

SLANG IN UZBEK: FORMATION, SOCIAL FUNCTIONS, AND LINGUISTIC DYNAMICS

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Abstract. This article examines the formation, dissemination, and social functions of slang in the Uzbek language. It explores how slang emerges within youth communities, subcultures, and digital communication platforms, reflecting social identity, group affiliation, and pragmatic usage. The study also analyzes linguistic features of slang, including semantic flexibility, expressive potential, morphological mechanisms, and lexical innovations. Drawing on both local and international linguistic research, the article highlights the role of slang in shaping language dynamics, cultural identity, and contemporary communication practices in Uzbek society.

Keywords: Uzbek slang, formation, social function, linguistic dynamics, youth language, digital communication, expressive language, subcultural language

In contemporary linguistics, slang has increasingly attracted scholarly attention as a distinct sociolinguistic phenomenon. Slang may be defined as a set of informal lexical units predominantly used in non-official or conversational contexts and shaped by the communicative needs of particular social groups. Unlike standardized vocabulary, slang is characterized by its dynamism, expressive potential, and close connection to group identity and social interaction. In recent decades, the sphere of slang usage has expanded significantly: it is no longer confined to oral speech but is actively employed in written forms as well, especially within internet communication, social networking platforms, and various domains of popular culture. This shift has prompted linguists to reconsider traditional approaches to lexical classification and to analyze slang within broader frameworks of discourse, media linguistics, and social communication. Contemporary approaches to the analysis of slang emphasize several interrelated analytical dimensions.

First, the sociolinguistic approach focuses on the emergence, dissemination, and social conditioning of slang, examining its close association with specific social groups. In particular, youth communities and various subcultural groups—such as rap and hip-hop cultures or online communities—employ slang as a marker of identity and group affiliation, reinforcing in-group solidarity and social distinction. Second, the pragmatic approach investigates the communicative purposes and contextual functions of slang usage. Through slang, speakers may signal familiarity, reduce the level of formality, or deliberately challenge prevailing social norms and stereotypes. In this sense, slang serves not only as a lexical resource but also as a pragmatic strategy within interpersonal communication. Third, the semantic-historical approach examines semantic shifts, metaphorical extensions, and the diachronic development of slang items, including their potential incorporation into the standard language or, conversely, their gradual disappearance from active usage. This perspective highlights the fluid and transitional nature of slang within the lexical system of a language. In addition, corpus-based linguistic approaches enable a systematic analysis of slang through electronic text corpora, allowing researchers to investigate frequency of occurrence, contextual distribution, and patterns of semantic networking. This method has proven particularly effective in the study of internet-based “chat slang,” which is widely attested in digital communication. Finally, within the fields of translation studies and

language education, slang represents a significant area of inquiry, as it poses challenges related to equivalence, cultural specificity, and pragmatic transfer across languages. The strategies for rendering slang in translation and teaching it in foreign-language contexts remain among the most актуал and debated issues in contemporary linguistic research. Slang may be classified according to several major criteria commonly used in contemporary linguistic studies. One of the primary criteria is based on social grouping. From this perspective, slang can be divided into youth slang, professional slang, and subcultural slang. These types of slang are employed by members of specific social communities and function as markers of group identity, shared experience, and informal communication practices.

