

Semantic features of slang in English

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Annotation: This research explores the semantic shifts occurring in English slang, examining both historical and contemporary examples to understand the underlying mechanisms and sociocultural factors driving these changes. In the last decades, the number of investigations related to the slang words in the field of linguistics has increased dramatically. Although much attention has been paid to this sphere, there is lack of scientific researches relevant to the semantic analysis of the slang words. The semantic and morphological analyses are employed, focusing on slang formation and semantic shifts that involve the alteration of word meanings due to various influences, including social interactions, media exposure, cultural exchange, and significant societal events. Through a literature review, the study investigates how slang terms evolve over time. Key mechanisms identified include the blending and shortening of words, distributional modelling for semantic change detection, and the impact of global and cultural exchanges. The study also highlights the semantic features of slang words, focusing on how the familiar words shifted over time and gained new meanings.

Keywords: Slang, semantic shift, slang formation, metaphorization, reduplicatives, semantic processes, generalization, narrowing, morphological processes, amelioration, pejoration.

Ingiliz tilidagi slenglarning semantik xususiyatlari

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu tadqiqot ingliz tilidagi slenglarda yuz beradigan semantik o'zgarishlarni, bu o'zgarishlarga sabab bo'luvchi asosiy mexanizmlar va ijtimoiy-madaniy omillarni tushunihs uchun tarixiy va zamonaviy misollarni o'rganadi. So'nggi o'n yilliklarda tilshunoslik sohasida sleng so'zlar bilan bog'liq tadqiqotlar soni keskin ortib bormoqda. Bu sohaga katta e'tibor qaratilgan bo'lsa-da, sleng so'zlarning semantik tahliliga oid ilmiy izlanishlar yetarli emas. Semantik va morfologik tahlillar turli xil ta'sirlar, jumladan, ijtimoiy o'zaro ta'sirlar, ommaviy axborot vositalarining ta'siri, madaniy almashinuv va muhim ijtimoiy voqealar tufayli so'z ma'nolarining o'zgarishini o'z ichiga olgan sleng shakllanishi va semantik o'zgarishlarga qaratilgan. Adabiyotlarni o'rganish orqali tadqiqot sleng atamalarining vaqt o'tishi bilan qanday rivojlanishini o'rganadi. Aniqlangan asosiy mexanizmlar orasida so'zlarni biriktirish va qisqartirish, semantik o'zgarishlarni aniqlash uchun taqsimlash modellashtirish va global va madaniy almashinuvlarning ta'siri kiradi. Tadqiqotda sleng so'zlarning semantik xususiyatlari ham yoritilgan, ya'ni hammaga birdek tanish bo'lgan so'zlarning vaqt o'tishi bilan qanday o'zgarib, yangi ma'no kasb etganiga e'tibor qaratilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: Sleng, semantik o'zgarish, sleng yasalishi, metaforizatsiya, reduplikativlar, semantik jarayonlar, umumlashtirish, qisqartirish, morfologik jarayonlar, amelioratsiya, pejoratsiya.

Семантические особенности сленга в английском языке

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Аннотация: В данном исследовании рассматриваются семантические сдвиги, происходящие в английском сленге, на исторических и современных примерах, чтобы понять глубинные механизмы и социокультурные факторы, обуславливающие эти изменения. В последние десятилетия количество исследований, связанных со сленговыми словами, в области лингвистики резко возросло. Несмотря на то, что этой сфере уделяется большое внимание, существует недостаток научных исследований, посвященных семантическому анализу сленговых слов. В работе используются семантический и морфологический анализы, посвященные образованию сленга и семантическим сдвигам, которые связаны с изменением значений слов под влиянием различных факторов, включая социальные взаимодействия, воздействие СМИ, культурный обмен и значимые общественные события. В обзоре литературы исследуется, как сленговые термины эволюционируют с течением времени. Выявлены такие ключевые механизмы, как смешение и сокращение слов, моделирование распространения для выявления семантических изменений, а также влияние глобальных и культурных обменов. Исследование также освещает семантические особенности сленговых слов, фокусируясь на том, как знакомые слова менялись с течением времени и приобретали новые значения.

Ключевые слова: сленг, семантический сдвиг, сленгообразование, метафоризация, редупликативы, семантические процессы, генерализация, сужение, морфологические процессы, мелиорация, пежорация.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic entity that continuously evolves to accommodate the changing needs and contexts of its speakers. Among the various facets of linguistic change, semantic shift – particularly as observed in slang – stands out as a fascinating area of study. According to Pei, Sun and Xu (2019), slang is often regarded as informal and non-standard language, plays a significant role in this evolution. It reflects social, cultural, and generational shifts, offering a unique lens through which to examine how meanings of words transform over time. Semantic shift, also known as semantic change, refers to the phenomenon where the meaning of a word changes in some way. Situmorang and Herman (2021) showed that this change can be subtle or dramatic, encompassing broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and other types of shifts. Slang words are particularly prone to such changes due to their informal nature and their frequent use within specific social groups. Understanding these shifts can provide insights into larger trends in language usage and cultural evolution.

