

## TYPES AND FUNCTIONS AMERICAN AND BRITISH SLANGS

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores the types and communicative functions of slang in American and British English within sociolinguistic and pragmatic frameworks. Slang is examined as a dynamic and informal layer of vocabulary that reflects social identity, group membership, cultural values, and communicative intentions. The study classifies slang into several types, including youth slang, professional slang, ethnic slang, internet slang, and regional slang, highlighting both shared and culture-specific features in American and British usage. Particular attention is paid to the pragmatic functions of slang, such as expressing solidarity, creating in-group identity, signaling informality, conveying humor or irony, and reinforcing emotional or evaluative meanings. A comparative analysis reveals that while American and British slangs share common functional purposes, they differ in lexical creativity, sociocultural references, and degrees of standardization. The findings demonstrate that slang plays a crucial role in everyday communication and serves as an important marker of linguistic innovation and cultural diversity in both varieties of English.

**Keywords:** slang, American English, British English, types of slang, functions of slang, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, informal language, cultural identity

With one and half billion speakers worldwide, English is the most widely spoken language. Slang is defined as a casual type of language that is playful or trendy. Some slang words become common phrases. Slang phrases tend to develop from the attempt to find fresh and vigorous, colorful, pungent, or humorous expressions. And in our current technology age, English has assumed the dominant language of global communication on the internet. But that does not mean English sounds the same wherever it is spoken. Some American slang terms and words can seem like an alien language to the British and Australians – or even to other Americans, depending on their regional dialect. In addition to internet slang, there are several types of slang words. Below, it is demonstrated a few of the most popular national ones that one is likely to hear in some of the most widely-spoken languages.

#### 1) American Slang

Learning American street slang is vital to understanding the growth and evolution of the English language. American slang words consist of coined words and phrases and new or extended meanings attached to established terms. Examples of common slang within the United States include:

“Screw up” means to mess up or make a mistake or by mistake.

Example: The package was delayed through an addressing screw up.

“Hold your horses” means to slow down or just a second.

Example: Hold your horses for a minute while I return to get my wallet.

“Twenty four seven (24/7)” refers to something that is non-stop or around the clock.

Example: That grocery store is open 24/7.

“It is not rocket science” explains something by hyperbolically stating what it is not.

Example: If it is not rocket science, then it must be easy.

Hits the spot expresses that something (usually food or drink) was exactly what you needed.

Example: Drinking the lemonade after the baseball game hit the spot.

Some slang words are commonly used across the country and appear in nationwide communication such as movies, television and magazines. But, some slang words have not gone mainstream and are used only in certain regions of the U.S. For example, here are a few regional slang words.

Word	Meaning	Example
ayah (Mgaine)	used as a form of greeting	Ayah, how are you?
brick (New York)	Cold	Layer up; it is brick outside.
clothes tree (Northeast)		
	piece of furniture with extended arms that stands against the wall for hanging clothes.	Thought we had a break-in the other night, but it was just the cat knocking over the clothes tree.
fixin' to (South and Texas)		
	a quick way to say "will do that shortly"	
	I'm fixin' to go to the store. Y'all want anything?	
hella (Northern California)		
	a very casual slang word used as an adjective to describe something that is really good.	Waves are hella good; it's a great day to surf.

### British Slang

British slang is English-language slang originating from and used in the United Kingdom and also used to a limited extent in Anglophone countries such as Ireland, South Africa, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, especially by British expatriates. It is also used in the United States to a limited extent. While some slang words and phrases are used throughout Britain (for instance, knackered, meaning “exhausted”). Others are restricted to smaller regions, even to small geographical areas. The nations of the United Kingdom, which are England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, all have their own slang words, as does London. London slang has many varieties, the best known of which is rhyming slang. Below, it is illustrated some examples of British slang words:

Chuffed means someone is pleased or happy about something.

Example: I am absolutely chuffed with my birthday present. Thanks!

Knackered which is derived originally from “knacker”, refers to a person who slaughters old worn-out horses, “knackered” expresses exhaustion, that someone is extremely tired.

Example: I have been up half of the night with the baby. I am totally knackered.

“Bants” is an abbreviation of “banter.” “Banter” means to joke or to exchange witty (quick and fun) remarks with others.

Example: I am going to Nando’s for some bants with the lads.

