

# **Slang Used among British and Czech Teenagers**

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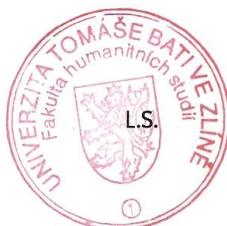
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Bakalářská práce zkoumá slang používaný českými a britskými teenagery. Teoretická část podává informace o historii a vývoji slangu, dále obsahuje přehled o zdrojích slangu a důvodech používání slangu. Analytická část zahrnuje dotazník, který slouží k nalezení podobností a rozdílů mezi českými a britskými uživateli slangu a jejich rodiči.

Klíčová slova: teenage slang, slang, formální jazyk, neformální jazyk, řeč, teenager, rodiče

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores slang used among Czech and British teenagers. The theoretical part gives information about the history and development of slang. It also gives an overview about sources of slang and reasons for its usage. The analytical part includes a questionnaire which is used to find similarities and differences between Czech and British slang users and their parents.

Keywords: teenage slang, slang, formal language, informal language, speech, teenager, parents

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## INTRODUCTION

If we were today's British teenagers, we might get this text from our school mate:

*"John's chick is well fit. But... he wanna chill out wid his m8s rather than take her to the film. She got like well lairy and she legged it. LOL." <sup>1</sup>*

Most of us would not be able to understand many of these words and probably the whole point of this text. Even these teenagers' parents would have to try hard to understand it. However this is today's British teenagers' slang that they commonly use in their everyday life.

There are many slang words used in teenagers' informal speech and all of them are used for different reasons and based on many different sources. Nowadays these words spread very quickly and easily through the Internet, music and television. Sometimes it can be very difficult to decode them even by the teenagers' parents or teachers. But maybe this can be one of today's teenagers' purposes of using slang.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the slang used among British and Czech teenagers. I want to find out which nation uses slang more and for which reasons. I want to analyse if slang is still seen as vulgar and also explore the most used sources of the teenage slang.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is theoretical and it gives an overview about history and developments of slang. It explores reasons for using slang, sources of slang and also discovers more trends in teenage language that are used nowadays. All these information are based on linguistic literature.

The second part of this thesis is analytical part. The analysis will be accomplished by a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be given online to parents of today's Czech and British teenagers. According to their answers I will evaluate results in a form of graphs and give relevant comments.

The main purpose of the analytical part is to identify possible differences and similarities between these two nations about their teenage slang and also learn how these teenagers' parents are aware of their children's language.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC, "Say what? A parents' guide to UK teenage slang," BBC News Web site. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8551273.stm> (accessed April 23, 2011).

## **I. THEORY**

# 1 DEFINITIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SLANG

## 1.1 What is Slang?

Slang refers to a non-standard and informal vocabulary which represents near synonyms for words and phrases used in standard language. It used to be associated with uneducated and undignified people or groups.<sup>2</sup> However nowadays slang covers all social groups, subcultures and types of jobs. It has been changing over time according to fashion, habits and background of its users.

Slang is something new, creative and sometimes shocking. Some slang words can become so common in usage that they can even enter a standard language.<sup>3</sup> Slang is a source of many new words. Some of them are used for a short time and disappear quickly. The reason they die out is simply because they become boring and widely known.

Slang is part of a colloquial language. That means it appears mostly in spoken language and gets richer by speaking.<sup>4</sup> But there are also slang words and shortened informal expressions typical for written language. Their origin is usually in sms language and the Internet which are nowadays highly used by teenagers.

Everybody has their own slang. Some people think that slang is something only young people use and as they grow up, they start to use proper language. However they do not realize that all people use some kind of slang – teenagers, adults, rich and poor. But not all people of our age can understand our slang.<sup>5</sup> There are many factors that influence our speech. It can be the place where we grew up or music we listen to. Therefore slang creates boundaries and divides people into many groups based on different criteria. That means slang identifies every single person.

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<sup>2</sup> Algeo, John, ed. *English in North America*. Vol. 6 of *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 220.

<sup>3</sup> Burridge, Kate. *Blooming English: Observations on the Roots, Cultivation and Hybrids of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 115.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

## 1.2 Etymology of the word “Slang”

The origin of the word slang is not very clear. There are several theories by different linguists. According to a lexicographer of the English language Eric Partridge the word slang is connected to Norwegian words *in sleng* which mean improbable. However other linguists think that it was derived from a word *slengjeord* which means a nickname or *slengja kjeften* which means literary to sling the jaw, to abuse a person. Another parallel mentioned by Partridge is with word *to sling words* which means to talk. <sup>6</sup>

The word slang first occurred in 1700. It represented idioms and secret language of the underworld. The modern meaning used for this word nowadays occurred in the early 1800s. <sup>7</sup>

## 1.3 The History of Slang

According to Hotten slang is as old as the language and has been used for centuries in streets in every part of the world in every period of time. It always occurred at places of higher settlement. People in the cities become part of certain groups which usually lead to creating their own slang. <sup>8</sup>

However the usage of slang back there was quite different from today. In old times slang was used usually by drunken people in pubs, as a part of humorous and vulgar speech. People used their own slang words to discuss improper subjects. <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Leo Spitzer, “Slang,” *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.67, No.2 (February 1952).  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2909962> (accessed January 9, 2011), 99-100.

<sup>7</sup> Burridge, *Blooming English*, 114-115.

<sup>8</sup> Hotten, John Camden. *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant, and Vulgar Words; Used at the Present Day in the Streets of London, the Universities of Oxford and*. London: Forgotten Books, 2010, 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

## 1.4 British Slang Today

There are about twenty thousands slang words used in British English. Slang changes constantly and that is a reason why we can come across different synonyms for one single word after quite short time. Some slang words are based on an actual political situation or a famous person at a certain time. And after these issues and people are forgotten, slang words connected to them disappear as quickly as they were first created.<sup>10</sup>

Many slang words used mostly among teenagers are connected to new technologies. Our parents started to use the Internet and mobile phones at later age, that is why they might not know words like: *to google something* (to search something on the Internet), *to facebook somebody* (to add somebody on facebook) or abbreviations like *LOL* (laughing out loud), *BRB* (be right back). Internet is also an instrument of faster spreading of slang, which I will try to prove in the practical part of the thesis.

Because Great Britain is a big country, slang is not the same in all regions. Teenage slang used in London and other big cities contains very different words when compared to other parts of the country.

A research on teenage slang was carried out by BBC News School Report in 2010. The aim was to learn how slang words differ in different parts of the Great Britain. The results proved that slang words at different places of the country differ widely. Words that are spread by Facebook, text messaging and TV programmes, such as *LOL* are used universally. However slang expressions used very often by young people, such as *girlfriend*, *beautiful*, *funny*, are substituted by wide range of variations of different slang words according to a certain region. According to Paul Kerswill, a professor of linguistics at Lancaster University, each region's slang is influenced by regional development, but some words tend to be homogenous and therefore are used everywhere.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Else David. *British Language and Culture (Lonely Planet Language and Culture) (Language Reference)*. 2nd ed. Victoria: Lonely Planet, 2007, 123-124.

<sup>11</sup> BBC. *Say what?*

City/Region	Words given to teenagers to express in their own slang		
	girlfriend	beautiful	funny
Swansea, Wales	<i>missus</i>	<i>flat out bangin'</i>	<i>hilarious</i>
Keighley, West Yorkshire	<i>bird</i>	<i>proper fit</i>	<i>quality haha</i>
Bellshill, Lanarkshire	<i>burd</i>	<i>well stunnin'</i>	<i>well funny</i>
Shepherds Bush, London	<i>chick</i>	<i>proper buff</i>	<i>bare jokes</i>
Londonderry, NI	<i>girlfriend</i>	<i>pure stunnin'</i>	<i>some craic</i>
Godalming, Surrey	<i>girlfriend</i>	<i>well fit</i>	<i>LOL</i>

Figure 1 Teenage Slang in Different Parts of the UK, my own table <sup>12</sup>

To illustrate the difference between slang used in various regions, researchers from BBC asked British teenagers at six different high schools to express one sentence in their own slang.<sup>13</sup>

I chose three words of this sentence that differ the most and put them into a table. We can observe wide range of different slang expressions that are used in various regions of the United Kingdom

## 1.5 Czech Slang Today

Czech teenage slang has the same character as British slang or slang in general. It changes quickly and is based on young people's interests and shared values. Unlike British slang, Czech slang does not differ in various regions. This is reasoned by the smaller size of our country, low influence of ethnic groups, different languages and cultures.

A big trend in Czech teenage slang are words coming from English language. Teenagers either use them as they are (*loser, beer, pub, good, nice*) or they make their own words that are derived from English words but modified according to Czech grammar.

