

Saudi Youth Slang Innovations: A Sociolinguistic Approach

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Abstract

This study is a sociolinguistic investigation of Saudi youth slang. Contrary to the situation in many countries, where research and projects on youth slang are popular, Saudi Arabia is destitute of systematic records and analysis of this linguistic phenomenon. The study analyzes the social factors influencing it. Besides, it sheds lights on the sources from which Saudi youth acquire new slang expressions and the reasons for using them. Moreover, it discusses the major topics of interest on which Saudi youth slang focuses. The study concludes that age and Saudi youth slang are negatively correlated. That is, the younger a person is, the higher the level of his/her acquaintance of slang. In addition, it shows that men use more slang expressions than women. Furthermore, it indicates that men and women have different interests in terms of Saudi youth slang topics, especially the sexual ones. Some typical examples of current Saudi youth slang are also provided.

Keywords: Slang, youth, sociolinguistic features, gender differences, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

This study is a sociolinguistic investigation of Saudi youth slang, henceforth SYS. As a linguistic phenomenon, slang started to attract discussions and studies among scholars from the eighteenth century until the present time. Contrary to the situation in many countries, where research and projects on youth slang are popular (e.g. Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou, 2003; Elbe, 1996; Partridge, 1979), Saudi Arabia is destitute of systematic records and critical analysis of the phenomenon of youth slang. Formal and theoretical discussions of SYS from sociolinguistic perspectives are largely absent. Despite the fact that SYS is a rich and complex language variety, which constitutes a significant and almost ubiquitous part of Saudi Arabic, it has received scant attention from sociolinguists and no attempts have been made at describing it. As it permeates the life of Saudi youth and bears very high research values, it cries out for our attention.

Therefore, this study investigates the different aspects of SYS from a sociolinguistic perspective. It seeks to investigate the use of SYS, its effects and its linguistic features. Moreover, it attempts to find out the interrelationship between social variables such as age, gender, acquaintance, and frequency of using SYS among Saudi youth. Moreover, it explores sources through which they learn new SYS expressions and reasons for which they use it during communication together with distributions of its topic focus between men and women. It is hoped that this study will contribute to an in-depth understanding of SYS, draw more attention, and arouse serious research interest in SYS.

Despite the fact that linguists and scholars attempt to define the term 'slang', they report that it is difficult to come up with an accurate definition for the term. Partridge (1979), for example, points out that "*Slang is easy enough to use but very hard to write about.*" Similarly, Dumas and Lighter (1978, p. 10) argues that "*One of the clichés of the study of slang is that anyone can recognize slang, but no one can define it.*" In addition to the difficulty and complexity involved in finding an accurate definition of the term, is the attitude that linguists have about slang.

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Many linguists and lexicographers hold a negative and an antagonistic viewpoint towards slang. It was labelled as a linguistic taboo which should not appear in most formal social occasions. It was regarded as *"a vulgar, offensive, and profane form of language"* (e.g. Foerster, & Steadman, 2000; Partridge, 1979). Andersson and Trudgill (1990, p. 70) state that British criminals used the term *"slang"* to label their own language, whereas the word *"cant"* was used by the outside world. Similarly, Asher and Simpson (1994, p. 3961) believe that slang originally denotes cant, *"the restricted speech of the low often criminal classes of society."* Other researchers argue that slang is improper, unsystematic, unacceptable language usage, and an unconventional vocabulary that diverges from that of a standard lexicon (Bembe, 2008; Benedict and Munro, 1997; Lighter, 1994).

In addition, Bloomfield (1933) argues that users of slang form young persons, sportsmen, gamblers, vagrants, criminals, and most other speakers in their relaxed and unpretentious moods. Also, one of the criteria that Dumas and Lighter (1978, p. 10) propose for qualifying a term as slang is if the presence of the term *"will markedly lower, at least for the moment, the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing."* Similarly, Elbe (1998, p. 42), argues that *"slang is the idiosyncratic and deviant vocabulary of quirky or suspicious groups."* Also, Flexner (1975, p. vi), states that slang is simply *"not accepted as good, formal usage by the majority."* In addition, Greenough and Kittredge (1962, p. 55) observe that *"slang is commonly made by the use of harsh, violent, or ludicrous metaphors, obscure analogies, meaningless words, and expressions derived from the less known or less esteemed vocations or customs."* Besides, Sornig (1981, p. 71) describes slang as *"astigmatized language variety or deviant variant when compared with the codified standard language."* Likewise, Thorne (2009: iii) describes it as *"informal", "illegitimate", "non-standard", "low", "disreputable", "sub-standard", and "disreputable".*

To many others, slang has its value and functional usage (e.g. Tobin 1972; Chapman, 1986). They believe that it is a vital linguistic phenomenon, which is so vital to human growth and order. In addition, they argue that slang plays an important role in any society as it depicts the linguistic inventiveness and aptitude of its users. The researcher supports this point of view because slang is a serviceable communication system. It can facilitate human communication and provide its users with some extra communicative functions (e.g. self-expression, fulfilling the need to give freshness and novelty in speech, express informality, and show solidarity within social groups) which cannot be attained perfectly by standard language.

One of the distinctive aspects of youth is their creativity in innovating and using slang. Previous sociolinguistic and lexicographic research on youth slang has documented the large number of resources available to speakers in the creation and displaying of youth identities. Elbe (1989), for example, argues that slang is a central component of youth culture and speaking a particular slang is determined by an individual's desire to identify with a specific speech community or an up to the minute trend in society. She states that *"slang is "an ever changing and fashionable set of vocabulary of sociability used to establish or reinforce identity cohesiveness within a group with a trend or fashion in a society at large"* (Elbe, 1989, p. 11). Moreover, she postulates that *"slang is strongly connected to social or group identity."* In addition, Labov (1992) argues that youth culture is characterized by the use of slang terms through which their identity is displayed. In addition, she argues that youth slang terms can be divided into three categories. These are: (1) those for describing people; (2) those for negatively and positively depicting people, activities, and places; and (3) those for leisure time activities. Furthermore, some linguists argue that men use slang more than women, and anyone of any socio-economic status can use slang in appropriate situations (e.g. Arluke, Kutakoff and Levin, 1987; Lighter 1994; Myers and Cortese, 1995; Tannen, 1990). Based on the generalizations above about slang, the present study is geared towards investigating whether the use of slang among Saudi youth fits some of the aforementioned characterizations.

