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VERSATILITY OF THE SLANG CONCEPTION

In English linguistics there is observed tendency to unite very different notions by the term “slang”. The English linguists themselves admit the defect of this term. The term “slang” has so broadened its meaning and used to designate such a great number of different notions that it is very difficult to draw a differentiating line between them determining what is slang and what is not.

Recently there has been affirmed in linguistics a differential interpretation of “slang” in which different notions are distinguished. The most essential of them distinguishing the slang properties are the following:

1. Slang is a lexical phenomenon, it is a certain lexics (words and word combinations, sometimes called as “slangisms”)
2. Slang is not a literary lexics i.e. words and word combinations being beyond the limits of literary English from the viewpoint of the requirements of a modern literary norm.
3. Slang is the lexics, appearing and being used first of all in spoken language. At first slang penetrates into the literature as a means of characterizing peculiarities of colloquial speech in a certain medium. Anyhow some part of slangisms is also used sometimes in literature for the other stylistic purposes as a specific expressive lexics (as a rule, of synonymous nature with respect to literary one).
4. Slang is an emotionally-coloured lexics.
5. Slang is characterized by more or less brightly-expressed familiar paint of overwhelming majority of words and word combinations. This property of the slang limits stylistic borders of its usage. Lexics of the slang is connected with a certain talkative-low colloquial unceremonious style of English speech.
6. Unceremonious emotional colouring of many words and expressions of the slang differs with a great diversity of tints (humorous, ironical, mocking – disdainful, scornful, rude and even vulgar). Some followers also relate indecent obscene words and expressions to slang which is not correct.

Negative estimation of designated objects, phenomena, actions etc in unceremonious and often in rude form is common for emotional colouring of the majority of words and expressions of the slang, that’s why the slang lexics has lowered stylistic colouring in comparison with literary speech.

Such a criterion is the most general being applicable in almost all the cases. Its defect is dependence on the whole row of inconstant subjective factors (for example, social and class motives) and inconstant changes.

7. Depending on sphere of usage the slang can be subdivided into generally-known and generally-used (so called general slang and little-known (or unknown in general use) and narrow-used.

Little-known and narrow-used slang is connected with certain professional and social groups of people genetically (by origin) and due to the fact that it is predominately used in more or less limited medium. Therefore this subgroup of slang is sometimes designated by the terms “jargons”, “jargonisms”, “professional slang”, “professionalisms”, “argo”, “argotisms” and others.

General slang is a combination of slangisms, penetrated into a general usage from different resources (different professional or social groups). General usage or clearness of these slangisms does not mean their transition to the category of literary lexics. As a rule they remain beyond the limits of literary language. A certain part of words and expressions of general slang can penetrate into a literary language losing the properties being typical to the slang.

8. Most of the words and expressions of the slang are not comprehensible or little-comprehensible for the main mass of the population (specially at the period of their appearance and transition to broader sphere of usage), because first of all they are connected with original form of expression, for example, in many cases of transfer of meaning (figurative usage being so typical for the slang (like for expressive lexics in general). Incomprehensibility can also be the result of the fact that these slangisms are borrowings from dialects and jargons of English and foreign languages.

Incomprehensibility or little-comprehensibility of separate words and word combinations of the slang can also be caused by the fact that they mean some little-known notions (for example, specific notions of some profession, speciality) or connected with certain circumstances. That's why narrow-used part of the slang is often referred to the jargons (first of all meaning incomprehensible language of some narrow field of activity).

Analysis of lexic and phraseological units of the slang from the viewpoint of the notions of Russian linguistic terminology cites terms in each concrete case such as talkative and low-colloquial lexics, jargonisms, professionalisms, dialectisms, rude-unceremonious lexics, vulgarisms etc.