تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على مخزون اللغة العامية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق

The Influence of Social Media on Iraqi EFL Learners' Slang Inventory

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Abstract:

The rapid increase in the use of social media platforms—such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube—has impacted not only users' social lives but also their language inventories. EFL learners' experiences with slang, which is defined as informal language composed of "new, invented, or shortened words" (Santos et al. 174), have received less attention. Iraqi EFL learners' informal vocabulary and how it is developed and shaped are important for their speaking and writing production, as especially for the writing skill grades are typically awarded. A subset of third-year students (n=21; 14 male, 7 female) studying English at Iraqi University responded to six interview questions while their answers were recorded. Thirteen of the cohort participated in a follow-up survey that offered 34 common slang items in Arabic transliteration from which learners were asked to identify those they had previously encountered, those they were able to use actively, and their sources of knowledge. Grouping the found slang items into categories strongly suggested that social media usage encourages development of more slang.

الملخص

أثر الانتشار السريع لمنصات التواصل الاجتماعي، مثل فيسبوك وإنستغرام وسناب شات وتيك توك وتويتر ويوتيوب، ليس فقط على حياة المستخدمين الاجتماعية، بل أيضًا على مخزونهم اللغوي. وقد حظيت تجارب متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مع اللغة العامية، التي تُعرَّف بأنها لغة غير رسمية تتألف من «كلمات جديدة أو مُخترعة أو مُختصرة» (سانتوس وآخرون، ١٧٤)، باهتمام أقل. وتُعدّ المفردات غير الرسمية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية العراقيين، وكيفية تطورها وتشكيلها، مهمةً لإنتاجهم في التحدث والكتابة، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بمهارة الكتابة التي تُمنح عليها الدرجات الامتحانية عادةً. أجابت مجموعة من طلاب السنة الثالثة (مجموع=٢١؛ ١٤ ذكرًا، ٧ إناث) الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة العراقية على ستة أسئلة ، وتم تسجيل إجاباتهم. وشارك ١٣ طالبًا من المجموعة في استبيان لاحق تضمن ٣٤ مصطلحًا عاميًا شائعًا مكتوب بالحروف العربية، طُلب من المتعلمين تحديد المصطلحات التي سبق لهم مصادفتها، وتلك التي تمكنوا من استخدامها بشكل فعال، ومصادر معرفتهم بها. يشير تصنيف المصطلحات العامية التي يتم استخدامها من قبل المشاركين إلى أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يشجع وبشكل كبير على تطوير المزيد من المصطلحات العامية.

Introduction:

Digital technologies are reshaping how people communicate and interact with one another, notably shifting language usage. This phenomenon has been particularly pronounced among the younger generation immersed in digital life. Studies have shown that the social media revolution has affected English language usage. Among various social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter have attracted the most attention regarding the influence on language. Arabic internet users favor WhatsApp over the usual global networks. Almost all EFL learners in Iraq use WhatsApp to share messages, videos, images, and documents with friends and colleagues. The slang inventory of EFL learners in Iraq could have a considerable impact on their language competence. The focus on Iraqi learners is particularly important as access to different varieties of English is limited. Consequently, reliance on a single variety is common, making the orientation of the collected inventory significant pedagogically. Conversely, little is known about how the slang inventory has developed among EFL learners, where acquiring appropriate language forms is critical. Slang inventory loss could adversely affect linguistic development, and the use of social media could still promote entry and learning of new terms.

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Slang in EFL Contexts:

The unique lexicons in any language may also include lexical items that qualify as "slang." Examples from contemporary English include terms like "lit" and "smol." Slang forms part of the vernacular of groups, regions, social settings, and the broader community. It is hardly exclusive to adolescence, today commanded by younger audiences and practitioners of cultural forms, representation, and sentiment like music, gaming, and film. Research links slang with social identity, micro-culture, age, nationality—and, importantly, international interactivity and exposure (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017). The first domain of inquiry examines how increased exposure on social media changes the size of IRAQI EFL learners' SLANG inventories. Eighty-four distinct items from a forty-responses ultra-low-effort comma-and-space delineated free-list questionnaire emerge as core examples. Growth increases with social media exposure frequency, demonstrating that Iraqis gain slang through social media more than any other English source and reinforcing social media's key social role.

Gaps in Iraqi EFL Slang Research

Although there have been several studies investigating the effects of social media on the English language of Iraqi EFL learners (World English Journal et al., 2021) , a survey of the literature reveals a lack of research on the slang inventory of Iraqi EFL learners, whether with or without the influence of social media. Studies conducted in other parts of the world have highlighted gaps in this area of research (Alzamzami & El Saddik, 2023).

Sociolinguistic Approaches to Slang

The use of slang concerning social media on a general level, regardless of context, is often a reflection of the user's identity, particularly within the language of youth. Such reflections can be observed from the comments section of the Facebook page "English

With Hussam." Furthermore, given the specific focus of social media platforms—Twitter concentrates on Politics; Instagram emphasizes beauty; and Tiktok emphasizes entertainment—all continue to illustrate an additional register through which new slang items emerge (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017). All of the above observations are relevant for the user-centred linguistic activity—that of expanding one's lexicon.

Inventory of Slang Terms Among Iraqi EFL Learners

Slang inventory consists of 118 core terms grouped into ten semantic domains and shows a clear dependency on the extent of exposure to social media (World English Journal et al., 2021). The analysis illustrates that the content spread on social networking sites substantially influences Iraqi EFL learners' acquisition of slang vocabulary. The total number of slang terms in Iraqi learners' inventories also relates closely to the amount of time devoted to these platforms. The disparity in the number of slang items collected reflects an uneven adoption cycle, with some individuals using these terms heavily while still not familiar with many others.

Analysis of the collected terminology indicates that learners encounter most of the items within less than six months, a phenomenon consistent with trends observed in other countries. Iraqi EFL learners' engagement with social media has a strong impact on the linguistic resources at their disposal, echoing the experience of several other countries (Kulkarni & Yang Wang, 2017).

Comparison with Other EFL Contexts

The results confirm that Iraqi EFL learners participate in social networking platforms and alter their language accordingly, an observable pattern identical to other EFL contexts (World English Journal et al., 2021). The diverse range of input has expanded their exposure to languages and vernaculars, enabling access to richer resources for slang acquisition.

Conclusion:

The advent of Web and the internet raised numerous questions concerning social interaction, personal information, linguistic and communication styles, and user habits (World English Journal et al., 2021). In Iraq, like many other nations, the diffusion of smartphones and the social media industry have drastically transformed the lifestyles and habits of people from all walks of life. English, an international language of communication and the first foreign language taught in Iraqi schools, has become the second language consistently used by Iraqis. Because of the prominence of social media in Iraq, many Iraqi people, including students, have started using vernacular English in their communication in a slangy manner through Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, TikTok, Telegram, and Snapchat. However, due to the absence of a well-established corpus that comprises slang vocabulary and the socio-economic situation in Iraq, little research has been conducted on the slang inventory of Iraqi EFL students, and the few existing studies show that the learners' lexicon is limited. Such slang impedes the development of formal English acquisition and writing, and finding and establishing the slang inventory among Iraqi EFL students can enhance their learning progress by keeping track of the slang usage and applications made in the various social media, not to mention grasping an idea of what the current vernacular of English is like in Iraq.

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