

ON THE USAGE OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH SLANG as Distinguished from Colloquial Lexis

I. VITONYTĖ-GENIENĖ

The definition of slang as a language phenomenon has always caused great difficulties. It has always roused a great deal of interest, its usage has been discussed a lot, admired or disapproved of, but always considered too vague to be exactly defined. Sometimes the understanding of slang is so wide¹ that it makes it impossible even to define slang in linguistic terms (e.g. people talk of poet's slang, school-boy's slang, shopkeeper's slang, the slang of 'prigs' who write history and essays, etc.). Therefore slang is often used as a synonym for the words 'language', 'style', 'cant', 'jargon', often understood as the specific language of a professional or trade group, very frequently not discriminated from colloquial lexis and often defined as 'improper', 'vulgar', and 'rude' talk. Yet it is extremely popular.

Various authors understand slang in different ways stating that slang consists mainly of new coinages, novelties, clipped words which as easily gain popularity as they rapidly fall into disuse, some linguists look upon slang as not respectable, improper and unfit for literary use². Others describe slang as a means of making the language vivid and imaginative. R. Quirk, for example, calls slang words "ordinary man's poetry" and "daring new expressions that have not been accepted by the majority of us as Standard English"³.

Being widely spread in Modern English, slang has been discussed in the works of quite a number of English and American authors, such as J. B. Greenough and G. L. Kittridge, E. Partridge, P. Roberts, H. Fowler⁴ and others. Soviet linguists, too, have made a number of useful observations of English and Ame-

¹ For critical analysis of different definitions of slang see И. П. Гальперин, О термине „слэнг“, — „Вопросы языкознания“, 1956, № 6.

² H. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, Oxford, 1961, p. 307—308; Webster's Third New International Dictionary, N.Y., 1961.

³ R. Quirk, *The Use of English*, London, 1962, p. 90.

⁴ J. B. Greenough and G. L. Kittridge, *Words and their Ways in English Speech*, New York, 1929; E. Partridge, *The Charm of Words*, London, 1960; P. Roberts, *Understanding of English*, New York, 1958; H. Fowler, *Modern English Usage*, London, 1962

rican slang, its historical links and interrelations with dialects⁵. The distinguishing features of slang from other lexical items, however, still want to be discussed and defined.

One of the recent definitions of slang, given by M. M. Makovski⁶, points out that slang is a special, historically defined variant of the language norms, more or less characteristic of all social groups of the speakers, mainly used in spoken language, and genetically and historically different from jargon and professionalisms. Correct though such a definition of slang may be, it is too general. It does not point out to any criteria for discerning slang in the whole body of English lexis and, especially, for delimiting it from colloquial lexical items⁷. These two layers of lexis are as often as not mixed and treated together⁷ and their discrimination creates sometimes a puzzle even for native speakers⁸.

In distinguishing slang from colloquial lexis grammatical, semantical, lexical (word-building) and phonological features are of little help. For:

a) slang usually behaves in the same way in the sentence structure as any other lexical item (e.g. there is no difference in the two grammatical patterns: 'he is crazy' and 'he is dotty');

b) slang items may represent any part of speech, e.g. to be fagged – v.i.; stunning – adj.;

c) from the point of view of word formation they may be clipped forms, as e.g. 'donkers' (crazy) as well as words having a usual morphological structure;

d) they may have a wide synonymic range, as many words do. E.g.:

to be put in clink	} = to be put in prison
to be put inside	
to be put in the nick	

⁵ Г. А. Судзиловский, К вопросу о „слэнге“ в английской военной лексике, Автореферат канд. дисс., Калинин, 1954; М. М. Маковский, Взаимодействие ареальных вариантов слэнга и их соотношение с языковым стандартом. – „Вопросы языкознания“, 1963, № 5, стр. 21.

⁶ М. Маковский, Указ. раб., стр. 22.

⁷ There is a lot of mixing of slang and colloquial English in various dictionaries. (see: W. Little, H. W. Fowler, J. Coulson, The Shorter English Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles, 1947). Some of them do not even discriminate between these two groups of lexis (see, e.g.: G. S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, A Dictionary of Slang and Colloquial English, London, 1912).

