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YOUTH SLANG IN SOCIAL NETS (A CASE STUDY OF SPANISH LANGUAGE)

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Abstract

The modern lifestyle implies a high speed of information transfer. Young people communication interlinks strongly with information technology and takes place within the framework of social networks, instant messengers, forums and chats. Thus, many words of the spoken language are distorted, rethought and attached with additional meanings leading to a specific youth texting slang. The relevance of the research is due to the high interest of modern Linguistics in special features of today's youth slang on social media and the ways of word formation in computer-mediated communication. The purpose of the study is to consider the corpus of chat messages posted on Instagram by Spanish young people aged 16-20, to identify the ways of youth slang formation and to single out specific spelling features of texting. A new type of communication mediated by gadgets contributed to the emergence of a special oral-written texting language that is a set of generally accepted abbreviations and nonverbal symbols, which allows conveying a maximum of meaning in a minimum of characters. The analysis of the assembled corpus of chat messages shows that many of their linguistic features have signs of oral colloquial speech and are associated with the predominantly dialogical and informal nature of chat communication. The methodological basis of the research are discursive and communicative approaches. The obtained research results may be useful for special lectures on Spanish Descriptive Lexicology and Internet discourse.

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1. Introduction

Language is a social phenomenon; as an instrument of communication, it reflects its speakers' characteristics, and reacts to the needs of the society. The basic part of communication is speech that is a particular manner to reflect reality. The vocabulary of a language is its most variable part; it keeps changing during the development of human society and shows not only social changes, but also helps to make sense of the turning points in our history and culture, because the vocabulary relates directly to all the fields of human activity. Undoubtedly, the most significant changes in the vocabulary happen during the times of social and political upheaval and under their influence (Stockwell & Minkova, 2009). Nevertheless, this is not to say that only changes in social and political life lead to the changes in the vocabulary. The explosion of new words and phrases can be the result of such events as development of technology.

Referring to the issue of expressiveness, we ought to make a distinction between emotionally neutral vocabulary and emotionally colored vocabulary. Emotionally colored vocabulary is close to stylistic variations. The closeness between expressiveness and stylistic differences is especially noticeable when we explore slang that is an inherent component of spoken language and expresses diverse interests of divergent representatives of the society and how different social groups evaluate various phenomena. The analysis of the stylistically colored vocabulary implies analysis of the lexis in different functional styles.

Functional style is a historically formed system of speech means used in a particular sphere of human communication (Naranjo, 2014). Consequently, the choice of functional style depends upon the goal set by the speaker. The choice of speech styles will vary depending on social ambience of the communication. Extra linguistic factors govern functional styles' formation associated with pragmatic situations of communication, because functional styles become manifest in various communicative circumstances. The pragmatic situation of communication includes agents of communication, subject and circumstances of communication.

Familiar colloquial speech unlike literary speech promptly assimilates slang and new words. Slang is an emotionally colored vocabulary characterized by a more or less pronounced familiar coloring of the vast majority of words and phrases. This property of slang limits the stylistic boundaries of its use. Slang is relatively stable for a certain period, widely used and stylistically marked lexical layer. Partridge stresses out that slang is "very fragile, unstable, not codified, and often completely colloquial subjects of lexemes, reflecting the public consciousness of people belonging to a particular social or professional environment" (Partridge, 1993, p. 148).

In accordance with the statements of some linguists (Aguilar & Franco, 2018; Gallego, 1993), the concept "slang" can have such kinds as:

1) *Social slang*, as its name suggests, is the slang created by wide range of people with two different objectives: to stand out from the rest or to avoid being understood by others. Thus, in line with its name, this type of slang could be categorized as that used by urban tribes or groups of adolescents.

2) *Professional slang*, are terms and specific terminology of a profession. To understand professional slang one should have knowledge of certain area or profession. Given the importance of understanding these terms for the development of a profession, there are dictionaries on this type of slang.

The language is dynamic. It is rather difficult to determine the boundaries between language layers; slang words can easily go to other layers and vice versa. Slang takes many words from the standard language and at the same time gives many words to the standard.

Computer mediated communication has helped shape a special texting language that is a set of generally accepted abbreviations and allows conveying a maximum of meaning using a minimum of text characters and developing such type of communication as Internet discourse.

As David Crystal stresses (Crystal, 2006), the main characteristic of the Internet discourse is the synthesis of written and oral speech that occurs in a specific communicative situation designated as “Internet-using situations”. In our research, we explore youth slang on the Instagram page “Confesiones” in Spanish, using methods of discursive analysis, which allows us to reveal the meaning hidden in the text, to identify its goals, to establish links between language and social processes.