Another trend among Czech slang users is revival of expressions that have disappeared decades ago. Some of them keep their meaning the same, such as *štramanda* (a pretty

<sup>12</sup> BBC. *Say what?*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

woman) which first occurred in early 1900's. On the other hand some words changed their meaning, such as *ty vole/ty krávo* which changed their level of offence. From being offensive they became words for expressing a surprise or shock. Third group of slang words are those which do not change their meaning for very long time and that have been still used after decades since they first occurred.<sup>14</sup>

According to Blahníková, Czech teenage slang is full of new abbreviations with its origin in the Internet communication and text messaging. Some of them are abbreviations of Czech expressions, such as *njn* (no jo no), others are originally English, such as *btw* (by the way) or *omg* (oh my God). Even these English expressions are used in Czech sentences and they are pronounced as a word. They are no longer used only in internet communications and text messaging but nowadays teenagers use them commonly in a face-to-face communication.<sup>15</sup>

Another feature typical for Czech teenage slang according to Blahníková, are coded vulgarisms. Purpose of this kind of slang is to use a usual word with hidden meaning of a swear word. She mentions a Czech word/name *dorota* which is nowadays used among teenage girls to cover a swear meaning, aimed for another unpopular girl, who they talk about at that time.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Willoughby, "Social Changes Influencing Teenage Slang but Some Words Perennial," *Český rozhlas*, March 2, 2006. <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/panorama/social-changes-influencing-teenage-slang-but-some-words-perennial> (accessed April 24, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Irena Blahníková, "Pubertální slang bývá pro některé rodiče velmi složitou šifrou," *Kutnohorský deník*, April 30, 2009. [http://kutnohorsky.denik.cz/zpravy\\_region/kh\\_slang20090430.html](http://kutnohorsky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/kh_slang20090430.html) (accessed April 24, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



## 2 FORMAL VS. INFORMAL LANGUAGE

According to Akmajian, each of us use both formal and informal language styles and shift between them very naturally according to different situations we are in at a certain moment. These shifts are unconscious and automatic.<sup>17</sup>

The feature according to which we distinguish formal and informal language is called tenor. It is a situation of a language use. The differences between the formal and informal language are the words that are used. In formal language people tend to be more objective and keep their personal opinions and attitudes for themselves. On the other hand when they use the informal language, they express their both positive and negative attitudes directly.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.1 Formal Language

We can observe the usage of the formal language clearly in serious, formal and official situations. In these situations people must pay attention on what they say and how. An example of such situation can be a job interview, meeting an important person or standing before a court.<sup>19</sup>

In formal situations people frequently use full forms of words, titles and words expressing politeness. Formal language does not include any slang words and swear words.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.2 Informal Language

The informal speech, on the other hand, is used in relaxed conversations. In these situations the speech is rapid and spontaneous and is not censored by the speaker. People use the informal language when speaking to their close friends and family.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Akmajian, Adrian, Richard A. Demers, Ann K. Farmer, and Robert M. Harnish. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. 5 ed. N.p.: The MIT Press, 2001, 287.

<sup>18</sup> Eggins, Suzanne. *Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. 2nd ed. London: Continuum, 2004, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Akmajin, *Linguistics*, 287.

<sup>20</sup> Eggins, *Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 103.

<sup>21</sup> Akmajin, *Linguistics*, 287.

The informal language contains colloquial vocabulary, slang and abbreviated forms. Other typical features of the informal speech are first names, nicknames, interruptions and swear words.<sup>22</sup>

Slang is a part of informal language. According to Kvetko informal vocabulary consists of more or less unstable words that are used in everyday speech. There are several groups of informal vocabulary and they are all considered as a part of informal language. The boundaries of individual groups are difficult to determine, especially between slang and colloquialism.<sup>23</sup>

Some expressions of different categories of informal language can be considered as slang by mistake. Therefore I chose the most common categories of informal language and gave definitions and examples.

### 2.2.1 Categories of Informal Language

#### **Cant**

- An old secret language used among beggars, thieves and criminals. It was always created as a code with a purpose of secrecy. Cant and slang are often regarded as synonyms but unlike cant, slang is always modern and up-to-date.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Jargon**

- Jargon contains technical vocabulary that is connected with a specific activity or profession such as IT specialists, astronomers or officers. Jargon may also contain slang words. The reason for using jargon is to include the insiders (members of one certain group) and to exclude the others who do not belong there.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Eggins, *Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Kvetko, Pavol. *English Lexicology In Theory and Practice*. Trnava: Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, 2005, 77-78.

<sup>24</sup> Hotten, *A Dictionary of Modern Slang*, 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Yule, George. *The Study of Language*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 245.

Examples: sport jargon: *matchball* (the last ball after a match is finished), computer jargon: *cookies* (data saved in a computer after visiting a certain website).

### Collocations

- Groups of words that are used in informal everyday speech. They are known by most of the people who use English or other certain languages as their mother tongue. These words are logically connected to each other and together form a phrase that is used by native speakers naturally. Unlike slang, collocations tend to be stable. They do not change quickly according to present and modern issues. Examples: *square-jawed hero* (handsome man, women's idol), *chain smoking* (smoking another cigarette after one is finished).

Of course there are differences in collocations in different types of English. For example word *salt* is usually collocates with *pepper*. However for people living by the sea it may better collocate with commonly used *salt water*.<sup>26</sup>

### Words with local colouring

- Local words used in certain areas are called dialect or dialectisms. Their boundaries are not very stable so dialect changes a lot because of standard language taught in schools. Previous generations used dialect much more than people do today. That is why we can hear the traditional dialect mostly from our grandparents.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Yule. *The Study of Language*, 122-123.

<sup>27</sup> Kvetko. *English Lexicology In Theory and Practice*, 93.

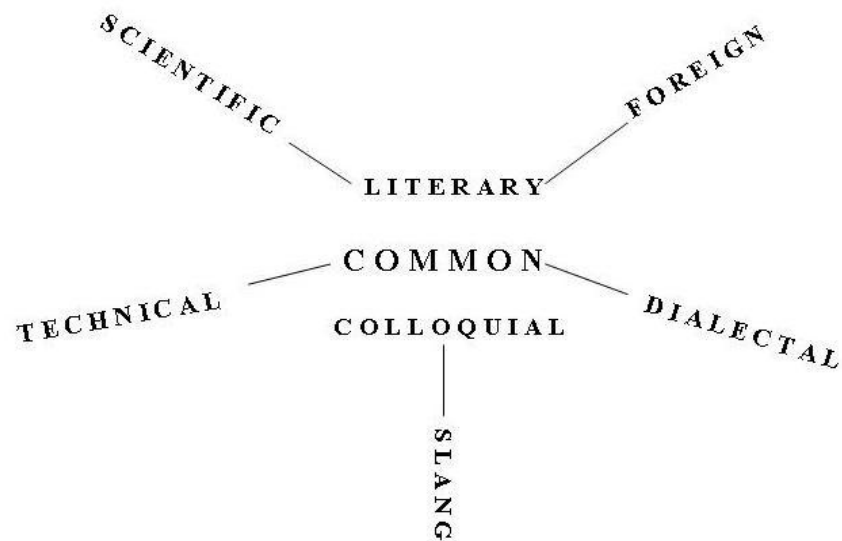


Figure 2. The Vocabulary of English According to the Oxford English Dictionary 1933 <sup>28</sup>

This diagram shows how editors of the Oxford English Dictionary see the English language. Literary and colloquial words meet common vocabulary, which is placed in the centre. Scientific and foreign words become common after some time of usage and enter the common vocabulary usually through technical literature. Technical and dialectal vocabulary enters the common language both through speech and literature. And slang words first become colloquial and after some time also enter the common group.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Jackson, Howard, and Etienne Zé Amvela. *Words, Meaning and Vocabulary: An Introduction to Modern English Lexicology*. 2nd ed. London: Continuum, 2007, 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

### 3 TYPES OF SLANG

As I already mentioned the boundaries between slang and other types of informal language can be difficult to determine. That is the reason why some linguists can use different names for this kind of vocabulary. Some of them consider words with local colouring as dialect and not slang. Others say that dialect is a type of slang and call it regional slang. As slang changes during the time, it is very difficult to give exact criteria for slang groups.

This is a general division of slang according to Kvetko:

#### 3.1 Special slang

- Vocabulary typical for certain groups of people which makes them different from the others (e.g. teenagers, soldiers, religion groups).

#### 3.2 General slang

- Vocabulary that is informal but not used by certain group of people.

#### 3.3 Back slang

- Words that are read from the back, such as *emit* (time), *nottub* (button).

#### 3.4 Central slang

- Words that are read from the middle, such as *ietqui* (quiet).

#### 3.5 Rhyming Slang

- Slang used in London, also known as Cockney.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kvetko. *English Lexicology In Theory and Practice*, 79.

