

Pragmatic Competence in Informal Interpersonal Communication

White Lies · Slang · Terms of Endearment

ACADEMIC PRESENTATION · LINGUISTICS & COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Assoc. Prof. Sashka Jovanovska, PhD

Department of English Language and Literature

Faculty of Philology





Pragmatic competence is an essential component of communicative language ability, encompassing knowledge of how to use language effectively in real-world situations. It extends far beyond grammatical accuracy.

Contextual Appropriateness

Knowing *when*, *where*, and *to whom* to say what — adapting language to social roles and settings.

Face-Management & Politeness

Navigating face threats, maintaining relational harmony, and honoring sociocultural norms of deference and solidarity.

Beyond the Grammar Rule

A grammatically perfect utterance can still be pragmatically inappropriate — competence lives in the interactional layer.



White Lies as Pragmatic Strategy

Prosocial Function

White lies are regarded as a pragmatic strategy that harmonizes interpersonal relationships and smooths social communication. They are not failures of honesty — they are instruments of relational maintenance.

Cross-Cultural Variation

The evaluation of prosocial lies is influenced by an interplay of intercultural communication strategies depending on cultural group membership. Canadian, Chinese, and German adults assign markedly different moral weights to the same prosocial lie.

Relationship Harmony
Protecting a partner's feelings after a disappointment or failure

Face Protection

Avoiding embarrassment for self or other in public interaction

Social Lubrication

Enabling routine exchanges (e.g., "I'm fine") without emotional cost





"White lies differ from real lies in that their politeness lies in one's willingness to say something untrue even though it may be transparent to all that one does not mean it."

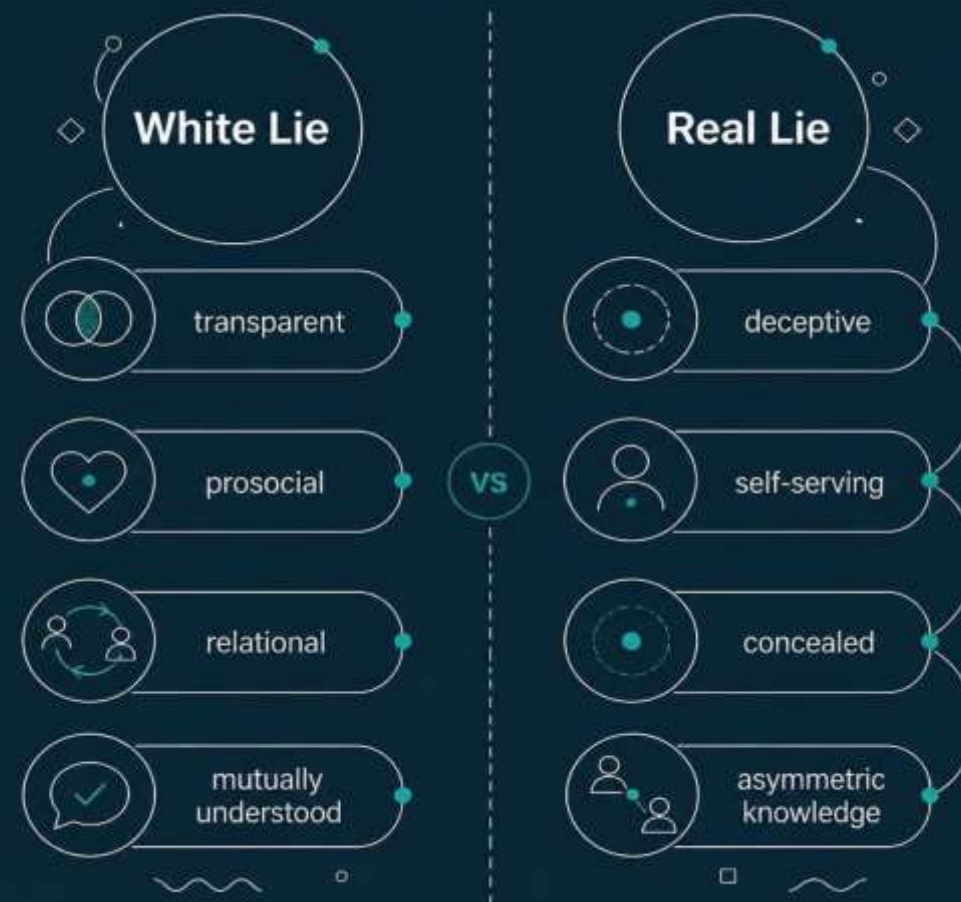
Key Theoretical Distinction

White lies are **socially constituted** and often mutually understood by both speaker and hearer — rendering them categorically different from deceptive lies. Transparency is constitutive of their pragmatic effect.

