THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING SLANG IN THE CLASS OF INDONESIAN AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Laura Zarbaliyeva, M.H.
Department of Foreign Languages, Azerbaijan University of Languages
laurazarbaliyeva@yahoo.com

Abstract
Slang is a controversial issue in teaching a second language since some teachers consider slang as a lower level of language while the others argue of its being an integral part of everyday language. Language purists choose not to use slang in the classroom because they associate it with vulgarity which would not be appropriate for academic environment. On the other hand, those who approve teaching slang believe that it is a key to a certain language speaking world. Indonesian slang that differs significantly from the standard language in both vocabulary and grammatical structure is used not only in everyday conversation but it also penetrated into popular media these days. This is the reason why an Indonesian language learner who has been taught only the proper version of the language faces difficulties in communicating with a native speaker or in fully understanding newspaper articles and TV programs. This paper suggests introducing slang in classes of Indonesian as a second language to increase confidence in students to interact actively with native speakers which can be realized via song lyrics, movies and role plays.

Keywords: Indonesian as a second language, slang, second language teaching

A. Introduction

Based on the experience of teaching Indonesian as a second language for several years, the author supports teaching slang in the classroom for many reasons. One reason to include slang in a second language teaching is because language and culture cannot be separated from one another. Another reason is that students of no knowledge of slang come across difficulties outside of class. Besides, teaching slang means teaching the authentic language as well.

The students of the Department of Indonesian Studies at the Azerbaijan University of Languages are taught the Indonesian language for eight semesters. They are taught only standard Indonesian during the first three semesters which include teaching the grammatical structure and vocabulary of the language. These students can fully understand textbooks and they write using only the standard form of the language. Those who are not familiar with slang, that is, beginners of Indonesian find themselves in an awkward situation when they happen to communicate with native speakers of Indonesian as the language they used to use in the classroom differs strongly from that of its everyday version. The students get curious about the Indonesian slang that they have heard from their new friends who are native speakers and their eagerness to learn
slang cannot be ignored by a teacher. That is why, we include slang in teaching beginning from the fourth semester of the Indonesian classes.

B. Contents

1. Indonesian Slang as the Primary Media for Communication

_**Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics**_ (1992) defines slang as casual, very informal speech, using expressive but informal words and expressions and _Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary_ characterizes slang as nonstandard vocabulary of extreme informality, usually not limited to any region which includes newly coined words, shortened forms, and standard words used playfully out of their usual context. According to Yelistratov (http://mnytud.arts.klte.hu/szleng/szl_kut/02szlkul/resum.htm), slang is a universal fact of culture. The main purpose of using slang, as Dalzell states (https://e-folio.web.virginia.edu/Q-folio/1/EDIS542/2006Fall-1/c/Us/erItems/lad2m_809.html), is “to establish a sense of commonality among its speakers”. Based on the above mentioned definitions of slang we can conclude that slang as an informal language reflects the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken.

Slang researcher Mihály Péter believes that “the evolution of slang is mostly supported by city life, moreover by big city life and this also supports the argument that slang is a historical category of language” (Péter, 1999:33 cited in Tamás Kis), although he immediately notes that “the circumstances that tradition and innovation, regularity and irregularity, automatisation and actualisation are antinomies basically determining the life of language alludes to the universal tendency of forming slang. Partridge considers slang to be as old a phenomenon as the poetic language because playing with language and spontaneous expression of the self is an ancient characteristic of men” (Péter, 1999:33 cited in Tamás Kis). The evolution of the Indonesian slang has been mainly influenced by the factors like urbanization and mass communication and is considered the primary language of oral and written (electronic) communication used by any Indonesian in daily life. This is impossible to hear people talk standard Indonesian except if in formal situation. This slang enriched with borrowings from foreign and local languages developed from the formal Indonesian language.

