Youth and Student Slang in British and American English:
An Annotated Bibliography.

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ABSTRACT
This article contains an annotated bibliography of the slang used by young people, and specifically the slang of students, in both Britain and the United States. In addition, there is a brief account of the English influences on foreign youth slang. Some introductory remarks on the expressive nature of the language of such groups are also made.

Introduction
Slang is an area of lexis in a permanent state of flux consisting of vivid and colorful words and phrases which characterize various social and professional groups, especially when these terms are used for in-group communication. Slang provides and reinforces social identity but it is also used in society at large to achieve an air of informality and relaxation. Because of its nature and the multiplicity of its aims, slang is a meeting point for people working in different fields, lexicologists, sociolinguists, psychologists, and even for the lay public.

However, the study of slang, especially its lexicographic registration, is often overlooked or disregarded, due, in great part, to its ephemerality and the informal, humorous and taboo character of many of its expressions, which leads to the belief that it is a deviation from the standard language.

Of all social groups, the young are the most prone to the use and renovation of slang and unconventional language. They exhibit great social dynamism and are receptive to changes in fashion: in clothes, look, style, and also in speech. They have little political power but they may use slang as a counter-cultural tool, as an arm against established authority and conventions. In our modern and cultivated societies, students constitute one large subgroup within the young which deserves special study, for many a time they
develop a special kind of vocabulary. As a modest contribution to this area of research, in the present article I have compiled and commented on the bibliography related to the special vocabulary of these two groups in British and American English. Such a restriction on the field of study has led me to try to compile as exhaustive a list as possible, which explains why works of very different approaches and length have been included.

The list can be taken as illustrative and representative of the differences between the range and extension of the slang used by youth and students in Britain and America in the last decades, which immediately leads us to think of differences in their social environments. It is easy to understand that some social groups are more prone than others to creating and using slang. On the whole, Americans are believed to be much fonder than are the British of using informal and unconventional language, as Mencken well pointed out in his American Language. Certainly, there is a large body of general slang which differs noticeably from the British, but in the language used by students these differences are even greater. If slang is said to grow especially in small and somewhat restrained groups, one could argue that daily life of many a student on an American campus, often enclosed in halls and fraternities, helps them to develop a sense of solidarity and to become involved in a similar style of (communal) life. Conversely, the British student, being more integrated in normal living patterns, would tend to favour a more standard language. In this light one could also understand, for example, the paucity of student slang in a country like Spain where, in marked contrast, campus life hardly exists.

One perennial problem in the study of student slang is its differentiation from general slang. In effect, a good number of words and expressions classed as student slang are found to belong to the language of youth and other social groups. Outside the specific technical jargon of students, which is easy to trace and minimal in comparison, and the slang notoriously associated to the physical conditions of their life (housing, college, etc.), the expressive language found in it is very similar in its linguistic devices and motives to the one spoken by their non-student peers, for both groups share the same system of beliefs and are involved in similar communicational practices (drugs, music, fanzines, graffiti, etc.). Although the language of these particular fields is predominantly inspired by youth, it has not been included per se in this bibliography, unless they are associated to a particular youth sociolect.

For the same reason, I also haven’t included articles on slang whose content is general in application (for example, the Lighter/Dumas theoretical article, “Is Slang a Word for Linguists?”) or dictionaries and glossaries (e.g. Spears, Thorne, etc.) which have registered words coined or used by youth or students. If some lexicographic works of general outlook are listed (for example by Partridge), it is because they contain a section dedicated to the language of these groups. With these provisos—and these limitations—I have compiled the present bibliography.

Since the aim of this bibliography is to provide a useful tool for those who wish to do work in this area, many of the references listed here have been annotated, except in those cases where the titles themselves are sufficiently explanatory. All entries are listed alphabetically, although they have been previously classified under various thematic sections which discriminate between British and American youth and student slang, and general and special-word studies.
Youth and Student Slang

1. British (and general)

Youth slang


Widdicombe, Sue and Robin Wooffitt. The Language of Youth Subcultures. London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1994, 224 pp. Contains reference to the way youth subcultures such as punks, gothics, rockers and skinheads construct their identities through the use of language.

Student slang


Gradus ad Contrabrigiam: Dictionary of Terms Academical and Colloquial, or Cant, which are used at the University. Cambridge. 1803.


riddles, sobriquets, epithets, rhymes, etc.) of primary and secondary schoolchildren in Great Britain (and Ireland) during the years 1951-59.


Schmidt, F. A Study in English school-life and school-boy slang, as represented by Kipling's Stalky & Co. 1908.


2. American

Youth slang


Danesi, Marcel. “Pubilect: Observations on North American Teen-Ager Talk.” The Fourteenth LACUS Forum 1987. Lake Bluff: LACUS, 1988: 433-41. The paper studies the “dialect of puberty” from a purely sociolinguistic perspective by using taped conversations of middle-class teen-agers from the Toronto area. Inspired by the Whorfian hypothesis, the article examines the interconnection of language and thought in adolescents, and sees the emotive, connotative, and socially-coded dimensions of their language as both a reflection and a shape of their (egocentrist) way of looking at the world.


