

## **THE STUDY OF SLANG UTTERANCES IN *BRICK* MOVIE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study discussed about slang utterances found in the movie entitled *Brick* directed by Rian Johnson. It is interesting to conduct slang research on *Brick* movie since it is a unique neo-noir movie which portrays teenager's life that speak in an invented slang in the '20s, '30s, and '40s. By using descriptive qualitative method, the purpose of the study is to identify the types of slang appeared in the conversation and to observe the context behind the slang used in *Brick* movie. The slang data is analyzed based on the types of American Slang theory by Chapman (1988) and by Partridge (1933). To support the analysis of context, the writers used the Ethnography of Speaking by Hymes (1974). Regarding to the research findings, the writers identified that there are three types of slang used by the seven characters in *Brick* movie script, namely: student slang, primary slang and secondary slang. The most frequently type of slang is secondary slang with total of 12 data. Furthermore, the meaning of each slang utterances is not only based on dictionaries but also based on the context of situation, such as setting, participants, ends, act, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre. In conclusion, this study showed that there are many aspects of slang which can be analyzed more deeply into several other branches of linguistics, such as sociolinguistic, pragmatic and semantic.

**Keywords:** slang, types of slang, contextual meaning of slang, ethnography of speaking, *Brick* movie

### **ABSTRAK**

*Penelitian ini membahas tentang ujaran slang yang ditemukan dalam film berjudul Brick, yang disutradai oleh Rian Johnson. Melakukan penelitian terhadap slang di film Brick sangat menarik, sebab film tersebut adalah film neo-noir unik yang menggambarkan kehidupan remaja yang berbicara dalam bahasa slang yang diciptakan pada tahun 20-an, 30-an, dan 40-an. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis slang yang muncul dalam percakapan dan untuk mengamati konteks di balik*

*slang yang digunakan dalam film Brick. Data slang di analisis berdasarkan teori jenis-jenis slang Amerika oleh Chapman (1988) dan oleh Partridge (1933). Untuk mendukung analisis konteks, penulis menggunakan teori Etnografi Komunikasi oleh Hymes (1974). Mengenai temuan penelitian, penulis mengidentifikasi bahwa ada tiga jenis slang yang digunakan oleh tujuh karakter dalam naskah film Brick, yaitu: slang pelajar, slang primer dan slang sekunder. Jenis slang yang paling sering muncul adalah slang sekunder dengan jumlah 12 data. Lebih jauh lagi, makna dari setiap ujaran slang tidak hanya berdasarkan pada kamus, tetapi juga berdasarkan pada situasi konteks, seperti latar, partisipan, tujuan, tindak komunikatif, kaidah interaksi, bentuk pesan, norma, dan tipe peristiwa komunikasi. Kesimpulan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ada banyak aspek slang yang dapat dianalisis lebih dalam ke beberapa cabang linguistik lainnya, seperti sosiolinguistik, pragmatik dan semantik.*

**Kata kunci:** *slang, jenis-jenis slang, makna kontekstual slang, etnografi komunikasi, film Brick*

## A. INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool of communication that is used to interact with other people. It is used to convey or exchange a message to other people in oral or even in written way. Crimmon cited in Abadi (2009) states that "Standard English has two variants; formal and informal English" (p. 2). Formal English is usually used for serious texts and situations, such as research, business, application letter, papers, and so on. On the other hand, informal English is called colloquialism that is used in daily communication. When colloquial becomes extremely informal, it shades over slang.

Slang is expressions that do not belong to Standard English (Mencken, 1984). It is considered as non-standard because it does not follow the regular syntax, grammar, phonetic, and pragmatic of a Standard English. The use of slang in the movie industry also has become a common thing in order to express the characterization of the actors. *Brick* is a 2005 American crime mystery movie directed by Rian Johnson and starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt as the main actor.

It is interesting to analyze *Brick* movie because it is a unique neo-noir movie; a French term meaning "new black film" and it is a term to describe the old Hollywood crime movies which are not black and white. *Brick* movie portrays teenager's life which the setting and characters are about high school teenagers and it makes this movie different from other neo-noir movies. Moreover, it has received numerous awards such as won the Special Jury Prize for Originality of Vision at the Sundance Film Festival and most of the conversations between seven characters in the movie all speak in an invented slang in the '20s, '30s, and '40s that can be analyzed by the writers.

