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Y. M. Martysheva

THE ORIGIN OF ENGLISH SLANG: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The topic of slang is gaining currency today being used by everyone. As cultural frames of modern society have recently widened enough to let slang words penetrate into literature, press and speech of high-educated people special attention should be paid to this question. Slang words make up rather a great part of English lexicology so far and their number expands rapidly which brings serious concerns among linguists and lexicographers as their attitudes towards slang still stand in marked contrast. These attitudes are quite inconsistent and vary from naming slang as non-standard language system to slang as a special tool that helps to keep language alive by enriching it with new fresh and colorful expressions.

According to the results of the investigations held by linguists and data gathered slang can be defined as very informal variant of colloquial speech which doesn't coincide with the norms of literary speech but belongs to the lexis of limited use which also can be labeled by highly informal character and extreme emotiveness and it is used by a particular group of people.

The topic of slang is actively discussed in linguistics. Among the prominent linguists who put slang studying into the sphere of interest and as a result contributed a lot to the development of this topic are H. Alexander, G. Antrushyna, I. Arnold, A. Barrere, H. Bradley, W. Burke, R. Chapman, D. Crystal, O. Espersen, S. Flexner, J. Fowler, F. Freeman, I. Galperin, W. Henley, J. Hotten, O. Jespersen, V. Khomiakov, M. Lehnert, Ch. Leland, M. Makovsky, E. Mattiello, G. McNight, E. Partridge, S. Potter, R. Quirk, O. Ritter, S. Robertson, A. Smirnitsky, T. Solovieva, R. Spears, R. Steers, G. Stein, V. Vilyuman and others.

The aim of the article is to analyze the historical background and the sources of slang origin.

Speaking about slang origin there are no written records found which can describe it on the early stages of language development. Among the first signals about slang appearance and evolving were several articles on the lexicography of thieves' language which go back to the 15th – 16th centuries. One of the most noticeable works is considered to be the vocabulary conducted in 1565 by Th. Harman and titled "A caveat of warening for comen cursetors called vagabones". This work though was based on the R. Coplend's „The Hye Way to the Spyttel Hous" written earlier in 1530 - 1540. In Harman's vocabulary we can find some metaphorical expressions such as crashing-chetes (teeth) [1, p. 285 - 286], caster (coat) [Same], gygger (door) [Same], famble (hand) [Same], darkmans (night) [Same], lightmans (day) [Same]; jargonisms (mainly foreign borrowings) such as cassons – cheese [1, p. 291], comission – shirt [Same], to maunde – ask [Same], portico

– priest [Same], autem – church [Same], lage – water [Same], bowse – drink [Same]; slang elements such as nab (also nob, knob) – head [1, p. 296]. Later on the number of slang words incorporating the vocabulary alongside with jargonisms noticeably increased. As a result, slang lexis gained currency. The most prominent among them are R. Greene and his „A notable discovery of coosnage” (1591), Th. Dekker’s „The shoemaker’s holiday” (1599) and „Lanthe and candle-light” (1609); B. Jonson’s „Masque of the gypsies metamorphosed” (1614), R. Head’s „Canting academy, or villanies discovered” (1674) and some others.

In 1736 the vocabulary of slang called „Canting Dictionary (thieving slang)” by N. Bailey was published. It mainly contained lots of slang lexis concerning sex, prison slang and street expressions of the 18th century. One of the first vocabularies which used the term „slang” was „A dictionary of slang and cant languages, ancient and modern, as used by Adam Tylers, badgers, bullies” by G. Andrews in 1809. The most prominent are slang vocabularies compiled by J. Hotten in the mid of the 19th century. “The Slang Dictionary: Etymological, Historical, and Anecdotal” (1874) and E. Partridge’s “Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English” (1937) and „Slang To-day and Yesterday” (1933) on slang lexicology where he claims his own point of view on the topic of slang etymology and its characteristics. This work by E. Partridge made a great impact on the further process of slang development.

Despite the fact that British slang as a language phenomenon appeared in its present-day meaning around the 16th – 17th centuries. It still existed much earlier in the form of regional differences and local dialects which were first described by Chaucer, William Caxton and William of Malesbury.