**Student slang: General studies**

Abel, James W. *A Study of the Speech of Six Freshmen from Southern University (Negro).* Diss. Louisana State U, 1950.


Eble, Connie C. "Slang, Productivity, and Semantic Theory." *The Sixth LACUS Forum 1979*. Ed. W. C. McCormick and H. J. Izzo. Columbia: Hornbeam, 1980. 215-227. Illustrates the productive processes at work in college slang: semantic changes such as generalization, specialization, amelioration and pejoration; tropes such as metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, and irony; and processes of word-formation such as clipping, acronymy and rhyming.


———. "Scenes from Slang." *SECOL Bulletin* 5 (1981): 74-78. In addition to the ordinary semantic/pragmatic strategies like generalization, metonymy, metaphor, etc., "scenic" (i.e. cultural) information is needed in the creation and understanding of slang.

———. "Greetings and Farewells in College Slang." *The 9th LACUS Forum*. Ed John Morreall. Columbia: Hornbeam, 1983. 433-442. By adopting the notion of “frame” from the field of artificial intelligence, as proposed by M. Minsky (1975), the author examines synchronic semantic motivation of greetings and partings and describes kinds of words and phrases appropriate in these expressions.

allusions of college slang, in particular those found in entertainment areas like television, movies, popular music, and sports.

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"Slang: Etymology, Folk Etymology, and Multiple Etymology." The SECOL Review 10 (1986): 8-15. The paper addresses the difficulties of establishing the etymology of slang items, discussing in particular two processes which seem to loom larger in slang than in the general vocabulary, folk etymology and multiple etymology; e.g. a non “a loser” (← non-entity, non-factor), a quad “clumsy, stupid person” (← quadrangle, quadriplegic, etc.).

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"The Subversiveness of Slang," Th 13th LACUS Forum 1986. Ed. Ilah Fleming. Lake Bluff: LACUS, 1987. 477-82. Parting from Halliday's concept of “antilanguage,” the paper examines the irreverent edge to slang and argues that college slang is not a full-fledged antilanguage. The opposition to authority is “rather playful and in predictable areas, obligatory and automatic rather than heartfelt — basically serving as another sway for college students to acknowledge their common plight.”

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"Forms of Address in the Speech of College Students." The 17th LACUS Forum 1990. Ed. Angela Della Volpe. Lake Bluff: Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States, 1991. 483-87. The author points at the frequent and imaginative nature of students’ forms of address—which include, among others, attention-getters like man and dude, kinship terms (cuz ← cousin, bro ← brother), derogatory nons (butthead, skank), and invented nicknames (Hank for Henry)—and explores their social function.

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"Borrowing in College Slang." The LACUS Forum 1991. Ed. Ruth M. Brend. Lake Bluff: Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States, 1992. 505-510. The paper points at the infrequency of borrowings in college slang—fewer than 100 of at least 3,000 separate items—despite these being the greatest source of new words in the documented history of English. After examining a variety of borrowings from different languages, the dialect of blacks is pointed as the most influential.
Youth and Student Slang


Hall, B. H. College Words and Customs. Cambridge, 1856. Valuable examples drawn from British Universities as well as from many US colleges.


Lederman, Marie Jean. “Hip Language and Urban College English.” College Composition and Communication 20.3 (1969): 204-14. Suggests that urban college teachers should include student slang in their English composition classes.


Student slang: Glossaries and particular studies

[Bagg, Lyman]. Four Years at Yale. New Haven, 1871. Contains a seven-apage list of words from the author’s undergraduate years at Yale in the late 1860’s.
Bolwell, R. “College Slang Words and Phrases (from Western Reserve University).” Dialect Notes 4.3 (1915): 231-38.
Edmiston, W. C. A Study of Provincialisms from Northern Todd County, Kentucky. Diss. George Peabody College, 1929. List of 893 unusual words and expressions collected by personal observation and from school children.
Youth and Student Slang

Slang at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College.


King, Viola. Wha'Hapnin'? A Dictionary of Terms and Expressions Frequently Occurring in the Informal Speech of Young Black Adults in New Orleans. New Orleans: privately printed, 1974, 17 pp. Glossary of expressions from Southern University students, compiled to “provide the teacher of black children a means of familiarizing herself with the language that she is obligated to understand if she wishes to teach them.”


McPhee, M. C. “College Slang.” American Speech 3.2 (1927): 131-33. (Univ. of Nebraska.)


Includes number of says and proverbs.


Pierce, Marving. "Slang at the University of Virginia." Abstract in *South Atlantic Bulletin* 24.3 (1959): 4. Reports slang vocabulary at University of Virginia consists of 150 items and cites their principal characteristics.


3. English Influences on Foreign Youth Slang

French


Spanish


German


Finnish


Russian

Serbo-Croatian


Thai

Owens, Jerry. "Youth Culture in the United States: Some Implications for TEFL." *PASAA* (Thailand) 19.2 (1989), 50-55. Examines the linguistic influence of the subculture of British and American youth and argues for the introduction of changes in English as a foreign language textbooks in order to avoid a gap between teacher and student usage.

Hausa (and other African languages)