As it was stated in _Wikipedia_ Indonesian slang is an ever-evolving phenomenon. This is, in part, due to its vocabulary that is often so different from that of standard Indonesian and Malaysian and also because so many new words (both original and foreign) are quite easily incorporated into its increasingly wide vocabulary list.

The differences between standard and nonstandard Indonesian that exist in both vocabulary and grammatical structure are sometimes so striking that a beginner learner of the proper language would hardly understand the meaning of any slang expression, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Indonesian</th>
<th>Nonstandard Indonesian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apa kabar?</td>
<td><em>Lagi ngapain?</em> (How are you doing?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apakah Anda yakin?</td>
<td><em>Sumpe loh?</em> (Are you sure?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayah saya menggunakan narkoba</td>
<td><em>Bokap gue ngedrug.</em> (My father uses drugs.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We referred mainly to *Wikipedia* in discussing vocabulary and grammatical structure of Indonesian slang as this source seems contributing to slang more than any other reference. Indonesian slang vocabulary is enriched by a combination of derivatives or loan words / structures from foreign languages such as Min Nan commonly referred to as Hokkien, English, and Dutch, as well as local ethnic languages such as Batavian, Sundanese, and Javanese. However, in many cases, new words are simply created at random, their origins often quite obscure. A large proportion of the vocabulary used in Indonesian slang language was developed from formal Indonesian through several methods.

2. Controversial Opinions about Teaching Slang

There have always been arguments regarding the use of slang in teaching. Language purists prefer not to teach slang of a foreign language because they consider it inappropriate in an academic environment. These teachers are troubled about distorting the language that would lead to disadvantage for students. There are also cases when teachers who are not native speakers of the language they teach possess no knowledge of slang at all. In both the cases the teachers are satisfied with using textbooks and audio/video supplements in teaching a second language that use only standard language. The students that are taught the proper language using the four domains of language learning (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are active in class activities and discussions and they present their language skills with excellence. However, the same students can fail in fully comprehending the language they thought they were fluent in when occur to communicate with native speakers, watching TV programs or movies, reading pop culture magazines in that language and finally when travelling to the country where that language is spoken.

Those who refuse teaching slang for considering it a lower level of language actually do not realize its importance for the knowledge of language and its benefit to access the world of that language speaking world. However, in teaching slang we should consider the level of the taught slang. An international slang expert David Burke (1991:ix) talks about two categories of slang, that is, proper and obscene slang. In this paper it is proper slang the teaching of which we support in the classroom. Proper slang is what we refer to in every conversation and can hear everywhere in our daily life – and this makes slang an integral part of our everyday speech. Nevertheless the teaching of curse words in class could be of advantage for students as well to save them from embarrassment when communicating with native speakers.

Slang as a significant part of our speech is an important element of culture as well. Emmitt and Pollock (1997:47) describe culture as the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools which characterize a given group of people in a given period of time. Language is a part of all this.

Our culture influences our way of thinking and acting. To learn another language we need to learn to appreciate the culture of which the language is a part. We cannot really learn a second language – or more precisely, learn the uses of that language – unless we learn about the culture because many of the meanings constructed in the language are culture-specific. As teachers we need to appreciate that individuals who possess another language as their first language possess a different culture and a different way of creating meaning and reality (Emmitt and Pollock, 1997:48). Lack of sociocultural, factual, and contextual knowledge of the target language can present an
obstacle to comprehension because language is used to express its culture (Anderson and Lynch, 1988 cited in Yagang, 191 in Selected Articles from the English Teaching Forum 1989-1993).

A researcher of teaching slang in the classroom Barra (http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002...ipp...) states that as teachers, one of our goals should be to help our students to arrive at a communicative competence. This competence involves knowing the appropriate register for a given context and the having the ability to recognize words from a particular register when a person uses them. Knowledge of slang can help students in informal contexts in which the participants use language from an informal register. This knowledge can help them to understand the discourse and to participate in it like a member of the culture in which it occurs.