2. Problem Statement

Language is not a static phenomenon, but variable and multifaceted, and primarily in terms of expression. Nowadays communication technologies develop with extraordinary speed, quickly change our reality, give rise to new cultural phenomena and modify the language system. Texting language has expanded beyond Internet communication into everyday life. The linguistic phenomenon extends, modifies and spreads extremely fast because of social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Currently, slang is one of the most interesting language systems of modern Linguistics. From the point of view of Stylistics, slang is not a harmful layer of a standard language that vulgarizes the speaker’s oral speech, but an organic and somewhat necessary part of this system. Slang cannot be ignored or not given due attention to it.

3. Research Questions

Lexicology is concerned with various lexical units and studies vocabulary of a language regarding its origin, development and use. Slang performs such diverse interconnected functions as communicative function for communication between people, nominative function for naming objects, expressive function including emotional-expressive attitude to the content of the message, demonstrative function of belonging to a certain social group and the function to compress the utterance. In this context, the research questions are as follows:

- 3.1. To give definition of slang and to point out some reasons of using slang among young people;
- 3.2. To reveal young peoples’ preferred social nets in Spain;
- 3.3. To investigate communicative situation in the “Confesiones” chat group;
- 3.4. To consider the ways of Spanish slang formation and to reveal spelling features of texting in Spanish.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research paper is to identify the main trends in Spanish youth slang formation used in the “Confesiones” chat group on Instagram, to reveal the specific ways in which this vocabulary forms up and to describe the most characteristic features of Spanish texting language.

5. Research Methods

In accordance with the methods of discursive analysis, we take into account all components of the communicative situation, namely: the context of speech activity or sphere of communication; communicative goals or intentions; subject of the message; agents of communication, i.e., the author and the addressee or audience, number of participants; circumstances in which communication is carried out. In addition, ways of word formation processes and procedures for the formation of Spanish slang words are considered. The methodology relies on the studies of the following scientists: Gallego (1993), Partridge (1993), Allen (1993), Crystal (2006). During the analysis, we processed 250 chat messages posted on Instagram page “Confesiones”, including from one to ten comments written in the period of 2019-2020, using method of continuous sampling.

6. Findings

The Internet has made the world a large global field that strongly influenced our speech. The new virtual world contributes to the origin and use of slang words, many of them lost over time, but new ones constantly appear.

There is a great number of definitions given to the term *slang* since it is a wide and multifaceted concept. Allen (1993) says that *slang* is “a class of language used, among other for social and psychological uses, to assert social opposition and to deny allegiance to genteel, elite, and proper society and to its standard linguistic forms” (p. 267).

Lighter (1994) points out that the term slang can “rarely been defined in a way that is useful to linguists. Everyone has its own opinion of what constitutes slang, but no clear linguistic effort or model has come forth in producing criteria for which words should be regarded as slang and which are not” (p. 220). The linguist defines slang as “an informal, nonstandard, nontechnical vocabulary” that consists of “novel-sounding synonyms for standard words and phrases, associated with youthful, raffish, or undignified persons and groups”.

We are inclined towards the definition given by Eble (1996) who suggests that:

Slang is the distinctive vocabulary either of groups or of people who wish by their vocabulary to identify with a popular or avant-garde style. Slang is a class of language used, among other for social and psychological uses, to deny allegiance to genteel, elite, and proper society and to its standard linguistic forms. Slang is thus used to assert social opposition (...) Slang is an urban phenomenon which originated in the socially diverse urban subcultures. (pp. 289-297)

As for the functions of slang, Spolsky (1998) stresses that: “A specialized jargon serves not just to label new and needed concepts, but to establish bonds between members of the in-group and enforce boundaries for outsiders. If you don’t understand my jargon you don’t belong to my group” (p. 35).

Partridge (1993), British lexicographer, revealed fifteen reasons people use slang. Among them there are such as to demonstrate that one belongs to a certain group or class, to be secret, to be different and brief; to break the solemnity of a conversation, to play with words and to be novel.

Briz (2003) considers the following important differentiating factors in the linguistic behavior of individuals for using slang: age, sex, ethnic group, socioeconomic class and educational level. Generally, young people speak differently than adults, and sometimes use specific subcodes of a natural language.

Nowadays, the Internet is not only a worldwide computer network, but also a sociocultural environment, an independent cultural phenomenon that affects all areas of a person’s life, including language. The computer mediated communication created a new language of communication, which Crystal (2006) called Netspeak or Cyberspeak that relies on features belonging to written and oral speech. Netspeak is a texting language that represents a code used on social media websites by participants in Internet communication, mainly young people, in order to demonstrate their affiliation with the network group.