Originally Cockney was also a language of criminals in London's East End in the nineteenth century. Nowadays it is spoken by working-class community.<sup>31</sup>

The basic idea is replacing a Standard English word with words that rhyme with it, such as *joy of my life* (wife), *dog and bone* (phone), *Duke of Kent* (rent), *bread and honey* (money).<sup>32</sup>

Hotten used a very different division of slang. He divided slang according to its users' jobs, social class and background. This is a division of slang according to Hotten:

### **Fashionable slang**

– Also called as Upper-class slang. Its origin is in French language and has been used in books and newspapers for the upper class members, during their parties and events.<sup>33</sup>

### **Parliamentary slang**

– This type of slang has been used by the members of Houses of Parliament in London. It is a mixture of fashionable and literary slang types. It includes mainly phrases and words connected to politics. Examples: *plumper* (a single vote at an election), *a walk over* (a re-election without opposition).<sup>34</sup>

### **Military slang**

– Also called as Officers' slang. It contains words and phrases connected to a military service and has been used by British soldiers. Examples: *drag/trap* (a vehicle), *lobster-box* (a military station).<sup>35</sup>

### **University slang**

– This type of slang has been used especially at University of Cambridge and University of Oxford and some other British great public schools.

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<sup>31</sup> Katamba, Francis. *English Words: Structure, History, Usage*. 2 ed. Oxon: Routledge, 2005, 170-171.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Hotten, *A Dictionary of Modern Slang*, 58-59.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

It has been used by university students and contains also expressions of the fashionable slang. Examples: *crib* (house or apartment), *dead-men* (empty wine bottles), *dickey* (a half shirt).<sup>36</sup>

### **Religious slang**

– This type of slang refers to a terminology used by members of the English Church. It contains expressions connected to a faith, God and religious people's beliefs. Examples: *gracious* (nice), *dark* (without religious principles)<sup>37</sup>

### **Legal slang or slang of lawyers**

– Slang used among lawyers that contains terminology connected to law and business. Examples: *fullied* (fully committed for trial), *monkey with a long tail* (mortgage).<sup>38</sup>

### **Literary slang**

– Also called as Slang of Criticism. This type of slang includes dramatic, artistic and scientific expressions. Examples: *balaam box* (a depository for rejected newspaper articles).<sup>39</sup>

### **Theatrical slang**

– Slang used by actors who perform on a stage. It contains expressions connected to particular profession or activity in the theatres. Examples: *daddy* (the stage manager), *pro* (an actor by profession).<sup>40</sup>

**Civic slang** – this type of slang includes terminology used in the Stock Exchange, connected to wealth, shares and business. Examples: *bear* (a speculator on the Exchange), *breaking shins* (borrowing money).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hotten, *A Dictionary of Modern Slang*, 64.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

## 4 REASONS FOR USING SLANG

There are many reasons for using slang. In many cases people use slang just for fun or to become part of certain group. On the other hand, there is Cockney Rhyming Slang which has a deeper reason of usage and that is to enrich the language. So reason for using slang depends on an individual.

Typical reason of slang usage for teenagers is to create a code. They want to be distinguished from children and adults, so they create their own language and use it among people of the same age. This slang is then used mostly at school, in teenagers' free time spent with friends or while visiting internet chat rooms and social networks.

According to Partridge, these are some other reasons for using slang:

- to be original, different and new
- to be entertained because slang is playful
- to be witty, expressed in a humorous way
- to be picaresque and not boring
- to attract attention
- to avoid clichés
- to be brief and clear
- to be concrete or abstract
- to lessen or intensify our statements
- to reduce or to extend our statements
- to soften or mask our statements
- to amuse the audience
- to be part of certain school, profession, social class or intellectual group
- to prove somebody is not part of certain group <sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Partridge, Eric. *Slang To-Day And Yesterday*. London: William Press, 2007, 6-7.



## 5 LANGUAGE AND THE SOCIETY

According to Yule there are many factors that influence our language. It is not only the place we grew up which makes our dialect different from the others. There are also social factors that make our speech different from people who live at the same place as we do. It may be age, gender, social class, education or ethnicity. All together they affect the way we speak and create our own language which is a part of our identity. Studying of language from the social point of view is called sociolinguistics.<sup>43</sup>

### 5.1 Sociolinguistics and Social dialect

Sociolinguistics deals with the relationship among language and society. It is connected to anthropology and sociology. It studies how culture where we live influences our own speech and vocabulary.<sup>44</sup> So the level of our slang usage is mostly based on our background. Some groups of people, usually ethnic minorities and working class tend to use more slang. The reason is that they live surrounded by people of the similar social class and education where slang is not regarded as a bad language.

According to Yule sociolinguistics deals with all aspects affecting our language to discover a social dialect. That is a specific variety of language spoken by a group of people according to age, sex, education or social class. Within the social dialect there is a concept of overt and covert prestige. These are two groups of language in use.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Yule. *The Study of Language*. 239.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 240.

Yule mentions difference between overt prestige which is positively valued way of speaking in social communities. On the other hand covert prestige is hidden type which includes non-standard words and expressions spoken by different sub-groups. These non-standard expressions become a sign of certain sub-groups and they identify themselves with them. The covert prestige may include slang words and several types of bad language, such as swearing.<sup>46</sup>

## 5.2 What Influences Our Language?

### 5.2.1 Social Class and Education

Education influences our speech in a significant way. We do not hear highly educated people saying slang words, but that does not mean they never use any. More important is where they use them. People mind their language at work, at meetings and job interviews, where slang is certainly improper. However in not serious situations they might use slang words just for fun or to be original.

According to Yule, people who attended university tend to use less of bad language compared to people who left education system earlier. This is a consequence of spending a lot of time with reading books and dealing with written language everyday. That is also why we may come across with expression “he talks like a book”. This is mostly used for professors who graduated from more universities and this affected their language in an extreme way.<sup>47</sup>

Members of different social classes also have different language. The difference usually lays in their pronunciation. Yule mentions a study by Trudgill in 1974 from England which showed a difference between social classes in pronouncing [r] sound after a vowel. This study proved that the lower the class the stronger [r] sound appeared.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Yule. *The Study of Language*. 240.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 241.

Other indicators of lower class and less education are [h] - dropping and using [n] instead of [ŋ] at the end of words ending with -ing form. In this study lower class members and less educated tend to use more [n] sound and [h] – dropping than middle and upper class members and educated people.<sup>49</sup>

### 5.2.2 Age and Gender

Even when there are more people living in the same region, having the same social status and education, still there might be some differences in their language. It is because of different age group and gender. According to Yule the differences according to age are most noticeable between grand-parents and grand-children. Today's grandparents are unlikely to know what *rules* or *sucks*. They would not use “*like*” to introduce a reported speech as their grand-children.<sup>50</sup>

According to Yule, differences between male and female speech are in the topics. Men discuss more of non-personal topics such as sport and politics while women talk about their feelings and personal experiences without any problems. Women are also believed to use more hedges (*sort of, kind of*) and tags (*isn't it?, don't you?*).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Yule. *The Study of Language*. 240.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid..

## 6 TEENAGE LANGUAGE

### 6.1 Sub-culture and Its Influence on Our Speech

In every society there are sub-cultures formed. People become members of them according to their common ideas and interests. And it is the sub-culture what also influences people's language. This vocabulary then becomes one of the main features of certain sub-cultures.<sup>52</sup> Members of these sub-cultures have their own slang and use this special lexicon to prove they share the same ideas and to show where they belong. Being part of a group is the main reason of slang usage within the sub-culture.

Jackson mentions a youth culture as one of the most significant ones. It is a group of teenagers and adolescents. This group can be further divided according to their hobbies and interests. One of the typical criteria for further division is music these young people listen to. Then we can come across expressions related to different music styles, such as *funk*, *grunge*, *hip hop*, *indie*, *jungle*, *ragga*, *new wave* or related to partying such as *rage* (to party), *mosh* (dance recklessly), *stage diving* or *break-dancing*.<sup>53</sup>

Words used by sub-cultures are not usually recorded in general dictionaries because of their informal character. Members of youth culture also stop using them when they become adults.<sup>54</sup> Subcultures usually disappear after some years, as Hippies or Punks did, and together with them also their language dies out.

### 6.2 Trends in Teenage Talk

Language of teenagers and their parents may differ. Young people do not have to care about a proper language much because they spend most of their time with their friends. On the other hand adults have to behave according to their age which also includes choosing the right vocabulary. Yet they spend most of their time at work where formal language is always needed.

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<sup>52</sup> Jackson. *Words, Meaning and Vocabulary*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-156.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

Apart from slang, here are some other features typical for teenage language:

### 6.2.1 Taboo words

According to Jackson, taboo words are a vocabulary which is restricted by the society because of its offensive character. They contain words connected with parts of human body, sex and excretion. They may be called also vulgar words or coarse slang. Taboo words have similar life cycle as slang. After they become widely used in everyday speech, they can even occur in newspapers and literature and lose their taboo character.<sup>55</sup>

Kolář mentions euphemisms as a way how to get rid of taboo words. They are substitutions for offensive words by other, less vulgar and appropriate. The stronger the taboo word is, the more synonyms it usually has. Examples: *pass away* (die), *adult video* (pornography), *tired and emotional* (drunk), *expectorate* (spit).<sup>56</sup>

### 6.2.2 Swear words

Another category of bad language are swear words. As the taboo words, the swear words are also not supposed to be spoken out loud. However some of them can be accepted when used in appropriate situations as a kind of relief. Swearing is no longer seen as a sign of bad education or low social status. According to Stenstrom men swear in informal conversations more than women because it is a sign of independence and sometimes exhibitionism.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Jackson. *Words, Meaning and Vocabulary*, 162.

