

THE USE OF SLANG AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIAL PROCESSES IN THE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article explores youth slang as a dynamic linguistic phenomenon and a reflection of contemporary social processes. It examines the functional and structural characteristics of slang, the influence of globalization and digital media, and the sociocultural meanings embedded in slang expressions. Based on concrete examples from Russian-speaking youth, the study reveals how slang serves as a tool for identity formation, social critique, and emotional expression.

Keywords: Youth slang, social processes, globalization, digital media, identity, Russian language.

Introduction

Language is not a static system—it is a dynamic, evolving structure that responds to the social and cultural context in which it exists. Youth slang, as a distinct linguistic phenomenon, represents one of the most flexible and rapidly changing layers of language. It is closely tied to identity, group belonging, and the need for expressive communication. Slang is not only a linguistic tool; it is a mirror reflecting ongoing transformations in society.

In recent years, the use of slang among young people has become increasingly noticeable in both spoken and written language, particularly due to the influence of digital communication and globalization. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube actively shape and spread new slang forms. These expressions serve as markers of youth culture and help to encode current attitudes toward authority, success, relationships, and humor.

Purpose of the study:

To examine youth slang as a reflection of contemporary social processes in the Russian language environment.

Objectives of the study:

- To define the concept and functions of youth slang;
- To describe the social and cultural context in which slang develops;
- To identify the sources and mechanisms of slang formation;
- To analyze examples of slang expressions used by modern Russian-speaking youth;
- To demonstrate how slang reflects key trends in society, including globalization, irony, digitalization, and identity formation. Modern human speech has undergone many changes before taking on the form we know. The history of the development of a literary language is sometimes an analysis of how, under the influence of oral speech, a written variety of the language was democratized and made more accessible to the broad masses who speak this language. Language as a part of culture does not remain unchanged: society is evolving, and all



this is reflected in the language (especially in the lexical composition). Researchers note the connection between culture and language, social and linguistic transformations. [4, 98-104] With the advent of information technology, computer-related slang has become firmly entrenched in people's speech. The media and advertising, where slang is becoming more widespread, have not been left out. But this is especially noticeable when communicating directly with young people.

It should be said that the social problems of the modern world are reflected in our speech, extracting from the variants of the use of names-but the one that seems to the speaker to be particularly suitable at the moment, and often a slang expression is chosen from all possible synonyms, rather than literary, because it is the profanity that seems to the speaker to be the most expressive and accurate.

Theoretical Framework and the Role of Slang in Language

Slang is commonly understood as a type of informal, expressive vocabulary used within specific social groups. According to V.M. Mokienko, slang functions as "a marker of social stratification and a means of self-identification"¹. Youth slang, in particular, is not only age-specific but also dynamic, influenced by trends in popular culture, digital media, and social movements.

Youth slang is characterized by:

Semantic fluidity;

Emotional and evaluative functions;

Brevity and simplicity;

Creative word formation;

Borrowings from other languages, especially English.

As I.N. Kuznetsova notes, "slang represents a mobile and adaptive part of the lexicon that reflects changes in the cultural and communicative landscape of youth"².

In the digital era, slang is increasingly shaped by virtual interaction. Social networks and online communities have accelerated the circulation of neologisms and broadened the reach of subcultural vocabulary, integrating previously marginal expressions into mainstream youth speech.

Functions of Youth Slang

Youth slang serves multiple functions that go beyond simple communication. It reflects how young people perceive themselves, interact with peers, and respond to the changing world around them.

1. Identity Function

Slang allows young people to define their place within a social group. Using slang expressions helps signal belonging to a particular age, cultural, or subcultural community. For example, the use of words like *краш* or *флексить* immediately marks the speaker as someone "in the know," familiar with contemporary youth discourse.

2. Expressive and Emotional Function

Slang conveys attitudes, emotions, and assessments. It adds color to speech and allows young people to express feelings more vividly than through neutral vocabulary. Phrases like *жиза*, *трэш*, or *кринж* reflect reactions ranging from empathy to ridicule.



3. Economic (Linguistic Economy) Function

Slang often simplifies complex expressions into short, memorable forms. For instance, чекнуть replaces “to verify,” and зашквар encapsulates the idea of “something shameful or embarrassing” in a single, punchy word.

4. Playful and Creative Function

Slang offers space for linguistic play and creativity. Young people invent new forms not only for utility but also for fun. Words like рофл or абоба often originate as jokes or memes but later gain regular usage due to their humorous or absurd nature.

As N.D. Arutyunova points out, “language play, especially in youth environments, is a vital aspect of linguistic socialization, enabling speakers to shape and transform the symbolic space of language”³.

Sources and Mechanisms of Slang Formation

Youth slang is formed under the influence of various linguistic, social, and technological factors. Among the most important sources and mechanisms are:

1. Borrowings from English and Global Internet Culture

Due to globalization and the dominance of English on the internet, many slang terms in Russian youth speech are borrowed or transliterated from English. For instance:

краш (from crush)

токсик (from toxic)

флексить (from flex)

чекать (from check)

These borrowings are often adapted morphologically and semantically to Russian grammar and cultural context.

2. Social Media and Meme Culture

Digital platforms—especially TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram—serve as active spaces for the generation and dissemination of slang. Meme-based communication introduces absurd, ironic, or highly contextual expressions such as:

абоба (a meme nonsense word)

задушил (to be boring or preachy)

разъеб (something extremely impressive or cool)

3. Subcultures and Fandoms

Many slang terms arise within subcultural groups such as gamers, anime fans, or rap communities. Examples include:

имба (overpowered, from gaming)

задрот (someone overly devoted to games or studies)

донатить (to donate or pay for digital content)

4. Morphological Innovation

Youth slang often employs creative word formation:

суффиксация: зашкварный, кринжовый



конверсия: кринж as both noun and adjective

аббревиации: лс (личные сообщения), тг (телеграм)

As T.A. Rastorgueva emphasizes, “the innovation in youth speech often reveals not only communicative needs but also aesthetic and playful motivations”⁴.