According to the statistic published in 2020 (Concepto05, 2020), the preferred social networks of Spanish young people are Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube, and Twitter. Chats, forums and social networks are the most popular means of internet communication, and most of them can be attributed to the entertainment genre of the global network.

The principle of communication in chat group “Confesiones” is to enjoy communication, discussing on a certain topic or confessing secrets to chat participants using a set of specific means to implement communication activities. The communicative situation is characterized by superficiality of contacts and increased emotionality, it has mass character, i.e. consists of various participants. The agents of communication, often anonymized, may interact exchanging messages in real time, in so-called synchronous situation, or join the conversation any time they want which means asynchronous situation. The non-disclosure of the identity of the participants makes them feel more at ease. The main characteristics of chat communication are spontaneity, informality, emotionality and dialogism, that is, inherent properties of colloquial speech. The use of visual channel for transmitting information is a prerequisite for successful interaction in the chat group. The author of each message focuses on the recipients and selects vocabulary that is most suitable for the target audience on social networks. The process of communication in chat group “Confesiones” contributed to the emergence of a special slang texting language and we will consider its features below. While analyzing the chat messages we could identify such ways of Spanish youth slang formation:

1. Semantic changes: *tronco* – friend; *inflar* – to lie; *estar salado* – to be unlucky; *ser tapón* – of short stature; *ser un bocas* –whisperer, *cagao* - coward, *taladrar* – to pester; *rayarse* – to try one’s best; *coco, tarro, calabaza* for head; *pasta, pavos* for money, etc.
2. Morphological way of slang formation.

- 2.1. Compound words: *ser gordibuena* - fat and good; *ser abrazafarolas*- drunk; *-ser un aguafiestas* - party pooper; *follamigo* - friend with benefits; *ser un metemierda* - to sow discord, etc.
- 2.2. Word reductions: *tranki* – tranquilo; *mates* – matemáticas; *insti* – instituto; *uni-universidad*; *finde*- fin de semana (weekend), *Ciu*- University Campus.
- 2.3. Affixation: *jodedor* - merry fellow; *mamón, fiestuqui* – attractive party.
- 2.4. Telescoping: *NM* – no mucho; *NPN* – no pasa nada; *tb* – también; *MÑ* – mañana; *HP*- hijo de puta; *NPI* – Ni puta idea; *Bb* – bebe; *TKM* – te quiero mucho, etc. From English: *LOL, OMG, YOLO, NC*.
3. Onomatopoeic way: *estar de jajas* - to have fun; *ser un bla-bla* - to be chatterbox; *tener o dar yuyu* – to be afraid.
4. English borrowings: *ir a full* - to rock out; *sanamambiche* – sun of bitch; *poster*; *flipar, ser cul* (cool); *ser friki, crush* – love, *ser random* – improvisation, etc.

Due to the analysis of the chat messages on Confesiones Instagram page, we have revealed the following features of spelling used in texting language:

1. Use of symbols for whole words: *xa* – para; *xfa* –porfa / por favor; *es=* es igual; *xq* – / porque, *por qué*; *xo* – pero.
2. Mixture of numbers and letters: *s3*- estrés; *prpar2*- preparados.
3. Untypical writing tending to contraction: *Xao* – chao; *toy*– estoy; *to* – todo, *cucha* - escucha.
4. Changing words for a letter/letters: *t* – te; *s*– ese; *c* – sé; *tx* –taxi; *qn* - quien.
5. Use of *w* instead of *gu* – *wapa* (guapa).
6. Omitted diacritical marks, incorrect capitalization and punctuation marks.
7. Use of nonverbal symbols as emoticons / emoji.

The expressive function is evident in most chat messages given the nature of the Chat. In the chat messages, we can observe many expressive signs such as vocatives, interjections, and diminutives.

7. Conclusion

After the conducted investigation we can conclude that computer mediated Spanish youth slang is a special sublanguage within the national language used by young people aged 14 to 25 years in easy communication with peers and characterized by a special set of lexical units and the specificity of their spelling while texting. A characteristic feature of youth slang is the use of constantly transforming language means of high expressive power. While considering the corpus of chat messages posted on Instagram by Spanish young people, we revealed the main types of Spanish youth slang formation, which are the following: semantic, morphological, onomatopoeic and English borrowings, being semantic and morphological types the most productive. Modern linguistic research highlights the concept of youth slang since its main thrust is to analyze and explore language and speech in order to study the linguistic personality and linguistic identity. Thus, when studying the problem of youth slang, linguists not only investigate the linguistic features of this type of slang, but also consider the youth subculture.

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