There are two objectives of this research. The first is to identifying the types of slang that appeared in the conversation in *Brick* movie and the second is to observe the context behind the slang used in *Brick* movie.

## **B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. The Definition of Slang**

According to Chapman (1987), “slang is language that little to do with the main aim of the language, the connection of sounds with ideas in order to communicate each idea, but is rather an attitude, a feeling and an act” (p. 15). Based on Eble (1996), as an ever-changing set of informal words and phrases, most of the speakers use slang to emphasize social identity or cohesiveness within a subgroup or with a trend in society at large. Swan (1996) suggests slang as a part of the utterance and special expression of language founded mainly in our everyday conversation, especially in the particular groups of people. For the most of it, slang is usually used in younger groups of people.

From the definitions above, every linguist has different perspective about the definition of slang. However, all of the definitions agree that slang is “in-group” utterances (a group with which one feels a sense of solidarity or community of interests) because the speaker has to be a part of the accepted group to use slang utterances. Hence, the writers conclude that slang is very informal utterances that belong to a particular group of people and used in certain context to express something in a new way. In addition, slang reflects the social background of the speaker.

### **2. Partridge’s theory of Slang Types**

According to Partridge (1933) in his book *Slang Today and Yesterday*, there are some types of slang as follows

#### **a. Cockney Slang**

The term of cockney slang refers to working-class people in England, especially for east London. It is often use in reference to the cockney accent and cockney slang is the brightest spot in England because it has a very pronounced accent, for example; there is a change in consonantal variation of *th* to *f* or *v* sound, as in *fank you* for thank you. Cockney slang often rhyming and includes humor. Many phrases make sarcastic or ironic references to their subjects, such as *fat boy slim* for gym.

#### **b. Public House Slang**

The definition of public house slang is considered as public house group words and phrases make up for the smallness of the recorded vocabulary by nature the subject. It is genial, cheery, materialistic, but not gross nor cynical.

**c. Workmen's Slang**

This slang has a link with public house slang. This type also very closed to tradesman slang, but the difference is the characteristic of the slang usually considered to people's activity and related with money. For example, *brass* means money.

**d. Tradesmen's Slang**

In tradesmen's slang as in workmen's slang, some words are related to origin slang and the users are the workmen too. But, the difference is there are four typical users of tradesmen's slang: tailors, butchers, chemist, and builders. The tailors have the largest number of slang.

**e. Slang in Publicity**

This type of slang is often used for commerce, because much of modern commerce depends on publicity, a firm needs the catchy phrase or rhymes that can impress the public. For example, *sunlight* means soap.

**f. Slang in Art**

The utterances of artistic slang are quickly adopted by the society, although there are only a few words known as artistic slang. Slang in art is considerable more difficult than other slang terms, the meaning is so difficult to guess in present day. For example, *Gamut* means a picture, a detail, etc.

**g. Slang in Theatre or Theatrical Slang**

Slang in theatre is related with slang in art because theatre is one of art term. Theatre slang itself begins to develop in nineteenth centuries and expand its influence on ordinary and informal spoken English. Shakespeare used this slang in his plays for stylistic purposes, for example; *miching* from Hamlet means sneaking or hiding in the shadow.

**h. Slang in Schools and Universities or Student Slang**

The user of this slang is student, because their slang is fresh and full of creativity. The slang utterances are usually produced in a shortened, easier and more relax way. For example, *what's the mat?* Means what is the matter.

## **i. Military or Soldier's Slang**

Military slang is slang that comes around from the army community that is generally used by soldiers. Military slang is often used to reinforce or reflect (usually friendly and humorous) intergroup competition. Military slang shows the slang utterances connect to the war and attributes. For example, *come to the old soldier* means to attempt.

## **3. Chapman's theory of Slang Types**

According to Chapman (1988), types of American slang are basically subdivided into two types; they are Primary Slang and Secondary Slang.

