

LINGUISTIC PECULIARITIES OF DRUG SLANG IN MOVIES AND TV SERIES APPROACHING THE TOPIC OF DRUG USE

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În activitatea de cercetare realizată de marea majoritate a lingviștilor importanți și cu renume, fenomenele lingvistice ce țin de limbaj informal au fost deseori trecute cu vederea. Complexitatea subiectului argoului, și anume faptul că acesta adesea este confundat cu expresiile tehnice, folosite de specialiști dintr-un anumit domeniu, dar și stereotipul creat precum că argoul este întotdeauna vulgar și inacceptabil, au contribuit la faptul că acesta nu a fost studiat cu atenție. Pe de altă parte, din studiile existente, dar și analizând definițiile din dicționare, se poate concluziona că este un subiect foarte controversat și chiar simpla definiție a fenomenului prezintă o dificultate.

Even though the phenomenon of slang has frequently been discussed, the term was rarely defined in a way that is useful to linguists. Some called it „poetry of the poor”, others „poetry of everyday life”, it is indeed an amazing linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomenon, due to its constant mutation and ambiguity, that makes slang an extremely interesting, yet far from simple subject of inquiry for linguists and other language-related specialists

The topic of slang is very controversial among linguists, some of them choosing not to distinguish it too much from jargon, while others came up with their own classifications. All in all, the lack of a universally agreed definition of the concept itself, but also the lack of official dictionaries, because of the constant mutation and high level of secrecy among the users of drug slang, makes this topic stay among the most interesting and debated, thus, current for linguists, and naturally, for translators. Drug terminology and the way it penetrates the standard language, its ways of formation and strong colourful informal charging, are valuable knowledge that every specialist in language-related fields of activity should possess.

During the times, different linguists tried to define slang. Two notable linguists of the nineteenth century, James Bradstreet Greenough and

George Lyman Kittredge, referred to slang as a peculiar kind of vagabond language [7, p.55]. The father of slang, Eric Partridge, stated the fact that what in a certain moment is considered slang, may not remain slang in the next [9, p.2]. John Moore, in „You English Words”, referred to slang as the poetry of the poor [1, p.7]. Some linguists choose a more categorical definition, such as R. Ginzburg, for example, stating that slang words are those often regarded as a violation of Standard English [5, p.22]. John C. Hodges said that slang is the sluggard’s way of avoiding the search for the exact meaningful word [8, p.197]. Norman Foerster and J.M Steadman [4, p.290], referred to slang as a „cheap substitute for good diction” and added that it demonstrates laziness in thought and poverty of vocabulary. Henry Allan Gleason regarded slang as merely that portion of the vocabulary that changes most freely [6, p.6]. Irina Arnold, considers that slang words are identified and distinguished by contrasting them to standard literary vocabulary. They are expressive, mostly ironical words serving to create fresh names for some things that are frequent topics of discourse. For the most part they sound somewhat vulgar, cynical and harsh, aiming to show the object of speech in the light of an off-hand contemptuous ridicule [2, p.249]. In his study, the Italian sociolinguist Gaetano Berruto refers to slang as „secret idiom” or „informal variety of a language” [3, p.154].

As we can see there is much confusion regarding slang since there is no agreed definition of this phenomenon, and it is difficult to give one. On the one hand, it may be agreed that slang is non-standard vocabulary composed of words and senses characterized by connotations of extreme informality and a currency that is not limited to a specific region. On the other hand, Elisa Mattiello provides thirty one characteristics, which according to her, slang term exhibit, for instance: *group-restriction, informality, time-restriction, playfulness, humour, hybridism, etc.* After having analyzed the characteristics for identifying slang terms according to Elisa Mattiello, we can say that any given slang term, in our case, approaching the topic of drug use, indeed exhibits at least one of the given criteria.

For the purpose of the study we chose the films: *Trainspotting*, directed by Danny Boyle, with its colourful description of the so-called „junk culture” of heroin abuse, Richard Linklater’s *A Scanner Darkly*,

Requiem for a dream by Darren Aronofsky, the TV series *Breaking Bad*, *Weeds*, *The Wire*, *Mr. Robot* and others. There is an entire world behind the production and distribution of drugs, both in real life and movies. The topic of drug use is especially popular among writers and movie makers, as it captures one of the key addictions of humankind - drugs. The language that people use to talk about drugs can tell us many stories: where the drugs come from, how they are made and other. It is not unusual for subcultures to develop their own language to keep their communications secret from the mainstream.

