

YOUTH SLANG AS A SOCIAL CODE: ITS ROLES AND METHODS OF FORMATION

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Abstract. This article explores the various functions and distinctive features of slang, which enables speakers to express a wide range of communicative intentions. Beyond serving as a tool for maintaining privacy in communication, slang also operates as a means of linguistic economy, a method for generating new concepts, and a channel for emotional expression, among other purposes. The study highlights the factors that contribute to the widespread use of this non-standard linguistic form and its role in the continuous emergence of neologisms within national language corpora. The relevance of the research lies in the growing interest in the processes of non-standard word formation and the impact of sociolinguistic factors on these developments. The article examines key mechanisms that contribute to the expansion of youth slang vocabulary, including semantic, phonological, and grammatical word formation methods, as well as antonomasia and borrowings from foreign languages.

Key Words: Slang, slang functions, abbreviations, youth subculture, word formation, lexicology, sociolinguistics.

Абстракт. Эта статья исследует различные функции и отличительные черты сленга, который позволяет говорящим выражать широкий спектр коммуникативных намерений. Помимо служения инструментом для сохранения приватности в общении, сленг также функционирует как средство языковой экономии, метод создания новых понятий и канал эмоционального выражения, среди прочих целей. В исследовании выделяются факторы, способствующие широкому использованию этой нестандартной языковой формы и её роли в постоянном появлении неологизмов в национальных языковых корпусах. Актуальность работы обусловлена растущим интересом к процессам нестандартного словообразования и влиянию социолингвистических факторов на эти процессы. В статье рассматриваются ключевые механизмы, способствующие расширению лексикона молодежного сленга, включая семантические, фонологические и грамматические способы словообразования, а также антонимизию и заимствования из иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: сленг, функции сленга, аббревиатуры, молодежная субкультура, словообразование, лексикология, социолингвистика.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola slangning turli funksiyalari va o'ziga xos xususiyatlarini o'rganib, nutq so'zlovchilarga keng ko'lamli kommunikativ niyatlarni ifoda etish imkonini beradi. Slang muloqotda maxfiylikni saqlash vositasi bo'libgina qolmay, balki til iqtisodiyoti, yangi tushunchalar yaratish va emotsional ifoda kanali sifatida ham xizmat qiladi. Tadqiqotda ushbu noan'anaviy til shaklining keng tarqalishiga ta'sir qiluvchi omillar va milliy til korpuslarida yangi so'zlarning paydo bo'lishidagi roli ta'kidlanadi. Ishning dolzarbligi noan'anaviy so'z yasash jarayonlari va sotsiollingvistik omillarning ta'siriga bo'lgan ortib borayotgan qiziqishdan iborat. Maqolada yoshlar slengining lug'at fondini kengaytirishda semantik, fonologik va grammatik so'z yasash usullari, shuningdek antonomaziya va xorijiy tillardan olingan so'zlar asosiy mexanizmlar sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: slang, slang funksiyalari, qisqartmalar, yoshlar subkulturasasi, so'z yasash, leksikologiya, sotsiollingvistika.



Introduction. In today's communicative landscape, slang functions as a universal coding system for informal speech across various social groups. Linguistically, several categories of slang are typically identified, including youth, commercial, theatrical, parliamentary, military, and others. In cognitive linguistics, slang is most commonly associated with youth language and is defined by its informality, abbreviation, creativity, novelty, rapid integration into speech, widespread use, and other features.

While slang was once narrowly defined as a secret language used by thieves or beggars—or as jargon linked to specific professions or activities—such definitions are now outdated (Pongsapan, 2022). Historically, slang-speaking beggars, thieves, and wandering gypsies existed in England nearly five centuries ago, when such language was part of a sociolect known as “Kant.” The term ‘slang’ was formally recognized in 1788 following the publication of a dictionary of English vulgarisms. In modern lexicography, there is a growing trend to replace the label ‘slang’ with terms like ‘informal’ or ‘colloquial’ due to the word’s ambiguity and lack of precision.