⁸ The magazine "Modern English" (Oct. 1962, p. 13) presented the following extract, asking its readers to separate slang from colloquial words:

"I am whacked, too", gasped George... "My knees feel like water". „Be careful you two“, called his aunt from downstairs. "Don't get yourselves knocked up".

"All right, Aunt" shouted George. "We're a bit fagged, so we're just taking it easy for a minute. But we aren't done for yet."

"I remember the day we moved in here" said his uncle. "I was on my last legs as we carried this thing upstairs and by the time we'd got it into the bedroom, I was dead beat. I felt worn out for three days afterwards."

The majority of native speakers agreed (though there were different opinions as well) that the lexical items 'whacked' (tired), 'knocked up' (injured), 'fagged' (tired), 'dead beat' (dead tired) belong to slang and 'one's knees feel like water', 'to take smth easy', 'to be on one's last legs', 'to be worn out' are colloquialisms.

e) slang words denote bread-and-butter notions of the language, e.g. 'bats' (crazy), 'to crow' (to boast), 'spuds' (potatoes), etc.

It must be pointed out here that we treat slang as mainly lexical problem and deal here only with lexical items and not grammatical constructions or phonological features⁹.

The present paper does not intend to give a concise list of current slang. It is more concerned with theoretical problems of slang as a language phenomenon and its aims may be defined as follows:

- I. What objective criteria should be applied when separating slang items from colloquial lexical items?
- II. What are characteristic and distinguishing features in the usage of the English slang today?

It should be noted that the constant changeability of slang (i.e. its falling into disuse or becoming a standard literary norm) requires that the definition of its place in the whole body of English lexis should be done synchronically¹⁰.

In the present paper all the examples are taken from British English.

It should be noted as well that in this essay Cockney slang¹¹ or Beatnik slang¹² will not be analyzed for their special sociological reasons.

I. There being no special uniform phonological, semantical or grammatical markings for all slang items, we assume that its distinction among all other lexical items can be solved only in terms of *usage*. This is easily illustrated by the fact that not all the words are regarded by the speakers as suitable for all occasions. The usage, hence, depends upon such extra-linguistic determiners: a) the **social occasion** and b) the **speakers** (the informants). Using the term 'speakers' we have in mind a full scope of their qualities, such as age, education¹³, profession, sex, dialectal features. The social occasion in its turn suggests a reciprocal rela-

⁹ We disagree here with the conception that, e.g., the omission of the initial (h) in such words as "head", "hard", etc., should be treated as slang and not as dialect forms or uneducated English. The same refers to the treatment of some grammatical features, as, e.g., the forming of the Past Indefinite of the irregular verbs according to the type of the regular ones, etc. The following as well as some other phonological and grammatical features were attributed by M. M. Markovski to slang (see: „Языковая сущность современного английского слэнга“. „Иностранные языки в школе“ 1962, стр. 110—112).

¹⁰ The diachronic approach having, no doubt, its historical value, cannot define the place of slang in English lexis, as a speaker of Elisabethan times, for instance, used a number of words in a different meaning than, say, a representative of the modern society.

¹¹ J. Franklyn, *A Dictionary of Rhyming Slang*, London, 1962.

¹² E. Partridge, *A Square Digs of Beatnik*, London, 1957.

¹³ As there is no uniform educational system in Britain, it is necessary to distinguish amount and type of education. People, for instance, who have a public school education, even if they have had no university education, are very likely to understand 'dinner' as an evening meal, whereas descendants of the working class, even with a higher school training, refer to 'dinner' as a midday meal.

tionship between the speaker and the addressee¹⁴. A school-boy, for instance, might silence his friends by saying 'drop dead' or 'pipe down', whereas the teacher's word to his pupils would formally be 'shut up!' In their familiar or intimate talk, young men are apt to use slang and often refer to girls as 'birds' or 'ducks'. The usage of slang is, therefore, a stylistical problem, for it is concerned with a certain choice of words defined by the aims of discourse. The word 'bird', e.g. apart from its lexical meaning, gives an **additional stylistic colouring**¹⁵: it conveys an idea of intimacy, a nonchalant attitude among the speakers and, most often, indicates their young age.