The English criminal cant was the basis that gave rise to slang development and by the end of the 16th century it was called a language „without reason or order” [2, p. 314]. Being exceptionally used by the representatives of low social classes such as vagabonds, criminals and cheats in saloons and gambling houses it was strictly banned from general usage and was considered to be taboo. However, it could still be easily found in the plays of Richard Brome, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton and William Shakespeare as well as in songs and poems by Copland.

Due to certain historical events at the beginning of the 18th century such as West expansion, the Civil War and the abolitionist movement, slang gained currency especially quickly. It became widely used by various subcultures within every society or occupational group such as police, teenagers, sport groups, politicians, criminals, doctors, racial minorities. After this the attitude towards such a phenomenon as slang changed completely. The real turning point of slang development was its appreciation by the prominent scientists of that times and Walt Whitman in particular who claimed that slang represents future of language development saying that „slang was a wholesome of common humanity to escape the form bald literalism, and express itself illimitably” [3, p. 32]. Since then it wasn’t associated with the language of criminals anymore gaining more and more interest all over the

continents. From the diachronic perspective we can trace the development of the notion of slang since 1756 when it was first mentioned as a „language of a low or vulgar type” [1, p. 381]. Later on, since 1802 it was called „the cant or jargon of a certain period” [Same] and finally starting with 1818th it is a „language of a highly colloquial type, considered to be below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense” [Same]. Despite its rapid development slang still wasn't actively used by the writers till the 1920th but the situation changed after the World War II when it was used for entertainment by mass media and in literature.

Speaking about the USA, slang spread and evolving was also caused by some historical events and immigration in particular as the country has always been open for immigrants from different continents. During the 1880 – 1950th the pace of immigration was especially high as people were leaving Ireland, Germany, Italy, Greece, Poland and many other countries in search for better life abroad. Initially, the process of settlement started with the Englishmen and Scotch arrival which brought the whole families with them. By this period of time, slang had already spread greatly in Britain so that obviously it was brought to the USA by immigrants and got mixed with some local expressions and accents as well as the European ones. The basis of American slang represented a mixture of English slang brought from Britain and the one created by Afro-Americans although still the main sources of slang change. In the situation of American slang at some point of time these sources were cowboys, hunters and frontiersmen. During the 1920 – 1930th the speech was full of slang words concerning baseball and crime, later on such social groups as jazz musicians, soldiers and students enriched the vocabulary of slang.

Nowadays, in the 21st century slang words are absolutely ordinary and widely-accepted elements of speech, mass media and literature. Moreover, it is often used on purpose in order to show one's exceptional uniqueness, wittiness or sense of humor. Among the first who proposed the idea of etymology of the notion „slang” was English lexicographer John Hotten. He claims the word „slang” goes from gypsy's „slang” which means „secret language” [4, p. 38 – 39]. At the end of 19th century the notion of slang was considered as a borrowing from Scandinavian languages. This idea was put forward by B. Bradney and E. Weekley who thought the word „slang” is of the same origin with Norwegian „slenja-ord” (new slangish word) [5, p. 113], „slanja-namm” (nickname) [Same] and „slenja-kjeften” [Same] (to scold or abuse somebody). Nevertheless, Oxford Dictionary rejects Norwegian origin of the word „slang”. O. Ritter and K. Westendopf claimed the word „slang” appeared as a result of agglutination of the first part of the word „language” and „-s' ” suffix in such expressions „thieves' language”, „gypsies' language” [6, p. 13].

But the most authentic theory of slang origin belongs to a British lexicographer Eric Partridge who states that the word „slang” correlates with

the verb „tosling-tootter” [7, p. 89] which indicates the existence of such word combinations as „sling” words alongside with late slang combinations with the same verb, for example, sling language – to talk, sling the language – to speak a foreign language, sling a yarn – to tell a lie, to sling (a person) slang – to abuse, scold violently. Another lexicographer – I. Galperin pays special attention to the fact that approximately starting from the middle of the previous century the term „slang” has been used as „illegitimate colloquial speech” [8, p. 148] when till the middle of 19th century this term was applied to all the varieties of vulgar language except cant. In its modern meaning slang is often called as „metaphors and jocular, often with a coarse, mocking, cynical colouring” [9, p. 18]. Moreover, alongside with the term „slang” it is inappropriate to use such synonyms as lingo, argot, jargon, cant, despite the fact that slang was firstly used as a synonym for cant and later on for argot as well.