Today, slang is broadly understood as a distinct, peripheral layer of vocabulary that exists outside the boundaries of standard literary language and regional dialects. It encompasses metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and, less frequently, words used in their direct meanings. This vocabulary spans both openly accessible emotionally expressive language and non-standard phraseology, as well as more restricted linguistic groups (Pesina et al., 2021a). We propose that slang should include social jargon—particularly the expansive and semi-coded vocabulary popular among youth, which will be discussed in detail later—but it should not be conflated with professional terminology, occupational jargon, or criminal argot. Under this interpretation, slang can be regarded as a subsystem of the national language, as it is capable of fulfilling all the fundamental functions of language.

Materials and discussion. Given its ambiguous nature and heterogeneous composition, slang was classified in this study according to its functions and grouped into various lexico-semantic categories. This approach allowed us to identify the specific communicative contexts in which slang is most frequently, effectively, and appropriately used. The analysis was based on introspection, involving an intuitive reconstruction of the communicative scenarios involving both the speaker and the listener. Semantic analysis was likewise grounded in an intuitive understanding of the mental and linguistic processes of typical slang users. The research also employed comparative and linguocultural analysis methods. Furthermore, the collected slang vocabulary was structurally typologized according to its common formation mechanisms, including semantic shifts, phonological modifications, grammatical transformations, and other word-formation processes.

Some scholars argue that slang is simply “a deviation from established linguistic norms at the vocabulary level” (Amilia et al., 2022). Nevertheless, regardless of the criticisms it faces—whether viewed as linguistic degradation or cultural clutter—slang continues to serve a range of important and distinct functions. Our investigation into the roles of slang suggests that it is far more than just a means of filling conceptual gaps, creating secret codes, or expressing social defiance. We assert that youth slang emerges within the framework of a particular subculture that operates according to its own conventions, including specific linguistic preferences and patterns of speech behavior. Drawing on the more than ten key functions of slang identified in our study, we argue that slang constitutes a social language code that is continuously interpreted and reinterpreted by society. It possesses a unique expressive character that distinguishes it from other layers of the language. Rather than simply importing foreign or obscure vocabulary for the sake of coded communication, slang often facilitates the creation of entirely new concepts—phenomena that merit serious attention from cognitive linguists.



Alongside the subsystem of specialized terminology, slang meets the essential demand for the creation of new concepts and expressions. The emergence of slang terms is largely driven by the communicative needs of native speakers, especially the desire to produce vivid, emotionally charged language that conveys humor, irony, criticism, and other expressive nuances. Another expanding segment of the language consists of abbreviations and shortened forms, which have arisen primarily for the sake of efficiency—particularly in the context of social media and digital communication. It is the younger generation that demonstrates what can be described as “linguistic fearlessness.” Their heightened neuroplasticity at a young age enables the rapid development and reinforcement of new neural pathways, facilitating the quick adoption and stabilization of innovative language forms (Pesina et al., 2021a).

Results. Youth slang can be categorized into two main types: borrowed (from foreign languages) and authentic (native to the language community). In the Uzbek-speaking youth environment, numerous borrowed nouns are in active use, such as *cheater*, *olds*, *hype*, *toxic*, *crash*, *cringe*, and *prank*. Common borrowed verbs include *biting* (to provoke), *voicing*, *to lounge*, *to ruffle*, *to cheat*, *to check*, *to check in*, *to chill*, and *to shame*, while interjections like *auf* also exemplify this trend.

Slang has fulfilled essential linguistic functions for centuries. One of its primary roles is to reduce cognitive effort and promote linguistic economy in communication. For example, the term *pranking* denotes a type of deception designed to observe the target’s reaction, such as *prank calls* or the creation of fake social media profiles aimed at tricking individuals into revealing their romantic interests (*crushes*). Abbreviations also serve the function of language economy and often transition into slang over time. Terms like *pic/photo*, *tele*, *mike*, *dif*, *miz*, *collab* (short for *collaboration*), *comp*, and *Inet* (Internet) originated in spoken language and were previously considered slang.