The relationship between the speakers is always reflected in their language, e.g.:

Mick (from H. Pinter's 'The Caretaker'), a young man in his twenties, talks to old Davis with whom he is on quite familiar terms and treats him with no respect calling him 'son' and 'sonny' though the latter is about three times as old as himself:

Watch your step, sonny! You're knocking at the door when no one's at home. Don't push it too hard. You come busting into a private house, laying your hands on anything you can lay your hands on. Don't overstep the mark, son. (p. 38)

The study of the influence of various extra-linguistic determiners (age, sex, profession, degree of intimacy, etc.) upon the usage helps to sort out lexical items characteristic of each of them. Yet, it is obvious, that not every extra-linguistic determiner can help to sort out slang items. With a determiner such as profession, it is important not to confuse slang and **trade jargon**¹⁶, the technical terminology of occupations and sports (the cricketer's 'in-swinger, yorker, wrong 'un, late cut; the radio engineer's 'top, level, fade')¹⁷, for these are practical necessities which it would be most awkward to do without. They belong to closed professional boundaries of a particular trade or profession. 'Slang is to be distinguished also from **cant**, concealed or secret language. Used mainly by the card-sharper, the confidence trickster, the pickpocket, to escape conflict with the law, cant too is a necessity'. Further on D. Abercrombie very correctly points out that 'slang is always the property of a group, its use always proclaims membership of that group and shows social differentiation'. And as a versifier has put it: 'The chief use of slang is to show that you are one of the gang'¹⁸.

In this paper, in trying to separate slang items from the rest of the vocabulary, all the collected material was divided into several groups according to the

¹⁴ The term "relationship between the speaker and the addressee" is used as a technical term indicating reciprocity between speaking people or between the author and the reader.

¹⁵ The term "stylistic colouring" is taken from R. G. Piotrovski (see his „Грамматическая стилистика французского языка", Л., стр. 23.)

¹⁶ D. Abercrombie, Problems and Principles, London, 1957, p. 3. It must be noted that many authors confuse slang, cant and jargon (see, e.g. E. Partridge's 'Dictionary of Slang and Conversational English', or M. Roberts, op. cit.).

¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 7.

tenor of discourse¹⁹, defined by the relationship between the speaker and addressee and the social occasion²⁰. The tenor of discourse was divided into four grades according to the formality of the occasion: I Formal, II Neutral-colloquial, III Familiar and IV Intimate (all scales having 'spoken' and 'written' subdivisions).

The I **Formal** grade of tenor of discourse defines here all the most 'frozen' social occasions, e.g. such as all kinds of formal receptions, proceedings in a court of law, various formal letters, scientific papers, etc.

The **Neutral-colloquial** tenor grade of discourse is maintained in cases when no degree of familiarity is involved but at the same time it is devoid of the stiffness of the formal occasions. It may be characteristic of a casual dialogue among strangers, of the language of some university lectures and seminars, of the language of educated people discussing business, political matter etc.

The **III Familiar-colloquial** tenor grade covers one's discourse with one's equals: colleagues, workmates, etc.

The **IV Intimate-colloquial** tenor grade is characteristic of intimate friends, members of one's family talking in family surroundings.

It certainly must be borne in mind that matters of style being always less cut-and-dried than matters of phonology and grammar, there may be intermediate stages which very largely depend on idio-stylistic qualities of the speaker, e.g. some people may be rather informal when talking in public, whereas other people may be very formal even when talking to their colleagues. Yet, we suppose that the given four grade tenor scale comprises the rankshift of the tenor of discourse from the most formal social occasions to the informal ones.

These four tenor groups were taken as a basis for a test²¹, which helped to define the relationship of slang items to the different extra-linguistic determiners, such as: age, sex, social status, education. For this purpose a selection of 150 most commonly used lexical items (cant and trade jargon excluded) defined as slang words was taken. The selection was made by consulting educated native speakers and dictionaries. Each of the tested lexical items had to be found more than once in modern literature or taken from everyday conversation and passed on to a variegated audience of 20 people – male and female – representing a different degree and type of education, social standing, profession, age and sex²². Each

¹⁹ The term "tenor" is introduced by J. Spencer and understood as "style" of the discourse (Leeds University, School of English, 1962).