1. Methodology

It is very important for the present study to differentiate SYS from general Saudi Arabic slang. Dumas and Lighter (1978, p. 14) provided four identifying criteria of general slang:

- (1) *"Its presence will markedly lower, at least for the moment, the dignity of formal or serious speech and the user will use the term,"* (3) *"It is a tabooed term in ordinary discourse with persons of higher social status or group identity" or* (b) *to 'protect the user from the discomfort or annoyance of further elaboration."*

The researcher believes that in order for a word to be considered a slang, it must signify and suggest an associative or secondary meaning, which is context sensitive and easy to be understood, in addition to its primary meaning. This can be added, as a fifth criterion, to Dumas and Lighter's four (1978) criteria.

Furthermore, to differentiate SYS from general Saudi slang, two extra criteria can be proposed: 1) SYS must be a restricted linguistic code, only used within Saudi youth communities, which may appear vague, strange, frivolous, or unrelated to the adults or even to the youth of other groups, who may find it meaningless in varying degrees and scarcely use it in their own speech, and 2) any SYS term or expression must be related to categories associated with youth life, appearance, peer relationship, money, and leisure, either positively or negatively. Therefore, the SYS terms presented in the present study are contingent on these seven identifying criteria. In the present study, SYS is regarded as the body of words and expressions, frequently used by Saudi youth, which are not accepted as formal usage by the society.

1.1. Study Questions

The present study addresses three questions: 1) What is the interrelatedness between the sociolinguistic variables of age and gender and the level of familiarity/frequency of using SYS?; 2) What are the new sources of acquiring SYS expressions and the reasons for using these expressions among Saudi youth? 3) What are the topics of interest of SYS among Saudi youth? It is expected that through a detailed investigation of these questions, the study of SYS will be enhanced and more research regarding this phenomenon will be conducted.

1.2. The Participants

The sample consists of native Saudi Arabic-speaking youth ($n=165$; 121 men, and 44 women). They were randomly selected. They were made aware that involvement in the study was voluntary. If consent to participate was given, they were asked to complete the questionnaire. The men-to-women ratio was slightly skewed towards the men side. The average age of the sample was 19.78 years ($SD = 1.61$) ranging from 18 to 23. This range of age is believed to be the most active age group in the production and use of slang in a society (Adams 2002; Androutsopoulos, 2000; Elbe 1989, 1996, 1998; Labov 1992). Moreover, it can represent a complete and clear picture about the youth slang used in Saudi Arabia. As for the educational background, the participants were undergraduate and postgraduate students, studying at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. All of them were native speakers of Saudi Arabic Dialect. They self-reported their families as middle-class. Detailed demographic information of the participants is shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2:

1.3. Method of Data Collection

To generate findings with a high level of reliability and validity and arrive at a better comprehension of the slang used by Saudi youth, the group under investigation, I used quantitative methods of research. Data were collected between 2014-2015 through a questionnaire. The data gathered served to investigate the reasons for using SYS and the functions the lexical items it employs serve in particular contexts.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to investigate the sociolinguistic features of SYS and the phenomenon of its usage among Saudi youth. A total of 180 copies were administered and 165 copies were valid (validity rate: 86%). The questionnaire was comprised of five sections. Section one consisted of questions related to the demographic background of the participants. In section two, participants were given 15 local popular examples of slang that are believed to be very common and well-known among Saudi youth. The participants were required to provide corresponding synonyms for each of the slang examples. They were also required to indicate the frequency of the usage for each of the 15 slang examples within their peer circles. The main purpose of this section was to provide a brainstorming exercise for the participants that helped them to warm-up for sections three, four and five, and more importantly, to give them a better and more concrete notion of what SYS is.

Section three aimed at collecting SYS words and phrases that Saudi youth use. In this section, participants were required to list out as many SYS expressions as possible and give whatever kinds or topics of SYS expressions they can think of. Consequently, this section provides an extensive amount of prototypical and genuine examples of SYS expressions. In addition, the data collected throughout this section provides a general idea about the most popular SYS expressions that are being used at the moment and the prevailing topics of interest that SYS centers on among Saudi youth nowadays. It is worth noting here that the objectives for both section two and three was primarily to ascertain which group (e.g. men or women) had the largest SYS vocabulary and expressions.

Section four of the questionnaire consisted of one question requiring the participants to indicate to what extent they learn SYS from friends, peers, siblings, watching television, reading magazines or the internet. The purpose of this question was to establish the extent to which these sources influenced the participants' use of SYS.

Lastly, in section five, the participants were provided with possible reasons why they might use SYS and requested to indicate the reasons applicable to them. In order to make this section as brief as possible, only five multiple questions and one open-ended question were included. They focus on a variety of issues about SYS such as frequency and reasons for its usage, strategic use of it in conversations, participants' attitude, and reactions towards it. The aim of this section was to ensure that the reasons they indicated from the list corresponded with what the participants thought important reasons. The rationale for the open-ended question, which required the participants to write down any other reasons why they use SYS, was to determine whether there might be reasons other than the ones the researcher had presented to the participants.

1.4. Procedures

All the questionnaires were completed under my direct administration. After the questionnaires were distributed to the participants, instructions in Arabic were given to them. The study background was clearly stated and explained. Then, the concept of youth slang was defined according to the seven identifying criteria previously mentioned. Questions raised by the participants were fully answered before the questionnaire session began. To avoid the potential self-censorship of the participants (Elbe, 1996) or the influence of Hawthorne Effect, the alteration of behavior by the participants of the study as a result of being observed (Ravid, 2010) through which participants might be reluctant to provide any true information about SYS or simply pretend not knowing any slang at all as they would like to show a good personal image to others, I told the participants that all the questionnaires would be directly processed by me and all the information would be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only. A mutual trust and friendly atmosphere therefore, was established. Moreover, in order to avoid the problem of participants trying to coin some fake SYS examples in an attempt to help the researcher (Wong, 2006) or for the sake of filling in all the blanks in the questionnaire, the participants were strongly advised to provide genuine slang examples which would be really used in their daily speech or among their friends.