### **a. Primary Slang**

Primary slang is general slang expressions that often hear or used by speakers in their daily communication. It is not connected with a certain group in the society because the speakers are not just some people in a group but every person in order to avoid conventions and seriousness. It is used instead of clichés and standard language to change the level of formality. For instance, public slang: *footy* means football.

### **b. Secondary Slang**

Secondary slang is an utterances that used to express something in secret way where just restricted people who understand the meaning of that utterances. Therefore, it is mainly spoken by members of similar group. Some groups which produce their own slang are even engaged in illegal activities. For instance, drug user slang: *smack* means heroine.

## **4. Context**

Hymes (1974) found that there are several components of speech events that abbreviated as SPEAKING. They are (S) setting, (P) participants, (E) ends, (A) act characteristics, (K) keys, (I) instrumentalities, (N) norms of interaction and interpretation, and (G) genres that will be explained as follows

### **(S) Setting or Scene**

Setting is associated with the physical circumstance of a communicative event or refers with the time of conversation occurs. Meanwhile, scene is kind of psychological setting viewed from the cultural definition.

## (P) Participants

Participants are persons or individuals involving in a speech event. Participants consist of addresser, addressee, and audience. Addresser is a speaker or a writer who pronounces the utterance. Addressee is a hearer or reader who receives the utterance. Meanwhile, audience is the large amount of the hearer who may contribute the specification of speech events.

## (E) Ends

Ends are divided into two parts namely outcome and goal. Outcome is the purpose of the event from cultural point of view, while the goal is the purpose of the individual participants. Ends deliver the purpose that uttered by a speaker such as to inform, to discuss, to persuade, and event just to chitchat.

## (A) Act

Act sequence defines how something is said (the form of the message) and what is said by the speaker (the content of message). Act sequence can be correlated with the aesthetic and stylistic manner of the speaker in conversation.

## (K) Key

Key indicates the manner of a speaker that leads the hearer to the hidden message of speakers. The hidden message indicates by the tone, manner, feeling, atmosphere and attitude that occur in conversation.

## (I) Instrumentalities

Instrumentalities construct channel and the form of speech. How the speaker sends information to the hearer is defined as channel. Meanwhile, the form of the speech is related to the code and sub code variants.

## (N) Norms

Norms refer to the rules used within conversation and interaction. Norms of interaction is set of linguistic features controlling when and how often speech occurs. Meanwhile, norms of interpretation have a purpose to figure out what is being conveyed beyond the choice of word.

## (G) Genre

Genre is kind of categories of speech. It can be daily language, oration, editorial, course, teaching, prayer, etc. Generally, genre is associated with speech event. It can be cultural or traditional speech genres.

## **C. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research conducted as a descriptive qualitative research because the research uses data in the form of words; written or spoken words of the people and behaviors that can be observed, not controlled by laboratory and numbers or statistics as the tools in analyzing the data.

The data of this research is all utterances that contain slang. Meanwhile, the data source of this research is taken from *Brick* (2005) movie script. From this movie, the writers analyzed the slang utterances of the seven characters and the context situation of the movie.

As qualitative research, the writers themselves became the instrument of the research. There are three steps the writers used in this research. The first step is watching *Brick* movie for several times to have a very good understanding out of it. The second step, the writers marked and made a list of every utterance that included into slang from the dialog, monolog, and the narration contained in the movie script. The third step is sorted and organized the screenshot or dialogues as the sample of the data that related to slang utterances and its context.

The research used library technique which means it needs literary sources that are already collected relevant with the research (George, 2008). To make a right discussion of the slang, it started by classifying the types of slang and looking for the scenes to describe the context in every data of slang utterances. After the technique has done, then the conclusion is drawn.

In addition, the writers used data triangulation in this research by comparing the movie script data and the screen data taken from the screenshot in order to make sure the data presented is valid.

