

## ENGLISH MILITARY SLANG: DEFINITION, MEANS OF FORMATION AND THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION

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**Abstract.** Global instability with military interventions in various Muslim countries by coalitions headed by the USA has led to an increase in interest toward the armed forces of the United States and their coalition partners - foremost, the UK and other countries of the (British) Commonwealth of Nations. For those working in the sphere of military interpreting, the interest is in language and, in particular, military speak. The article considers the notion of English military slang as a separate vocabulary having certain attributes. Slang is considered to be informal speech with evaluative, expressive and emotional connotations standing apart from literary language. Means of English slang word formations are described. An analysis of thematic groups of military slang, put forward by other authors, is conducted. The author proposes a model of classification of English military slang based on certain thematic groups, provided with examples. These can be divided into 'interpersonal relations', subdivided further into 'everyday interpersonal relations between military personnel', 'interpersonal relations between military personnel depending on rank, position, armed service and service branch' and 'relations toward military personnel and civilian populations of foreign countries'; 'the activity of military personnel', subdivided further into 'everyday activity and life of military personnel', 'activity during armed conflicts and exercises' and 'leave and free time'; and 'a person and his surrounding world', subdivided further into 'food', 'clothing and uniform', 'weaponry and military equipment', 'state of health and body parts' and 'mood and mental state'. A conclusion is made that studying English military slang words is particularly useful in modern times, particularly for military interpreters, and that such courses should be included in the curriculum for future military interpreters.

**Keywords:** military slang; military jargon; English language; thematic group; armed forces.

At the beginning of the 21st Century, in an atmosphere of global instability caused mostly by various military interventions in Muslim countries, principally by coalitions of Western countries led by the USA, there is increased interest in the armed forces of the United States and its coalition partners - chiefly, the UK and other English-speaking countries of the (British) Commonwealth of Nations. For linguists working in the sphere of military translation, this interest is, first of all, in the language of these countries and especially the military vocabulary of the English language. While considering military vocabulary, however, it is important to take into consideration the fact that apart from fixed and customary expressions and collocations, and also rules of communication, there exists quite a big proportion of informal vocabulary. The combination of specif-

ically conversational and evocative words and expressions, called slang, composes an essential part of such vocabulary.

Fundamental research in the area of English military slang was conducted by G.A. Sudzilovskiy [1], E. Partridge [2] and V.P. Korovushkin [3-5] prior to the 1990s. Since then, there has recently appeared some individual smaller scale research in domestic linguistics [6, 7], but it should be noted that English military slang is relatively understudied, which, along with foreign policy factors, makes a research of its current condition extremely topical.

The subject of this paper is military slang in the English language. The purpose of the paper is to describe the current condition of English military slang, analyze it and create a model of thematic classification. Foreign and domestic vocabularies of English military slang served as the research material.

The term “slang” itself does not have a universally accepted meaning, which frequently complicates research in this field. The well-known American linguist Charles Fries noted in the 1940s that, “The term ‘slang’ has become so widened in its meaning and is applied to such a large number of different concepts that is extremely difficult to draw a dividing line between that which is slang and which is not” [8: 52]. The situation as regards a definition of military slang is the same nowadays.

In this paper, following the definition by I.V. Arnold [9], we shall define the term “slang” as a lexical level situated beyond the bounds of literary language and possessing strongly expressed evaluative, expressive and emotional connotations. By military slang “we shall understand that part (level) of slang in English vocabulary which is used first of all for denoting military concepts primarily in the armed forces of the United States and England” [1: 13]. At the same time, as A.D. Schweitzer [10] notes that it is necessary to consider that there are a number of differences in the use of military slang by representatives of different English-speaking countries.

In his work G.A. Sudzilovskiy distinguishes the terms “military slang” and “military jargon” - the latter, in his opinion, is created and used for esoteric purposes, just like Cockney rhyming slang [11]. In this paper, however, we do not distinguish these terms, agreeing with S.V. Lazarevich [6: 11], who recognizes the frequent use of the terms “slang” and “jargon” in modern Russian linguistics as synonymous. This is evidenced in the definition of slang in the Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary [12: 461]: “Slang (eng. Slang) - 1) the same as jargon (in domestic Russian literature mainly in relation to English-speaking countries); 2) the totality of jargons forming the level of spoken vocabulary, which displays a rude-familiar and sometimes humorous attitude to the subject of speech”.

Military slang is very extensive; it covers almost all areas of military life. Almost all terms, kinds of property, weapons, military equipment and any other things have their own names both in literary and informal language. It is caused by the necessity of having simple names for objects and events in the

private life and professional work of military personnel. Moreover, in D. Howard's opinion [13: 188], military slang supports the bonding of military personnel, traditionally coming from different social backgrounds.