<sup>56</sup> Kolář, Pavel. *A Guide to English Lexicon*. Opava: Slezská univerzita v Opavě, 2006, 87.

<sup>57</sup> Stenstrom, Anna-Brita, Gisle Andersen, and Ingrid Kristine Hasund. *Trends in Teenage Talk: Corpus Compilation, Analysis and Findings (Studies in Corpus Linguistics)*. N.p.: John Benjamins Publishing Co, A

According to Kolář people swear when they are annoyed, surprised or when they want to insult the others. Examples: *Damn! Hell! Shit! Fuck! My God! What the hell? You bastard! Bloody.*<sup>58</sup>

### 6.2.3 Vague words

Another trend in teenage talk mentioned by Stenstrom is the vague words. They occur in teenage talk as much as in adults' talk. Their function is just to fill spaces in a sentence and to sound more colloquial. Examples: *kind of, sort of, whatever, and stuff, for ages, plenty of, millions, billions, and so on.*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Kolář. *A Guide to English Lexicon*, 88.

<sup>59</sup> Stenstrom. *Trends in Teenage Talk*, 88-89.

## **II.**

## **ANALYSIS**

## **7 FORM AND PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH**

The research was accomplished by a questionnaire. The questionnaire was created in Google documents and placed on the Internet to make the research more comfortable and easier for the respondents. The respondents are parents of today's teenagers, twenty of them are British and twenty of them are Czech. The Czech and English versions of the questionnaire are included in appendices.

The questionnaire consists of fifteen questions. Most of the possible answers were in a form of multiple choice with only one possible answer. Two questions were in a form of checkboxes with more possible answers. Respondents also had an opportunity to express their own ideas.



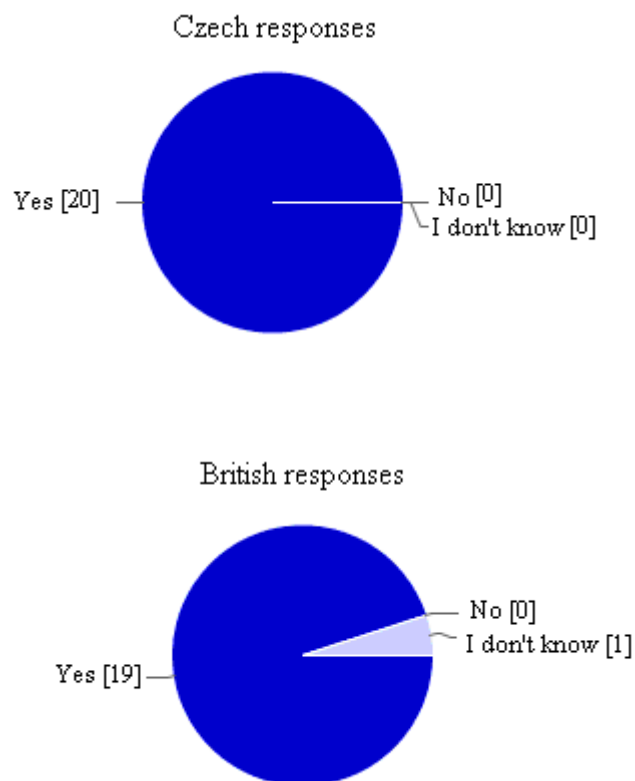
## 8 GRAPHICAL EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS

In this chapter the results of the research are given in a form of graphs. On the top the exact question is placed and numbered and below there are two graphs related to this question. The first graph is created from Czech respondents' answers and the second one from British respondents' answers.

Questions with up to four possible answers are in a form of a pie graph, those with more than four possible answers are in a form of a bar graph. The more positive the answer, the brighter the colour is. The exact number of each answer is placed in the brackets.

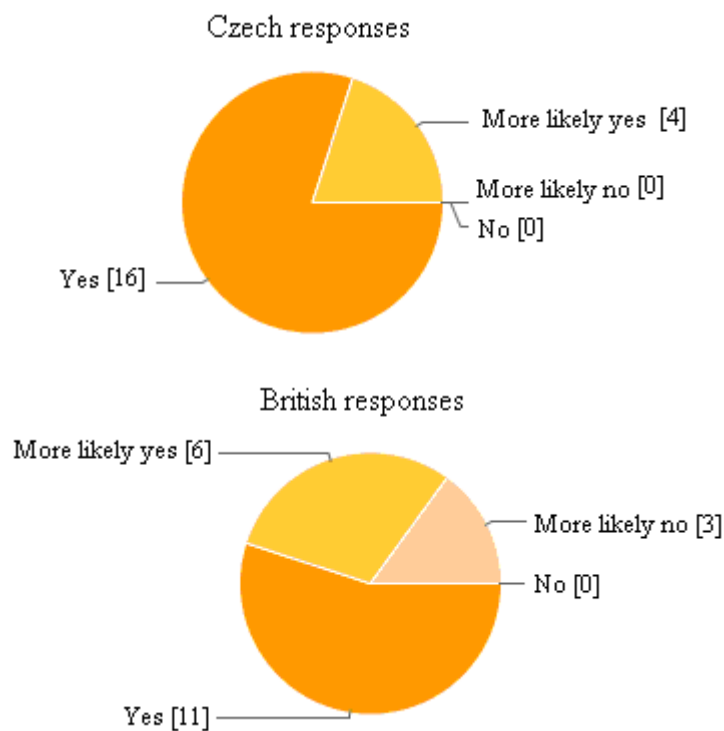
### 8.1 Graphs and Comments

#### 1. Do your children use slang?



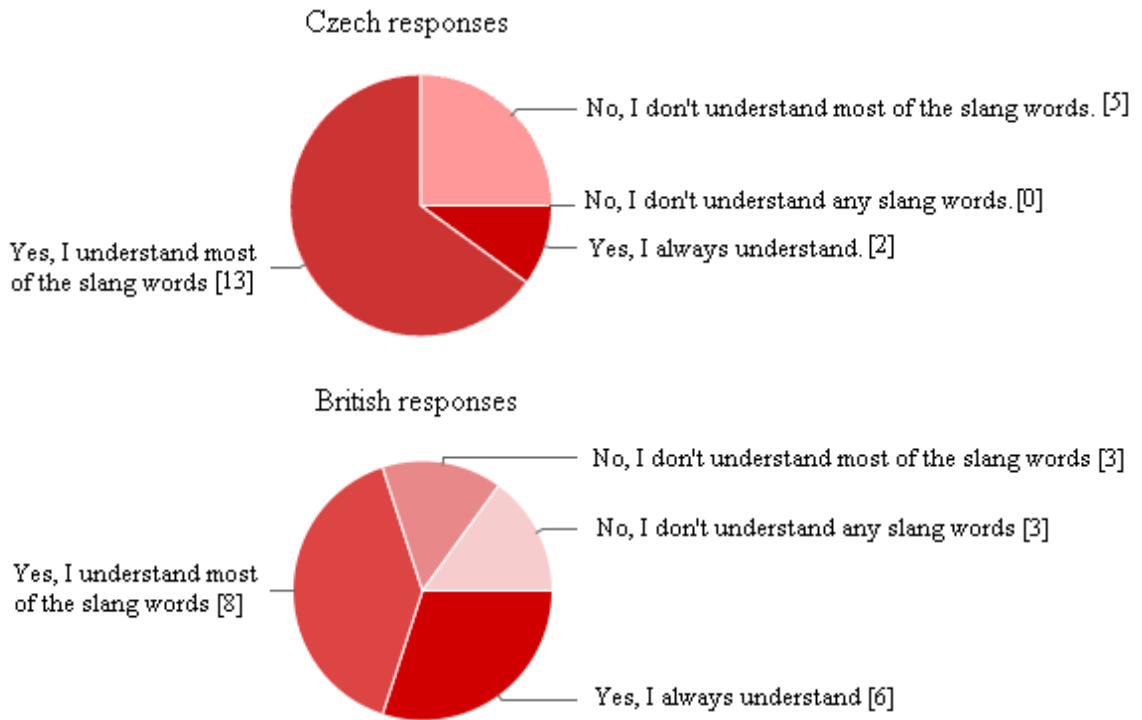
First question shows that in both nations teenagers use slang. Only one respondent on of the British group was not sure about the slang usage of his/her child. That proofs that teenagers are a group whose language includes high degree of slang and they use it daily.

## 2. Do your children use a different lexicon while talking to their friends?



According to the second question, all Czech teenagers use different words while talking to their friends. 85% of British teenagers' parents also said their children used a different lexicon, on the contrary 15% of them claim that their children are not likely to use a different language while talking to their friends.

