

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH SLANGS IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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Annotation: This article explores slang as a controversial element of non-standard vocabulary in linguistics. It analyzes different scholarly views on whether slang is an independent category or synonymous with jargon and argot, and examines its historical development and etymology. The study summarizes both negative and positive evaluations of slang and proposes a working definition that emphasizes its variability, expressiveness, and context-dependent nature.

Keywords: Slang; non-standard vocabulary; argot; jargon; cant; sociolinguistics; colloquial speech; expressive language; lexical change; language variation; youth language; linguistic identity.

When discussing slang as a type of non-standard vocabulary, it should be emphasized that it is still considered one of the most controversial and actual research topics in world linguistics. The main focus of debates concerns the existence of slang as an independent phenomenon separate from jargon and argot, as well as the issue of its primary social characteristics. The main reason for this is the relatively late entry of the term into linguistics and the fact that no final consensus has yet been reached in determining the boundaries between slang and other non-standard speech units (argot and jargon). In this sense, J. Farmer was right when he defined slang as “The darkest continent of the word world” [1].

In addition, there are various views regarding the etymology of the term slang. For example, according to J. Bine, the term slang derives from the words “A sling of string,” [2; 52] referring to the shackles forcibly fastened to prisoners’ hands and feet to prevent their escape.

J. C. Hotten emphasizes that the term slang does not originally belong to English, but is the “(Secret) language of the Gypsies,” and that it is synonymous with gibberish (an invented language kept secret from others).

Regarding the origin of the term slang, most researchers consider E. Partridge’s opinion to be correct. According to the scholar, the English word “Slang” and the Scandinavian “To sling – to speak, to say, to swear” originated from the same root. Therefore, he puts forward the idea that the term slang derived from the verb “To sling.”

The word slang as an independent term was first officially recorded in 1756 in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as “A speech unit of a vulgar character used within a narrow circle”. At this point, a natural question arises: “Had such units not existed in speech before that time?” It should be noted that such units had existed in English speech before, but they were referred to by different names: *lewd* (1386–), *knaveish* (1386–1529), *bawdy* (1513–), *ribaldous* (1565–), *cant* (1567–1750), *tavernly* (1612–), *billingsgate* (1652–), *low* (1672–), *vulgar* (1716–), *flash* (1746–) [3; 119]. According to E. Partridge, from the second half of the nineteenth century slang began to be used with the meaning “illegitimate colloquial speech.”

Examining the evolution of slang, from the time it was officially recognized as a term until relatively recent times, it was very often viewed negatively and constantly criticized. It was even expected that, remaining in the shadow of argot and jargon, it would fall out of use and disappear from speech. However, the term slang proved its vitality and survived longer than all of its synonyms, and it began to be used as a term in many other languages as well.

Up to the present day, many researchers have expressed numerous similar and differing opinions regarding slang. One of the most debated issues is whether slang exists as an independent category and, if it does, how to determine the boundary between it and other types of non-standard lexis. Therefore, summarizing the views expressed by researchers, it is appropriate to present them in the following way:

1. Theories that interpret slang only as the language of specific groups

Researchers who put forward this view consider slang to be synonymous with argot, jargon, or cant. For example, L. G. Anderson, P. Trudgill, A. Barrere, Ch. L. Leland, and D. Crystal evaluate slang only as “The secret language [4] of thieves, criminals and certain gangs,” while F. Grose and Q. Musaev interpret it as “The language of thieves and criminals and a synonym of cant” [5].

I. G. Matviyas, E. Matiello, O. S. Akhmanova, and D. E. Rozental define slang as “The language of professional and social groups,” while O. T. Gorbach and L. T. Bobokhonova define it as “argot.” In addition, in her article devoted to criminal slang, Sh. H. Shahobiddinova uses the phrase “Criminal slang / jargon,” [6; 3-4] which indicates that the scholar considers slang synonymous with jargon, while K. Allan and K. Burridge interpret it as “Jargon itself.”

2. Qualitative arguments supporting the existence of slang as a separate unit of speech, rather than as argot or jargon.

It should be noted that researchers belonging to this group emphasize that slang and other non-standard speech units are separate concepts, and at the same time state that slang usually absorbs argot, jargon and cant, thereby expanding its vocabulary and sphere of influence.

In this regard, the authors of the Dictionary of American Slang, G. Wentworth and B. Flexner, state: “Slang is a collection of words taken from various groups in society.” According to E. Levin, E. Blanco, T. Thorne and L. P. Krysin, “Slang and jargon / argot are two different concepts, and slang arises from them.” Furthermore, according to K. Allan and Yu. M. Skrebnev, “The main difference between slang and jargon / argot is that slang is used by the majority and is understandable to other groups.” According to G. Rahimov, “Slang is a concept separate from argot and jargon.” In this regard, E. V. Gelderen puts forward the view that “Slang and jargon are different things: slang is informal, whereas jargon is formal” [7; 235].