Tables 1.3 and 1.4 show the phonetic symbols, as well as the sounds of SYS in general, used in transcribing of the collected data.

2. Analysis and Results

2.1. Questionnaire Reliability

Table 2.1 shows that the reliability of the responses to the questionnaire measured by Cronbach's alpha was (0.99). This indicates that the participants were able to participate coherently in the questionnaire and they took the process seriously. That is, they did not respond to it randomly or haphazardly.

2.2. Correlation between age and familiarity of SYS

The working out of a correlation between the variables of age and familiarity of SYS is an important finding in this study. Through section one and two of the questionnaire, a significant amount of SYS examples were collected. It is worth noting here that it was not assumed that knowledge of a SYS item implied actual habitual use thereof, but it was interpreted as an indication of exposure to the term. It was expected that age and familiarity of SYS are negatively correlated. That is, the younger a respondent is, the more SYS he/she should know, or vice versa. As previously mentioned in section 1.3, the age range of the participants was between 18 and 23. The mean was 20.8 years (SD = 2.53). To test the correlation between age and familiarity of SYS, *Pearson product-moment coefficient* was utilized. The findings are shown in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2 shows that the test result is statistically significant and a strong negative correlation existed between age and familiarity of SYS ($r = -0.659, p < .001$). Accordingly, the younger the age of a participant, the higher the level of his/her understanding of SYS. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that when he/she moves out of the realm of adolescence, his/her familiarity with SYS will be more or less lost.

2.3. Interaction between age, gender and familiarity of SYS

As shown in the previous section, a significant negatively correlated relationship is clear between the two variables of age and familiarity of SYS. The variable of gender can also influence one's familiarity of SYS. Thus, a *two-way ANOVA test of variance* was conducted to evaluate the effects of age and gender (two independent variables) on the familiarity of SYS (a dependent variable). As shown in Table 2.3, the independent variable of age was divided into three age groups which more or less correspond to the educational level of the participants, i.e. group one is for 18 to 19 years (junior undergraduate students), group two is for 20 to 21 years (senior undergraduate students), and group three is for 22 to 23 years (postgraduate students). The *two-way ANOVA*, as shown in Table 2.4, indicates that no significant interaction is present between age group and gender, $p = 0.675$, but there are indeed significant main effects for both gender, $p = 0.001$, and age group, $p < 0.001$ respectively. The gender main effect indicates, as shown in Table 2.5, a significant difference in the familiarity of SYS between men and women as shown in the higher total mean of men ($\bar{x} = 3.98$) than that of women ($\bar{x} = 2.72$). Therefore, men tend to have a slightly higher familiarity with SYS than women. The *two-way ANOVA* also indicates a significant difference in terms of familiarity of SYS existing among the three age groups. Table 2.6 presents the results of a follow-up test to the main effect of age group. This follow-up test consisted of all pairwise comparisons among the three age groups. Table 2.6 provides the results of the *Tukey HSD (Honestly Significant Difference)* procedure used to control for Type I error across the pairwise comparisons. Tables 2.6 and 2.7 present the results of this analysis which indicates that age group one (18-19 years of age) and age group two (20-21 years of age) are significantly more familiar with SYS than age group three (22-23 years of age). Accordingly, the results of the present study confirm the trend that familiarity of SYS decreases as age increases, which echoed with the results of section 2.2.

2.4. Interrelationship between gender and frequency of using SYS

The study of gender differences in language use is nothing new. Previous research has indicated that men and women differ in their use and language is largely gender-determined (Cheshire and Trudgill, 1998; Coates, 1999, 2004; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1998; Goodwin, 1994). Men were characterized as using more forceful and vulgar speech than women. On the contrary, women speech was believed to be more gentle and polite, and euphemistic expressions could be spotted more frequently and easily than in men's speech. This is equally true for SYS in a sense that significant differences between men and women SYS could be found as exemplified in the following findings and discussions.

2.5. Frequency of using SYS between men and women

The aim of question one in part three of the questionnaire was to investigate the frequency of using SYS between men and women in their daily speech. Participants were asked to evaluate themselves according to a 5-rank scale that ranges from 'never use slang' to 'very often to use slang'. As shown in Figure 2.1, a few findings were indeed beyond general expectations. First, only 26 women chose the option 'never' (never use SYS). This implies that SYS would be used among women, at least to a certain degree, whereas six men indicated that they never used slang at all in their speech. As for the option 'rare', men and women shared merely similar results. The most important finding is the fact that men and women did not share similar results in options for both 'occasional' and 'very often' and 'often'. Accordingly, the results of the present study are consistent with the conventional notion that men use slang more frequently than women (Flexner, 1975; Jespersen, 2013). In addition, they are similar to the findings of Labov (1992) and Trudgill (1974) who have established that men use more slang expressions than women and slang is man's domain. It is crystal clear that Saudi women are lagging behind their counterparts in the realm of SYS which is a property monopolized by men.

2.6. Sources of knowing new SYS among Saudi youth

To locate and differentiate the major sources through which Saudi youth know new SYS words and expressions, question two in the questionnaire was set up. As shown in Figure 2.2, participants mainly know new slang expressions through seven sources. These are: 1) peer groups, 2) sports activities, 3) university campus, 4) Internet (e.g. chat rooms; newsgroups), 5) wedding parties, 6) car drifting activities and 7) TV programs. The results show that men know new slang expressions via these seven sources. Women know these expressions through peer groups, university campus, and wedding parties only.

Therefore, the major sources, except peer groups, university campus, and wedding parties, through which men know new SYS expressions are different from those of women. Figure 2.2 indicates that unlike women, men are actively and constantly trying to build up their SYS lexicon through a variety of sources.