We can come to conclusion that slang as an integral part of culture cannot be ignored in teaching a second language. The more we learn slang the more we get familiar with a given culture and it is clear that introducing slang in class will increase confidence in students to fully interact with native speakers.

3. Ways to Introduce Slang in Class

a). Since slang has been a disputable subject in teaching a second language there is hardly any literature on teaching slang apart from a few resources in the internet that approves teaching slang in class. A researcher of teaching slang in the classroom Barra (http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002...ipp...) believes that many foreign language teachers who are not native speakers of the target language do not include slang in their teaching because of lack of slang knowledge. As a result of this lack of use in the classroom, there is a resultant lack of written resources on the subject.

Another reason for the lack of information on this topic may be associated with its changing nature. According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992) most slang is rather unstable as its words and expressions can change quite rapidly.

New slang words and expressions appear and the older ones die out what makes it impractical to publish a book of slang. Besides, Emmitt and Pollock (1997:65) note that some slang words become so widely used that they become an accepted part of the language. The role of slang in the language highlights how language changes over time. What is acceptable in different contexts changes. It must be remembered that it is the community of language-users, not a textbook, that determines what is acceptable.

In this case as teachers we are faced with a dilemma of teaching whether only an up-to-date or also including an outdated slang. Teaching both would be of benefit for the students in order to be able to differentiate older and most up-to-date words, not to sound funny to native speakers and to catch up with current informal usage of a given language. First of all, teachers themselves should update their knowledge of slang so that student would not get confused in choosing the right slang word or expression. Besides, students would have more confidence in teachers who possess knowledge of slang.
The internet references recommend several effective ways of introducing slang to students like via song lyrics, movies, and role plays and simulations. In order to make students be accustomed to informal usage of language the best way to start introducing slang in the classroom would be by teaching song lyrics first, then followed by showing movies. After getting used to hear unusual slang words and expressions finally students can play roles and take part in simulations using colloquial speech.

Foreign-language learners usually devote more time to reading than to listening, and so lack exposure to different kinds of listening materials (Yagang, 191 in Selected Articles from the English Teaching Forum 1989-1993). Brown and her colleagues (cited in Nunan, 1999:237) found that prior experience as a listener helps speakers improve their performance as a speaker. There are two possible reasons for this finding. In the first place, being a listener gives learners models to deploy when acting as a speaker. In addition, being a hearer first helps the learner appreciate the difficulties inherent in the task. Nunan (1999:237) also states that giving speakers experience in the hearer’s role is more helpful than simple practice in tasks in which a speaker is having real difficulties in appreciating what a particular task requires. In task in which speakers are largely successful in meeting a particular task demand, repeated practice may enable them to improve further their performance in this respect, and may indeed be a pleasant and motivating experience.

This means that teachers should improve students’ listening skills to make them good speakers later. However, students should initially be acquainted with slang words and expressions; a teacher can give them a list of frequently used slang words and explain the major differences between standard and nonstandard Indonesian as can be seen from the following examples from Wikipedia:

- Nasalisation of active verb, shortening or exclusion of the original prefix and adding -in at the end of the word, for example:
  - memikirkan (pikir) (to think) into mikirin
  - menanyakan (tanya) (to ask) into nanyain (exclusion of "me-"), often with a glottal stop between the a and the i, thus nanya’in

- Adding -in at the end of the passive transitive verbs, for example:
  - diajari (to be taught) into diajarin
  - dipukuli (to be beaten) into dipukulin

- Adding ke- at the beginning of passive intransitive verbs, instead of using ter- and altering pronunciation from 'a' to 'e' (Javanese influence), for example:
  - tertangkap (to be caught) into ketangkep
  - terpelését (to accidentally slip) into kepelését

- Eliminating one or few letters of the word, for example:
  - habis (depleted/ finished/emptied) into abis
  - tahu (to know) into tau

- Contraction of two or more words into one word, for example:
  - terima kasih (thank you) into makasih
  - jaga image (to safeguard one's social image) into ja'ım, with a glottal stop between the a and the i
  - Percaya diri (confidence) into PD (pédë)
• Replacing letter a with e in some words (Javanese influence), for example:
  o benar (correct) into bener
  o pintar (smart) into pinter

• Contracting diphthong into monosyllabic letter, for example:
  o kalau (if) into kalo
  o pakai (use) into paké

• Addition/exclusion of silent consonants and glottal stops to the beginning/ends of words:
  o pakai (use) into paké or even pakék (final -k being a glottal stop)
  o enggak (no, not) into nggak or ngga or even gak/ga/kaga/ogah/wegah
    (enggak itself is also a slang word.)