Slang abbreviations enhance the speed and efficiency of communication by increasing the informativeness and compression of messages. In social media contexts, numerous abbreviations are widely used, such as *HAND* (have a nice day), *LOL* (laughing out loud), *ILY* (I love you), *ZZZ* (sleeping), *RB* (be right back), *BTW* (by the way), *EOM* (end of message), and *MK* (let me know).

Platform-specific slang is also prevalent. On YouTube, for instance, terms include *Mukbang* (a live video where someone eats on camera), *Hypebeast* (a person who buys expensive branded items to impress others), *Haul* (a video showing recently purchased items), *Challenge* (a call to perform something unusual), and *Gang* (a group of collaborating YouTubers). Instagram has given rise to its own set of abbreviations and hashtags, such as *Foodporn* (visually appealing food photography), *WCW* (Woman Crush Wednesday – a post highlighting a female crush), *MCM* (Man Crush Monday), *F4F* (Follow for Follow – mutual subscription), and *OOTD* (Outfit of the Day).

There are numerous abbreviations in which letters or numbers substitute for entire words—for example, *2* for *to/too*, *4* for *for*, *B* for *be*, *C* for *see*, *R* for *are*, *Y* for *why*, and combinations like *2moro* (tomorrow), *2nte* (tonight), *F2F* (face to face), among others.

It is often argued that slang is predominantly used by individuals who are creative and original, driven by a desire to express themselves uniquely. Indeed, people with creative potential tend to experiment freely with language, making the creation of bold linguistic associations, unexpected expressions, and new heuristic insights an important function of slang. Slang also serves as a tool for self-affirmation and peer recognition, enabling individuals to mask their insecurities behind “high-status” or socially valued words. As such, slang can act as a marker of personal growth and development, fueled by young people’s openness and curiosity to explore new and unusual linguistic forms.



Frequently, slang is perceived as a form of protest against established linguistic norms and conventions, reflecting dissent within the pluralistic values of various subcultures. Through slang, youth express their socio-political stance—for example, the Russian slang term *ватник* (*vatnik*, literally “quilted jacket”) serves as a derogatory nickname for someone who passively consumes information and uncritically accepts dominant narratives, often spending excessive time watching television. Conversely, slang often functions as a euphemistic device, softening harsh statements and providing allegorical or indirect expressions that reduce communicative discomfort—for instance, calling someone a *cheater* in Uzbekistan is considered less offensive than labeling them a *gossiper* or *liar*.

Slang also compensates for gaps in conceptual vocabulary by offering novel ways to express ideas within the linguistic system. Examples include *to ruffle* (laughing gently), *voicing* (sending a voice message), and *orat'* (laughing out loud). Slang terms often use exaggerated or witty nominations, such as *krinzh* (awkwardness accompanied by shame), *toxic* (someone who destroys self-confidence), or *bread-basket* (stomach). In contexts where mental and emotional release is required, standard literary or everyday language may fail, highlighting slang's role as an essential expressive resource.

Given slang's deep impact on young people's lives, its continued use is fully justified. Slang expressions tend to be quickly accepted as authentic but often have a limited lifespan; like metaphors, they eventually shift from fresh and lively to cliché or obsolete (Sarbunan, 2020; Mensah, 2021).

One of slang's most important functions is maintaining confidentiality and exclusivity in communication. This involves keeping information secret and ensuring understanding only among peers of the same age or social group. In this way, slang serves as a signal proclaiming “I am a true member of this group,” creating a linguistic boundary between “insiders” and “outsiders.” Historically, language has been a strategic tool in conflicts and wars, underscoring the power of coded speech.