According to Fišer and Ljubešić (2019), the study of semantic shift in slang is not merely an academic exercise, it has also practical implications. Understanding how and why words change meaning can help build more successful communication techniques in disciplines like sociolinguistics, lexicography, and language education.

Additionally, it can help in creating more accurate dictionaries and teaching materials that reflect contemporary language use. This research aims to explore the mechanisms behind semantic shift in slang words within the English language. By examining a selection of slang terms, the study will identify patterns and factors that contribute to these shifts. The focus will be on both historical and contemporary slang, providing a comprehensive view of how slang evolves over time.

The article aims to analyze and systematize semantic changes of slang expressions in order to investigate their functions in communication, and to determine the influence of slang on language development and its perception in different social groups.

There is hardly any other term that is as ambiguous and obscure as the term slang. Slang seems to mean everything that is below the standard usage of present-day language. The notion of slang has

caused much controversy for many years. Much has been said and written about it. A lot of different opinions have been expressed concerning its nature, its boundaries and the attitude that should be adopted towards it.

V. A. Xomyakov (1971) interprets the concept of “slang” as “a special peripheral layer of non-literary vocabulary and phraseology, lying both outside the boundaries of literary colloquial speech and outside the boundaries of dialects of the national English language”.

Lexicographer E. Partridge, who is known for his research in the field of slang, gives the following definition: “existing in the colloquial sphere very fragile, unstable, not codified in any way, and often quite random and random sets of lexemes, reflecting the social consciousness of people belonging to a particular social or professional environment”. He emphasizes that slang units are unstable, reflect the social consciousness of people who belong to a certain social or professional environment.

Y. A. Petrova and S. V. Samarskaya (2020) in their article mention the following features of slang units:

- slang may be incomprehensible for some part of the population. One of the reasons is that in many cases slang is a borrowing from other languages;
- expressive and emotional coloring of slang has a sufficient number of shades (from joking to rudeness).

According to the researcher I. V. Arnold (1986), slang includes only “colloquial words and expressions with rough or humorous emotional coloring” that are not accepted in literary speech.

Slang is usually simple and overt rather than complex or subtle. It tends to shorten and simplify rather than to develop and elaborate; to omit the incidental and the marginal rather than to describe in full; to render metaphorical, pictorial, picturesque; to take nothing too seriously, yet clearly, though very lightly and briefly. From another angle slang is rather a spoken than a written language - or more accurately, a vocabulary - and it normally springs from speech rather than from the printed page.

Slang comes to be a very numerous part of the English language. It is considered to be one of the main representatives of the nation itself.

Slang is a language that speakers deliberately use to break with the standard language and to change the level of discourse in the direction of informality. It shows the speakers' intention to be fresh and starting in their expression, to ease social exchanges, to create friendly atmosphere, to reduce excessive seriousness and avoid clichés, in brief, to enrich the language. It includes words that are not specific for any social or professional group. E.g. everybody knows that a nerd is "an intelligent person" and the crackers means "crazy", or bevy means "an alcoholic drink", caff means "café" and fiver meaning "a five pound bank note". There are many slang words that can mean "money", e.g. "Cash", "Dos", "Dough", "Moolah", "Notes", "Readies". The British refer to their currency as "Quid" or "Nicker". The US dollar, on the other hand, is called "Buck" or "Green-Buck".

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a literature review methodology to explore the semantic shifts in English slang. By systematically reviewing and analyzing existing scholarly works, articles, books, and digital sources, this research aims to gather comprehensive insights about semantic change in slang terms. The literature review will involve identifying and synthesizing relevant studies that address historical and contemporary slang usage, semantic theories, and sociolinguistic factors influencing language evolution. Additionally, it employs semantic and morphological analyses, focuses on analyzing the meaning of words, how those meanings change and formation of slang words in the context of everyday speech. For this purpose, the methods of component analysis and analysis of meanings in context proposed in the works of such linguists as D. Lyons (“Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics”) and C. Fillmore (“Frame Semantics”) are used. These methods help to reveal how the meanings of slang expressions vary depending on the context and how they are related to cognitive processes

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of semantic shifts in English slang reveals a complex interplay of various mechanisms that drive changes in meaning over time. In 2019, one of the primary mechanisms is explored by Fajardo, which involves the blending and shortening of words to create new slang terms. This process not only alters the original meaning but also adapts the term to fit the communicative needs and cultural context of its users, particularly among teenagers who seek to establish a unique linguistic identity. Distributional modelling, as detailed by Fišer and Ljubešić (2019), provides another crucial mechanism for detecting semantic shifts. By analyzing large corpora of text and observing changes in the contextual usage of words, researchers can identify patterns of semantic change. This method highlights how shifts in word meanings often occur gradually as words are used in new contexts or acquire additional connotations over time. The computational approach offers a quantitative way to trace the evolution of slang and understand the underlying dynamics.