2.7. Reasons for using SYS among Saudi youth

In question three of the questionnaire, participants were required to choose the reasons why they use SYS out of 12 different options given. These options include: a) my friends use slang and I just follow them (due to peer pressure), b) to mock or insult others, c) to be fun or humorous, d) to be trendy, e) to be smart and cool, f) to help express oneself or to show emphasis, g) to be friendly, h) to be euphemistic, i) to be secretive, and lastly, participants are allowed to provide any other possible reasons in j) others.

Figure 2.3 shows that men and women share one reason for using SYS (i.e., desire to sound more funny and humorous.) Men and women use SYS expressions to break the ice in a conversation. Elbe (1996, p. 122) argues that humor can also be *"directed either inside a group or outside a group and can be either esteeming or disparaging."* She believes that the sense of fun and humor produced by slang can strengthen and reinforce the self-approval of oneself and secure his status among in-group members by teasing and laughing at those out-groups who are at the bottom of the youth communities. The results of the present study indicates that, unlike women, men also use SYS owing to four major reasons and the most important one is that they use it as a habitual practice. Their natural and habitual use of SYS is a core component in their speech. SYS, therefore, can be regarded as a language code commonly used among Saudi men to help set up a boundary separating their social group from others.

Peer pressure is another major reason for using SYS among men. Danesi (1994, p. 14) argues that peer pressure is *"a kind of verbal instrument which can strengthen peer-group identities and youth naturally use slang so as to demonstrate adherence and conformity to peer-generated and peer-sanctioned models of behavior."* Moreover, Dundes and Porter (1963, p. 273) point out that *"in order to get accepted by their peers, youth must conform to a rigid pattern of social behavior under which the individual is not permitted to be different, or risk being ostracized by the group."* In other words, slang can support its users with a particular group and thus, confirm a sense of belonging and group identification. *"Sharing and maintaining a constantly changing in-group vocabulary aids group solidarity and serves to include and exclude members"* (Elbe, 1996, p. 119). Therefore, *"a mastery of slang can secure one's position in the peer circle and gain respect from both in-group and out-group members in youth communities"* (Wong, 2006, p. 53).

Figure 2.3 also shows that SYS serves different social functions. Men would use SYS for teasing, laughing at, or insulting others. Besides, it plays an important role in promoting friendship within peer circles. Referring to this, Maltz and Borker (1982, p. 207) argue that *"men tend to achieve relative status and attain dominance in peer circles by demonstrating their verbal skills against one another through mockery or insult in an attempt to show an upper hand over the others and a skillful manipulation of slang, in particular during verbal dueling with others."* They also believe that slang can act as a promoter to peer relationship. Therefore, men address each other in disparaging slang expressions, but in a friendly manner.

2.8. Distributions of topics of interest of SYS between men and women

The total valid SYS examples provided by the participants cover three major topics, i.e. sex (including organs, and sexual activities), evaluations of people (men 62.53% and women 14.54%) and leisure and fun (men 57.23% and women 9.52). These three topics are of fundamental interests to youth in Saudi Arabia. Details are shown in Figure 2.4.

The number of SYS examples across the three topics of interest provided by men is different from the ones provided by women. Examples of sex (including organs and activities) were provided only by men. Moreover, for evaluations of people and leisure and fun, men outscored their women counterparts. Therefore, the findings of the present study confirm the notion that gender differences would lead to a different focus of slang across different topics of interest between men and women (Tannen, 1990). Besides, Lighter's (1994) claim that the use of sexual terms confined to men is now common in women speech too does not hold true in the findings of the present study.

Figure 2.4 shows that 83.55% of SYS terms collected are about sex. These lexical items, provided only by men, can be categorized into two semantic fields i.e. items used for describing 1) women and their sexual body parts, and 2) sexual intercourse and male sexual body parts.

Terms describing women and their sexual body parts includes, among others, *أبْهَمَة* /*abhma*/, 'beautiful woman', *سَبْعَة* /*sanʕa*/ 'stunning woman', *يَدْحَة* /*kawaiha*/, 'black woman', *بُزْجَة* /*būjja*/ 'ugly woman', and *فَجْحَة* /*fajha*/ 'obese woman'. In addition, there are some terms that describe women behavior (e.g. *بُويَة* /*būya*/ 'lesbian', *كَلَاوَكَة* /*kalwaka*/ 'slut', *مَامْبُونَة* /*mambūna*/ 'horny', *رَبِيحَة* /*rābiḥa*/ 'horny', *مِسْتَوِيَة* /*mistawya*/ 'horny', *حَبَابِيق* /*hababiq*/ 'lesbian'.) The collected data also include some lexical items that describe women's and men's buttocks (e.g. *مَكْوَة* /*makwa*/, *حَبَابَة* /*habba*/, *أُمُّ* /*um*/, *أَحْمَد* /*ahmad*/, *أَلِيخَة* /*alixā*/, *سِتْبَنَة* /*sitbna*/.) For woman's anus, the word *مَسَة* /*xamsa*/ was found in the collected data. Besides, the word *مِفْدِرَة* /*amifdira*/ is used to refer to a woman with big buttocks. Moreover, woman's vagina was referred to as *فَق* /*fag*/, and *أَحْر* /*ahar*/ . In addition, the word *كَبِينِي* /*kibinī*/ is used to refer to a fantastic vagina, and *مِرَاتِيْب* /*mirattib*/ to a wet vagina. Moreover, the word *دِيْد* /*dyūd*/ is used for breasts and *زِنْمَة* /*zinma*/ for women's clitoris.