On the downside, slang can sometimes exert a negative communicative impact, provoking emotional discomfort or instability in its users and listeners. Its often aggressive or pejorative terms may violate mental comfort zones and convey a spectrum of negative emotions. However, the use of such pejorative vocabulary can also function as an emotional release, helping to restore mental balance and strength, provided it is not used as a direct insult.

An important source of slang enrichment is the active integration of computer technologies, particularly computer games. Users of these games create original terms to describe aspects of the virtual world, characterized by uniqueness, brevity, and semantic density. This linguistic economy is essential for fast communication and for overcoming language barriers during international gameplay.

The vocabulary of this computer-related substandard language is lexically and stylistically heterogeneous, combining elements from both literary language and slang. For instance, in the computer game GTA, the urbanized social environment significantly influences the emotional tone of the characters' speech. The game transfers street slang from real-life urban settings into its virtual world, where common word-formation processes such as affixation, compounding, and abbreviation prevail.

Computer programming slang primarily exists in oral form, which allows for rapid adaptation and incorporation of changes. Slang functions as an antagonist to literary language, constituting a special lexical subsystem with distinct properties within certain groups, such as software developers. For example, Uzbek programmers use jargon like *solve a bug*, *get a task*, *participate in a rally* / *one-to-one*, and *lay out code-review* (meaning to write code). It is important to distinguish slang from professional jargon and terms, though computer slang often crosses over into everyday youth speech.



Many slang terms are borrowed from English into Uzbek but with altered meanings, often becoming so-called “false friends” of the translator. For example, the Uzbek slang word *botanik* (*botanik*, meaning a nerd or bookworm) likely originates not from the English word *botany* but from *to batten* (to freeloader or learn by copying). The association with the academic discipline may have emerged later in Uzbek usage. The boundary between slang and vulgarisms can also be blurred—for example, the English BS (“bullshit”) sounds milder to Uzbeks, while the Uzbek equivalent of the English *bloody* is much more vulgar.

In terms of lexico-semantic word formation, processes like metaphorization and metonymization are common and productive in slang. Among the most prolific methods of expanding youth slang vocabulary are word formation and word composition. Here are some key ways slangisms are formed:

Onomatopoeia or sound imitation: *clackers* – false teeth, *to glug* – to get drunk, *ticker* – watch, *ding-dong* – fight, *hushhush* – secret politics, *coconuts* – cocaine.

Lexical word formation, including secondary nomination (metaphor): *old fogey* / *biddy* – old woman, *bad* – cool, *Merry-go-round* – deceiver, *box* – TV, *sharp* – smart, *eyes* – female breasts, *sugar*, *grass* – drugs (heroin), *pickled* – drunk, *jungle juice* – moonshine.

Cases of metonymy: *Law* – police, *Job* – crime, *Naked* – no money, *Rolling* – rich.

Lexical methods also include phraseological units such as: *Make-a bomb* – get rich, *To do a flit* – to quit one’s flat or lodgings at night without paying rent, *Get smb wet* – to kill someone.

An interesting phenomenon is the use of zoologisms like *dog*, which can have opposite meanings depending on context: *be the top dog* – to be the best at something, *to go to the dogs* – to lose social status or deteriorate.

The vague borderline between slang and informal colloquial speech should be highlighted. It is important to note that many slang terms tend to move upward into more general functional styles of language use. Examples include:

Verbs and phrases: *to fib* / *to tell porkies* (to lie), *to kip* / *snooze* (to have a nap), *a cushy number* (an easy job), *a witter* (someone who talks a lot of uninteresting nonsense), *rot* (nonsense), *to grab* (to cause a reaction in someone), *groove* (something very enjoyable), *hang up* (a psychological or emotional problem).