Another important criterion for the classification of slang relates to its phonetic and morphological characteristics. In this respect, slang expressions may be created through various word-formation processes or may appear as modified and metaphorical lexical items. This approach highlights the structural mechanisms through which slang units emerge and evolve within the language system. A further criterion concerns the source language of slang units. Some slang expressions originate within the language itself, while others are borrowed from foreign languages, most notably from English. This classification underscores the influence of language contact, globalization, and intercultural communication on the development of contemporary slang vocabulary. Slang performs a number of important functions in communication, each of which reflects its role in social interaction and discourse. One of the key functions of slang is its identificational function. Through the use of slang, speakers are able to signal their membership in a particular social group, thereby strengthening in-group solidarity while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from outsiders. Another significant function of slang is its expressive function. Slang enriches speech with vivid imagery, emotional coloring, and stylistic nuance, allowing speakers to convey attitudes, feelings, and evaluations more effectively than through neutral or standardized vocabulary. Slang also fulfills an interpersonal distance function, as it serves as a marker of the level of formality or informality within a communicative situation. The use of slang often indicates reduced social distance between interlocutors, whereas its absence may signal formality or institutionalized communication. Finally, slang carries an ironic and sarcastic function, enabling speakers to express social, cultural, or ideological attitudes in an indirect manner. Through irony and sarcasm, slang becomes a tool for implicit evaluation, social commentary, and subtle critique within everyday and mediated discourse. Within contemporary linguistics, there exists a range of perspectives on substandard language units, including slang, argot, vulgarisms, and obscenities (from Latin *obscenus* — “shameful, repulsive”; expressions that violate norms of decency or politeness). While some scholars regard these forms primarily as expressive resources, others perceive them as potentially harmful to the language system. For instance, N. Quldoshev interprets vulgar words, agnomys, argot, and obscenities as linguistic disturbances that undermine the purity and clarity of language. According to his research, such units, particularly in oral speech, can lead to violations of communicative norms, thereby contributing to a decline in overall speech culture. Slang units, in particular, are often characterized by strong emotional connotations, humor, irony, or even taboo content. These features distinguish slang from standard or formal language and contribute to its social significance. Consequently, young speakers frequently value slang as a marker of unfiltered honesty, simplicity, and fidelity to personal identity. This phenomenon is referred to in Western sociolinguistics as “covert prestige”. Studies by Labov and Trudgill demonstrate that, in some cases, speakers—especially younger individuals—deliberately prioritize nonstandard, group-specific forms of speech over normative language, using them to express and reinforce the values and identity of their social group. Nevertheless, slang remains one of the relatively under-researched areas within contemporary linguistic studies. This can be

explained by several factors. First, slang is often perceived as illegal, informal, or transient in nature. Its unstable character, rapid renewal, predominance in oral speech, and frequent association with humor, irony, or taboo content make it difficult to document in written sources. Linguists have traditionally regarded such units as deviations from standard language, which has led to their marginalization in scholarly research. Consequently, systematic studies of slang, particularly in the context of regional dialects, remain insufficiently developed. Another reason lies in the inherent dynamics of slang itself. Slang expressions typically emerge within small social groups, such as youth communities or professional circles, and may later become widespread or fade from use. This cyclical pattern of development requires continuous observation and linguistic monitoring. However, in most cases, such monitoring has not been adequately implemented, either methodologically or technically. As a result, existing research often portrays slang as marginal to linguistic culture, of limited importance, or merely a passing fashion, thereby underestimating its social and linguistic significance. Contemporary linguistic research, particularly within the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmalinguistics, and cultural linguistics, indicates that slang constitutes an integral and dynamic component of the language system. Slang reflects societal changes, youth cultural trends, technological advancements, social tensions, and even psychological states. Consequently, the study of slang vocabulary should be approached not only from a linguistic perspective but also in connection with sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and information technologies. Research on slang has been conducted extensively in European linguistics, particularly within English, French, German, and other language traditions, with detailed studies from the perspectives of stylistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cultural linguistics. However, in Uzbek linguistics, research in this area remains insufficiently developed. This can be largely attributed to the nonstandard nature of slang, its predominance in oral communication, rapid changes in usage, and limited representation in written sources. Before investigating slang usage in the dialects of the Khorezm region, it is essential to clarify the conceptual framework of slang in linguistic studies. E. Arua and M. Alimi define slang as “the use of nonstandard, diverse, and innovative linguistic resources in interpersonal communication.” According to these scholars, slang represents a dynamic, context-dependent, and emotionally rich layer of language, reflecting the linguistic identity of various social groups. Slang is inherently informal and often restricted to narrow social circles. Its use within such groups fosters unique forms of social interaction and cohesion. According to M. Harris, as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, slang emerges when a particular user group applies specialized terms in novel ways or assigns new meanings to existing expressions. Similarly, S. Johnson and J. Shirli characterize slang as “informal, nonstandard words or expressions associated with subcultures within society.” Based on these definitions, it can be argued that slang constitutes a widespread sociolinguistic phenomenon present in nearly all contemporary languages. Slang serves multiple social functions: it strengthens social bonds within groups, reinforces group identity, and promotes internal cohesion. One of its primary roles is the enhancement of collective unity, enabling social groups to consolidate solidarity through language. In this way, slang is both a linguistic and a social instrument, mediating communication, identity, and group belonging in modern society. M. Adams, in his research, emphasizes the functions of slang primarily within a social context, considering an individual's membership in a particular group, their identity, and communicative needs. According to Adams, slang serves as a linguistic tool that allows individuals to signal their self-presentation, express loyalty to their group, and distinguish themselves from other social groups. R. Aboh, on the other hand, defines slang as “a functional language created to meet the communicative needs of a community speaking a particular language.” This perspective frames slang not merely as a transient, informal lexical layer, but as a linguistic phenomenon governed by its own internal