Examples of the terms and expressions describing sexual intercourse and male sexual body parts include *يَجْفُشُف* /*yajfif*/ 'touching another person's tongue, i.e. French kiss), and *يَجْفُف* /*yajʕaf*/ 'gently sucking another person's lip to send a strong romantic signal), *أَفْرَس* /*afriṣ*/ 'sexual intercourse', *أَفْخِيَة* /*afxiya*/ 'intercultural sex', *أَهَابَهَا* /*ahabha*/ 'He had sexual intercourse with her', *أَبِيك سِبْرْمِيْنَلَبْمِي* /*abīk sibriminlabmi*/ 'I want to have sex with you', *أَنْعَب* /*anʕab*/ 'touching a woman's/ a man's buttocks), *زَرْب* /*zarb*/ 'sexual intercourse', *أَلْبِيْق* /*albiq*/ 'inserting of the erect penis into a woman's or man's anus for sexual pleasure', *أَتَجَلِيخ* /*atjlix*/ 'masturbation', *أَبُوْت* /*abbūt*/ 'condoms', *أَنْعَب* /*anʕab*/ 'anus', and *أَمِيْهِنَة* /*amiḥna*/ 'sexual desire'. The head of the penis was referred as *أَمَة* /*ama*/ and *أَكْمَرَة* /*akma*/ . The words *أَلِيْر* /*ir*/, *أَفَيْد* /*faid*/, *أَغْرَان* /*agrān*/, *أَفْصَة* /*afṣa*/, *أَلِي* /*ali*/, *أَقْوَع* /*aqwʕ*/, and *أَقِيْر* /*aqir*/ are used to refer to the penis. Also, the word *أَمِسَالَة* /*amisallah*/ is used to describe a man with a large penis. In addition, *أَمِبَسَبِيْس* /*mibasbis*/ and *أَمِيْكْرِي* /*mīkri*/ are used to describe gay men.

It is clear that gender differences exist in the use of SYS sexual lexical items. Due to Saudi cultural norms, the use of such items by women is not only viewed as unacceptable, but also strongly discouraged. Therefore, unlike women, men use sexually explicit words, have an extensive number of sexual vocabulary, which are erotic, vulgar, and yet creative and vivid in nature. This is an indication of "underlying conceptual and cultural assumptions concerning gender and sexuality, which differ according to the gender of the producers" (Wong, 2006, p. 20). Besides, it implies a high level of confidence, which is typically attributed to men's language in the Saudi society. Accordingly, the results of the present study are consistent with the previous studies which supported empirically gender differences in sexual slang use (e.g. Myers and Cortese, 1995; De Klerk, 1990; Phillips, 1990; Preston and Stanley, 1987; Arluke, Kutakoff and Levin, 1987; Jay, 1980).

Figure 2.4 also shows that the second most popular topic of interest after sex is evaluation of people. It also indicates that the examples provided by men (62.53 %) are larger than those provided by women (14.54%). The majority of these examples bear negative meanings and connotations, though a few examples with positive evaluations and appraisals can be found. Some typical negative examples are *أَكْبِيْل* /*akbil*/ 'stupid', *أَبِيْغْنَة* /*abighna*/ 'pain in the neck', *أَبُوْر* /*abūr*/ 'talkative', *أَكِيْدِيْس* /*akidīs*/ 'useless', *أَقِيْطِي* /*aqiṭi*/ 'stingy', *أَمِبَازْوَة* /*mibazwa*/ 'careless', *أَمِبَايْكَة* /*mibayka*/ 'idiot', *أَمِل* /*aml*/ 'stinky', *أَخْجَمَة* /*xajmah*/ 'dunce', *أَوْرُوْج* /*awruj*/ 'pusillanimous', *أَمِخَاوِيْز* /*mīxāwīz*/ 'biased', *أَشْرَر* /*ashrar*/ 'drug-addicted', *أَزْلَانِي* /*azlanī*/ 'a person who preys on women', *أَمَاوِي* /*māhawwi*/ 'goon', *أَمِبَرَانِي* /*mībārānī*/ 'a person who likes to have sex with young boys', *أَجْبَلَة* /*ajballa*/ 'unashamed', *أَمِبَسَبِيْس* /*mibasbis*/ 'snitch', *أَمِبَة* /*mībah*/ 'wimp', *أَمِبَرِيْب* /*mīrib*/ 'discourteous', *أَمِيْسَالِي* /*mīsalī*/ 'miser', *أَمِيْفَاهِي* /*mīfāhi*/ 'simple-minded', *أَمِسْوَان* /*mīswān*/ 'smelly', *أَمِكَمَا* /*mīkama*/ 'foolish', *أَمَاغْرُوْد* /*māgrūd*/ 'unlucky', *أَمَالُوْف* /*mālūf*/ 'nosy', *أَمِيْهَاتِي* /*mīhāti*/ 'cocky', *أَمَسْيُوْل* /*masyūl*/ 'naughty', *أَمَلِيْع* /*amlīʕ*/ 'unashamed', *أَمَلِيْج* /*amlīj*/ 'penniless', *أَمِلَاوُوْح* /*mīlāwūḥ*/ 'vagrant', *أَمِلَاوُوْح* /*mīlāwūḥ*/ 'penniless', *أَمِغْبِي* /*mīghbi*/ 'haggard', *أَمِلِيْل* /*mīlīl*/ 'stupid', *أَمِيْرَار* /*mīrār*/ 'pimp', *أَمِيْهَابِيْب* /*mīhābīb*/ 'drug-addicted', *أَمِيْجَب* /*mījās*/ 'pygmy', *أَمِيْخَاوِيْز* /*mīxāwīz*/ 'coward', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'rude', *أَمِيْكَسْوَانِي* /*mīkāsawānī*/ 'swine', *أَمِيْغْرَار* /*mīghrār*/ 'grump', *أَمِيْغْرَار* /*mīghrār*/ 'panhandler', *أَمِيْغْرَار* /*mīghrār*/ 'slim', *أَمِيْخَاوِيْز* /*mīxāwīz*/ 'pushover', *أَمِيْخَاوِيْز* /*mīxāwīz*/ 'phony', *أَمِيْخَاوِيْز* /*mīxāwīz*/ 'dopey', *أَمِيْخَاوِيْز* /*mīxāwīz*/ 'scatterbrain', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'impulsive', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'lire', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'very angry', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'thief', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'Syrian man', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'Egyptian man', *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'unwise' and *أَمِيْجِي* /*mīji*/ 'plumber'.