• Contracting the beginning three letters with the infix -ok- after the first letter
  (ended with closest consonant if the third letter is a vowel), for example:
  o Bapak / Ayah (father) into Bokap
  o Ibu (mother) into Nyokap

• Add prefix nge- or ng- to signify activity, for example:
  o ngebun (to go fast)
  o ngomong (speaking)

• Some words are simply transliterated from English, for example:
  o Sorry into sori,
  o Friend into prén.

• Many words also emerged without following the above rules at all, many of
  which have their own unique history and/or origin. For example:
  o Camer – calon mertua, future in-laws.

• ABG / Abégé (teenagers) – stands for 'Anak Baru Gede' which literally means 'a
  child who just grown up'.

• Lebai means 'overacting', originated from the word 'lebih' meaning 'more'.

• Tete'em or TTM means 'teman tapi mesra' - casual sex partner. This word
  became famous after Ratu's song TTM published.

  A lot of slang particles are used in the end of a sentence. Some of these
  particles do not change the meaning of the sentence while some of the others
  emphasize the meaning. There are also particles which can give hesitancy to the
  sentence. For example:

  • Particles which do not change a sentence meaning:
    o Nih, for example:
      \[\text{Dia datang nih} = \text{Dia datang} \ (\text{She/he comes})\]

  • Particles which emphasize the meaning of a sentence:
    o Dong
    o Kok
    o Lah
    o Lho

    For example: \[\text{Dia datang dong} / \text{Dia datang kok} / \text{Dia datang lah} / \text{Dia datang lho}\]. All of them can be translated as 'She/he does come'. However, "Dia
"datang dong" can mean *She is coming for sure*, in other intonation when 'o' in the word *dong* is pronounced longer – it means *She wants to come*. *Dia datang kok* is used when we convince someone who does not believe that she would come. *Dia datanglah* means *She does come*, it's used when we are very sure that she would come and underestimating her coming. *Dia datang lho* means *She comes, you know?*

- **Particles which can give hesitancy to the sentence:**
  - *Ah.* Example of use: *Dia datang ah* can be translated as 'I think she/he is coming'.
  - *Dong.* Example of use: *Dia datang dooong*. It means 'I wish she comes' or 'Please let her come'.

- **Particles always initiate question sentences.**
  - *Kok*
  - *Lho*

  Both *Kok, dia datang? / Lho, dia datang?* can be translated as "How could she come?"

b). Music is a powerful stimulus for student engagement precisely because it speaks directly to our emotions while still allowing us to see our brains to analyse it and its effects if we so wish. A piece of music can change the atmosphere in a classroom or prepare students for a new activity. It can amuse and entertain, and it can make a satisfactory connection between the world of leisure and the world of learning… One of the most useful kinds of text for students to work with is song lyrics, especially where the song in question is one which the students are very keen on or teachers can choose songs which they like, or which are appropriate in terms of topic and subject matter (Harmer, 2001:242-243).

There are several ways of teaching slang via song lyrics in class. Harmer (2001:244) suggests giving students lyrics with various words blanked out; the teacher can give students a list of words and ask them to listen to the song to see which of the words are used. The teacher can ask students to put lines in order, or complete half-finished lines. Or the teacher can simply have students listen to a song and say what they think the title might be – or say where they would most like hear it.