Another linguist E. Mattiello looks at the question of slang origin from the position based on the lexicographic approach. She states that „in dictionaries, there is no unique clear-cut definition of slang because this concept has acquired different senses in different periods of time. Originally, the term was used to refer to the language of criminals, thieves and vagabonds” [10, p. 34]. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, for instance, states that in the mid-eighteenth century, slang was labeled as „the special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character” [11].

Since the period of the 18th century slang has been used to denote the language of various social subgroups due to their profession, for example: slang of lawyers differs from the slang of scientists; or due to their interests as the slang of rock music fans has not much in common with the slang of artists. Finally, in the early 19th century slang came closer to the vocabulary of standard usage but still being more spoken rather than written. „Today slang covers both the specific and the general sense. It typically consists of new words and develops from the attempt to find fresh, vigorous, colorful, pungent or humorous expressions” [10, p. 35].

So, we can conclude that slang, being a very important element of the language system, fulfills a specific range of tasks. It can be defined as very informal variant of colloquial speech which doesn't coincide with the norms of literary speech but belongs to the lexis of limited use which also can be labeled by highly informal character and extreme emotiveness and is used by a particular group of people. According to the investigations held slang can be assumed to originate around the 15th – 16th centuries as a thieves' slang which later on evolved into the language of highly colloquial type. English slang origin is closely connected with its history which influenced its further development. Although, the most authentic theory of slang origin belongs to a British lexicographer E. Partridge who claims that the word „slang” comes from such word combinations as „sling” words used with late slang combinations. Today, the status of slang has noticeably arisen as it is used by

the representatives of various subgroups (mainly by their profession and interests), but not necessarily of low culture.

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Мартишева Ю. М. Походження англомовного сленгу: історична ретроспектива.

У статті розглядається походження англомовного сленгу та визначається його місце у системі англійської мови. Дана проблема вважається достатньо актуальною, так як сленг є явищем, яке широко розповсюджене у сучасній літературі, мові та різноманітних засобах інформації. У статті дається визначення поняття „сленг” та короткий історичний огляд джерел його походження; факторів, які вплинули на його становлення та розвиток; а також інформація про словники та статті, у яких вперше характеризували поняття „сленг”. Стаття також містить декілька визначень цього поняття з точки зору лінгвістів, які займалися вивченням цієї проблеми.

Ключові слова: сленг, нелітературна мова, розмовна мова, соціальна субкультура, мова злочинців, жаргонізми.

Мартишева Ю. Н. Происхождение англоязычного сленга: историческая ретроспектива.

Данная статья рассматривает происхождение англоязычного сленга и определяет его место в системе английского языка. Этот вопрос

является достаточно распространённым в силу того, что сленг – явление, которое широко используется в современной литературе, речи и средствах информации. В статье дается определение понятия „сленг” и краткий исторический обзор источников его происхождения; факторов, которые повлияли на его развитие; а также информация о словарях и статьях, в которых впервые понятие сленга было использовано и описано. Статья также содержит несколько определений сленга с точки зрения выдающихся лингвистов, изучающих данный вопрос.

Ключевые слова: сленг, нелитературный язык, разговорная речь, социальная субкультура, язык преступников, жаргонизмы.

Martysheva Y. M. The Origin of English Slang: HISTORICAL Background

The article is devoted to the phenomenon of English slang origin and identifying of its place in the system of English language. The question discussed is gaining currency nowadays as it can easily be found in practically any kind of contemporary literary work, speech, mass media. English slang, being a very important element of the language system, fulfills a specific range of tasks. It can be defined as very informal variant of colloquial speech which doesn't coincide with the norms of literary speech but belongs to the lexis of limited use which also can be labeled by highly informal character and extreme emotiveness and is used by a particular group of people. English slang origin is closely connected with its history which influenced its further development. Today, the status of slang has noticeably arisen as it is used by the representatives of various subgroups (mainly by their profession and interests), but not necessarily of low culture.

The article consists of the description of slang as well as short historical extract about the main sources of its origin and factors which influenced its development, the information about first articles and vocabularies where it was first used and described. The article also contains different points of view on the topic of slang stated by the linguists and lexicographers who contributed a lot to the studying of this question.

Key words: slang, non-standard language, colloquial speech, social subculture, language of criminals, jargonisms.

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