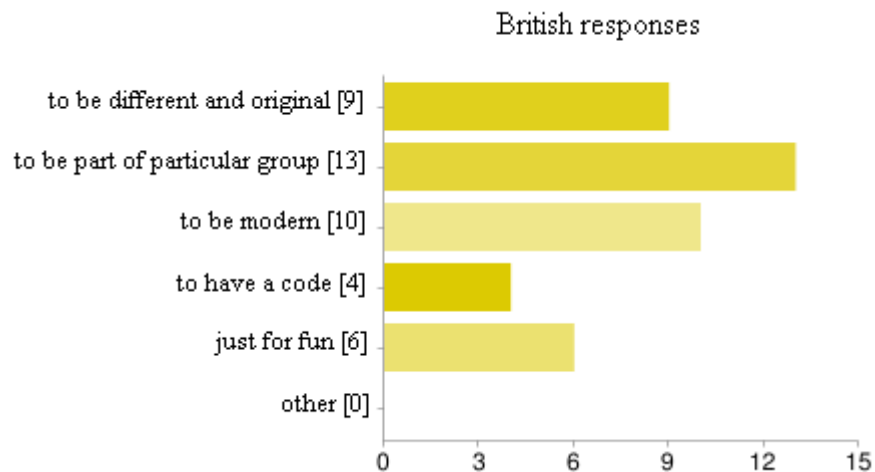
## 3. Do you always understand your children's slang words?



This issue explores the parents' awareness of their children's slang words. Three quarters of the Czech respondents are familiar with their children's slang and understand it while one quarter does not understand most of their children's slang words. This situation is quite similar among British people. Nearly three quarters are up-to-date with the teenage slang, 15% do not understand most of the slang words and another 15% do not understand any slang words.

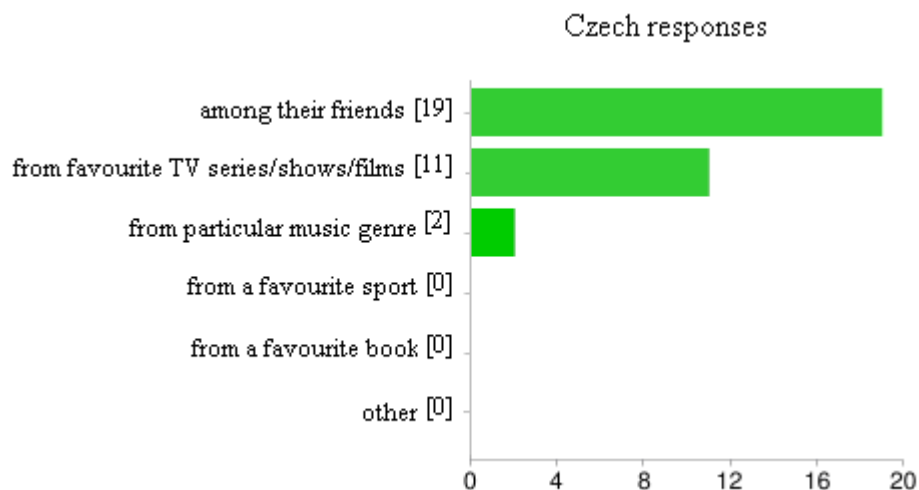
**4. Why do you think your children use slang?**

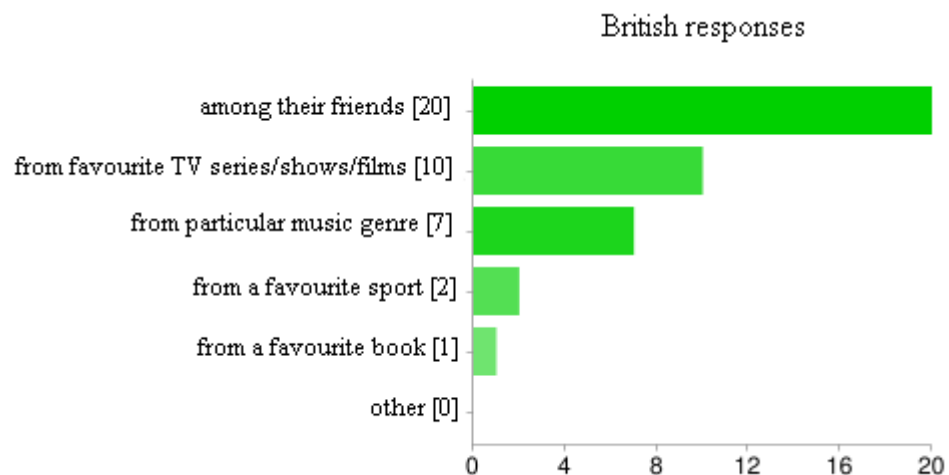




This question tries to find the most important reasons for slang usage among teenagers. The respondents had the opportunity to choose more than one possibility. Both Czech and British parents placed the same reasons on the first three places. The reason with the highest number of responses was “to be part of particular group”, the second one was “to be modern” and the reason with the third highest number was “to be different and original”.

##### 5. Where do you think your children learn slang?

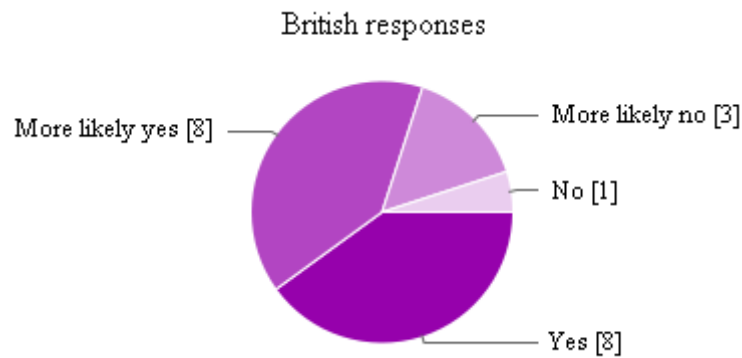




This issue is focused on sources of the teenage slang. The most of both Czech and British respondents think their children learn slang among their friends. Second highest number of answers was “favourite TV series/shows/films” and the third was “particular music genre”. Few British respondents also included favourite book and favourite sport activity as sources of their children’s slang.

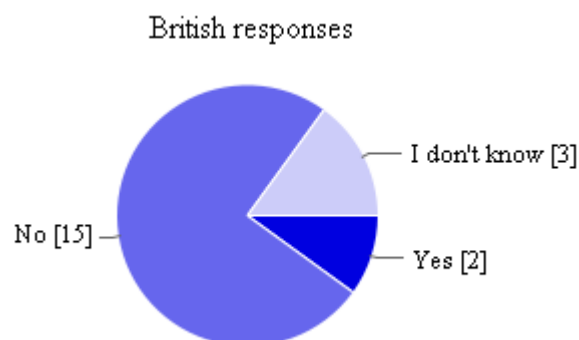
#### 6. Do your children’s slang words change often according to their up-to-date interests?





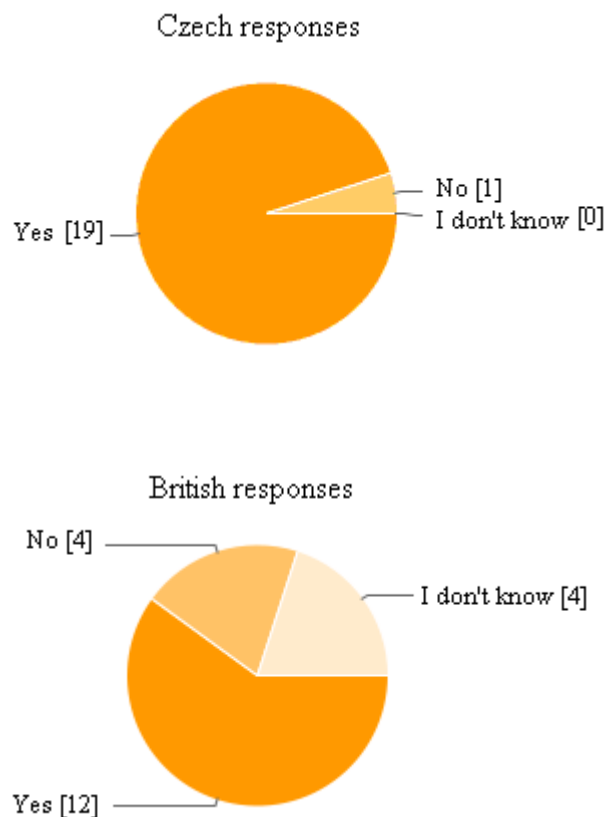
This question explores the instability of slang due to changing of the current interests of teenagers. Except two people, all Czech respondents agree that their children's slang changes according to their up-to-date interests. The number of British people, who agree with change of slang according to current interests, was slightly lower. But still it was more than three quarters of all respondents.