principles and playing a significant role in communication. In European linguistic studies, youth are often regarded as a distinct social group, which explains why they are the largest users of slang. As G. Yule points out, “young people and adolescents are responsible for linguistic innovations and language change.” On the one hand, such innovations enrich the lexical resources of a language; on the other hand, they foster social cohesion among users. Therefore, it is appropriate to view slang not as an informal or nonstandard negative phenomenon, but rather as a form of linguistic creativity. In her study, Z. Rahimova distinguishes between the concepts of slang, jargon, and argot, while also examining their interrelations. According to her, slang primarily constitutes an emotional and expressive layer of speech, composed of short, impactful, and dynamic units that are widely used across social strata. These features are also observed in the Uzbek language, particularly among urban youth, where slang has increasingly spread through digital and networked communication channels, such as the Internet and social media platforms, in recent years.

In the current era of globalization and digital communication, Uzbek slang has become increasingly multisourced and multilayered. Notably, in youth speech, lexical borrowings from Russian and English are frequently encountered. For instance, foreign-derived terms like “krasavchik” extend beyond their literal translations, acquiring new connotative meanings in the Uzbek context. While “krasavchik” in Russian literally means “handsome young man,” among Uzbek youth it is used to convey appreciation or praise, such as “well done” or “excellent job,” illustrating the polysemous nature of slang. Regional dialects also exhibit unique slang expressions. In the Khorezm region and other provinces, the phrase “gap yo‘q” (literally “no talk”) is employed to express high evaluation or commendation, demonstrating how slang can develop new semantic layers based on context. In recent years, the impact of the Internet and social media on language has grown, making these platforms central to the formation and dissemination of slang. Platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok have facilitated the emergence of slang that is actively used not only in virtual interactions but also in everyday spoken discourse. This process exemplifies mediated language change, where linguistic innovation occurs through digital communication tools. Several illustrative examples highlight this phenomenon:

The term “Chen” (originally “chain” from English) is used on platforms like Telegram and Instagram to denote a chain of responses, where users answer a question and prompt others to participate in the same chain. This expression conveys interactivity, social connectivity, and participatory communication—effectively serving a socially identificational function in informal interpersonal exchanges.

The term “Flashmob”, although directly borrowed from English, has acquired a slang function in Uzbek. It refers to short-term, organized, collective actions, such as TikTok users dancing to the same music or completing a shared task. In contemporary culture, this slang expression embodies notions of collectivity, social unity, and participation in trends.

These examples, originating in the context of social media, illustrate how slang can transition from small-group usage to widespread public discourse. Such units not only create new semantic fields but also perform key sociolinguistic functions, including expressing group membership, following trends, and signaling social positioning within society. In conclusion, slang represents a constantly evolving, creative linguistic phenomenon that develops in tandem with societal changes. Its polysemous nature demonstrates semantic flexibility within the modern lexicon. The ability of a single term to convey multiple meanings, adapt to various contexts, and carry emotional and social connotations enriches slang both pragmatically and expressively. From a social perspective, slang functions as a tool for group identification and integration. Through its use, individuals affirm their membership within a particular social group while simultaneously

distinguishing themselves from others. For this reason, sociolinguists such as Labov (covert prestige), Trudgill (group solidarity), Holmes (politeness theory), Eble (slang and socialization), and Eckert (slang and youth culture) consider slang a serious subject of scientific inquiry. Local studies have also begun to contribute to this field; for instance, Z. Rahimova, in her research, differentiates between slang, jargon, and argot in Uzbek, highlighting their functions in linguistic economy, expressiveness, and innovation. This demonstrates that Uzbek is keeping pace with global trends in slang usage. Slang is one of the natural factors that shape and renew language over time. It reflects societal changes, particularly trends among youth. Studying slang thus provides insight into the dynamic nature of language and the transformations occurring in contemporary communication. Today, new slang expressions emerge rapidly, especially through the Internet and mass media, and quickly disseminate to broad audiences. This presents linguists with new avenues for research and underscores the importance of examining slang as a central component of both linguistic and social dynamics.

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