After analyzing the examples, the following classifications have been proposed:

a) simple slang terms: *shard*, *glass*, *ice* referring to methamphetamine, *joint*, *pot*, *grass*, *bomber* - for marijuana cigarette, *skag*, *smack*, *ballot* referring to heroin, *snow*, *chalk*, *flake*, and *sugar* for cocaine and crack, etc.

b) derived slang terms: *tweaker*, derived from *tweak*, meaning the person who is addicted to methamphetamine; *croaker* for doctor who writes prescriptions to drug addicts; *player*, for one involved in the drug trade; *tester* for a free sample of cocaine; *enforcer* for a gunman in a drug crew; *slinger* a low-to mid-level worker in the drug trade who sells drugs on the corner. Other examples: *injected*, *inhaled*, *sniffed*, *snorted*, *smoked*, etc.

c) compounds: two or more stems written separately - *blue sky*, *blue stuff*, *pure stuff* for pure crystal methamphetamine, *sweet sixteen* for a small amount of meth, *big rush* for cocaine, *mary jane* for marijuana, *icebreaker* for DXM, *crew member* for member involved in a drug dealer gang, *cut house* where a drug crew dilutes and packages product, *bed bugs* for fellow addicts; hyphenated compounds - *forget-me pill* for rohypnol and *go-fast* for methcathinone; one word compounds, for example: *airhead*, meaning a user of marijuana, *bonecrusher*, for crack, which is an example with a suffix, *breakdown* having the meaning of crack sold/bought for half price, *burnout* for heavy abuser of drugs.

d) collocations: *golden girls*, *black pearl*, *Chinese red*, *china white* for heroin, *to sling dope* – meaning to sell drugs in the street, *black dust* for PCP, *geek joints* for cigarettes or cigars filled with tobacco and crack. Sniffing heroin, being an unusual and even more dangerous

practice is referred to with the collocation *chase the dragon* which also means to inhale heroin fumes. This structure also gave birth to expressions like *dragon chaser*.

e) phrasal verbs and their use in the field of drugs includes probably an infinite list of possible variants. From our list of films and series we selected the following: *get high* – to use drugs; most commonly used in reference to smoking marijuana; *get stoned*, *get lifted*, *hit up*, *get down*, *get the wind*, *get wasted*, *push off*, *charge up*, *chase up*, *dip in*, *get through*, *fire up* - meaning to be under the influence of drugs, or use them.

f) abbreviations: *mj* for marijuana, *h* for heroin, *x* for ecstasy, *c* for cocaine or crack, *DXM* for dextrometorphan, *Mexican v*, the *v* standing for valium; *crystal m*, *m* standing for methamphetamine, or *special k* for ketamine, *captain h* for heroin, *c joint* for place where cocaine is sold. In some cases the characters repeated the already abbreviated drug name. For instance: *hh* or *cc*, for heroin and cocaine respectively.

g) clipped words. One of the most frequently used is *meth*, short for methamphetamine, *amph* short for amphetamine, *hash* for hashish, *narco* for narcotics police officer. *Mary* short for marijuana also falls into this category.

h) eponyms: *mary*, *jane*, *john*, *jay*, *Mary Jane*, *Mary Jonas*, *Mary Ann*, *Meggie*, *Meg* for marijuana, *Jones*, *L.A.*, *Georgia*, *Florida* for heroin, *Johnson* for crack, *Cristina* for methamphetamine, *Abe* for five dollars worth of crack.

If we speak about translation, rendering slang is a difficult task even impossible. However, some techniques may be applied successfully, for example:

1) literal translation: He snorted just *one line of cocaine* rendered as El a tras o *liniuță de cocaină*;

2) adaptation: Shit, man, then we get us *a pound of pure* and retire, rendered as: Rahat, omule, facem rost de *un kil pur* și ne retragem. As we know, *pound* is a unit of weight, equal to 16 ounces or 453.5 grams while a kilogram – means 1000 grams. Thus we deal with a stylistic adaptation to the target audience and less semantic, since a pound and kilo are totally different units of weight.

3) equivalence: I'm gonna sit around and watch you *push off* and not go myself? – Să stau și să mă uit cum *tragi pe nas*?;

4) generalization: Maybe we should *dip in* now. – Ar trebui să luăm niște droguri, acum.; 5) explicitation: We supposed to walk up to some clerk at a hotel and ask him for a *connection*? - Să mergem la vreun hotel și să întrebăm dacă știi pe cineva care vinde? (with reference to drugs).;

6) concretization: Get with it. You telling me that you can't nose out some *dope* when it's around? – Vrei să spui că n-o să-ți dai seama dacă sunt *prafuri* prin zonă?; etc.

In conclusion, we can say that the present investigation was a valuable practice, exploring a wide range of both theoretical and practical aspects of one of the most disorganized varieties of colloquial speech that is slang, which as we concluded, follows no rules, but that socially-driven desire to keep the intended a secret. Slang has its own micro-system of chaotically created, and yet, linguistically organisable elements that are an important part of everyday life. In respect of translation, we may say that with or without the theoretical preparation, the task of the translator when it comes to rendering the meaning of drug slang remains very troublesome.

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*Recomandat
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