**7. Are your children members of a certain youth subculture, such as emo/hip-hopper/skater/other?**



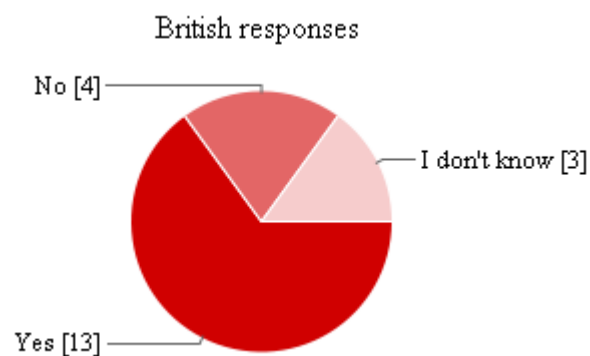
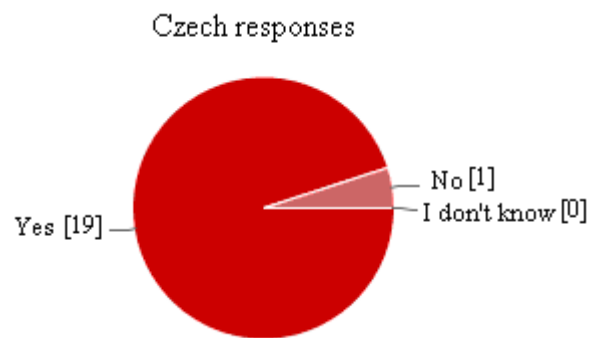
This issue searches for a relation between slang and membership of youth culture. Eight Czech parents and two British parents consider their children members of some subculture. As all respondents say their children use slang, we can say all teenagers use slang words without a condition to be a member of particular subculture.

#### 8. Do your children use any social network such as Facebook or Twitter?



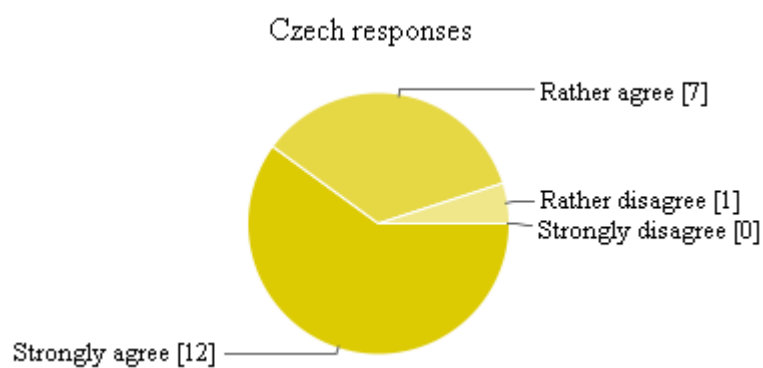
This question explores the usage of social networks as a potential source of slang words. All Czech teenagers except one use Facebook or other social networks. The number among British teenagers is lower, social networks are used by twelve out of twenty teenagers.

#### 9. Do your children use any kind of internet communication such as chat rooms or messengers (ICQ, Skype)?

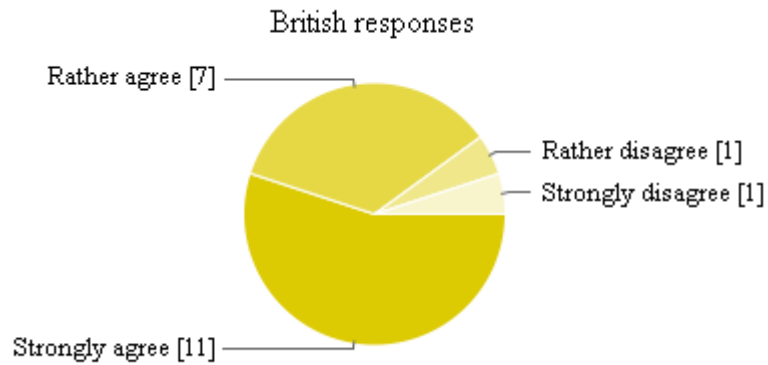


Similar to the previous topic is the question about usage of the Internet communication. The same number of Czech and British social network users also use chat rooms or messengers. That might be their source of slang, because this type of communication functions similarly as a spoken language. Level of informality during this type of conversation is very high.

#### 10. Do you agree that teenage slang spreads fast through the Internet?

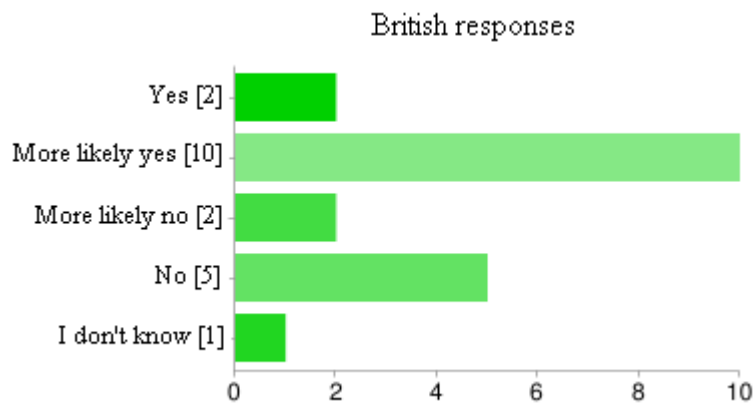
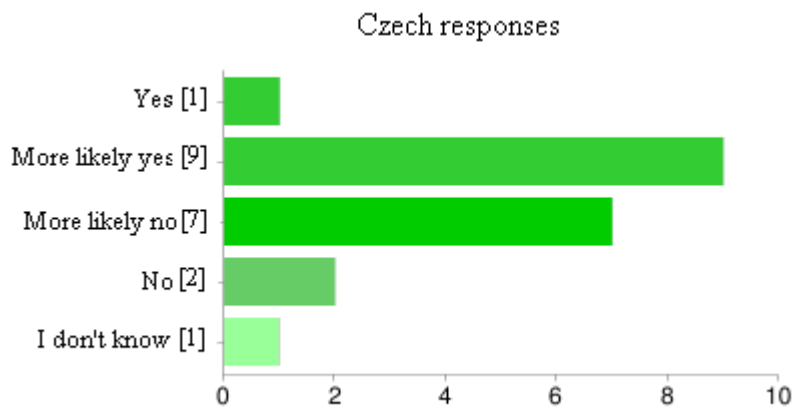






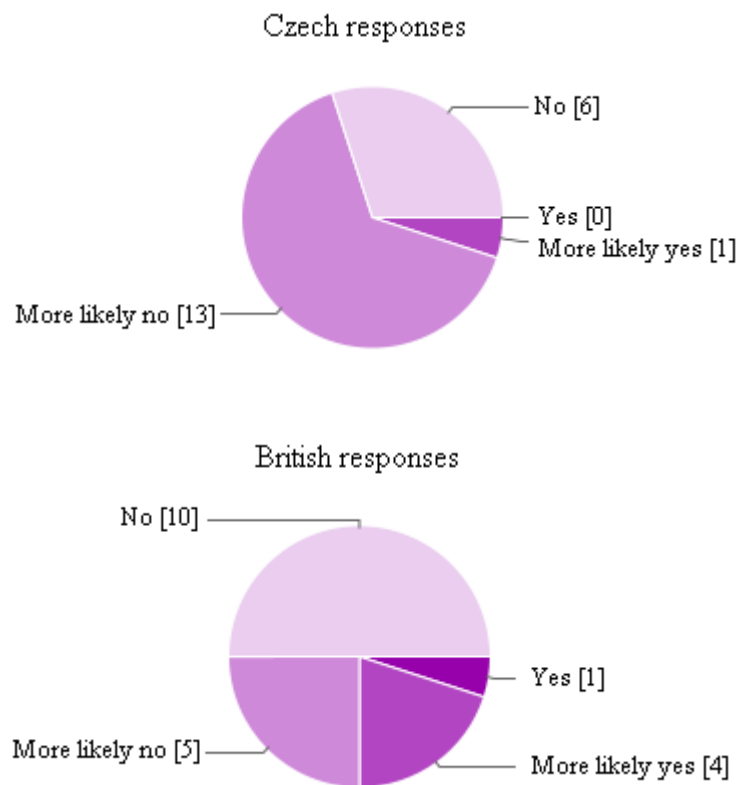
95% of Czech parents and 90% of British parents agreed that teenage slang spreads fast through the Internet. There is no need to use formal language on the Internet, especially while using social networks or blogs, which nowadays become highly popular among young people.

