang words and expressions are straight-out racist and offensive if used to the wrong audience but considered as brotherly code among the right group. The mafia, however, is bounded by its criminality and racketeering and is undoubtedly full of uneducated people from the fringe areas. The 'Black Mass' is a novel that explicitly covers this environment. From the novel, we found 15 occurrences of slang that can be discussed within the property of this section. As not to violate any code and lessen the awareness of ethical importance, only those slang considered less profane are chosen to be discussed in the following examples. Let us now examine the first in this group.

Extract 13:
The agents who developed Halloran found themselves fighting a rearguard action against Connolly, who had dismissed Halloran's lurid account as self-serving prattle from a dirtbag.
(Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 149)

"Dirtbag" means 'a despicable person, unkempt in his/her demeanor'. Albeit some seriously swearing words are absent, this slang is quite insulting. People are starting to use this slang when feeling less respected, annoyed, or offended by others. The use of "dirtbag" is common when referring to a filthy or disreputable person. This is perhaps related to what Danesi (2007) referred to as a visual representation. Such a character is generally unpleasant and primarily associated with doing something dishonest or unacceptable. This word seems to have started to gain popularity in the early 1900s (Conroy, 2021). One supporting data we found about the use of slang in such circumstances is what Zhou and Fan (2013) published. They suggested that drug setting and American slang are closely interrelated. They also reported that the social setting among people who smoked marijuana around the 1970s has accounted for the

use of typical expressions and terminologies among people who speak similar regional dialects. Their findings were also supported by Dai and He (2010).

> Extract 14:
> But Bulger just shook his head. No, not guys like me, he said. "I'll always be a redneck mick from South Boston."
> (Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 24)

"Mick" is a derogatory and offensive word for an Irish person. Regardless of the context, this very sensitive word must be left unspoken unless the speaker and the hearer are Irish or have that Irish heritage. This slang word was adapted from the ubiquitous name in Ireland, Mickey or Michael. Around 1850 and 1856, in the UK, American and British sarcasm began to be directed at it because it was so common and ordinary. According to Urbandictionary (n.d.), the Irish were known for voluntarily causing problems in foreign lands, assembling gangs after gangs, and enrolling themselves in several fight clubs around the country. This lack of decent attitudes got them several names tailored specifically by the Britons and Americans, and "Mick" was probably one of those names. Perhaps, this word is still deemed offensive today by the Irish due to its negative historical facts, just like how every African descendant hates the term "nigger", such offensive sociological properties of slang have been found in many contexts. In line with our findings, Meinawati et al. (2019), for instance, found that using the 'fish' expression is considered offensive to others as it carries a sense of disrespect. Another example of offensiveness can be seen in the following example.

> Extract 15:
> He had seen the real Mafia in New Jersey, and Angiulo successors like Salemme seemed like penny-ante bookies.
> (Lehr & O'Neill, 2000, p. 252)

The term "penny-ante" is normally used when referring to something of little value or importance. This slang word is usually followed by another word describing a person as low-end and contemptible. Found to be used first in the US around 1935 (Dalzell, 2009), this adjective is a slang word that insults a person because of its cultural meaning. The excerpt in Extract 15 clearly illustrates this meaning by showing how one prominent prosecutor who had worked on a much more extensive criminal case sees his next case as insignificant. To emphasize the meaning in verbal communication, the speaker uses a specific tone and volume when conveying the message of the term being used (Danesi, 2004).

5.   CONCLUSION

Slang is frequently associated with many sociological properties in its use, and the 'Black Mass' novel under investigation is no exception. The current study discovered that this novel contains a plethora of slang words and expressions, with specific slang of freshness and novelty being the most frequently occurring. Except for musicality, the other properties appear to co-occur fairly consistently throughout the novel. This could be due to the author's preferred method and possibly the language style used. Other factors, such as the author's choice of setting, the topic of

racketeering, and mobsters plaguing regions of the United States, prompted the gangster to invent new terminologies and expressions. That may have been the origin of slang at the time.

Other characters' involvement added playfulness and light humor to the novel's language. However, this is only a portion of Mattiello's (2008) sociological slang properties, and many more may be discovered in other novels. The current study's findings are expected to add to existing debates in the literature because exploring slang is regarded as a one-of-a-kind work in language and linguistics, particularly within the context of a novel. After all, as Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) put it, 'language is a system of signs used to convey ideas and messages among humans'. In practice, every word we say or write does not always have the same meaning and is always contextual.

A linguistic study like this one almost always has limitations and drawbacks. Apart from the chosen linguistic theme, one of the significant drawbacks of the current study is its likely limited impact in the educational setting. Our investigation of slang within a single novel was the extent of our work. Future research may look into a broader context with more contemporary settings. As slang evolves, its use by speakers from various linguistic backgrounds may be worth investigating.

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