

# Slang in modern english

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



What is it exactly that differentiates slang from the standard vocabulary?

Because most slang terms are simply old words given additional new meanings, slang cannot usually be distinguished on the basis of its formal or grammatical features.

### **A. Humor**

American slang is considered as "comedy" by Americans because of its humorous effect. The humor of American slang first represented in terms of its phonetic humor. A great amount of American slangs take advantage of the euphony to achieve the aim of being easily to be understood and remembered and to get the purposes of being readable and vivid. Rhyme is a common phonetic method in American slang to get its humorous effect. There are many examples: the bee's knees (outstanding people or thing); fender-bender (a trifle); razzle-dazzle (carnival) and so on. The usage of rhyme in American slang can make people feel a sense of rhythm in sounds.

The characteristic in humor can also be shown through lexicon. NATO is an acronym, which is short for the famous North Atlantic Treaty Organization but now American people develop NATO into a slang which has a quite different meaning with the original one, that is, the new meaning of NATO is used to describe somebody or something that only says something but not puts their plans to practice.

### **B. Conciseness**

Conciseness may not be the soul of American slang, but it is perhaps the chief feature. This is attained either by apocope, as in vamp for vampire, molt for muttonhead, fan for fanatic (apparently), etc., or by the substitution

of an expressive monosyllable or compound of monosyllables for a longer word or description. Simp (stupid person), veep (vice president), classy (fashionable), etc. are brief and easy to speak out.

When they defined a Communist as either a crank or a crook, the subject is really exhausted. It is difficult now to imagine how we got on so long without the word stunt, how they expressed the characteristics so conveniently summed up in dope-fiend or high-brow, or any other possible way of describing that mixture of the cheap pathetic and the ludicrous which is now universally labeled sob stuff.

### **C. Originality**

Slang is the diction that results from the favorite game among the young and lively of playing with words and renaming things and actions; some invent new words, or mutilate or misapply the old, for the pleasure of novelty, and others catch up such words for the pleasure of being in the fashion. For example, live wire, smoker eater and flying coffin refer to " living man", " fireman", " plane" respectively.

These similes are so novel and vivid that they can't be made without good imagination, while think-machine (brain), sparkler (diamond), pickers (hands), cannedmusic(musical disk) are more vivid and expressive.

Sometimes slang words are invented by a few people for the pleasure of novelty and imitated by others who like to be in fashion. Many of the slang words coined during the Second World War have passed out of use along with the events that called them into life.

### **D. Instability**

Whereas the words which form the backbone of the language still show no signs of failing variety, it is unusual for slang words to remain in use for more than a few years, though some slang terms serve a useful purpose and so pass into the standard language. The vocabulary of slang changes rapidly: what is new and exciting for one generation is old-fashioned for the next. Old slang often either drifts into obsolescence or becomes accepted into the standard language, losing its eccentric color.

Flapper, for instance, started life in the late 19th century as a slang term for a young unconventional or lively woman, but subsequently moved into the general language as a specific term for such a vogue woman of the 1920s. Similarly, the use of gay in the sense "homosexual" has its roots firmly in slang of the 1930s, but is now widely accepted as standard terminology.

Idiolect is a personal dialect of an individual speaker that combines elements regarding regional, social, gender, and age variations. In other words, an individual speaker's regional and social background, his/her gender and age jointly determine the way he/she talks (Dai & He, 2010, p. 115). Slang is a kind of sociolect and idiolect has to do with separation brought about by different social and individual conditions. Then let's firstly go to some individual conditions influencing American slang.

### **American Slang and Gender**

Language, like other form of social activity, has to be appropriate to the speakers using it. This is why, in many communities, men and women's speech is different. In the use of American slang, men and women differ from

each other. Most American slang is created and used by males. De Klerk also found that the gender difference in use and tolerance of slang was leveling out in contemporary society and that the stereotype of males being the primary slang users was open to question.

Many types of slang words including the taboo and strongly derogatory ones, those referring to sex, women, work, money, whiskey, politics, transportation, sports, and the like refer primarily to male endeavor and interest. The majority of entries in all slang dictionaries could be labeled "primarily masculine use". Moreover, men belong to more sub-groups than do women; men create and use occupational cant and jargon; in business, men have acquaintances that belong to many different sub-groups.

Women, on the other hand, still tend to be restricted to family and neighborhood friends. Women have very little of their own slang. The new words applied to women's clothing, hair styles, homes, kitchen utensils and gadgets are usually created by men. Except when she accompanies her boy friend or husband to his recreation (baseball, hunting, etc.), a woman seldom mingles with other groups.

When women do mingle outside of their own neighborhood and family circles, they do not often talk of the outside world of business, politics, or other fields of general interest where new feminine names for objects, concepts, and viewpoints could evolve. Women, who do work usually replace men at men's jobs, are less involved in business life than men and have a shorter business career (often only an interim between school and marriage).

The major female sub-groups contributing to American slang are: airline stewardesses, beauty-operators, chorus girls, nurses, prostitutes, and waitresses. Nowadays, due to the influence of feminist movement, women are trying to enter into the male preserve, but the majority of Americans are less tolerant of women using slang.