Military slang is formed in different ways, namely: lexical-semantic derivation, morphological derivation (word composition, affixation, word shortening, onomatopoeia, and conversion), the appearance of phraseological units, loanwords from foreign languages and territorial dialects of English language, jargon loanwords [1: 17-43]. Let us consider examples of slang derivation using modern-day English military slang as an example:

1) lexical-semantic derivation, i.e. derivation of units through meaning transfer, generating such slangisms as "boot" - recruit;

2) word composition, e.g. "chair force" from "chair" and "air force" (scornfully);

3) affixation, e.g. "go-fasters" (trainers) are so called because they considerably facilitate movement on foot in mountainous and hilly areas;

4) word shortening, e.g. "corp" from "corporal";

5) onomatopoeia, e.g. "whiz bang";

6) conversion, e.g. "locked and loaded" - in full fighting mood (originally it was said about a loaded weapon, which was ready for combat use);

7) appearance of a phraseological unit, e.g. "to dog a watch" - to serve on patrol or in a guard;

8) loanwords from foreign languages, e.g. "Blitzkrieg" - blitzkrieg, lightning war; the word was loaned from German to denote not only the tactics of fast war, but also a dynamic and fleeting advance;

9) loanwords from other territorial dialects of English language, e.g. "nothing to write home about" (something insignificant) - an American phraseological unit, loaned from British military slang;

10) jargon loanwords, e.g. "tommy gun" - assault rifle (named after the submachine gun which was popular among the gangsters before WWII).

Military slang can be classified by categories and thematic groups, which aids its studying for both research and educational purposes. Several Russian linguists have suggested different classifications.

I.V. Belova and Yu.Y. Pavlova [14] divide English military slang vocabulary into groups which reflect various aspects and objects of servicemen's lives:

I. Relations between people:

1) everyday relations between people;

2) relations between different categories of servicemen depending on rank and position;

3) relations between servicemen of different countries.

II. Physical activity:

1) activity during everyday service;

2) activity during combat;

- 3) activity during exercises.
- III. Dismissal and free time.
- IV. People and the world around them:
  - 1) food;
  - 2) clothes and outfit;
  - 3) weapons and military equipment;
  - 4) health condition;
  - 5) mood, psychological condition;
  - 6) body parts.

In the author's opinion, the thematic groups suggested by I.V. Belova and Yu.Y. Pavlova represent a relatively objective classification of English military slang, but nonetheless they have some disadvantages. Firstly, relations between military personnel may depend not only on rank or position, but also on service arm and branch. Secondly, there are many slangisms in English military slang, which can be applied not only to foreign servicemen, but also to foreign civilians, which demonstrate rather clearly the servicemen's attitude to them. Thirdly, the majority of slangisms, which describe activity during combat and during exercises, belong to both thematic groups, as exercises often reflect combat conditions (e.g. the authors provide the expression "to go over the top" [14: 34], which can be equally applied to both combat and exercises). Therefore, these two groups may be united.

A highly detailed thematic classification of Russian military slang, considered by V.P. Korovushkin [3-5], is offered in research by S.V. Lazarevich [6: 54], and goes as follows:

I. Thematic groups which reflect the military profession:

- 1) Military equipment ("heavy transport vehicles, ground forces, air forces, navy", "Guns and small arms", "ammunition");
- 2) Military action ("combat actions, battle, attack", "retreat, defeat", "shooting, bombardment, explosion", "military maneuvers", "death in the war, to kill, to injure, to be killed, to be wounded");
- 3) Kinds and types of armed forces ("ground forces, soldier of the ground forces, infantrymen", "air force troops, soldiers of the Air Forces, the pilots", "naval forces, soldiers of the naval forces, seamen, sailors", "artillery, gunners", "tank forces, motorised rifle troops, tank man", "marine troops, marines", "airborne troops, paratroopers", "border troops, border guard", "defense troops, soldiers of the defense troops", "internal forces, soldiers of the internal forces", "military commandant and headquarters soldiers", "special forces");
- 4) Military ranks, positions and professions (slang names of servicemen in military rank, position or military profession);
- 5) Service life (the principle of urgent service is reflected on the Russian military slang, which has a large number of slang lexemes which are calling a serviceman depending on length of service);

6) Wars (lexemes, generated by military conflicts and reflecting the specificity of these conflicts - "designation of the enemy", "designation of military equipment", "slang nicknames of figures which associated with military conflicts", "a slang term for areas related with military conflicts").

II. Thematic groups which is reflecting the domestic-military side of life of armed forces:

1) Food ("slangisms which designate the process of eating and food in general", "slangisms denoting specific types of food and dishes in the soldiers and cadets canteens");

2) Uniform ("the common name of military clothing", "top military clothing", "underwear", "military boots", "military headwear");

3) Barracks everyday life ("living quarters of the military unit or ship", "plank beds in the barracks and the guardhouse", "janitorial duty", "instrument of cleaning", "sleep").

III. Thematic groups of slangisms concerning both professional and everyday aspects of life in the military:

1) Interpersonal relationships ("evaluation of external qualities", "evaluation of external qualities", "hazing, bullying", "ethnic relations").