**11. Did your parents consider slang vulgar?**



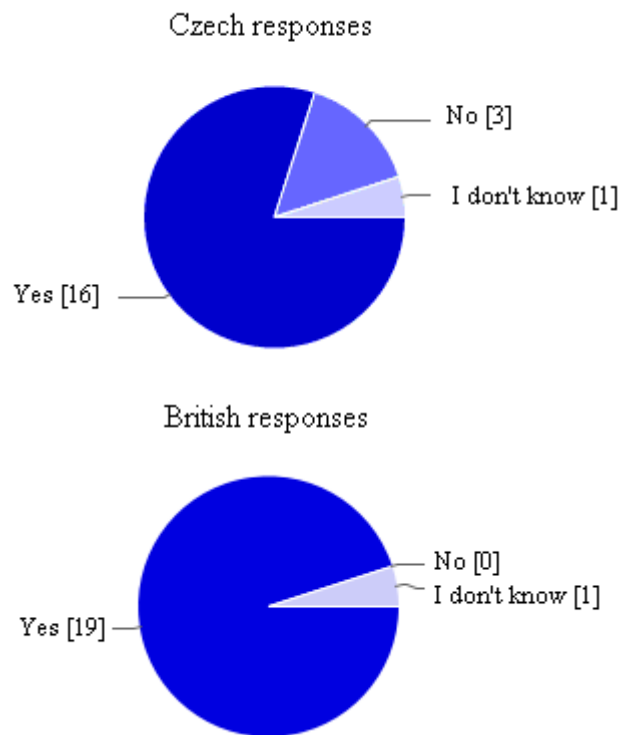
Questions number 11 and 12 are used to find a possible difference in opinions about the vulgarity of slang. Answers of Czech respondents were very different. Half of today's teenagers' grandparents considered slang vulgar and another half did not. While among British people, number of grandparents considering slang vulgar is little bit higher – 60%.

### 12. Do you consider slang vulgar?



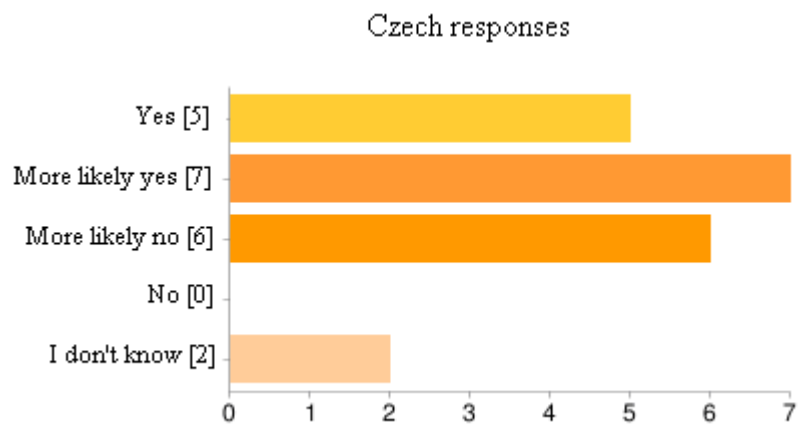
On the contrary the generation of today's parents has very different opinion about the vulgarity of slang. 95% of Czech respondents and 75% of British respondents do not consider slang vulgar. These results are much higher than in the previous question. However what else we can observe here is higher number of Czech parents who do not consider slang vulgar compared to the British group. The reason for this difference might be the believed British conservativeness.

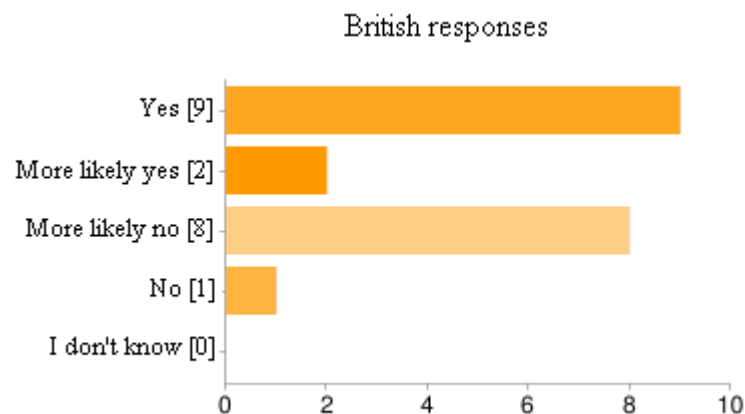
### 13. Did you use slang when you were a teenager?



80% of Czech and 95% of British respondents also spoke slang when they were teenagers.

**14. Do your children use slang more often than you did at their age?**





60% of Czech and 55% of British parents think that their children use slang more often than they did when they were teenagers. The people who answered positively were also asked for possible reasons. They are included in the last question as a list.

**15. If you answered “yes/more likely yes” for the previous question, what do you think is the main reason?**

Czech responses:

- Different era
- Modern era
- Development of mass media, therefore faster access to information and new words, social networking, a need to save time, therefore using of slang and abbreviations
- Influence of modern culture and access to everything
- More time spent by television and internet (2x)
- Influence of foreign cultures – films, series, music, new communication forms
- Slang is no more vulgar, it is accepted
- Internet (3x)
- Different era, different upbringing than in the past, internet
- Today’s teenagers watch more films, series, listen to music

British responses:

- Because nowadays there is more and more slang coming into the language
- The influence of the media culture is much greater now than when I was a teenager
- Internet 2x
- Celebrity
- Different generation
- TV, Internet
- Easier access to information
- Last generation cared more about the proper speech
- Different generation, different opinions
- More time spent on Internet, TV watching

Most of the reasons of higher slang usage of today's teenagers were the same for both Czech and British parents. The most given answer was the opportunity of using the Internet which the previous generation did not have. As another reason mentioned by many respondents was TV watching and mass media culture in general with easy and fast access to information

Both Czech and British parents suppose that their children use slang more often because of different and modern era we now live in and changes in upbringing of today's children. For most of the people slang is not considered vulgar and is accepted by today's generation of parents unlike the previous generations who cared about the proper speech more.

British parents also mentioned that nowadays there are more slang words than in the past. And one of them believes that a source of the teenage slang might be an influence of celebrities.

Another interesting opinion of the Czech parents is the influence of foreign cultures. Today's teenagers have much easier and faster access to foreign films, series and music which can be their source of new slang words.

## 9 CONCLUSION OF THE ANALYSIS

### 9.1 Similarities of Slang Usage among Czech and British Teenagers

When we compare Czech and British Teenagers, we can identify more similarities than differences.

According to results of the questionnaire all Czech and British teenagers use slang. Both Czech and British teenagers use slang especially when they are talking to their friends and during other situations in which informal language is common.

Same answers were received also about the reasons for using slang. Both Czech and British teenagers use slang mainly for being part of particular group, for being modern or for being different and original. All these three reasons besides many others were mentioned already by Patridge in 1933. That proves that people use slang still for the same reasons. Some of them are just more popular between different age groups.

Today's teenagers logically use slang because they want to be original and modern or to be seen as members of a certain subculture or group. On the other hand just a small number of them use slang as a code for being not understood by their parents or teachers. Therefore we can say that slang's original purpose disappeared and was substituted by different causes with less deep meaning.

Another matter with same results was the source of slang among Czech and British teenagers. Both nationalities placed the same sources on the first three ranks. According to the results teenagers learn slang among their friends, from favourite TV shows, films and series and also from particular music genre. That also refers to subcultures mentioned in the theoretical part. Young people gather together in order to share common hobbies and listen to their favourite music genres according to the type of group. New slang words are then brought by their friends or found in lyrics of favourite bands.

However most of the Czech and also British parents agreed that their children learn new slang words on the Internet while using chat rooms and social networks. This source might be seen as a new way how to learn slang, because the generation of today's teenagers' parents did not have this chance. Communication on the Internet functions similarly as spoken language, especially when carried out through chat rooms or social networks. Here people do not need to use a formal language as they communicate mostly

with their friends and family members. The same case is nowadays very popular blogs, Internet pages written by public, especially teenagers for expressing themselves in their own way and commenting on their interests and life in general. Thanks to high level of informality, blogs can be considered as a modern source of new slang words.

Same results among Czech and British teenagers were found also in changes of slang. Both groups' slang words change according to their up-to-date interests and hobbies. This shows the instability of slang, one of the main characteristics of slang words mentioned in the theoretical part. It is also related to the life cycle of slang. Teenagers use certain slang words, then adopt a new ideas or interests and start to use new slang words related to the new interests. The old words then either disappear or become adopted by wider range of users and then enter colloquial words or even standard language.

## **9.2 Differences of Slang Usage between Czech and British Teenagers**

According to the results of the questionnaire there were much more members of certain subcultures among Czech teenagers. Being member of subculture, that shares the same interests, is a rich source of new slang words. However there were very few members of subculture among British teenagers, still all of them use slang. Therefore being member of a certain subculture is not a condition of using slang. Even the subculture influence its members' language, teenagers learn slang also at different places mentioned in the previous sub-chapter where sources of slang were discussed.

The same situation occurred when using of internet communication was being researched. There was a higher number of teenagers using chat rooms, messengers or social networking among Czech teenagers. However the lower number of British teenagers did not affect number of young people using slang. All British teenagers use slang anyway which also proves that they have many others sources where they learn slang.