²⁰ The division of language (lexical items and grammatical structures) according to age, style, breadth and responsibility (the last two scales dealing with 'good' and 'bad' English) is found in M. Joos 'The Five Clocks' (see International Journal of American Linguistics, vol. 28, Indiana University Research Centre, Bloomington, 1962), written with a humorous approach to snobbish and wrong attitudes to language phenomena and giving a lot of interesting material. However, the work lacks conclusions and criteria for differentiating various lexical items and grammatical constructions according to different tenor of discourse.

²¹ The test had been made during the author's ten-months' stay in Great Britain in 1962–1963.

²² Among them were: 3 undergraduates, 3 post-graduate students, 4 teachers and lecturers, 2 housewives, 4 manual workers and 4 schoolchildren.

selected lexical item was tested with each of the 20 informants according to the following table below:

EXTRA-LINGUISTIC DETERMINERS

U S A G E

Education Profession	Social Status	Age M/F	The Tenor of Discourse		The informant's reasons for the usage
			I FORMAL	Spoken	
				Written	
			II NEUTRAL- COLLOQUIAL	Spoken	
				Written	
			III FAMILIAR	Spoken	
				Written	
			IV INTIMATE	Spoken	
				Written	

Thus, the phrase "to be nuts about smth" (to be crazy about smth), for example, was defined by a middle-aged higher school graduate as "too youthful to be used at all", whereas by students it was defined as suitable for Intimate and Familiar (both spoken and written) occasions and not to be used higher along the tenor scale as it was current mainly among one's equals and intimate friends, etc.

The test showed that the usage of the tested lexical items in different tenor grades depends upon such extra-linguistic determiners as education, social standing, age, sex. Different informants used different lexical items differently. Yet there was a marked uniformity of usage in, for instance, groups of the same degree of education and social standing²³, i.e. 80% of intellectuals would usually place (with some exceptions) one word in the same tenor grade and the uneducated working class people tended to have their similar opinions on the usage.

In the language of educated people using Standard English it was noticed

²³ These two register determiners define each other and depend on each other as degree and type of education (see p. 111) usually characterize one's social standing. In this paper we use the following terms for the language of different sociological groups: the language of intellectuals or *intelligentsia*, which indicates an educated man's language, using normally Standard English (some lexical phonological features of a dialect may come into it). This term is opposed to the term 'the language of uneducated working class people'.

that out of tested 150 words and phrases (cant, trade jargon and taboo words²⁴ excluded) about 110 were used only in the IVth (Intimate), sometimes reaching the IIIrd (Familiar) tenor grade, but never used higher along the tenor scale. It was admitted that these lexical items represent slang as distinguished from other layers of the English lexis²⁵. Here belong such words and phrases as: to be nuts about smb., to kick one's heels, to be sloshed (drunk), a conk (head), hols (holidays), etc.

Thus, we came to the conclusion that the restriction according to different tenor grades helps to define slang among other lexical items in general and to discriminate between slang and colloquialisms in particular.

Making the test for the slang items, it was noticed that about 40 words and phrases out of all tested lexical items climb up as high as IInd (Neutral-colloquial) stage of discourse, never, however, reaching the top grade I (Formal). It is easily observed that on less formal occasions people tend to use lexical items which are synonymic equivalents to neutral lexis. In casual talk, they would be 'dead tired' of 'that stuff' ('stuff' meaning practically anything) and would start 'picking up a bit of a conversation'. These lexical items differ from the Neutral-colloquial lexis, for the latter may be easily used even in the Formal tenor grade along with high-flown, bookish words and phrases. In other words, colloquialisms must have a capacity of functioning **only** along three tenor grade groups: IInd (Neutral-colloquial), IIIrd (Familiar) and IVth (Intimate). Thus, the following lexical items could be considered colloquialisms, e.g.:

to be short	— to be in monetary trouble
bob	— shilling, e.g.:

Davies: Oh well now, mister, if you want the truth
I'm a bit short.