Most scholars who have studied slang have mainly emphasized its social aspect and evaluated it from this point of view. Their views may be summarized as follows:

1. Researchers who have expressed negative attitudes about slang. They evaluate slang as an element that corrupts language and oppose its free usage. For example, J. Genung defines slang as follows: “Slang is an epidemic disease of human language. ... the worst thing is that all sanitary requirements are always rejected in it” [8; 32].

J. Fernald states: “... Slang is a reflection of mental poverty. Using it to stir such a low way of life always brings mud and sludge to the surface.”

Such negative opinions have been expressed by many researchers, while N. Ferster and J. Stedman described slang as “A cheap substitute for a high-value word,” while M. Millhauser and J. Hodges considered its use “a method of lazy people who avoid using a word with a clear meaning in its full form.” A. Rapoport defines it as “A collection of various metaphors in the speech of people who cannot write according to the rules and regulations of slang and are not very educated.”

2. Researchers expressing a positive attitude toward slang. They valued slang as it is and considered its use as a matter of course. In their opinion, the use of slang relieves speech of monotony, gives it a special liveliness, variety, and has various unique features. Therefore, the famous scientist U. Labov advises that all materials about slang should be “Free from extralinguistic abstractions.”

W. Whitman assesses that “Slang is an attempt to free all humanity from excessive literaryism and to contribute to the demonstration of its freedom of speech” [9]

In addition, G. A. Gleason defines slang as “A highly mobile type of vocabulary,” K. Eble states that slang consists of words and expressions characteristic of colloquial speech that change according to trends and fashion, E. Partridge and T. Dalzell describe it as “unconventional,” and J. Coleman emphasizes that slang can help a person integrate into a social group he or she wishes to join, attract the attention of the opposite sex, and even save one’s life on the street.

A number of other researchers, including J. Yule, assessed slang as “a reflection of social life, mainly among young people, in relation to fashion,” while A. Agutter said that “slang is characterized by its newness, originality, and variability,” while Yu. Skrebnev believes that “slang ... is new, unusual, rich in humor and charm, and as soon as its originality is lost, it undergoes change” [10]

V. Zhukovskaya emphasizes that “Slang consists of emotionally colored, ironic, new and unusual words and expressions” [11; 79] L. T. Bobokhonova notes that “sometimes slang can be rude and express a humorous effect,” while Q. M. Musaeu particularly stresses that “Slang possesses strong expressive power in oral speech” [12; 47].

Summarizing the opinions expressed by linguists both worldwide and in our country, we propose the following working definition of the phenomenon of slang: slang consists of words and expressions characteristic of oral speech which:

a) are sometimes used in a closed (secret) manner in the speech of various communities united by a common purpose;

b) in some cases are used within broader circles;

c) sometimes change and renew rapidly;

d) sometimes remain very stable and long-lasting;

e) in certain cases may enter the sphere of the literary language;

f) may function as insult;

g) may express irony;

h) may serve as mockery;

i) may function as humor;

j) sometimes, on the contrary, may reflect features of enthusiasm or elevated tone.

Now we will attempt to comment on each point of the above definition with the help of examples, which are as follows:

a) used in a closed (secret) way for others (A-head, airmal, barbecue n.2, B dog, bingo);

b) in some cases going beyond the limits of a group and used on a wide scale (AKA, ASAP, ZZZ, LOL, John, Bob, Jane, Benjie, Brummagem, Amerika, Oz, Jew York);

c) sometimes rapidly changing and renewing (Yippie (1960–1975), ahhh, Rooshan (1949–1955), flavor of the week (2000–2005), frozen feline (1955–1960), kiki (1935–1950), lu-cu-pu (1945–1955));

d) sometimes very stable and long-lasting (Duds (1440+), neck (1518+), stiff (1790+), jerwater (1890+), job (1690+), Jemmy/Jimmy (1762+), bogs (1789+));

e) in some cases able to enter the stream of the literary language (Bus, jazz, jeep, quiz, jukebox, gadget, bet, odd, shabby, trip, hitch-hiker, snob, mortarboard);

f) sometimes used as insult (Shit, shit-ass, cock, fuckbrain, honey box, a-hole);

g) sometimes expressing irony (Sleep, frosty, to liberate, old man, old lady);

h) in some cases used for mockery (Greek, Aesop, Picasso, newsy, canary, octopus);

i) sometimes reflecting humorous meaning (all-timer's disease; - amundo; and away we go!; knee-biter; another day; another dollar; are you for real?; balloon; be careful, Matt!; beno; but why?);

j) sometimes, conversely, reflecting enthusiasm or elevated tone (peachy, atomic, nicey-nice; fab; keen; groovy; happening).

None of the characteristics listed above should be regarded as strict or unchangeable features of slang. Oral speech units, particularly slang, are relatively unstable and prone to change, and their use in speech can never be rigidly limited. We believe that the definition of slang should be approached on the basis of this very principle. From our point of view, the word “sometimes” is the key word characteristic of slang, as it reveals all of its features.

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