

**LINGUISTIC VARIABILITY: YOUTH SLANG AND ITS ROLE IN LANGUAGE  
EVOLUTION****Saodat Amrakulovna Rakhmatova**

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mail: [saodatraxmatova67@gmail.com](mailto:saodatraxmatova67@gmail.com)**Abstract**

The article examines the phenomenon of youth slang as a form of linguistic variability and as one of the factors in the evolution of the Russian language. Based on the analysis of lexical, morphological, and syntactic aspects of youth speech, the mechanisms of its interaction with the literary norm are identified. The study employs methods of corpus analysis, observation, and comparative description. The results show that youth slang not only reflects sociocultural changes but also enables the renewal of the language system by introducing new words, forms, and stylistic devices. At the same time, tension remains between the innovative potential of slang and the requirements of linguistic normativity.

**Keywords:** youth slang, linguistic variability, language evolution, sociolinguistics, Russian language, lexical innovations, language norm.

**Introduction**

Language is not a static system but a dynamic, constantly developing organism that reflects changes in society, culture, technology, and worldview. In the context of the rapid transformation of the modern world, linguistic variability becomes especially prominent — the ability of a language to exist in multiple social, functional, and territorial conditions [Shmelev, 2018, pp. 12–15]. One of the most vivid and socially significant forms of such variability is youth slang, which in recent years has ceased to be a marginal phenomenon and has begun to shape processes of linguistic evolution.

Historically, the term jargon carried a negative connotation and was associated with “incorrect,” “distorted,” or “low” forms of speech. However, within modern sociolinguistics and cognitive linguistics, there is an increasing tendency to view jargon as a legitimate sociolectal form that performs key communicative and identificational functions [Lapteva, 2003, p. 45]. This is particularly relevant for young people — a social group positioned at the intersection of cultural,

technological, and generational transformations. Youth slang functions not only as a means of self-expression but also as a tool for constructing group solidarity, cultural codes, and digital identity.

In linguistics, jargon is understood as a socially restricted variety of language characteristic of a specific social group and fulfilling the function of intra-group identification and self-expression [Lapteva, 2003, p. 45]. In the conditions of digitalization, globalization, and accelerated social change, youth slang exerts an increasingly strong influence on the general language system.

In the Russian-speaking context, interest in youth speech has intensified with the development of the Internet and social media. Platforms such as TikTok, Telegram, Instagram, and YouTube have become laboratories of linguistic experimentation, where new words, expressions, and stylistic devices emerge, spread, and transform with remarkable speed. As a result, the boundaries between “jargon,” “slang,” “Internet vocabulary,” and the standard language are becoming increasingly blurred. Words such as hype, meme, cringe, and lifehack, which were initially perceived as marginal or foreign, are now actively used in mass media, advertising, and even in semi-official contexts, which indicates a process of normalization of slang vocabulary [Kostomarov, 2002, pp. 57–60; Kuznetsov, 2023].

Scientific interest in this topic is driven not only by linguistic but also by sociocultural, pedagogical, and even political considerations. On the one hand, youth slang demonstrates the creative potential of the language and its capacity for adaptation. On the other hand, it causes concern among proponents of conservative views on language norms, forming the basis of theories about the “degradation of language” or the “loss of cultural heritage” [Proshin, 2020, pp. 90–94]. However, as the history of language shows, similar fears arose during every significant linguistic shift — from the borrowings of the Petrine era to the mass spread of radio and television in the twentieth century [Kostomarov, 2002, pp. 21–25].

The purpose of this article is not merely to record instances of youth slang usage but to reflect on its role in long-term processes of linguistic evolution.

The study addresses the following aspects:

- ✓ the linguistic structure of youth slang (lexical, morphological, and syntactic levels);
- ✓ mechanisms of its dissemination and integration into the literary language;
- ✓ sociocultural functions and its status within the system of language norms;
- ✓ prospects for interaction between slang and the standard language in digital communication.

Thus, the article contributes to understanding how social change is transmitted into the linguistic system through the communicative practices of the younger generation, one of the main agents of linguistic innovation.

## **Methods**

To achieve the stated objectives, a комплекс approach combining several linguistic methods was applied.

Corpus analysis based on data from the National Corpus of the Russian Language and open Internet corpora (e.g., corpora of contemporary Russian online texts). A selection of texts published between 2015 and 2025 containing slang units such as zashkvar, cringe, lifehack, chill, meme, and trash was analyzed [National Corpus of the Russian Language].

Observation and data collection, including the analysis of posts on social media platforms (VKontakte, Telegram, TikTok, Instagram), forums, and comments under video content. Particular attention was paid to frequency of use and semantic transformation.