The teacher can further ask students to replace slang words in a song lyric with their standard equivalents and then to translate into students’ first language. By memorizing the lyrics of this song students can memorize the intended words and expressions as well as in the example below:

*Sudah, sudahlah, gak ada waktu
Gak ada waktu mikirin kamu
Pergi, pergilah, jauhi diriku
Mendingan cabut ke laut aja lu

(Refrain of the song *Ga Ada Waktu* by Radja)
c). Most students show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as hear it, and when this is coupled with interesting books (Harmer, 2001:282). One of the main advantages of video is that students do not just hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since for example, general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture, and other visual clues. Thus we can observe how intonation can match facial expression. All such paralinguistic features give valuable meaning clues and help viewers to see beyond what they are listening to, thus interpret the text more deeply (Harmer, 2001:282).

It is preferably to show a movie which is not deep in meaning so that students can concentrate mainly on the speech of the movie characters rather than the plot itself. Romantic comedies like *Bukan Bintang Biasa* (2007) by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo or *Get Married 2* (2009) by Hanung Bramantyo are good examples that can be shown to the students beginning from the IV semester where Indonesian is taught as a second language.

Here is a suggested activity for teaching slang via watching movies. As a pre-watching activity students are given a list of slang vocabulary used in the movie so that they can determine the meaning of new slang words and expressions, or a teacher can give them their definitions as in the examples below (from the film *Bukan Bintang Biasa* by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo), discuss them in class, compare with their standard equivalents and eventually understand the natural speech of characters while watching that movie:

- *gua=gue=saya* – I, me
- *gitu=begitu* – like that, so
- *gantiin=menggantikan* – to change
- *ngeliat=liat=lihat* – to see
- *tanggung=tidak perlu khawatir* – there is no need to worry
- *makasih=terima kasih* – thank you
- *kek=entah ... entah* – who knows
- *doang=hanya* – only
- *GR=ge-er=gede rasa* – arrogant
- *nyokap-ibu* – mother
- *bokap-ayah* – father
- *bete=bad temper*
- *duit=uang* – money
- *pede=percaya diri* – self-confidence
- *mendingan=lebih baik* - better

Students watch the movie with subtitles and take notes at the same time. As a post-watching activity students prepare a report on the watched movie, show differences between colloquial language and the language they would find in a typical textbook.

Another activity can be realized by watching a movie based on a novel. The film *Obama Anak Menteng* (2010) by John De Rantau and Damien Dematra, for example, the characters of which use a lot of Jakarta slang is based on Damien Dematra’s novel *Obama Anak Menteng* (2010). Students can first read the novel...
and get familiar with slang words and expressions used in the novel and then watch the film to listen to the natural Indonesian speech or to see the language-in-use, and later discuss this in class.

Examples from the novel Obama Anak Menteng (2010) by Damien Dematra:

“Gak apa-apa dong, biar gue nggak keliatan bego!” Yuniadi berkilah, menatap kakaknya (p.22).

’Apa menurut lu mereka bakal ngelukain gue?’ tanya Barry (p.81).

“Elu lagi! Mau ngapain sih, pake acara nongkrong-nongkrong pake baju cewek gitu?” (p.85).

d). Many students derive great benefit from simulation and role-play. Students ‘simulate’ a real-life encounter as if they were doing so in the real world. Simulation and role-play can be used to encourage general oral fluency, or to train students for specific situations (Harmer, 2001:274). Simulation and role-play went through a period of relative unpopularity, yet this is a pity since they have three distinct advantages. In the first place they can be good fun and thus motivating. Second, they allow hesitant students to be more forthright in their opinions and behaviour than they might be when speaking for themselves, since they do not have to take the same responsibility for what they are saying. Third, by broadening the world of the classroom to include the world outside, they allow students to use a much wider range of language than some more task-centred activities may do (Harmer, 2001:275). Accordingly after getting used to listen to native speaker’s speech students can feel more prepared to take part in simulations and role plays. Acting as native speakers contributes to students’ motivation for learning a foreign language as well.