→ Deceptive Lie

→ White Lie

→ Context Dependency





Slang, Generational Linguistic Innovation



Gen Y (Millennials)

Slang reflects analog social bonding and early digital culture. Initialism is the dominant slang type. Slang is used strategically but seen as informal register.



Gen Z

Slang as a socially empowering communicative tool — more than Gen Y. Heavy stance-marking, irony, and identity construction through lexical choice.



Gen Alpha

Extreme lexical compression, digital culture-driven semantic shifts, and part-of-speech conversion shaped by platform-specific cultures (TikTok, gaming).

- ❏ Younger speakers exhibit unusually frequent use of slang and features indexing speaker stance and emotional involvement — a consistent cross-generational finding.

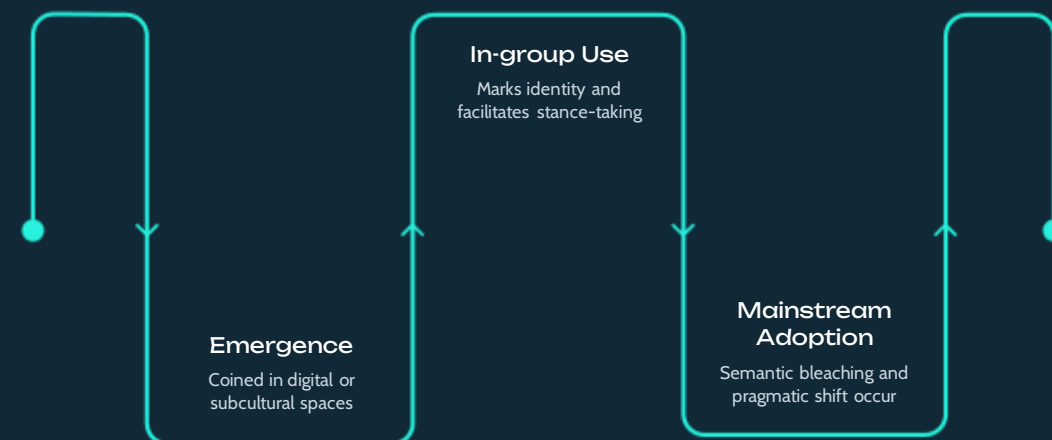
Slang Functions in Discourse



Pragmatic Dimensions

Slang in computer-mediated communication is not merely informal vocabulary — it carries **identity-constructing** and **stance-taking** functions that are central to in-group belonging.

- **Semantic shift:** "Slay" (kill → excel/dominate) and "it's giving" (it resembles/evokes) involve pragmatic enrichment beyond lexical meaning
- **In-group opacity:** Slang presupposes shared cultural and contextual knowledge — inclusive for insiders, deliberately opaque to outsiders
- **Platform specificity:** Expressions emerge from and circulate within specific digital ecosystems, accelerating change beyond traditional language evolution



Terms of Endearment: Pragmatic Functions

Terms of endearment function as indicators of personal attitude and emotion, as well as markers of informality, closeness, and emotive politeness. They operate at the intersection of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and affect.

Intimacy Signaling

Degree of intimacy is the dominant determining factor, accounting for the majority of endearment usage — most common among lovers, close friends, and family members.

Emotive Politeness

Endearments enact positive politeness by affirming in-group solidarity and emotional closeness, reinforcing the relational bond through repeated use.