Typical positive examples include 'ثوقدي' /*Jigirdi*/ 'skillful', 'مِرَاسِم' /*mirassim*/ 'stylish', 'أَطْخَم' /*aṭṭaxam*/ 'handsome', 'أَبَلِييَّة' /*Abeliyya*/ 'astute', 'أَبْخَاص' /*abḫaṣ*/ 'highly knowledgeable', 'مَغْزِي' /*maghzi*/ 'rich', 'أَوْوِدِي' /*aḳwidi*/ 'generous', 'بَاطِرَان' /*batrān*/ 'courageous', 'بِزَّة' /*bizza*/ 'swinger', 'مُتَوَّخ' /*mutawwax*/ 'generous', 'مُشَيِّتَة' /*muṣṣiṭah*/ 'a person who has a good reputation', 'كِلْبَان' /*kilbān*/ 'handsome', 'مُصْطَفَى' /*muṣṭafā*/ 'studious', 'أَمْلُوحَة' /*ammlūḥab*/ 'pretty', 'مِسْفَهْل' /*misfahil*/ 'happy', 'فَانَاب' /*fānab*/ 'reliable', 'مِيدَارِصِم' /*midarṣim*/ 'nimble', 'مِسْتَلِج' /*mistilliq*/ 'active', 'دَافِر' /*dāfir*/ 'diligent', 'أَمَل' /*āmil*/ 'resolute', 'سَانَيْدِي' /*sanāydi*/ and 'زِكْرَت' /*zikirt*/ 'a group of men'.

Finally, the third topic of interest is about leisure and fun which focuses primarily on a few activities such as car drifting and pleasure trips. By looking at the SYS lexicon, we will be able to understand what types of leisure and fun occupy the time of Saudi youth most and what kind of lifestyle they are generally in. The collected data show that men have two hobbies they intensely love to practice or at least watch. These are 'فَافِي' /*fāfi*/ 'tire-burning acrobatics' and 'تَاوِي' /*taḳwi*/ 'off-roading'. Among the collected lexical items related to 'فَافِي' /*fāfi*/ and 'تَاوِي' /*taḳwi*/ are 'مَارَة' /*ḥāra*/ 'excellent driver', 'مِسَازِز' /*misazziz*/ 'driver assistant', 'مُكَب' /*muḳib*/ 'legions of youth', 'تَرْهِيم' /*tarhīm*/ 'exterior car decoration' and 'مِصْصَاص' /*miṣṣaṣ*/ 'a vehicle specifically meant for off-road use'. Also, the collected data includes lexical items as 'كَاثَة' /*kaṯa*/ 'pleasure trip', 'مِسْتِزَال' /*mistinzāl*/ 'crazy dance', 'أَيَسَاسِيس' /*ayisāsīs*/ 'roam the streets', 'وَجْج' /*wajwij*/ 'roam around', 'وَجْج' /*wajwij*/ 'hang around', 'أَيَيس' /*ayīs*/ 'desert', 'زِيَهَاب' /*ziḥāb*/ 'desert supplies and provisions' and 'جَمَة' /*ajma*/ 'hilly area'.

It is crystal clear that most of SYS is created and used by men. Many types of SYS words including the taboo and strongly derogatory ones, those referring to sex, women, money, sports, and the like refer primarily to men's endeavors and interests. This is due to the fact that men belong to more sub-groups than women. Men have acquaintances that belong to many different sub-groups. However, women in Saudi Arabia still tend to be restricted to family and neighborhood friends. They seldom mingle with other groups. Besides, Saudis are less tolerant of women using slang. In addition, men are ready to challenge traditional conventions and customs. They tend to make good use of SYS terms. They use these terms in very informal environment, particularly chatting with close friends, because, I believe, SYS lexical items and expressions are efficient shorthand ways to express their ideas and concepts. Besides, the use of SYS makes their communication more efficient and reinforces their relationships.

3. Limitations of the study

The data collected have a high level of validity and authenticity. However, it might still be bound by some potential constraints. The most important one is concerned with the temporality of the data. Algeo (1980, p. 267) argues that "slang is like leaves "every year old ones wither and fall away, and every year new ones sprout and thrive." So, since the lifespan of a majority of slang expressions is noticeably short (Lighter, 1994; Elbe 1996; Thorne, 2009), it is possible that a slang expression can belong to SYS at the time when it is gathered, but it might have become general slang, ceased to be slang, or simply disappeared. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that SYS is time-specific and most of the examples listed in this study are largely confined to the period between the year 2014 and 2015 in the youth communities in Saudi Arabia. In addition, although data were collected from participants of different age groups and social backgrounds, a normal distribution of data cannot be perfectly guaranteed since the use of SYS is certainly not homogeneous across different Saudi youth communities as SYS is group-specific. Therefore, SYS expressions of a particular youth group may not be fully understood by youth from others. Finally, many SYS examples were provided without their exact meaning. Therefore, I sought the assistance of my students at Al-Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University for clarifications.

4. Conclusion

SYS is one of the language varieties in Saudi Arabic. It is the product of Saudi youth culture and Saudi society. It performs functions that aid to Saudi youth development and provide them with a language code for their personal world. It helps them develop a sense of individuality, belonging, and a place in the Saudi society. They use it to paint a vivid picture of their emotions so that listeners can truly understand how they feel. Therefore, it can be considered as a badge of identity and an important clue to social group membership.

This study looks into different issues of SYS from a sociolinguistic point of view. It analyzes the social factors influencing SYS. It concludes that age and SYS are negatively correlated. That is, the younger a person is, the higher the level of his/her acquaintance of SYS. Moreover, gender plays a significant role in determining one's familiarity with SYS. It is found that men tend to have higher familiarity with SYS than women. Likewise, there is a significant difference between men and women in terms of frequency of using SYS. In all social occasions, men's rank is higher than their women counterparts. They are capable of coining new words and changing the meaning of established Saudi Arabic dialect to convey their feelings and draw pictures of the people and events in their social world. That is, the coinage of new words and changing the meaning of established words allow them to descriptively label their world. Moreover, this study sheds lights on the primary sources from which Saudi youth come across new SYS expressions and the underlying reasons for using them. Besides, it discusses the three major topics of interest on which SYS focuses. It was found that men and women share different interests in terms of SYS topics, especially the sexual one.