Aston: Here's a few bob.

fantastic	— (The Caretaker, p. 19) said about smth. remarkable, unbelievable, extraordinary, e.g.:
All tickets sold in 7 hours	— it's fantastic! (a headline in DM, 4 Apr. 1963, p. 31)
to hit it off	— to get on well
a fiver	— a five-pound note
to be dressed up to the nines	— to be very well dressed (about men)
fuddie-duddies	— conservative people who are against innovations

²⁴ In our estimation 'taboo' words (as well as curse words, see below, p. 117) cannot be considered slang, as they are long-lived lexical items, which do not claim intimacy of a group, but simply denote taboo objects which normally are not brought into conversation even in some intimate circles. Among outsiders they are usually substituted for by medical terms.

²⁵ See examples below on p. 116-120.

to come off	—	to succeed
to lead up		
the garden path	—	to cheat
tummy	—	stomach
to be hopeless	—	to be good-for-nothing
to be glib	—	to be talkative, etc.

II. The second important problem of the paper is the usage of slang items and the understanding of them by different groups of informants. The test enabled us to make the following conclusions:

1) The most marked differences in the usage of slang are due to different **type and degree of education and social standing**. Here several groups should be distinguished:

a) Lexical items which are understood as slang by intellectuals but are used by the uneducated people in the Neutral-colloquial tenor grade, reaching even the Formal, e.g.²⁶:

barmy	—	mal-adjusted, mad, stupid
belt up!	—	shut up
bloke	—	fellow, chap
to carry on with smb.	—	to have a love affair with smb.
cop	—	policeman
to do the dirty on smb.	—	to betray smb.
to do a roaring line trade	—	to do a very brisk career
to kick one's heels	—	to do nothing
lousy (dinner, play, etc.)	—	bad, dirty
smashing (or smashin')	—	splendid, very good, etc.
to hit the town ²⁷	—	to have a marvelous time
to glam up	—	to dress up and make up, e.g.:

Get yourself **glammed up** and we'll **hit the town**.

(J. Osborne, LBA, p. 85)

kidder	—	hoaxer (from kid, v. t.), in this case comedian
to belt out	—	to speak, e.g.:

This Cockney **Kidder** is in Demand (the headline) Goodbye Mr. Martine, I thought. Before you can look round, I thought, you'll be back **belting out** your old blue jokes in some East End pub where some misguided person discovered you

(NW, 24 Feb., 1963, p. 13)

²⁶ Examples given below include not only the ones from the test, but also a vast amount of material which proved the conclusions of the test when checked with occasional informants. The research is based upon about 500 examples of slang current among the native speakers in England. The material was selected from modern plays, papers and magazines as well as from oral discourse.

²⁷ A large number of slang items have come to Britain from the U.S.A. The influence of American slang is not discussed here as it requires a special investigation.

A lot of slang examples are found in some newspapers and magazines such as the *News of the World*, *Daily Mirror*, *Reveille*, etc. This does not contradict the rule that slang is used mainly among intimates. It is used in the press for certain stylistic colouring – giving an idea of familiarity, friendliness, easiness and liveliness.

It is interesting to note that the majority of educated people use slang with full awareness. Using such a lexical item as 'crackers', for instance, ('he must be absolutely crackers') at a party where there might be strangers, the speaker is conscious of using a word which is current among teenagers, but he wants to add some stylistic colouring to his language and expects his hearers to understand it.

Yet many from the above-quoted lexical items sound 'good' English words to the representatives of uneducated people and some of them as: bloke, to carry on with smb., to be put in clink, smashing, etc. go up as far as the Formal tenor grade in their usage. A lot of them are used in modern literature depicting working class life, e.g.:

Who would believe anyway that I was carrying on with his missis?

(A. Sillitoe, SNSM, p. 29)

The future meant things, both good and bad, to look forward to, like the coming of summer (good); military training in the end of August (purgatory); Goose Fair in October (smashin'); Bonfire (good if you didn't get blown)

(A. Sillitoe, SNSM, p. 111)

An uneducated man would commonly use 'cop' for policeman, and define a bad dinner as 'lousy', and this would be the most proper thing for him to say.

It is interesting to note that some of the words have a double distribution, functioning as 'bad', taboo, curse words, on the one hand, and as slang words on the other. This case is very well illustrated by the words 'bloody' and 'bitch'. Being long-lived curse words, they may asquire at the same time, a much milder meaning, e.g.:

When someone said to Arthur "I've got yo' weighed", his stock reply was: "Oh, ev yer? Then ye're **bloody**²⁸ clever, mate, because I ain't got meself weighed-up, I can tell yer".