Compound nouns formed by combining two nouns: *boneshaker* – a rattletrap (old, noisy car), *cake-hole* – mouth, *dirtbag* – a loser, *gatemouth* – talker, *headlights* – large female breasts, *hellhole* – a messy or unpleasant place, *hayseed* – redneck, *jockstrap* – athlete (jock), *lowrider* – a young man driving a car with lowered suspension, *lunch-box* – a simpleton, *moon-ass* – someone in love, *mouthpiece* – lawyer, *deadhead* – fool, *limpdick* – impotent person, *numbskull* – dumbass, *wethead* – beginner, *scumbag* – bastard, *blabbermouth* – talker, *milksop* – coward.

Complex verbs in American youth slang: Compounding two nouns: *to window-shop* (to look at shop windows), Noun + verb: *to force-feed*, *to lollygag* (to laze around), Adjective + verb: *to blackwash* (to slander), *to sweet-talk* (to persuade), Compound adjectives (noun + adjective): *sorry-ass* (useless).

Sound changes and rearrangements (metathesis): Changes in sound order within words to form slang variants, often called back-slang: *dabnam* instead of *bad man*, *doog* instead of *good*, *eno* instead of *one*, *on* instead of *no*, *reeb* instead of *beer*, *wen* instead of *new*, *yob* instead of *boy*, *Uoy nac ees reh screekin ginwash* instead of *you can see her knickers showing*.

Root word changes (central slang): *ilkem* instead of *milk*, *utchker* instead of *catch*.

Rhyming slang: *apples and pears* – stairs, *artful dodger* – lodger, *bread and honey* – money, *Cain and Abel* – table, *cat and mouse* – house, *flea and louse* – house, *joy of my life* – wife, *north and south* – mouth, *porkpies* – lies, *pot and pan* – old man, *read and write* – fight, *tin plate* – mate, *trouble and strife* – wife, *uncle Fred* – bread (money).



Affixation in slang noun formation: Prefixation: *upstairs* – brains, Suffixation: *dropout* – one who quit, *knockout* – handsome person, *nosh-up* – feast, *pile-up* – accident, *to piss-up* – to get drunk, *fiver* – five-dollar bill, *lifer* – criminal sentenced to life, *baddie* – villain, Prefix + suffix: *up-and-downer* – fight, Attaching prepositions or particles: *buncha* – bunch of people, *kinda*, *sorta* – kind of, sort of, *outta* – out of, *righto* – yes, *to-do* – quarrel, *weirdo* – eccentric.

As this list shows, the emergence of new slang word forms relies on a variety of traditional word formation mechanisms. Semantically, most slang vocabulary carries negative connotations. However, slang also often emphasizes the grotesque, ridiculous, or humorous aspects of objects or phenomena. Many slang terms serve as more expressive equivalents of existing words found in other layers of the vocabulary, enhancing emotional or stylistic effect (Shalkov et al., 2021).

Conclusion.

Thus, slang, as a crucial vanguard sublanguage, radically updates the modern language within a relatively short period. It actively generates new concepts and modifies existing frequently used lexemes (Roth-Gordon, 2020; Solonchak & Pesina, 2015). The creators and users of slangisms operate within specific subcultures governed by their own norms and rules. Slangisms serve as a unified means of expressing emotionality and vividness by verbalizing the speaker's emotional state—fulfilling individual needs for verbal self-expression regardless of the user's age.

Slang is characterized by a high degree of compression in speech acts and a high information density, which facilitates faster communication both within and across different social groups. Influenced by sociolinguistic features and factors typical of this substandard language, literary and colloquial languages increasingly adopt slangisms, especially in the realm of information technology. As a linguistic phenomenon, slang relies on the creation of numerous new concepts and the systematic violation of generally accepted language norms, which often masks individual uncertainty in language use.

Globalization, technological advancement, Internet communication, and media play a significant role in shaping this substandard lexical layer. Consequently, slangisms reflect the evolving values and linguistic orientations of contemporary society, making their study particularly relevant for cognitive linguists.

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