SYS is so broad that one study alone barely skims the surface. The current study shed light on many areas; however, many issues concerning all aspects of SYS still require further investigation. The study of SYS is still in its infant stage in the field of sociolinguistics. It is hoped that through this study, researchers and academicians will have an interest in SYS and more in-depth research can be done in the future.

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Tables

Table 1.1 *Distribution of the gender of the participants*

| Gender | Frequency | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| ValidMen | 121 | 73.3 | 73.3 |
| Women | 44 | 26.7 | 100 |
| Total | 165 | 100 | |

Table 1.2: *Distribution of the age groups of the participants*

| Age | Frequency | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| 18 | 45 | 27.3 | 27.3 |
| 19 | 42 | 25.5 | 52.7 |
| 20 | 27 | 16.4 | 69.1 |
| 21 | 20 | 12.1 | 81.2 |
| 22 | 17 | 10.3 | 91.5 |
| 23 | 14 | 8.5 | 100 |
| Total | 165 | 100 | |

Table 1.3: Consonant symbols used in the transcription of SYS examples

| Bilabial | Labio-Dental | Inter-Dental | Dental | Alveolar | Alveo-Palatal | Palatal | Velar | Uvular | Pharyngeal | Glottal | |
|----------|--------------|--------------|--------|----------|---------------|---------|----------|--------|------------|---------|-----------------------------------|
| | | | t ت | t ط | | | k ك | | | ' | Stops Voiceless |
| b ب | | | d د | d ض | | | g ج/ق | | | ء | Voiced |
| | f ف | θ ظ | | s س | ʃ ص | | | x خ | ħ ح | h ه | Fricatives Voiceless |
| | | ð ذ | | z ز | | | | ʁ غ | | | Voiced |
| | | | | | j ج | | | | | | Affricates Voiceless Voiced |
| m م | | | n ن | | | | | | | | Nasal |
| | | | l ل | | | | | | | | Lateral |
| | | | r ر | | | | | | | | Trill |
| w و | | | | | y ي | | | | | | Glides |

Table 1.4
Vowel symbols used in the transcription of SYS examples

| | Front | | Central | | Back | |
|------|-------|------|---------|------|-------|------|
| | Short | Long | Short | Long | Short | Long |
| High | | ĩ | | | | ũ |
| Mid | i | | | | u | |
| Low | | | a | ã | | |

Table 2.1: Reliability of the questionnaire survey

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| 0.998 | 110 |

Table 2.2: *Correlations between age and familiarity of SYS*

| | | Age | Valid SYS |
|-----------|--------------------|----------|-----------|
| Age | Pearson Correlatio | 1 | -0.659** |
| | Sig. (2 tailed) | . | .000 |
| | N | 165 | 165 |
| Valid SYS | Pearson Correlatio | -0.659** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2 tailed) | .000 | . |
| | N | 165 | 165 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2.3
The division of the independent variable of age into three age groups

| Age | Frequency | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 18-19 | 87 | 52.7 |
| | 20-21 | 47 | 28.5 |
| | 22-23 | 31 | 18.8 |
| | 165 | 100.0 | |

Table 2.4
Two-way ANOVA test of the effect of age group and gender on the familiarity of SYS

| Dependent Variable: Valid Slang | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|-----------------|-----|
| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Squared | Eta |
| Corrected Model | 117.613 ^a | 5 | 23.523 | 50.543 | .000 | .614 | |
| Intercept | 921.940 | 1 | 921.940 | 1980.951 | .000 | .926 | |
| gender | 50.115 | 1 | 50.115 | 107.681 | .000 | .404 | |
| age group | 56.014 | 2 | 28.007 | 60.178 | .000 | .431 | |
| gender * age group | .366 | 2 | .183 | 0.394 | .675 | .005 | |
| Error | 73.999 | 159 | .465 | | | | |
| Total | 2388.000 | 165 | | | | | |
| Corrected Total | 191.612 | 164 | | | | | |

Table 2.5
Mean and standard deviation of the familiarity of youth slang

| Dependent Variable: Valid Slang | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|--------|------|----------------|
| Gender | Age Group | Number | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Men | 18-19 | 60 | 4.53 | 0.595 |
| | 20-21 | 38 | 3.73 | 0.723 |
| | 22-23 | 23 | 2.95 | 0.824 |
| | Total | 121 | 3.98 | 0.912 |
| Women | 18-20 | 27 | 3.25 | 0.764 |
| | 21-23 | 9 | 2.22 | 0.440 |
| | 24-26 | 8 | 1.50 | 0.534 |
| | Total | 44 | 2.72 | 0.973 |
| Total | 18-20 | 87 | 4.13 | 0.878 |
| | 21-23 | 47 | 3.44 | 0.904 |
| | 24-26 | 31 | 2.58 | 0.992 |
| | Total | 165 | 3.64 | 1.08 |

Table 2.6: *Pairwise comparisons among the three groups*

| Dependent Variable: Valid Slang | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|-------------------|---|-------------|---------|
| (I) age group | (J) age group | | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. ^a | 95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a | | |
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | |
| dimension1 | 1 | dimension2 | 2 | .917* | .149 | .000 | .622 | 1.211 |
| | | | 3 | 1.668* | .161 | .000 | 1.350 | 1.986 |
| | 2 | dimension2 | 1 | -.917* | .149 | .000 | -1.211- | -.622- |
| | | | 3 | .751* | .189 | .000 | .379 | 1.124 |
| | 3 | dimension2 | 1 | -1.668* | .161 | .000 | -1.986- | -1.350- |
| | | | 2 | -.751* | .189 | .000 | -1.124- | -.379- |

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

Table 2.7: *Tukey HSD among the three groups*

| (I) age group | (J) age group | | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | | |
|---------------|---------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|-------------|----------|
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | |
| dimension2 | 1 | dimension3 | 2 | .6911* | .12350 | .000 | .3989 | .9833 |
| | | | 3 | 1.5573* | .14270 | .000 | 1.2197 | 1.8949 |
| | 2 | dimension3 | 1 | -.6911* | .12350 | .000 | -.9833- | -.3989- |
| | | | 3 | .8662* | .15785 | .000 | .4927 | 1.2396 |
| | 3 | dimension3 | 1 | -1.5573* | .14270 | .000 | -1.8949- | -1.2197- |
| | | | 2 | -.8662* | .15785 | .000 | -1.2396- | -.4927- |

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = .465.

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Figures

Figure 2.1
Frequency of using SYS between Men and Women

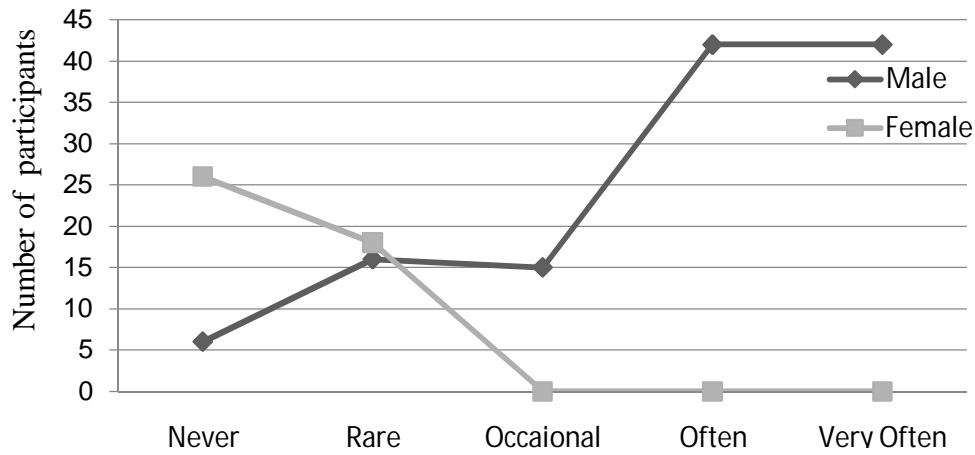


Figure 2.2
Sources of knowing new SYS among Saudi youth

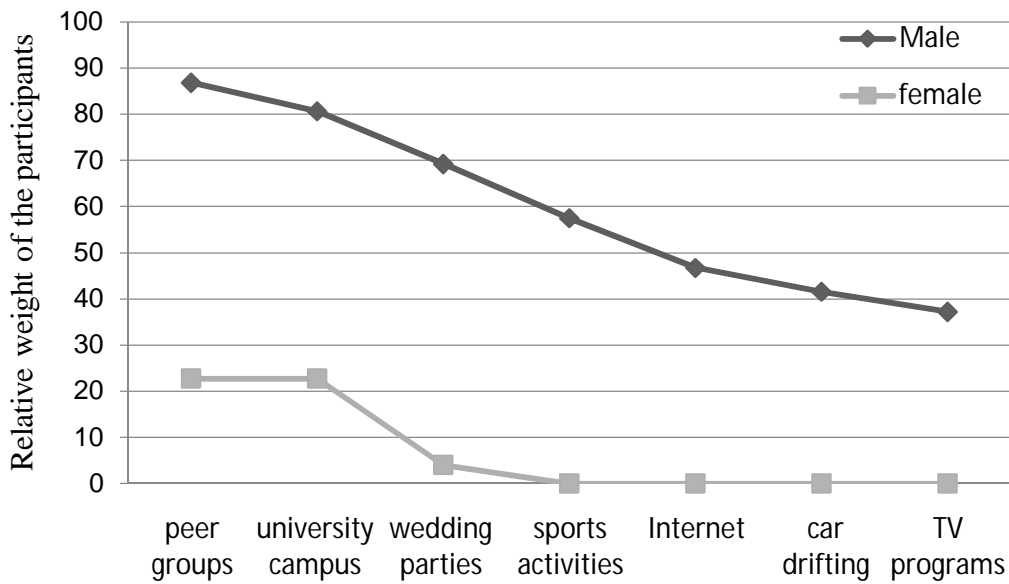


Figure 2.3
Reasons for using SYS among Saudi youth

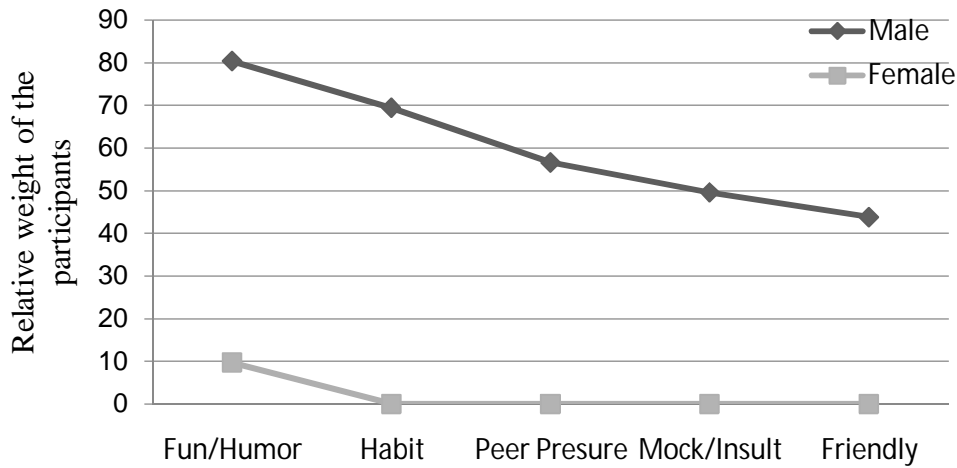


Figure 2.4
Distributions of topics of interest of SYS between Men and Women