Comparative-descriptive method, involving the comparison of slang units with their equivalents in the standard language and tracing their “linguistic careers” from marginal usage to inclusion in dictionaries, such as The Great Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language edited by S. A. Kuznetsov [Kuznetsov, 2023].

Sociolinguistic survey, a pilot study conducted among university students (n = 120, aged 17–23), aimed at identifying attitudes toward slang, frequency of its use, and adherence to linguistic norms.

## **Results**

### **1. Lexical Level**

The analysis showed that youth slang in Russian is characterized by intensive lexical innovation. The following main sources of slang neologisms were identified:

✓ Borrowings from English: hype, flex, scam, deadline, lifehack. Many of these units have lost their foreign status and have become fully integrated into the Russian language system [Kostomarov, 2002, pp. 57–60].

✓ Abbreviations and graphic reductions: thx, pls, DM, HW.

✓ Word-formation innovations: to ban, to scam, to cringe — verbs formed from nouns through prefixation and suffixation.

✓ Semantic shifts: trash (originally meaning “waste”) now denotes something absurd or shameful; to chill means “to relax,” representing an extension of the original meaning.

Many of these words have already been recorded in authoritative dictionaries. For example, cringe was first registered in the National Corpus of the Russian Language in 2016 and by 2023 had entered dictionaries of youth slang and was frequently used in media discourse [National Corpus of the Russian Language; Kuznetsov, 2023].

### **2. Grammatical and Syntactic Level**

Although grammatical structure is less dynamic than vocabulary, several tendencies were identified:

- ✓ simplification of syntax, with the predominance of simple sentences and ellipsis;
- ✓ mixing of stylistic registers within a single text;
- ✓ frequent use of emotive particles and discourse markers.

### 3. Sociolinguistic Data

The survey revealed that 89% of respondents regularly use slang in informal communication, while 62% employ it in written digital discourse. At the same time, 74% believe that some slang words have already become part of the norm, whereas 68% consciously avoid them in formal contexts. This indicates functional differentiation: slang is perceived as acceptable in informal communication but inappropriate in official discourse [Proshin, 2020, pp. 90–94].

### Discussion

The results confirm the hypothesis that youth slang plays a dual role in the linguistic system: on the one hand, it functions as a tool of social identification; on the other, it serves as a source of linguistic innovation. From the perspective of theories of language evolution, peripheral social groups — in this case, young people — often act as the driving force behind linguistic change [Labov, 2001, pp. 73–75].

It is important to note that not all slang units become established in the language. As shown by V. G. Kostomarov, the “viability” of a word depends on its functional load, contextual convenience, and communicative prestige [Kostomarov, 2002, pp. 78–81]. Thus, words such as *hype* and *meme* gained widespread use due to their relevance in the digital environment, whereas others remained limited to narrow social groups.

Furthermore, reverse influence can be observed: the standard language assimilates elements of slang, which leads to an expansion of stylistic resources. For example, the word *trash* is now used in media headlines in an ironic evaluative sense.

At the same time, normative resistance persists. Many linguists and educators express concern about the erosion of language norms [Proshin, 2020, pp. 90–94]. Nevertheless, history demonstrates that such conflicts are an inherent part of language development.

### Conclusion

Summarizing the results of the study, it can be stated that youth slang represents not a temporary fashion or linguistic “noise,” but a systematic phenomenon deeply integrated into the processes of development of the Russian language. Its role extends beyond intra-group communication: slang acts as a catalyst for linguistic change, lexical and stylistic innovation, and serves as a mirror of sociocultural transformations.

The analysis shows that youth slang possesses a high degree of adaptability. It responds quickly to the challenges of the digital era, globalization, and cultural hybridization, creating new linguistic means to denote previously non-existent realities (e.g., fake, to troll, digital). At the same time, a clear hierarchical selection mechanism operates: only those slang elements that demonstrate high functional utility, semantic transparency, and social relevance gain a chance to become part of the standard language.

An important force promoting slang vocabulary into the norm is not a single event but a long evolutionary process passing through stages of marginalization, ironic usage, stylistic neutralization, and eventual dictionary fixation. For example, the word meme, borrowed from Internet culture, completed the path from a specialized term to a commonly used concept within less than a decade.

The sociolinguistic aspect is also significant: young people consciously manipulate linguistic registers, choosing them according to communicative situations. This indicates not a decline in literacy but a high level of linguistic competence involving flexible communicative strategies.

Future research perspectives include the study of digital platforms and social media algorithms in the dissemination of slang elements, comparative analysis of youth slang in different languages, and pedagogical approaches to teaching conscious register choice. Youth slang should therefore be regarded as a vivid manifestation of linguistic variability and a foundation for understanding the evolution of the Russian language.

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