Youth Slang as a Reflection of Social Processes

Youth slang functions not only as a means of communication but also as a mirror of broader societal shifts. It captures trends, tensions, and values that define a particular historical moment. In recent years, the development of slang among young people in Russian-speaking contexts has closely reflected the following social processes:

1. Globalization and Digitalization

As digital media erases borders between cultures, Russian-speaking youth actively absorb and integrate international linguistic trends, particularly from English. Words such as краш, флексить, токсик, and чекать demonstrate how deeply global culture has penetrated everyday communication.

This reflects both:

the dominance of English-language platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Reddit);
and a desire for linguistic modernity and inclusion in a globalized identity.

2. Individualization and Identity Formation

Slang also reveals how youth seek to express their individuality and navigate group identities. The emergence of terms like тян (anime girl), няшный (cute, from Japanese nyan), or задрот (obsessive gamer/student) reflect the spread of niche identities.

These lexical markers act as:

badges of belonging to fandoms or subcultures;
boundaries that separate “us” from “them.”

3. Irony and Emotional Detachment

Modern slang often carries an ironic or mocking tone. Expressions like кринж, рофл, абоба, or этобаза reflect a detached, humorous attitude toward life and societal norms. This ironic stance may reflect:

disappointment in traditional values,
resistance to authority,
or a coping mechanism in a rapidly changing and uncertain world.

As sociolinguist E. Sapir wrote, “language is a guide to social reality,”⁵ and in the case of youth slang, this “reality” is often filtered through layers of sarcasm, parody, and digital humor.

4. Changing Norms and Moral Values

Youth slang also reflects evolving attitudes toward ethics, authority, and interpersonal behavior. For instance, words like зашквар or токсик serve not just as descriptors, but as moral evaluations. A person described as токсик is socially condemned, and behavior labeled as зашквар is seen as inappropriate.



Thus, slang becomes:
an instrument of social judgment;
a tool for regulating behavior within peer groups.

Analysis of Specific Slang Examples

To illustrate the social and linguistic dynamics of youth slang, below is a table of widely used expressions among Russian-speaking young people. Each example includes its origin, meaning, and social function.

Slang Term	Origin	Meaning	Social Context
Краш	English <i>crush</i>	Someone one is romantically attracted to	Expresses romantic interest; widely used in digital contexts
Жиза	Shortened from <i>жизненная ситуация</i>	"Same," "I can relate"	Indicates solidarity, emotional resonance; common in chats, memes
Кринж	English <i>cringe</i>	Awkward, embarrassing situation	Signals disapproval or mockery; used ironically
Зашквар	From prison slang	Something shameful or outdated	Strongly negative connotation; moral and social disapproval
Токсик	English <i>toxic</i>	A person with harmful behavior	Expresses condemnation; drawn from pop psychology
Флексить	English <i>flex</i>	To show off or brag	Indicates performative success, often materialistic
Чекать	English <i>check</i>	To check, verify	Reflects linguistic economy and digital influence
Рофл	English acronym ROFL	Joke, mockery	Used to convey humor or sarcasm
Имба	From English <i>imbalance</i> (gaming)	Something overly powerful or cool	Popular in gamer slang; extended to general use
Абоба	Memeword	Nonsensical, humorous filler	Represents absurdity; reflects meme culture

These expressions demonstrate several key trends:

Global influence: Many terms are direct or adapted borrowings from English.

Irony and critique: Words like **кринж** and **зашквар** are used to ridicule or distance oneself from perceived social failures.

Emotional economy: Slang condenses complex reactions into short, expressive units—**жиза** replaces an entire shared experience in one word.

Subcultural signals: Words like **имба** and **задрот** point to in-group identities, especially in gaming and tech-savvy circles.

Furthermore, these terms are often **multifunctional**. For instance:

Кринж can function as a noun ("Это был кринж") or adjective ("Кринжовая ситуация").

Рофл can be both a noun ("Полнейший рофл") and verb ("Они рофлят над ним").

Slang also allows for the **creative manipulation of grammar**, creating derivatives like:



Зашкварный (adjective from *зашквар*)

Токсичить (verb from *токсик*)

Флексил (past tense of *флексить*)

Such morphological innovations show that youth are not only borrowing terms but actively adapting them into native grammatical frameworks.

Conclusion

Youth slang is not merely a linguistic curiosity—it is a dynamic, expressive subsystem that reflects the evolving social, cultural, and psychological landscape of modern society. Through slang, young people navigate their identities, express emotions, critique norms, and engage in playful linguistic innovation.

This study has shown that:

Youth slang functions as a mirror of social reality, capturing current values, trends, and tensions. It reflects globalization, especially through borrowings from English and the influence of online platforms.

It reveals the emotional and moral stances of young people, often through irony, sarcasm, or criticism.

It provides insight into group dynamics and identity formation, with certain terms acting as social markers.

It illustrates the creativity and flexibility of informal language, particularly in its morphology and adaptability.

The spread and popularity of slang terms such as *кринж*, *краш*, *жиза*, and *токсик* signal not only shifts in vocabulary but also deeper transformations in communication norms, worldviews, and the role of language in digital-age socialization.

Further research may examine:

Regional variation in slang use;

The influence of gender and socioeconomic background;

Longitudinal studies of slang life cycles;

The incorporation of slang into mainstream or institutional discourse (e.g., advertising, media).

Ultimately, studying youth slang offers a powerful lens into how language evolves in response to the lived experiences of its speakers—especially the younger generation who are actively shaping the future of both society and speech.

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