(A. Sillitoe, SNSM, p. 35)

Remarkably enough, these words are still milder with intelligentsia. Thus, people wanting to stress that they are 'of one group', might jocularly and lovingly refer to their good and respectable friends as 'Oh that **bloody** Margo' or 'that old **bitch** Kate'. It is certainly characteristic only of daring people who are apt to bring the slangy element into their language.

b) There is a certain amount of slang items which have a lower class imprint and are felt for this reason by the representatives of higher classes to be vulgar. For middle class bourgeois representatives the word 'caff', for instance, will be

²⁸ In this case the word acquires the meaning 'very'.

associated with a 'sleezy, sheap tea-shop, frequented by labourers mainly', e.g.:
Davis:

I was lucky you come into that **caff**.

(H. Pinter, C, p. 12)

The same very often applies to the word 'mum' – mother, e.g.:

Mick: His old **mum** was still living at the Angel.

(H. Pinter, C, p. 32)

An upper middle class representative saying 'all the mums came along', would certainly mean working-class women.

When these words are used, there is often a feeling among the speakers of 'belonging to one gang'. Thus, in a shop, a worker-woman would usually ask for 'vegetables', and among the family members, 'what's veg for tonight?' would be the normal question. Richer representatives of bourgeoisie as a rule don't use 'veg', because it is always associated with the cheap 'meat-and-two-veg' sort of dinner, a working man's diet.

Several more examples of the same kind, e. g.:

conk	–	head
to carry the can	–	to take responsibility
to get the bullet	–	to get the sack
gaffer	–	an old silly person
charlie	–	fool
shur up	–	shut up
sod	–	chap, bloke
to shut one's gap	–	to shut one's mouth ²⁰ .

The test showed that the working class uses a lot of slang, which came with the young men returning from the army, e.g.: 'grub' – food, 'grub-up' – food's ready, 'char' – tea, 'swaddie' – an army chap, 'pit' – bed, 'to laugh kitbags' – to laugh heartily, 'we'll be laughing' – we'll succeed, etc.

c) Middle and upper class society very often use their own slang which is not used and sometimes not even understood by 'outsiders'. Referring to somebody as being 'wet', a middleclass representative would mean his being 'untidy, sloppy', using a meaning of the word which is not understood by an ordinary man. A higher middle-class family daughter (sometimes with aristocratic aspirations) might speak to her parents using 'Mummy' and 'Daddy', e.g. Jimmy (in Osborne's 'Look Back in Anger') calls his parents-in-law 'Mummy and Daddy', imitating his wife and showing at the same time, contempt for their higher social status, e.g.:

Mummy and Daddy turn pale and face the east every time they remember she's married to me. But if they saw all this going on, they'd collapse.

(J. Osborne, LBA, p. 31)

Intellectuals very often understand slang words in a different way. For instance, the word 'posh' means 'rich' and has a very wide range of collocations with less educated people (a posh hat, a posh shop, a posh party, a posh dinner, etc.). To some of the intelligentsia, however, 'posh' would be ap-

²⁰ Illustrations of these examples may be found in H. Pinter's, A. Wesker's and A. Sillitoe's works.

plied only when talking about gaudily dressed lower-class people having higher class aspirations.

d) The use of slang is very closely connected with the practical use of things. Better-off people usually pay for the goods they buy, whereas the poorer ones might buy things 'on tick', e.g.:

Mrs. Bull stood at the yard end peering through half darkness to find out who was nipping to Taylor's for a basket of grub on tick.

(A. Sillitoe, p. 89)

People who use margarine in their food refer to it as 'marge', whereas for the others who do not, it remains 'margarine'.

'Posh' magazines are full of upper class words. Crocodile skin, for instance, may be referred to as 'croc', e.g.:

The great look of the great fake: or which **croc** is the mock **croc**?

(Q, 27 Nov. 1962, p. 55)

2) The usage of slang differs among various age groups of the speakers. Another big group of slang words is the property of teenagers and the younger generation. Many of the below given slang items represent students' slang, e.g.:

super, sooper — splendid, e.g.:

Alison: Well, you're a jolly super bear, too. A really soooooooper, marvellous bear.