Here is a part of play script Ande-Ande Lumut that contains a lot of slang words and expressions below played by the third year students learning Indonesian as a second language at the Azerbaijan University of Languages:

K.Ungu :”Iya! Lebih baik kamu cari tempat lain saja! Di sini tempatnya sudah penuh! Ayo pergi sana!”
K.Kuning :”Please... saya mohon... saya mau disuruh apa saja deh... please…”
K.Abang :”Plas plis plas plis! Ngomongnya saja aneh-aneh. Sudah sana pergi saja! Nggak level!”

e). Introducing slang in the classroom through suggested methods above can contribute to students’ familiarization with a given culture better and make them feel more comfortable when communicating with native speakers. Students themselves are very eager to learn slang to be able to use it out of class especially in social networks. Learning slang can be just fun and take a tension in the classroom. However, students’ use of slang in the classroom is preferably restricted to role plays and simulations. The students cannot be allowed to use nonstandard language in other cases which would bring to the real language distortion what language purists are so worried about. These students would not be able to differentiate between standard and nonstandard language as well. So teachers should guide
students as when and where they can use slang. A few lessons each semester are enough to update students’ slang vocabulary and to train them for specific situations where slang can be used so that they can practice using slang in the classroom.

C. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion it can be concluded that although slang has been a controversial issue in teaching a second language for its negative reputation, as a part of a given culture its importance cannot be ignored by teachers. Indonesian slang that differs strikingly from standard Indonesian and serves as the primary language of oral communication in daily life should be introduced in classes where Indonesian is taught as a second language. By learning Indonesian slang students can get access to Indonesian culture which is expressed by language. Otherwise if as teachers we allow their language knowledge limit only to its formal usage we will let them lack to truly understand the natural speech and communicate with native speakers. However, it does not mean that teachers have to promote the total use of slang in the classroom but the use of slang should be limited to a certain extent. This paper suggests several ways of introducing slang in the classroom which include teaching slang through song lyrics, movies, and role plays and simulations.

REFERENCES


Yagang, F. Listening Problems and Solutions. Selected Articles from the English Teaching Forum 1989-1993, p.191

Internet sources:


Films:

*Bukan Bintang Biasa* by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo, 2007

*Get Married 2* by Hanung Bramantyo, 2009

*Obama Anak Menteng* by John De Rantau and Damien Dematra, 2010
Attachments:

A frame from *Bukan Bintang Biasa* by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo, 2007

A frame from *Bukan Bintang Biasa* by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo, 2007

A frame from *Bukan Bintang Biasa* by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo, 2007
A frame from *Bukan Bintang Biasa* by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo, 2007

A frame from *Get Married 2* by Hanung Bramantyo, 2009

A frame from *Get Married 2* by Hanung Bramantyo, 2009
A frame from *Get Married 2* by Hanung Bramantyo, 2009

A frame from *Get Married 2* by Hanung Bramantyo, 2009

A frame from *Obama Anak Menteng* by John De Rantau and Damien Dematra, 2010
A frame from *Obama Anak Menteng* by John De Rantau and Damien Dematra, 2010

A frame from *Obama Anak Menteng* by John De Rantau and Damien Dematra, 2010

A frame from *Obama Anak Menteng* by John De Rantau and Damien Dematra, 2010
A frame from *Obama Anak Menteng* by John De Rantau and Damien Dematra, 2010

A frame from *Ande-Ande Lumut* played by the third year students of the Department of Indonesian Studies

A frame from *Ande-Ande Lumut* played by the third year students of the Department of Indonesian Studies
A frame from *Ande-Ande Lumut* played by the third year students of the Department of Indonesian Studies.
A frame from *Ande-Ande Lumut* played by the third year students of the Department of Indonesian Studies

A frame from *Ande-Ande Lumut* played by the third year students of the Department of Indonesian Studies

A frame from *Ande-Ande Lumut* played by the third year students of the Department of Indonesian Studies