The meaning of slang terms can change over time through a variety of semantic processes, including:

1. **Broadening.** This process is when the meaning of a word expands to broader contexts. The broadening can occur through a process of generalization, where the original meaning of the word becomes less specific. For example: original meaning of the term “sick” meant physically ill, but it has broadened in slang to also mean cool or awesome.
2. **Narrowing.** This process is when the meaning of a word becomes more restricted. The narrowing can occur through a process of specialization, where the word becomes associated with a particular context or group. For instance: the term “gay” originally meant happy or cheerful, but it has narrowed in slang to refer specifically to homosexual individuals.
3. **Amelioration and pejoration.** Amelioration occurs when the meaning of a word becomes more positive, while pejoration occurs when the meaning becomes more negative. For example, the term “nice” originally meant foolish or ignorant, but it has undergone amelioration to mean pleasant or agreeable. Another example is that, the term “awful” originally meant inspiring, but it has undergone pejoration to mean terrible or unpleasant.

There are some common morphological processes used in slang formation:

1. Metaphorization

Metaphorization is directly linked with cognition and role of context in this situation is undeniable. Because without context no meaning can be given to that word. As for slangs the social group using that slang should take into consideration the intellectual level, status of the social group, place, situation, and purpose of slang, reason for giving meaning to it and other features. Otherwise, the speech act cannot fulfill its function. For instance:

I was so busy with my family before the exam, that lonely had three days to cram in all revision work!

The “*cram*” in this context is a slang and archaic meaning is “*memorize, learn by heart*”.

However, with the help of the context, we understand it through cognition. According to the background knowledge, the person used “*cram*” depending on the situation that “he was busy before the exam” and “should pass the exam” at the end. This slang was used because the semantic component is based on the “*study hastily*”.

One more word related to eating is used as slang: *I’m going to get some grab for myself from the local take away. Do you ‘want anything?* The “*grab*” in this sentence has been used in the meaning of lunch. In fact, the meaning of the word “*grab*” is “to take or grasp suddenly”, but the expression of “*from local takeaway*” in the second part of the sentence could change its meaning as a slang. We explain it that the meaning of the word “*takeaway*” is a “*restaurant that cooks and sells food that you takeaway and eat somewhere else*”. For example: *We can get something to eat from Chinese takeaway.*

Many words may acquire a completely different meaning in modern slang terms and also a professional interpreter can’t understand a man’s speech from Colorado, Texas as in each region the language is different. It’s all about everyday slang.

Let's take for example the verb "to get", it has many meanings. For a sample: *It seems to me that I've forgot money. Don't worry I got it.* In this sentence it means "to have". *Do you understand how to drive this boat? – Yes, I got it.* Now we can use verb "to get" in a meaning "to understand".

I got the vase in the last second before I dropped it. At the third sentence it means "to catch".

It will be very attentive how we use "to get" with regard to people. For example, *"I got Bob by"* – this phrase means *"I shot Bobby"*. If we use this phrase to a woman it can be understood as an attempt to harass a woman. As a result, the verb "to get" replaces other verbs. For instance, *"I've loved you since I got you"*. It's another slang meaning of word "get". Although it applies to a person, it translates as *"I've loved you since I found (met) you"*. At the second sentence the verb "to get" has a positive meaning in contrast with the first sentence.

Also, the verb "to get" can use in such slang phrases: *"get a load of something"* – "see, look, understand something". For instance: *Are you getting load of what he saying?* It means *"Do you understand what he saying?"*.

For example, the expression *"get a life"* means "to do business, not to interfere". For instance: *Just get a life and do not come here.* Here it means "Go to do business" instead of "coming here".

2. Reduplicatives

In Merlini Barbaresi's (forthcoming) classification, English reduplicatives (or echo-words) belong to four main patterns:

Ablaut (or apophonic) reduplicatives, exhibiting vowel gradation (i.e. a systematic alternation of the stressed vowel), as in *chit-chat*, *tick-tock*;

Rhyming reduplicatives, exhibiting rhyming constituents and apophony of the initial consonant, as in *fuzzy-wuzzy*;

Rhyming compounds, in which both bases are meaningful, as in *funny bunny*;

Copy (or exact) reduplicatives, in which the two constituents are identical, as in *bye-bye*.

3. Acronyms and initialisms

According to Bauer (1983), acronyms and initialisms are words coined by taking the initial letters of the words in a title or phrase. Still, they represent two different word-formation processes, since acronyms are words pronounced as full words (i.e. by applying the regular reading rules), while initialisms are pronounced as sequences of letters (i.e. by naming each individual letter of the abbreviated words). Another scholar Plag (2003), states that both can be spelt with either capital or lower-case letters, but, intuitively, only initialisms can have dots, though there seems to be a tendency towards avoiding them.

Slang acronyms are quite numerous. Some examples are *dink* (double/dual income no kids) 'either partner of a usu. professional working couple who have no children', *DOM* (dirty old man), *Nimby/NIMBY* (not in my back yard) 'used as a slogan objecting to the siting of something considered unpleasant in one's locality', etc.,

There are some examples for initialisms: *BLT* (bacon, lettuce, and tomato (sandwich)), *O.K./OK/ok* (oll/orl correct) 'all right', 'fashionable, modish', *O.O.* (once-over), *O.P./O.P.'s* (other people's (cigarettes or alcoholic drink)), *OPM* (other people's money).

4. Blending

Blending is a common derivational process in English. Blends, also called contaminations or "portmanteau words" (after Carroll), are formed by merging parts of words into one word, as in *smog*, from *smoke* and *fog*.

In English slang, we distinguish prototypical from partial blends.

Prototypical blends. Some slang blends prototypically consist of the head of one word and the tail of another one. They are often adjectives formed from two standard or colloquial adjectives having a similar or related meaning, as in *glob* (*gob* + *blob*) 'a mass or lump of some liquid or semi-

liquid substance’ and revusical (revue + musical) ‘a theatrical entertainment that combines elements of the revue and musical’.

Partial and less prototypical blends. They behave as typical blends, though one of the two bases remains intact. The first base is a word followed by a word head in kidvid (kid + video) ‘a television programme or video made for children.

The second base is a word preceded by a head in doohickey (doodad + hickey, also doojigger) ‘any small object, esp. mechanical’, tab show (tabloid show) ‘a short version of a musical’.

Many slang blends simply merge where the two words overlap, as in nerk (nerd + berk/jerk) ‘a foolish or objectionable person’, scuzz (scum + fuzz, but also considered a corrupted abbrev. of disgusting) ‘contemptible or despicable person’, squiz (squint + quiz) ‘a look or glance’, swingle (swinging + single) ‘a ‘swinging’ single or unaccompanied person’, vidiot (video + idiot) ‘a habitual viewer of television or player of video games’, yatter (orig. Sc. dialect) (yammer + chatter) ‘talk idly and incessantly’.

5. Clipping

Clipping is a process which abbreviates a word to one of its parts. The most common pattern is back-clipping, in which the beginning of a base lexeme is retained (e.g. lab laboratory). Other possible patterns include fore-clipping, in which the final part of the word is retained (e.g. phone from telephone), clippings in which the middle of the word is retained (e.g. flu from influenza), and clipped compounds (e.g. cablegram from cable telegram), which differ from partial blends because their bases have a composite rather than independent meaning.

Clipping is common in slang. In particular, it develops slang terms of special private groups, in which an allusion is sufficient to indicate the whole. For instance, American college students use frat instead of fraternity, Oxford or Cambridge University students call ‘an officer’ prog, abbreviated from proggins or earlier proctor, pecs is used among bodybuilders to refer to pectoral muscles, post is a medicine slang term used in the place of post-mortem, prop is used by criminals to refer to property (as in prop game, man, etc.), ump stands for umpire in baseball slang, scorp and scam are military slang terms for scorpion ‘a civil inhabitant of Gibraltar’ and scramble ‘depart quickly’.

Examples of slang terms and their semantic analysis

Slang term	Original meaning	Current meaning	slang	Semantic process
Swag	Stolen goods	Style\ Confidence		Amelioration
Flex	To bend	To show off		Metaphorization
Swole	Swollen	Extremely muscular		Metaphorization
Tea	Liquid beverage	Gossip		Semantic extension
Salty	Containing salt	Angry\ annoyed		Semantic shift

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of slang words in English, classifying them into semantic and morphological processes. The article illustrates the development and evolution of slang words. Additionally, the findings highlight slang words are main representatives of the nations and tend to change according to the speakers’ intentions. There are some examples of slang words are analyzed taken from dictionary and their meanings that they have acquired and changed as a result of semantic shift over time. By examining this sample of slang words, it was found that slang mostly exploits regularity within word-formation. It uses the same word-formation processes as Standard English, and it usually uses them in the same way as well. The word-formation processes found in this sample of words were compounding, shortening, suffixation, blending and conversion. Even though the majority of words were coined in a regular way, within each word formation process, there also appeared some irregularities, probably chiefly used in slang.

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