(J. Osborne, LBA, p. 34)

to do a ton — to reach a speed of one hundred miles p.h. (usually on a motor-bike), e.g.:

In those days she had a boy friend with a motor-bike.

They'did a ton' on the road to Southend.

(Q, 17 Apr. 1962, p. 26)

Some other examples:

bash smb. up — to hit smb.

to be nuts about smth. — to be crazy about smth.

to take the Mickie (extract the Michael) out of smb. — to say smth, one does not really mean, ma subtle sarcastic way

potty — crazy, mad

bod — a person (as in: 'how many bods are we going to have for lunch?')

sloshed — drunk

booze-up — a drinking party

stunning! — splendid

dressed to kill — smartly dressed (of a woman, girl, dressed to attract men)

Some of the slang words are most used only in the schoolboys' or school-girls' language, such e.g.:

hol — holiday

I say, it's a bit much for the chaps at school when the head's got a

niece like this. I mean, it's enough to put a fellow right off his algebra. What's more, nobody wants to go on their hols.

(NW, 24 Feb, 1963, p. 13)

drop dead — shut up!
sloppy — silly
You're for it!
You've had it!³⁰ — I'll bash you up!

The test showed us that the language of young people differs not only in degree, but in the **type of education** as well.

Public school children very often add the typical ending **-ers** to some nonce nouns, e.g.:

'he is bonkers, conkers, donkers' (meaning he is crazy)

This trend is found among Oxbridge students as well. They very commonly use the following words:

champers — champagne
breakers — breakfast or lunch
ruggers — rugby
wagger-baggers — a waste-paper basket
the New Staggers — the New Stateman

The attitude to slang of different **age groups** is different. For some people of the younger generation some slang items seem out-of-date, some of them are not used by them at all. To such belong the following:

booby (a silly ass), super, sugar (girl), what's cooking, chick (girl), razzle-dazzle (a merry party), etc.

The older age representatives might use them still.

Slang may end up its life with a generation. No man under sixty refers to a 'flapper' or says he is 'fed-up' with the sight of one. The modern thing is to be 'browned off' with the sight of teenagers³¹.

3) Some of the slang words are to be considered as **men's words** used directly by male speakers, such as 'bird', 'chick', 'sugar' (in reference to women), 'to lay smb. out', 'to smash smb. in smithereens' (to beat smb. up), etc. Examples from literature and the data given by informants proved that men's language tends to be more slangy than that of women.

Before summing up the results of the test, several more points in reference to the meaning of slang should be mentioned.

The analysis of slang lexical items has shown that from the point of view of semantics, they may be divided into two main groups.

1. Lexical items which function in their main meaning. These are usually:

a) clipped novelties, e.g. loony, potty, conk, wagger-baggers, etc.

b) shortened word forms, e.g. caff, veg, croc, to glam up, etc.

2. Lexical items that acquire their slang meaning as a secondary, tertiary etc. meaning of the words, e.g. smashing, bloke, belt up, to kick one's heels, etc.

³⁰ Note: the Past Tense here does not indicate a past action.

³¹ J. Franklyn, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

The test proved that:

1. Contemporary English slang is always duplicating the conventional vocabulary, i.e. it always has a synonym which may be used in Neutral-colloquial or Formal tenor grade of discourse. This makes its definition more difficult.

2. A hard-and-fast definition of slang perhaps is hardly possible at all, for language is a live thing and slang constitutes the most lively, individualized and imaginative part of it. Yet it certainly must be admitted that the only reliable distinction of slang is to be made in stylistic terms, in terms of the relationship between the speaker and the addressee on a certain social occasion. From this point of view, some new coinages, clipped and shortened forms as well as lexical items in their secondary, tertiary etc. meanings, doubling the conventional vocabulary and used as a part of sociological behaviour only in the 'Intimate' or 'Familiar' tenor grade groups (cant, trade jargon and taboo words excluded) belong to slang. These are the words that claim intimacy within a small social group, yet their spread is universal, i.e. they expand beyond the boundaries of a particular social group, being used in some cases by the majority of native speakers in England.

3. As there exist social barriers in England the use of slang reflects a very strong class imprint upon the language. The contemporary English slang has a strong marking of such extra-linguistic determiners as: social status, age, education (type and degree). The most numerous groups of this layer of lexis belong to the working-class slang and teenage slang.

4. It is very important to note that slang is always more emotionally coloured than the synonymous neutral lexis.

Though there is a certain amount of slang in popular newspapers and magazines, the test showed, however, that people chiefly use it when speaking and not when writing.

The use and creation of slang may be explained:

a) by boredom with old locutions and a search for new, vivid, imaginative synonyms instead of the dry-as-dust conventional ones;

b) slang can be explained as a vital necessity, for it is a part of people's behaviour, one of the links, media, that bring social groups together.

Therefore the opinion of some authors that all slang is 'bad', 'vulgar' English does not hold water. Slang has for centuries been a faithful companion of the accepted standard. People cannot help creating slang, for the speakers cannot do without bringing new, colourful vivid, expressive, often jocular words and phrases into their speech. One, certainly, cannot accept all the clipped forms the creative man's mind is ready to invent, yet the best part of slang proves the great vitality of the language and the creative power of the ordinary man.

The test proved that some slang items are specimens of regional slang (as e.g. mucky — dirty, wads — cake, to call (kæl) — to have a gossip, etc. used in the North of England). This question, however, should be a subject of a special research.

Vilniaus Valstybinis pedagoginis
institutas
Anglų kalbos katedra

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1966 m. rugsėjo mėn.

Abbreviations

- DM - "Daily Mirror", November 1962, April 1963
NW - The News of the World, February 1963, April 1963
Q - Queen, April 1962, November 1962
W - Woman, April 1962

- C - H. Pinter, *The Caretaker*, London, 1962
LBA - J. Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, London, Faber and Faber ed., 1959
SNSM - A. Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, London, Penguin Books, 1961
TJ - A. Wesker, *I'm Talking about Jerusalem. The Wesker Trilogy*. Penguin Books, 1964

DABARTINĖS ANGLŲ KALBOS SLENGO VARTOJIMŲ KLAUSIMU

I. VITONYTĖ-GENIENĖ

Reziūmė

Slegui priklausančių žodžių ir išsireiškimų išskyrimas iš kitų leksinių vienetų tarpo bei jo vartojimas nėra pakankamai išnagrinėti.

Slego išskyrimas anglų kalbos žodyne ir atribojimas nuo šnekamosios kalbos žodžių bei išsireiškimų turi būti sprendžiamas stilistinio vartojimo požiūriu ir priklauso nuo kalbančiųjų tarpusavio santykių.

Savo stažavimosi Anglijoje metu šio straipsnio autorė atliko eksperimentą, kuriame bandė nustatyti, kokiems stilistiniams tonams būdingas slengo vartojimas. Tam tikslui buvo atrinkta 150 leksinių vienetų, ir kiekvieno iš jų vartojimas buvo patikrintas, apklausus 20 įvairios profesijos, skirtingo išsilavinimo, socialinės padėties, amžiaus ir lyties žmonių. Pateikus keturių stilistinių tonų skalę: 1) oficialųjį stilistinį toną, 2) neutralųjį-šnekamąjį, 3) familiarų ir 4) intymųjį buvo nustatyta, kad slengas vartojamas tik familiariame ir intymiajame stilistiniuose tonuose. Taip pat paaiškėjo, kad šnekamosios kalbos leksiniai vienetai plačiai vartojami trijų stilistinių tonų skalėje: neutraliajame-šnekamajame, familiariajame ir intymiajame tone.

Eksperimentu buvo nustatyta, kad tokie extra-lingvistiniai faktoriai, kaip išsilavinimas, socialinė padėtis, amžius ir lytis turi didžiulės reikšmės slengo vartojimui. Eksperimentas parodė, kad skirtingo išsilavinimo, socialinės padėties, amžiaus bei lyties kalbantieji vartoja skirtingus slengo leksinius vienetus.

Slegui priklauso kai kurie stilistiškai nuspalvinti žodžiai ir išsireiškimai išvestinėmis reikšmėmis, o taip pat įvairūs sutrumpinti bei sutraukti žodžiai (pvz., *smashing, to kick one's heels, to get the bullet, wagger-baggers, veg, conk* ir kt.).