### **American Slang and Occupation**

Generally speaking, there is an inverse relationship between the occupation variable and acceptance of slang, for the higher the training and education required for the position, the lower the tolerance for slang. Occupation is, therefore, the most discrimination variable. Furthermore, professional people are somewhat more accepting of slang than

### **American Slang and Age**

Age factor also influences the use of American slang. American youths, especially teenagers and college students, are the main consumers and makers of American slang. American teenagers and college students are the fashion makers. They are radical in every aspect including their ways of using language. They are not afraid of making mistakes, but ready to explore the unknown things.

They are full of curiosity, pursuit and are mad with new things. At the same time, they have a strong sense of independence; do not bend blindly to any authorities like parents and teachers. They are ready to challenge traditional conventions and customs. They tend to make good use of the slang terms created by the musicians, pop singers, or those engaged in the popular trades. For instance, the words crazy originally means mad, strange, silly,

but the musicians of the pop used this word to mean a completely different meaning beautiful, excellent, or exciting.

Adults (including elderly Americans) comparatively use slang less, but sometimes they use it in some very informal environment, particularly chatting with family members or close friends. At that time, slang terms can be efficient shorthand ways to express their ideas and concepts. Not only does this make their communication more efficient, but also it reinforces their friendship.

Sociolect refers to the linguistic variety characteristic of a particular social class. Two people who were born and brought up in the same geographical region and speak the same regional dialect may speak differently because of a number of social factors. (Dai & He, 2010, p. 113) It has to do with separation brought about by different social conditions. In other words, it means some social settings which influences American slang.

### **Drug Setting and American Slang**

Drug problem is serious in America. The National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse, in its extensive survey published in 1972, found that twenty-four million Americans had smoked marijuana; the incidence of use reached 40 percent in the eighteen-to-twenty-one age group, and 38 percent in the twenty-two-to-twenty-five age group.

A UCLA professor was quoted in the days of hip as saying that "if a young man hasn't smoked pot by the time he's twenty, he's probably sick," that is, "seriously neurotic," because marijuana is "a way of life for American's youth." Evidence from the hip era suggests that indeed huge numbers of the

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young weresmokingit. A sample of 219 University of Kansas students in 1971 indicated that 69 percent had smoked marijuana and that 92 percent had friends who smoked it.

### **Rock and American Slang**

Rock influenced a generation both physically and emotionally. The hippies lived and breathed it as well as believed that it was the most important new musical form to come along in centuries. To the hippies, rock was not just sound, it was part and parcel of a way of life, and its ethical dimensions were therefore substantial.

Rock, however, was communal, and thus it provided a medium for cultural communication, that is, rock can also be used as a cultural. Slang words of rock and roll also leave their marks in the American vocabulary.

In the 1950s radio, which had been the nation's major mass medium, lost most of its listeners to TV. It survived by a sort of narrow casting, specializing in rock and roll for the rebellious young, news and music for drive-time audiences, and an alliance with the alarm clock in the clock radio. The transistor radio became truly portable. This formula succeeded so well that by the 1970s and 1980s, the old lower class rock songs became Bolded-oldies, and the exuberance of American music was perhaps the high point of cultural creativity in this period.

### **General issues of translation**

The second half of the 20th century has seen the in-depth study of translation, which is sometimes called Theory of Translation, Science of Translation, Translation Linguistics, or even Translatology. It has been



claimed abroad that translation studies began in 1972 with Holmes's paper presented at the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics, "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies".

However, unfortunately, European and American scholars seemed to have been unaware of the achievements of the Russian school of translation studies. Works by V. Komissarov, A. Shveitser, A. Fedorov and many others confirmed the status of translation studies as a discipline of its own even in the 1950s.

The main concern of translation theory is to determine appropriate translation methods for the widest possible range of texts<sup>3</sup> and to give insight into the translation process, into the relations between thought and language, culture and speech.

There are several aspects of this branch of linguistics:

- General theory of translation, whose object is general notions typical of translation from any language.
- Specific (or partial, in terms of Holmes) theory of translation that deals with the regularities of translation characteristic of particular languages - for example, translation from English into Russian and vice versa.
- Special (partial) theory of translation that pays attention to texts of various registers and genres.

There are two terms corresponding to the Russian word "????????": translation and interpretation. Those who discriminate between the terms

refer the term 'translation' to the written text, and the term 'interpretation' to oral speech. However, the terms are polysemantic: to interpret might mean "to render or discuss the meaning of the text" - an outstanding British translation theorist P. Newmark, for example, states that "when a part of a text is important to the writer's intention, but insufficiently determined semantically, the translator has to interpret".

The term to translate is often referred to any (written or oral) manner of expression in another language. One should also differentiate the terms translating and rendering. When we translate, we express in another language not only what is conveyed in the source text but also how it is done. In rendering, we only convey the ideas (the what) of the source text. Several approaches are used for defining translation.