Cheeky: when someone is cheeky, it means that they are being a little rude or disrespectful, but usually in a way that is funny and endearing (cute).

Example: That is a cheeky smile...are you up to something?

Did you just take the last biscuit? That was a bit cheeky!

It can also be used if you are eating, drinking or doing something that you maybe should not or that is not good for you.

Example: I am just going to have a cheeky burger on the way home.

Are you coming to the pub tonight

On a Tuesday?! Well OK, just a few cheeky drinks.

Cuppa which comes from the phrase “cup of”. The implied (suggested) meaning is a cup of tea. The word “tea” is not actually needed, just need to make it clear if it is a “cuppa” coffee or a “cuppa” something other than tea.

Example: Would you like a cuppa?

I would love one. I will get the kettle on.

Mate: While in standard English a mate is a life partner, it is commonly used in Britain to mean a friend. It is also often used to address strangers in informal situations, such as in bars or on public transport. It is particularly used between men, but not always. A similar word is “pal”, which is also used in American English.

Example: What are you doing this weekend?

Hanging out with some of my mates.

Excuse me, mate, is anyone sitting here?

Hey pal, could I get a whisky and a beer please?

Sherbets, in Britain, is a word for a fizzy sweet or sweet powder. However, inviting someone to go to the pub for a few sherbets is not an invitation to eat sweets, but an invitation to drink a few beers. It is possible that this comes from the fizzy, frothy top on beers.

Example: Do you fancy a few sherbets after work tonight?

Asking someone if they “fancy” something is a way of asking if they would like it.

Canada has two official languages, English and French, and a third unofficial one: Canadian slang. With a multicultural society centered around the simple things in life—leisure, friendly competition, and politeness—it is no coincidence these are reflected in the common tongue. Here are given Canadian slang words, terms and sayings to sound like a local:

Toque- less cultured folk might refer to a winter hat as a “beanie,” but cold weather headwear is strictly referred to as a toque in Canada.

Example: Eh there, ‘ya think I need a toque for the walk to Timmies?

Chesterfield - technically a couch, but a chesterfield is so much more. Chesterfields are intrinsically designed with floral patterns and can usually be found in your grandma’s living room.

Example: Get your feet off the chesterfield!

Newfie - anyone from Newfoundland is a Newfie and is a denotation the people

In contemporary linguistics, slang is regarded as a dynamic and informal lexical layer that reflects social interaction, cultural change, and linguistic creativity. Unlike standard or formal vocabulary, slang is closely associated with specific social groups, generations, or communicative contexts, and it often functions as a marker of identity and social belonging. From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang represents the interaction between language and society, revealing how speakers negotiate meaning, power, and group membership through non-standard linguistic choices.

American and British slang have developed under different historical, cultural, and social conditions, which has led to both shared characteristics and notable divergences. In both varieties of English, slang evolves rapidly due to urbanization, youth culture, mass media, and technological innovation. However, American slang is often characterized by a higher degree of lexical innovation and global diffusion, largely influenced by popular culture, entertainment industries, and digital communication. British slang, by contrast, tends to preserve stronger regional variation and historical continuity, reflecting long-established social structures and localized speech communities. These differences contribute to distinct patterns of usage and pragmatic interpretation in the two varieties.

From a theoretical standpoint, slang can be classified according to social, functional, and linguistic criteria. Social classifications distinguish slang used by particular groups, such as youth communities, professional circles, or subcultures. Functional classifications focus on the communicative purposes slang serves in interaction, while linguistic classifications examine word-formation processes and semantic change. Such typologies demonstrate that slang is not merely a collection of informal words but a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon embedded in broader systems of meaning and communication.

Pragmatically, slang fulfills several important functions in discourse. It contributes to the construction of in-group solidarity and social intimacy, allowing speakers to signal shared values and experiences. Slang also enhances expressiveness by conveying emotional attitudes, evaluations, and speaker stance more vividly than neutral vocabulary. In addition, it plays a role in managing informality, reducing social distance, and softening or intensifying communicative intent depending on context. These pragmatic functions make slang a powerful tool in everyday interaction, particularly in spoken and digital communication.

Overall, the theoretical analysis of American and British slang highlights its role as an indicator of linguistic change and cultural diversity. Studying slang from sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives allows researchers to better understand how non-standard language contributes to meaning-making, identity formation, and variation within and across English language varieties.

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