When all results are considered together, we can say that there are not deeper differences when both groups are compared. Both Czech and British teenagers use slang in the same situations, have same sources and use slang for the same reasons. This leads to conclusion that there are not differences between these two nations. More differences may be found when different age groups or different social classes are compared.

### 9.3 Teenage Slang from Parents' Point of View

When we look at the answers given in the questionnaire from parents' point of view, we may observe that both Czech and British parents are well aware of their children's slang. They all answered very clearly all questions about their children's slang and some of them expressed their own useful ideas about fast spreading of today's generation's slang.

About three quarters of both nations' parents understand their children's slang words. This shows that parents are well informed about today's slang. Their children use slang also at home and parents are curious about meaning of the new slang words.

Parents were also asked about vulgarity of slang. This question discovered very different opinions also within each nation's group. When grandparents of Czech teenagers are considered, we observe half of positive and half of negative answers. On the other hand 60 percent of British grandparents considered slang vulgar and 40 percent did not. These results show that there are many different ideas based on different criteria. What can make these results so different may be for example a different social class, cultural background or different upbringing of the generation of today's parents. High number of positive answers about slang's vulgarity are given because of different era today's parents lived in when they were teenagers.

According to answers of today's parents about vulgarity of slang, we can observe a very high number of negative opinions among both Czech and British groups. This shows that slang is no longer considered vulgar as it was in the past. People accepted slang words as new, playful and modern, with which people share their interests. They also realized the difference between other trends in teenage talk and slang, such as taboo words, mentioned in the theoretical part.

Slightly higher number of Czech answers about slang being not vulgar can be reasoned by British conservatism. Upbringing of Czech children tends to be more liberal, so parents do not mind when their children use informal language among their friends and family. However British parents care about proper language more, as they also care about their children reading books instead of spending time on the Internet or watching television.

Today's teenagers and their parents when they were at their children's age— which of these groups uses slang more? According to the research, there are twice more Czech parents who think that their children use slang more often than they did at their age.



Number of British parents is not so high, but still the majority agrees that their children use slang more often.

But is there really more slang words nowadays in the language or people are just able to identify them easily? According to me the number of slang words is the same, because slang still has the same life cycle as it used to have decades ago. Slang words occur suddenly, are being used for some time and then disappear or become commonly used. The very good awareness of today's parents about their children's slang words does not mean that they are more of them. However their children definitely have more sources of slang than they did.

It is very obvious that parents identify as the richest sources of slang those, that they could not use when they were teenagers. Therefore they find the Internet as the richest source of slang words. They did not have the opportunity to use it when they were younger, so it is the instrument of fast slang spreading that they perceive the most. Another reason why they think their children use slang more often is the fast access to all kinds of information, the mass media and different and modern era we are now living in.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to discover people's awareness of slang. I wanted to learn how slang has changed in the eyes of today's parents, compared to a previous generation. And mainly I wanted to give a useful overview about today's teenagers and their speech.

It is not easy to write about slang. There is not much information on this topic, probably because of the instability of slang. There are many slang dictionaries published every year but their current validity and reliability is very short. Slang words appear and disappear very fast. However I chose to write about slang, even it was a bit challenging. It is interesting to know how people speak in their real life, when they do not have to mind their language because of being watched.

I chose to focus my attention on teenage slang because according to my opinion it is a group which uses slang the most. Young people have wide range of sources of slang and great deal of reasons for using it, unlike adults. And comparing Czech and British nationalities was more of a logical reason. As I am Czech I am interested in the way Czech teenagers speak. And I decided to compare them with British people because I lived in the United Kingdom few years ago, so British nationality is the one I also know very well.

Results of my research showed that there are not very significant differences between Czech and British slang users. All of them use slang. Most of them use it especially among their friends and without very deep reasons. Slang is a part of today's modern era and all teenagers want to be modern and original. Language can be a unique sign typical for each person, so teenagers are well up-to-date with all new slang expressions in order to be always in. Their sources are quite different than those their parents had. And the biggest difference, for teenagers the best, for their parents usually a nightmare, is the Internet. This time-killing phenomenon is probably the richest source of teenage slang. Not only because teenagers can find new slang words on their friends' blogs, on Facebook or through the Internet communication. But also Internet gives them very fast and easy access to other rich sources, such as music, foreign TV shows, films and series, which all together highly influence their informal language.

Today's teenagers' parents are aware of all these facts. Most of them know up-to-date slang words and are able to understand their children easily. And the most important fact is that they do not consider slang vulgar anymore as previous generations did. People accept

teenage slang as a necessary part of their children's teenage period, something that will disappear when they will become adults.

All these information that were proved in my research are very interesting. I am very glad I was able to find respondents in Great Britain and compare their opinions with those of Czech people. I hope this thesis may become a useful piece of work for those who are also interested in the English language and at the same time a good inspiration for future graduates of our university.

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## APPENDICES

### P I Questionnaire – Teenage Slang (Czech version)

1. Používají vaše děti slang?
  - Ano
  - Ne
  - Nevím
  
2. Používají vaše děti jiné výrazy, když mluví se svými kamarády?
  - Ano
  - Spíše ano
  - Spíše ne
  - Ne
  
3. Rozumíte vždy slangu vašich dětí?
  - Ano, rozumím vždy.
  - Ano, rozumím většině jejich slangových výrazů.
  - Ne, nerozumím většině jejich slangových výrazů.
  - Ne, nerozumím žádným jejich slangových výrazům.
  
4. Proč myslíte, že vaše děti používají slang?
  - snaha být odlišný, originální
  - snaha zapadnout do určité skupiny
  - snaha být moderní
  - mít jazykový kód
  - jen pro zábavu
  - jiná odpověď:
  
5. Kde si myslíte, že se vaše děti učí slang?
  - mezi svými kamarády
  - z oblíbených TV seriálů/pořadů/filmů

- z oblíbeného hudebního stylu
- z oblíbeného sportu
- z oblíbené knihy
- jiná odpověď:

6. Mění se slang vašich dětí podle jejich aktuálních zájmů?

- Ano
- Spíše ano
- Spíše ne
- Ne

7. Jsou vaše děti členy určité subkultury, jako emo/hip hopper/skater/jiné?

- Ano
- Ne
- Nevím

8. Používají vaše děti sociální sítě, např. Facebook nebo Twitter?

- Ano
- Ne
- Nevím

9. Používají vaše děti prostředky internetové komunikace, např. online chat nebo messenger (ICQ, Skype)?

- Ano
- Ne
- Nevím

10. Souhlasíte, že teenage slang se rychle šíří přes internet?

- Určitě ano
- Spíše ano
- Spíše ne
- Určitě ne

11. Považovali vaši rodiče slang za vulgární?

- Ano
- Spíše ano
- Spíše ne
- Ne
- Nevím

12. Považujete slang za vulgární?

- Ano
- Spíše ano
- Spíše ne
- Ne

13. Používal/a jste slang, když jste byl/a teenager?

- Ano
- Ne
- Nevím

14. Používají vaše děti slang častěji než vy v jejich letech?

- Ano
- Spíše ano
- Spíše ne
- Ne
- Nevím

15. Pokud jste na předcházející otázku odpověděl/a „Ano/Spíše ano“, co považujete za hlavní důvod?

Prosím, vyplňte:



## **P II Questionnaire – Teenage Slang (British version)**

1. Do your children use slang?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
  
2. Do your children use a different lexicon while talking to their friends?
  - Yes
  - More likely yes
  - More likely no
  - No
  
3. Do you always understand your children's slang words?
  - Yes, I always understand.
  - Yes, I understand most of the slang words.
  - No, I don't understand most of the slang words.
  - No, I don't understand any slang words.
  
4. Why do you think your children use slang?
  - to be different and original
  - to be part of particular group
  - to be modern
  - to have a code
  - just for fun
  - Different answer:
  
5. Where do you think your children learn slang?
  - among their friends
  - from favourite TV series/shows/films
  - from particular music genre

- from a favourite sport
- from a favourite book
- Different answer:

6. Do your children's slang words change often according to their up-to-date interests?

- Yes
- More likely yes
- More likely no
- No

7. Are your children members of a certain youth subculture, such as emo/hip-hopper/skater/other?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

8. Do your children use any social network such as Facebook or Twitter?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

9. Do your children use any kind of internet communication such as chat rooms or messengers (ICQ, Skype)?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

10. Do you agree that teenage slang spreads fast through the Internet?

- Strongly agree.
- Rather agree.
- Rather disagree.
- Strongly disagree.

11. Did your parents consider slang vulgar?

- Yes
- More likely yes
- More likely no
- No
- I don't know

12. Do you consider slang vulgar?

- Yes
- More likely yes
- More likely no
- No

13. Did you use slang when you were a teenager?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

14. Do your children use slang more often than you did at their age?

- Yes
- More likely yes
- More likely no
- No
- I don't know

15. If you answered yes/more likely yes in the previous question, what do you think is the main reason?

Please, write in: