

**CULTURAL SEMANTICS IN ENGLISH YOUTH SLANG EXPRESSIONS**

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article examines the lexical and semantic features of contemporary youth slang in the UK and the USA, focusing on how cultural context shapes its creation, evolution and interpretation. Using a linguacultural approach, we analyze data from slang dictionaries, youth-oriented media and corpora of spoken English to identify key semantic domains and sociocultural forces behind popular terms. We find that youth slang is characterized by constant innovation, expressive/emotive usage, brevity and creative word formation. Slang serves strong identity and in-group functions often drawing on subcultural values and media (music, internet, activism) as sources. Comparative analysis shows both shared patterns and culture specific variants. For example, British youth have adopted American-origin terms (bonkers, cheers, queue) under Gen Z influence, while American youth incorporate Britishisms (mate, wicked). Illustrative examples (sick, cool, peng, lit, ace) demonstrate semantic shifts like amelioration, metaphorical extension and reclaiming taboo language. Our findings indicate that youth slang semantics reflect underlying cultural schemes and worldviews: terms often encode shared values and attitudes. We conclude that cultural semantics—how language encodes a group's

collective knowledge and values-plays a central role in shaping youth slang. These insights underscore slang's importance as a window into contemporary youth culture and linguistic change.

INGLIZ TILI YOSHLAR SLENGI BIRLIKALARIDA MADANIY SEMANTIKA

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit so'zlar: yoshlar slengi, madaniy semantika, sotsiolingvistika, subleksikon, Gen Z, semantic o'zgarish, amelioratsiya.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada Buyuk Britaniya va AQSH dagi zamonaviy yoshlar slengining leksik va semantic xususiyatlari, xususan ularning yaratilishi, rivojlanishi va talqiniga madaniy kontekstning ta'siri lingvomadaniy yondashuv asosiyda o'rganiladi. Tadqiqotda yoshlar slengini aks ettiruvchi lug'atlar, yoshlarga yo'naltirilgan media manbalari hamda og'zaki ingliz tili korpuslaridan olingan ma'lumotlar tahlil qilinadi va asosiy semantic domenlar hamda ommabop birliklar ortidagi ijtimoiy-madaniy kuchlar aniqlanadi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadi, yoshlar slengi doimiy yangilanish, qisqalik, hissiy-ekspressiv bo'yoq dorlik va kreativ so'z yasalishi bilan ajralib turadi. Sleng avvalo guruh ichidagi identifikatsiya va yaqinlikni ifodalash vositasi bo'lib, ko'pincha submadaniyat, musiqa, internet tili va yoshlar faolligi kabi madaniy manbalardan shakllanadi. Qiyosiy tahlil ikki mamlakat slengi orasida umumiy jihatlar mavjud bo'lishi bilan birligida har bir madaniyatning o'ziga xos birliklari ham rivojlanishini tasdiqlaydi: Britaniyalik yoshlar AQSHdan kirib kelgan so'zlarni, Amerikalik yoshlar esa Britaniyaliklar tilini nutqiga faol singdirmoqda. Sick, cool, peng, lit, ace kabi misollar metafora, amelioratsiya hamda tabu birliklarning tilga qayta o'zlashtirishi kabi

semantic o'zgarishlarni o'zida yaqqol aks ettiradi. Maqola shuni xulosa qiladiki, madaniy semantika-til orqali nutq jamoasining umumiy qadriyatlari, bilimlari va munosabatlarini ifodalash yoshlar slengining shakllanishida asosiy omil hisoblanadi. Tadqiqot slengni yoshlar madaniyati va til o'zgarishlarini o'rganishda muhim lingvistik manba sifatida baholaydi.

КУЛЬТУРНАЯ СЕМАНТИКА В ВЫРАЖЕНИЯХ МОЛОДЕЖНОГО СЛЕНГА АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: молодёжный сленг, культурная семантика, социолингвистика, сублексикон, Gen Z, семантический сдвиг, мелиорация.

Аннотация: В этой статье рассматриваются лексические и семантические особенности современного молодёжного сленга в UK и USA с акцентом на то, как культурный контекст влияет на создание, развитие и восприятие сленговых единиц. В ходе исследования проведён качественный анализ данных из сленговых словарей, молодёжной медиа речи и корпусов современного разговорного английского языка. Установлено, что молодёжный сленг отличается постоянной обновляемостью, эмоциональной выразительностью, стремлением к краткости и творческими моделями словообразования. Сленг выполняет ключевую функцию групповой идентичности и внутригруппового взаимодействия, активно формируясь под влиянием таких культурных источников, как музыка, интернет-коммуникация и молодёжный активизм. Сравнительный анализ показывает, что при наличии общих тенденций у британской и американской молодёжи также развиваются и специфические, культурно обусловленные единицы. На примере слов sick, cool, peng,

lit, асе продемонстрированы характерные механизмы семантических сдвигов: метафорическое расширение, мелиорация, а также переосмысление табуированной лексики. Делается вывод, что культурная семантика — отражение коллективных ценностей, знаний и установок молодёжной группы через язык — играет центральную роль в формировании молодежного сленга. Исследование подтверждает значимость сленга как важного источника для изучения современной молодёжной культуры и динамики языковых изменений.

Introduction. Slang—very informal language that is usually spoken rather than written, used especially by particular groups of people . Youth slang is a dynamic sub-lexicon used by young people to express identity, solidarity and attitudes outside of formal register. Scholars define slang as a “stable set of certain lexical units and rules for their construction and use in informal communication” within an age-based subculture. It is marked by innovation and emotional coloring—for example, terms shift rapidly in meaning and style as youth experience change.

Youth slang is considered a dynamic and open linguistic system within modern linguistics. Youth slang functions as communicative medium for individuals aged 12-30, characterized by rapid variability due to generational changes and psychological characteristics of younger populations. Borrowing is the primary mechanism for slang formation, with English serving as the dominant source language. English functions as a “trendsetter”, supplying slang terms to many European languages, including Germanic and Slavic linguistic families. This contrasts with other languages that heavily borrow from English slang through direct transfers and transliterations . Youth slang should be understood as a self-organized, socially encoded, highly creative and fast-evolving lexical subsystem, shaped by metaphor, digital acceleration and cross-media influence rather than grammatical structure or formal norms.

Localism is a core trait of slang: even within English, British slang, American slang and Australian slang differ from by region and identity (e.g. bloke vs. guy). Each variety contains sub-variants such as Cockney slang. Some terms spread nationally (knackered-exhausted), while others remain localized (whistle and flute-suit), marking group solidarity rather than general usage . Localism in slang is not just geographical—it also reflects social identity, group boundaries and cultural micro-communities, where rhyme based forms like whistle and flute in-group markers rather than mainstream vocabulary.

Researches on English slang have noted both commonalities and differences across cultures. For instance, studies of American and British student slang show that Americans tend to use more informal and creative expressions than British. The present paper focuses specifically on UK and USA youth slang and asks: how cultural semantics influence slang creation and interpretation? Which sociocultural forces drive slang terms in each context? We also consider global diffusion of youth slang (e.g. via social media) to distinguish universal versus culture-specific features. To address these questions, we integrate lexicographic data (dictionaries, archived slang), examples from youth discourse and insights from cultural linguistics and linguoculturology. Our goals are to categorize slang expressions by semantic domain, analyze how meanings reflect cultural context, and illustrate these processes with representative examples.

Methods. We conducted a qualitative analysis of English youth slang, drawing on a range of sources. First, we surveyed slang dictionaries and archives (e.g. Thorne's Dictionary of Contemporary Slang and student slang corpora) to compile a list of common UK and US slang terms. We complemented this with language data from youth-oriented media and dictionaries including online versions. We focused on terms current as of the mid-2020s, emphasizing innovations used by Gen Z and younger Millennials.

Our analytical approach is rooted in linguoculturology and sociolinguistics: we examine each term's lexical semantics, etymology and pragmatic function and interpret it against its cultural backdrop (education, media, subculture references). This included identifying patterns of word formation (e.g. clipping, affication, borrowing) and semantic shift (metaphor, amelioration, pejoration). To highlight culture-specificity, we compared parallel categories in UK and US data and noted cross-cultural borrowings.

Results. Our sources converge on core features of youth slang. It shows semantic fluidity-meaning shift rapidly as tastes and social issues change. Slang is highly evaluative and expressive, often intensifying or modifying conventional words. Brevity and creativity are also typical: words are clipped or combined in novel ways. Borrowing from other languages or dialects is common. Youth slang is continually replenishing its lexicon, absorbing innovations to meet youth's expressive needs.

We identified several prominent semantic domains:

1. Identity and social groups. Terms that signal affiliation or distinguish peers. For example, US youth use pronouns like "fam" (family\friends) and "bro/dude" to address male peers; Brits use "mate" or "bruv" similarly. These terms index solidarity. Similarly, both cultures use slang for subgroups often with derogatory overtones. The semantics here depend on stereotypes and class models. For example, "chav" invokes specific British youth subculture.

2. Evaluation and effect. Both UK and US youth slang abounds in evaluative adjectives and adverbs. Words like “cool”, “fresh”, “wicked”, “dope” can mean “excellent”. Interestingly, some are used on both sides of the Atlantic but with different histories. E.g. “wicked” originally meant evil, but is revived slang for “extremely good” as a result of the process called amelioration, especially in New England US and also London British youth. British slang includes unique evaluative such as “ace” (excellent) or “peng” (attractive) reflecting regional usage. US slang adds “lit”, “on point”, “savage”. These reflect cultural semantics of intensity and authenticity-being “on point” is culturally valued. Our semantic analysis shows these terms often arise by metaphor or hyperbola.

3. Social behaviors and status. Slang for intoxication, sex or fashion also differs culturally. US youth might say “wasted”, “bombed”, “stone-cold” for drunk, whereas British youth use “mullered”, “knackered”, “smashed” for exhausted. For attraction Americans might say someone is “a snack” (good enough to eat), while Brits say “fit” or “blinding”. These reflect different metaphorical frames: American slang often uses food or combat metaphors (bombed, savage), British slang uses colloquial references (fit-attractive).

4. Cross-cultural diffusion. We observed a notable flow of slang between the US and UK. A recent corpus study found American youth interestingly using Britishisms under Gen Z influence. For example, “bonkers” for absurd, “cheers” for thanks. Our examples include Brit-influenced American teen usage of “telly” (TV), or “quarantine” shortened to “Q”, and vice versa Americans popularizing “awesome”. “cool” in the UK. These shared terms often retain their original meaning. For example, “queue” means “line up” in US contexts now. This cross-pollination indicates that media and migration cause some slang to become culture-general. At the same time, truly local idioms remain.

5. Global (internet) slang. Internet and popular culture have given rise to globally shared slang. For instance, “OMG” LOL”. Our data confirm that many such terms spread rapidly via social media. For example, “sus” (suspicious) from game Among Us became slang for “sketchy” across youth worldwide, independent of local culture. This suggest universal patterns: digital media creates new slang that bypasses geography. However, even global terms acquire local shading. British teens might elongate texts reflecting regional discourse patterns.

To illustrate, consider a few examples with semantic notes:

“Sick” (US)-slang word flipped from ill to awesome. This pejoration-to-amelioration is linked to extremes of feeling. For example, saying “That trick was sick” means it was impressively good.

“Cool” (US/UK)-originally meaning moderately cold, now generalized praise. It conveys approval with minimal emotion, reflecting youth value on composure.

“Cheeky” (UK)-meaning slightly indulgent/naughty. Originating from British usage for someone impudent, its slang sense has broadened to playful misbehavior, showing how existing vocabulary acquires niche idiomatic meaning in youth usage.

“Ace” (UK)-informal for excellent, common among younger Brits (“ace party). Etymologically linked to excellence, but now part of everyday slang.

“Peng” (UK)-of Jamaican origin, means very attractive. Its use in British cities reflects Caribbean cultural influence on youth.

“Ghost” (US/UK)-verb to “ghost someone” means to stop responding suddenly. This novel slang emerges from cultural context of digital dating and texting, where silent removal is akin to vanishing like a ghost.

“On fleek” (US)-meaning perfectly done (especially make-up/ appearance), a recent internet meme turned slang. Semantically, it connotes precision quality.

These examples demonstrate how youth slang often repurposes everyday words or idioms into new meanings driven by youth culture (media, humor, identity). Semantic analysis reveals that many slang senses rely on covert cultural cues. For example, understanding “on fleek” requires knowing its internet origin.

One of the most characteristic methods of American youth use to create internet slang expressions is compounding-combining two words into one. For example, airhead (a foolish, frivolous person), badmouth (to insult or speak ill of someone), homeboy (closest friend) and dead-head (stupid person) .

Discussion. Our findings highlight that cultural semantics-the meanings people share on their cultural background-are central to youth slang. Many slang expressions only make sense within a cultural context. For example, a British teen saying “I’m so cheezed off” (annoyed) invokes the informal British use of “cheese” to mean frustration, which US youth might not immediately grasp. Conversely, an American using “down for something” (willing to do it) reflects idioms of US youth culture, this suggests that even English is shared, cultural semantics cause slang to be partly culture-specific.

According to Mamichova, a distinctive feature of American slang is the rapid transition of words from one regional dialects into slang. This process is active in American speech, while in British English it is now hardly observed. American slang often has a sharp and witty tone . The observation about American slang rapidly incorporating regional expressions is interesting. America’s linguistic diversity and media interconnectedness do seem to facilitate this process more than in British English which has more established regional boundaries and perhaps stronger prescriptive linguistic traditions.

Importantly, slang also exhibits universal tendencies. Both UK and US youth use shortening, rhyming and compounding in similar ways. The motivation to coin fresh synonyms appears in all languages. Yet the specific forms differ: UK slang has many rhyming-slants (cockney heritage) and multicultural London terms, whereas US slang is heavily influenced by African Vernacular English and West Coast culture.

Recent decades show notable differences between British and American youth slang, especially among students, reflecting their distinct social environments. As H.L.Menchen observed, Americans favor informal language more than The British, with student speech showing even stronger differences. Slang develops rapidly in-tight-knit, closed groups. American campus life-dorms and fraternities-fosters solidarity and a shared group language. British student life, being more integrated into general society, tends toward standard language. This explains why student slang is minimal in countries like Spain, where distinct campus culture barely exists compared to the US and UK . While American student communities indeed promote dense slang innovation, the contrast with British students is somewhat overstated. UK universities also develop localized slang, though it may diffuse more quickly into mainstream usage. Likewise, the claim about Spain highlights an important point about campus culture, but student slang can still emerge in smaller pockets even without a strong residential system. Overall, campus structure influence slang productivity, but social media now accelerates slang spread globally, reducing these national differences.

Slang is not defined by grammar or form, but by social function. American slang stands out for its phonetic and lexical humor, using rhyme and euphony to make expressions catchy and memorable (the bee's knees, fender-bender, razzle-dazzle). It also re-codes known acronyms, for example reinterpreting NATO to mock someone who talks planning but never acts. A key feature is brevity, achieved through clipping and expressive monosyllables like simp, veep or short compounds, enabling rapid spread, especially online. Slang also relies on creative metaphorical naming (thin-machine- brain, flying coffin-plane), serving identity-marking and trend participation more than formal communication. Unlike stable standard vocabulary, slang is fast-changing: terms quickly disaapear or enter common language, losing their original edge once normalized. Slang differs through humor, creativity, brevity, trend signaling and generational turnover-not grammatical structure . The analysis rightly highlights slang's social rather than structural nature and accurately captures the creativity that drives American slang formation. However, some examples (e.g. bee's knees) are historically dated and no longer representative of current US slang usage, which now leans more on digital-born blends, emoji and hybrid forms. The point about metaphor and brevity is valid, though these features are also widespread in British and global internet slang.

Implications of this study include recognizing that educators and lexicographers must be aware of evolving slang meanings. Slang dictionaries often lag behind youth usage; we found many examples that would be missing from older references. Our analysis suggests updating reference works with cultural notes (e.g. origin subculture, diaspora source) to capture semantics. For sociolinguistics, these results reinforce that examining youth language is essential for understanding language change in real time and how meaning is negotiated by communities. According to L.A.Sidorova who researched modern English youth slang through English youth movies and conversations (monologues, dialogues, polylogues) slang units were analyzed and categorized into main types. They are classified according to which social groups use the slang. The following primary slang categories were identified: Music. Informal lexicon related to music and its genres: chops-instrumental skills, cover-cover song, chorus-refrain, groove-rhythm, hook catchy melodic phrase in a song. Sports. Slang associated with sport and team roles: ace-excellent serve, benchwarmer-substitute player, blowout-victory by large margin, clean sheet-not conceding goals. Technology. Technical slang related to computers and networks: bug-program error, crash-system failure, firewall-network protection, hacker-system breaker. Fashion. Slang related to clothing style: chic-modern, stylish appearance, fierce-strong, glam-shiny. Social life: bae-closest, throw shade-indirect critics or jab. Student life: Campus slang units-hazing-group initiation ceremony, all-nighter-studying all night.

Through slang, speech becomes more expressive, memorable, concise and lively. It enables youth to demonstrate their generational identity, creatively encode thoughts and strengthen solidarity among peers .

Based on the studies carried out by M.S.Muhammas, G.Y.Alimova and O.Kh.Toxtakulova, slang serves as a critical mechanism for signaling group membership and constructing social identity among British youth. It enables young people to establish distinctiveness from adult populations and articulate affiliation with specific subcultures and peer networks. Multicultural London English represents the predominant linguistic variety in urban youth culture, synthesizing lexical and phonological features from African-Caribbean Patois, South Asian English, Cockney and Arabic. Lexical items such as “mandem” (friends), “safe” (reliable) and “innit” (isn’t it) function as sociolinguistic markers of group solidarity and shared cultural experiences, facilitating community cohesion . However, it could be noted that MLE is not a fixed variety but a fluid, evolving repertoire influenced by peer networks rather than ethnicity alone.

Conclusion. Cultural semantics profoundly shape English youth slang. Our study shows that slang meanings arise from shared cultural background: slang encodes the values, humor and experiences of its speakers. Both UK and US youths invent terms by stretching and shifting existing words, but the cultural contexts (dialects, traditions, media) give those terms specific

flavors. Some slang transcends borders via global youth culture, but much remains locally inflected. Notably, youth slang is not random. It often clusters into semantic fields reflecting youth priorities including social life, achievement, fun and emotions. The slang lexicon is a living map of youth culture. Understanding it requires listening to youths' voices within their cultural frames. Future work could extend this analysis across more regions or track emerging digital-age terms, but already it is clear that youth slang provides a rich terrain where language, identity and culture intersect.

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