## **D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **1. Findings**

#### **a. Types of Slang**

The writers found about twenty four utterances containing slang inside eighteen dialogues in *Brick* movie script. In referring to the first research question, there are three types of slang found. They are Student slang, Primary slang and Secondary slang. The meaning of some slang are from slang dictionaries such as NTC's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expression 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Partridge's Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, Shorter Slang Dictionary and Criminal Slang Dictionary of 1890 to 1919 to intensify the analysis. The complete result of the slang in *Brick* movie can be seen as follows



Table 1. Findings of the Data

No.	Slang Data	The Meaning in the Movie	Types of Slang
1	Specs	Spectacles	Student Slang
2	Take a powder	Run away	
3	Sap	An idiot or foolish	
4	Shines	To wield	
5	Ace	High quality	
6	Lapdog	A submissive man	Primary Slang
7	Cops	Police officer	
8	Cell	Mobile phone	
9	No dice	No chance	
10	Burgh	Town or City	
11	Blow	To leave	
12	Duck soup	Very easy	
13	Brick	Heroin	Secondary Slang
14	Raise	Get in touch	
15	Clam	Remain Silent	
16	Hash head	A frequent user of hashish	
17	Shamus	Private Detective	
18	Squawk	To expose	
19	Bull	Police officer	
20	Cash on the nail	Get money immediately	
21	Reef worm	A drug addict	
22	Hop	Drug	
23	Pow-wow	A meeting	
24	C's	100 (One hundred)	

## b. Student Slang

- The Brain : Last I saw, she was with what's her name, that drama vamp.  
Small time dealer, the evil one, the one you dated.
- Brendan : Kara. You know her locker number?
- The Brain : Kara's?
- Brendan : Em's.
- The Brain : 239.
- Brendan : Thanks Brain. Keep your **specs** on, find me if she shows.
- The Brain : Sure.

**Specs** are considered as slang because it comes from word with previously different meaning. In the mid-twentieth century it was used to be the shorter form of specifications, as in job **specs**. Now in this movie, **specs** are the shorter form of



spectacles. Besides, the meaning of the word is found in the Shorter Slang Dictionary by Paul Beale. This slang is categorized into student slang because it is produced in shortened way by Brendan the high school student which belongs to the characteristic of student slang.

In the following conversation, the participants are Brendan and The Brain. Brendan is a loner high school student who is looking for his ex-girlfriend named Emily. The Brain is a smart student who wears big round glasses. They are talking about the information of Kara and Emily as the topic. The setting is at the school across the parking lot. The discussion takes place in the afternoon after school.

Brendan is the speaker of the slang **specs**. When Brendan said, “keep your **specs** on” he is referring to The Brain’s eyeglasses. This slang occurs in order to maintain the close relationship between Brendan and The Brain. The facial expression between Brendan and The Brain is eye-to-eye contact which indicates the intention to communicate. The way Brendan trusts every word of the information The Brain given indicate their relationship is close, like a best friend. Since they know each other well, they tend to use slang to maintain their friendship. Besides, when Brendan loses his eyeglasses after one of the criminals named Tug punches him in the face, he asks Tug “where is my glasses?” instead of “where is my **specs**?” because he barely knows Tug and Tug is not a student.

### c. Primary Slang

- The Pin : Tug here's had the means to swipe half and cut it bad for a long time. Now we're splits my loss of trust's retroactive.
- Brendan : Did you, Tug?
- Tugger : No.
- Brendan : Alright, so let's shake and **blow**.
- The Pin : Not good enough.

**Blow** is considered as slang because it comes only a brief time of popularity in the 20s and it fade out of use in decades. As Eble (1996) said that slang is like the ever-changing fashion or trend in society at large. The slang word **blow** is categorized into primary slang since Brendan uses it to every character in the movie as general informal daily talk. He uses this slang to The Brain, The lapdog person and even to the criminals such as The Pin and Tugger in this scene. When Brendan said “let’s shake and **blow**”, it means “let’s shake hand and leave”.

The participants in this conversation consist of three people; they are The Pin, Brendan and Tugger. The setting is at The Pin’s room. The topic is talking about the last brick of heroin. The Pin thinks that Tugger swaps the last brick of heroin with the stronger one and poisons it to make his buyer overdose once they dose it. Tugger said he didn’t do it, and then Brendan asked him to leave with the slang blow. The atmosphere that occurs in this conversation is tense. The face expression between The Pin and Tugger is scowling. Therefore, the purpose of this

slang utterance occurs in this conversation is to end the discussion by calming down the situation or avoiding the seriousness in the convention.

