



AMERICAN PRISON JARGON

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the description of the prison jargon of the American linguistic areal. To date, the studying of social variants of the multinational English language is one of the current trends of modern linguistics. The author aims to give a generalized characteristics of the investigated phenomena taking into account its linguistic peculiarities. It is noted that the given sociolect is an integrated component of the American prison subculture and comes from the British cant. The vocabulary of the representatives of the American prison community is described by stylistic coloration, the existence of the most significant semantic formations for the members of the US prison subculture at the social level. Both standard and substandard means of word formation may be a replenishment source of the social language variety under discussion.

American prison slang is the most important means of communication among the American prison subculture. This sociolect is a little-studied area in Russian linguistics. The research material was extracted from English-language dictionaries of uncodified vocabulary edited by T. Dalzell [9, 10].

The original source of modern American prison jargon - an integral part of the AmE cant (the American version of the national English language) is considered to be British cant, which goes back to the conventional languages of criminals, traveling merchants, beggars and other asocial elements of the 16th century and is distinguished by a system of its own norms, values and models of behavior opposed to the dominant culture [1, p. 43-44; 8, p. 266-267]. The appearance of the AmE cant dates back to the 18th century [7, p. 9].

The American cant remained predominantly English in etymological terms until the Civil War. Deported from London under the Metropolitan Police Act (1829), a significant number of professional criminals immigrated to the United States. In the 1950s, their ranks were replenished by Australian escaped convicts and paroled prisoners, many of whom then settled in California. Elements of the lexicon of British settlers were not only borrowed by local "brothers", a significant part of them entered the general AmE slang of that time, and some of them continue to function to this day, cf.: dip 'pickpocket', moonshine 'smuggled whiskey', rat 'traitor'. However, over time, American Cant developed its own LE (lexical units), and by 1870,

the process of reverse borrowing of lexemes into Cant BrE (British version of the national English language) began. The language of the criminal world of the USA includes the lexicons of criminal elements, vagrants and prostitutes. Since the speakers of the aforementioned sociolects interact, their means of communication can also be mutually understandable to a certain extent [6, p. 311].

According to J. Coleman, the prerequisites for the emergence of socially marked language variants, including prison slang, include: 1) the presence of a standardized or generally accepted form of language, to which the sociolect is opposed; 2) the hierarchical structure of society (in this case, prison); 3) the threat of violence against the individual and his or her self-expression; 4) the identification of the subject with the group already at the bottom rung of the hierarchical ladder of society; 5) linguistic differentiation within the group; 6) high frequency of social contacts; 7) a tolerant attitude towards slang on the part of the administration, etc.

Prisoners who have the most influence and occupy a high position in the informal prison hierarchy use prison slang most often. Those who are unable to use this means of communication in response to their cellmates lose their status. In the event of disagreements that cannot always be resolved through open violence between representatives of the prison subculture, there is a need to use lexemes of the appropriate semantics - reflecting the behavioral characteristics of representatives of prison society: nonce 'a person who has committed a crime of a sexual nature', muppet 'a prisoner who is easily bullied by others' [ibidem, p. 58-59].

The prison slang of the linguistic area under study is a special variety of the language of the American criminal, mainly thieves' subculture. It has its own, special lexicon, the components of which may have a stylistic (for example, mockingly ironic) coloring, cf.: bit 'prison term', 'solving cell', two-time loser 'repeat offender', big day 'visiting day', college 'correctional facility for juvenile offenders', can 'police station', to fly a kite 'send a letter secretly from prison', to go over the wall 'escape from prison', to be buried 'have no hope of release', to dance 'be hanged', to fry 'be executed in the electric chair', etc [6, p. 312].