Register Marker

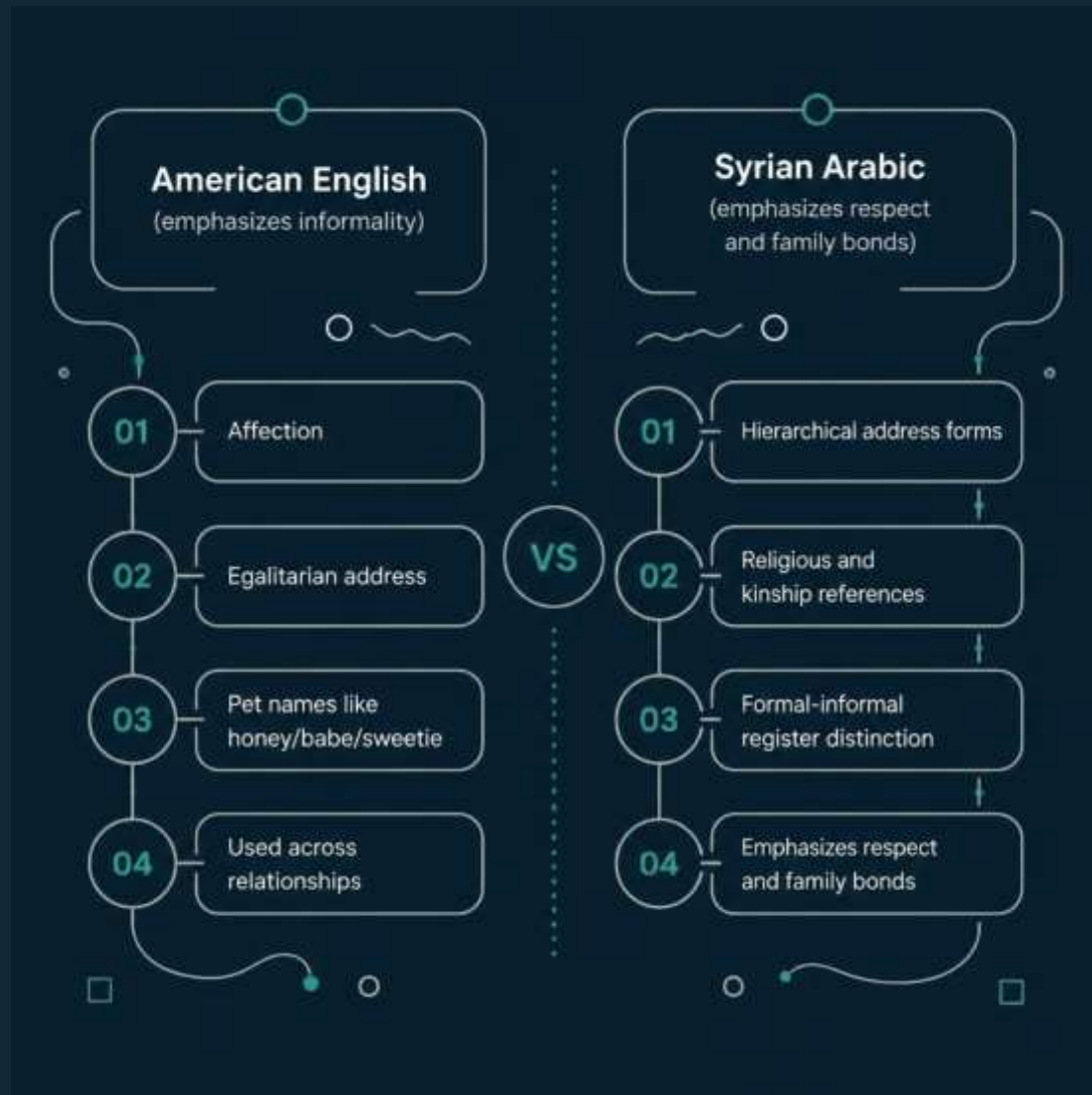
The choice to use (or withhold) an endearment is itself a pragmatic act — marking the relationship as informal, intimate, or specially valued.



66%

Intimacy-Driven

Share of endearment usage attributable to high degree of interpersonal intimacy



Sociocultural Shaping of Address Forms

Each culture develops distinct systems of endearment address shaped by values around hierarchy, family structure, religiosity, and concepts of intimacy. No system is universal.

American English

Prioritizes egalitarian informality. Endearments cross generational and social lines more freely; creativity in pet names is culturally encouraged.

Syrian Arabic

Family bonds and respect hierarchies shape address. Endearments encode relational role and status alongside affection.

Couples' Creativity

Across cultures, partners exhibit creative linguistic innovation — private endearments function as relational identity markers unique to the dyad.

Implications for Communication Studies



Context-Dependent Norms

Pragmatic competence requires navigating three distinct domains simultaneously: **deception** (white lies), **register** (slang), and **intimacy** (endearments). No single rule covers all three.



Pedagogy of Pragmatics

Teaching pragmatic competence demands cultural sensitivity and real-world discourse data — authentic interaction, not grammar-rule transfer. Cross-cultural case studies are indispensable.



Digital Acceleration

Computer-mediated communication accelerates linguistic change — slang now evolves at a pace that outstrips traditional descriptive linguistics. Real-time corpus analysis is essential.



Research Directions

Future work should examine how digital registers blur genre boundaries, how prosocial lie evaluation shifts across generations, and how endearment systems evolve with changing family structures.

□ Informal interpersonal communication is not peripheral to linguistics — it is where pragmatic competence is most dynamically expressed and most rapidly innovated.

Sources

- [Defining and Operationalizing the Construct of Pragmatic Competence: Review and Recommendations](#)
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- [Frontiers | Differences in the Evaluation of Prosocial Lies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Canadian, Chinese, and German Adults](#)
- [Lying and Politeness — Leiden University Scholarly Publications](#)
- [Patterns of Age-Based Linguistic Variation in American English](#)
- [The Evolution of Gen Alpha Slang: Linguistic Patterns and AI Translation Challenges](#)
- [Gen Y vs Gen Z: Generational Differences in English Slang Types and Perceived Use of Slang on Social Media](#)
- [Terms of Endearment in American English and Syrian Arabic Family Discourse](#)
- [Terms of Endearment in English — English Today, Cambridge University Press](#)