#### d. Secondary Slang

- Emily : Look, I did what she said with the **brick**, I didn't know it was bad, but the pin's on it now for poor Frisco and they're playing it all on me.
- Brendan : Slow down now, what?
- Emily : You gotta help me Brendan, please.

**Brick** is considered as slang because the writers found the meaning of the word in the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) Intelligence Report of Slang Code Words and Criminal Slang dictionary of 1890 to 1919 as the gangsters slang to name a pound or kilogram of a drug. In the case of the movie, it is a secret name for heroin because the shape and the size of the heroin literally look like a brick. Thus, the slang word **brick** is categorized into secondary slang since this slang is secretly used only by criminals or gangsters. Besides, Brendan as the hearer does not understand the meaning of the slang, because it is understood only by gangsters or criminals and Brendan is not a part of criminals yet.

The participants of this conversation are Emily and Brendan. Emily is Brendan's ex-girlfriend. The setting is on the payphone booth roadside the Pico and Alexander Street which Emily is on another payphone up the hill. The conversation takes place at 12:43 in the afternoon. The topic of this conversation is about Emily that asking for help, she is blubbering on the phone telling Brendan that she is in trouble. Emily is the speaker of the word **brick**. Brendan does not know how to responds, he asked "what?" when Emily mention about it. Brendan's face expression like frowned up his face also indicates that he doesn't know what is Emily talking about. Brendan is not a criminal member yet in this scene and that is why he does not understand what **brick** refer to. This slang occurs in the conversation to show Brendan that Emily belongs to a group which is involved in the community of drug dealer and she needs a help from Brendan.

## 2. Discussions

As described in the findings, they are 24 slang utterances that found from 3 types of slang in Brick movie; they are 5 Student Slang utterances, 7 Primary Slang utterances, and 12 Secondary Slang utterances. The most dominant slang type that used by all characters in Brick movie is Secondary Slang with a total of 12 data. The data slang utterances such as brick, bull and pow-wow are dominantly occurred in this slang type. According to Chapman theory, this type of slang is mainly used by members of a group to express something in a secret way, such as member of a street gang, or a criminal. Brick movie takes a lot of background places closely connected with criminal society. The secondary slang of the criminal underworld

helped the characters in Brick movie talking about drugs without mentioning the word drugs, especially for the main character that mostly used this slang to create a relationship with the drug dealer in order to communicate with each other in secret. According to Anderson & Trudgill (1990), many drug dealers must use slang to be able to have conversations about drugs without any outsiders knowing about it.

On the other hand, Student Slang is the fewest slang type in Brick movie. The total data of this type is only 5 data. According to Partridge theory, the user and originators of this slang is a student, because they make slang fresh and full of creativity. If looking from the movie characters in Brick movie, the characters are mostly young teenager but not all of them are student from high school. The high school student such as Brendan and The Brain are the introvert who usually seen on their own and not talking much with other students in school. The rest of the characters are the young criminal who is never seen in school. In addition, the movie setting is mostly being set in outside rather than in a school. Therefore, it can be understood that Student Slang becomes the fewest slang type in this movie.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

In this research, the writers found that the meaning of the slang in the movie script is based on the context, such as background of the characters and setting of the scene. Some of the slang meaning is also based on the slang dictionaries that appropriated with the context. The writers concluded that slangs in Brick movie script are classified into student slang, theory by Partridge (1933), primary slang and secondary slang by Chapman (1988). From the slang types that the writers mentioned, Secondary Slang is the most common uttered by the characters as this movie takes background places closely connected with criminal society. As the movie is about young criminals, many slang utterances uttered to create relationship with other criminals. Whereas, Student Slang is rarely used since the characters of the movie create a relationship with the outsider of drug community rather than student in school, especially for the main character who spontaneously use secondary slang to communicate with the drug dealer to approach their relationship.

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