Taking into account the internal structural organization within the studied fragment of the lexical-phraseological system of American prison jargon, it is possible to identify five main semantic blocks of unequal volume and heterogeneous structure with unclear boundaries, in the nominative-classification aspect uniting a multitude of lexical units and their lexical-semantic variants that express the most significant concepts, objects, phenomena and features of prison reality for prisoners. Each of such inter-part-of-speech semantic associations can be subdivided into smaller ones: (1) prison life (clothes, shoes, food): glitter 'salt', Nike down 'to wear clothes and shoes only from the brand «Nike»' [10, p. 437, 695]; (2) prison population (types of prisoners, their characteristics, relationships): crab bait 'newly arrived prisoner', hang on the leg 'curry favor with the administration' [10, p. 241, 480], catch a dummy 'refuse to talk' [9, p. 122]; (3) crimes and punishments (types of illegal acts, methods of committing them, legal consequences of committing crimes): four-cornered 'caught in the act', punch it 'make an escape', GE (< general electric) 'electric chair' [10, p. 390, 784, 424]; (4) characteristic features of a prison as a total institution (premises, territories, internal regulations, security and supervision, types of correctional institutions, informal prison norms, customs, values): junk tank 'a cell where drug addicts are kept', gallery 13 'prison

cemetery', airmail 'objects that prisoners throw at guards or other prisoners' [10, p. 584, 416, 10]; (5) what is most in demand in prison (alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, money): dove 'five dollar bill', run, Johnny, run 'cheap loose tobacco' [10, p. 313, 833, 370].

Also, the lexical-semantic features of the studied slang nominations are quite clearly manifested in the example of the lexical-semantic paradigm of "name of a person" in the form of a set of numerous lexical-semantic subclasses with varying degrees of detail, the elements of which are combined on the basis of the following aspects: a) profession / occupation: badge 'security guard' [10, p. 35]; b) level of intelligence: jerkwater 'stupid person' [10, p. 563]; c) the nature of the crime committed: accelerator 'arsonist' [10, p. 2]; d) propensity to commit crimes: boomerang 'recidivist' [10, p. 109]; e) character traits/behavior: breeze 'calm, reserved person' [10, p. 125]; f) belonging to a criminal group: ride '«comrade» in the gang' [10, p. 814]; g) belonging to a certain part of the world: slant-eye 'native of South Asia' [10, p. 895]; h) age: seed 'child' [10, p. 853]; i) family ties: T-Jones 'mother' [10, p. 995] etc. The division into lexical-semantic subclasses is subjective, since most lexemes are grouped into communities based on several features and, therefore, can simultaneously belong to several subclasses, cf.: crank 'a guard who gets pleasure from making life difficult for prisoners' [10, p. 244] (here the name of a person is characterized by at least such differential semes as 'gender' + 'profession' + 'behavioral features' + 'relationships with others').

The sources of replenishment of prison jargon in the studied linguistic area include both standard and colloquial methods of word formation: 1) semantic derivation: a) metaphorization: hog pen (pigsty, barn) «prison security control room» [9, p. 336]; b) metonymization: shelf (board) 'solitary confinement' [10, p. 861]; 2) rhyming slang: a) formations with internal rhyme (when both elements are present in the structure of slang, rhyming with each other [2, p. 161]): swap lies and swat flies 'engage in a long and useless conversation'; little Joe in the snow 'cocaine' [10, p. 964, 622]; b) formations with external rhyme (when the structure of a slang word contains only the first component, rhyming with the intended second element [2, p. 161]): gibbs (< lips) [10, p. 431]; 3) suffixation: cellie, celly 'cellmate' [9, p. 125]; 4) abbreviation: V (< visit) 'call'; seg (< seggie) 'insulator', 'punishment cell' [10, p. 1028, 853]; 5) alliteration (repetition of the initial components of a compound word/phrase [4, p. 166]): band box 'county jail' [10, p. 43]; 6) allusion (a figure of speech that implies a reference to a cultural and historical fact [3, p. 297]): Klondike 'solitary confinement cell' [10, p. 597] etc.

So, we have examined the prison jargon of the American linguistic area. It has been established that the sociolect under study has its own stylistic, lexical-semantic, etymological and derivational features. As of today, AmE prison slang has not been sufficiently studied in Uzbek linguistics and requires further research.

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