Additionally, based on a study of military slang dictionaries O.A. Zakharchuk [4] offers a slightly different thematic classification, the greatest disadvantage of which, in the author's opinion, is the lack of the most important thematic groups in this field - "combat" and "wars". It is known that armed conflicts, in the main, provide "favorable" conditions for the rapid emergence of new slangisms, for example, by borrowing [15, 16].

Considering the conformity of the thematic classification given above for Russian military slang to English military slang, we can note the great similarity of the two sublanguages. Nevertheless, there are great differences between Russian and English military slang, owing to the different organization of the armed forces, the differences in the realia and everyday life of soldiers, different combat experience, etc. For example, "there are few lexemes that express the attitude to servicemen of other countries (excluding slang referring to the enemy in war situations...) unlike in English military jargon" [6: 251].

Thus, the author suggests the following thematic classification of the English military slang, which, in his opinion, most fully reflects its features:

#### **I. Interpersonal relations:**

- 1) Everyday interpersonal relations between military personnel;
- 2) Interpersonal relations between military personnel depending on rank, position, armed service and service branch;
- 3) Attitude toward military personnel and civilian populations of foreign countries.

#### **II. The activity of military personnel:**

- 1) Everyday activity and life of military personnel;

- 2) Activity during armed conflicts and exercises;
- 3) Leave and free time.

### **III. A person and his surrounding world:**

- 1) Food;
- 2) Clothing and uniform;
- 3) Weaponry and military equipment;
- 4) State of health and body parts;
- 5) Mood and mental state.

Let us now examine some examples of English military-slang units according this classification:

#### **I. Interpersonal relations.**

- 1. Everyday interpersonal relations between military personnel:

- apple polisher - toady;
- brig rat - a military serviceman who is frequently in the guardhouse;
- chow hound - a man with an immoderate appetite, glutton, the Russian equivalent.

- 2. Interpersonal relations between military personnel depending on rank, position, armed service and service branch:

- chicken - colonel (this name is explained by the emblem of the eagle on a colonel's straps, which soldiers in jest call "chicken", because of this reason too a colonel can be called a "bird" or "full-bird", and lieutenant colonel a "half-bird");

- kill hat, heavy hat - junior drillmaster (his duty includes maintenance of harsh discipline among his subordinate personnel, and also execution of punishments for some types of misconduct);

- leafer - major (from the word leaf, in the form of which the emblem on a major's straps is made);

- leg - any military serviceman who does not service in the airborne troops or who does not have parachute training (a disparaging nickname, which airborne troops use for military servicemen of all other arms).

- 3. Attitude toward military personnel and civilian populations of foreign countries:

- Frog - Frenchman;
- Gerry - German;
- Hajji - Arab or any other man from the Middle East (from the word "hajj" - the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim must undertake);
- Itie or dego - Italian;
- Jap - Japanese.

#### **II. The activity of military personnel.**

- 1. Everyday activity and life of military personnel:

- to dog a watch - to serve in a patrol or guard, the Russian equivalent.

- house mouse - a soldier performing the task of maintaining order on a special part of a military base, which will be checked);

- to police the barracks - to do cleaning in the barracks.
- 2. Activity during armed conflicts and exercises:
  - blue - friendly or allied units;
  - blue on blue contact - friendly fire or shooting on friendly units;
  - to hit the silk - to do skydiving (the US Air Forces slang).
- 3. Leave and free time:
  - to go on liberty - to go on dismissal (a right to leave a military base on special short period of time);
  - anchor chain liberty - unauthorized absence;
  - GI shower - taking a shower with limited water and using wipes, compulsion to take a shower of a soldier who ignores hygiene measures.

### **III. A person and his surrounding world.**

- 1. Food:
  - chow - food;
  - to chow down - to eat;
  - chow line - line in canteen for taking food.
- 2. Clothing and uniform:
  - ammos - hiking boots;
  - basin hat, brain bucket - helmet;
  - cammies - camouflage uniform.
- 3. Weaponry and military equipment:
  - chatterbox - machinegun;
  - dime nickel - 105 mm self-propelled howitzer (slang of the US armed forces during the Vietnam War, the reason of this name is a comparison of the howitzer caliber (105) with the common name of coins with equivalent of 10 - dime and 5 cents - nickel);
  - egg - mine, bomb.
- 4. State of health and body parts:
  - basket case - badly wounded;
  - binnacle list - the list of absentees or released from daily activity due to their state of health;
  - to get one - to be wounded.
- 5. Mood and mental state:
  - dischargeitis - nervous excitement due to dismissal (from the word discharge - dismissal from the service);
  - fantod - irritated state;
  - locked and loaded - in a full battle mood (originally, a loaded weapon made ready for combat use).

In the course of the research, a large, poorly researched layer of slangisms was identified, which are used among servicemen in the armed forces of English-speaking countries. As stated in the introduction, English military slang is very rich and displays all aspects of servicemen's lives and activity as well as the standardized language of regulations. English military slang is

formed in various ways and is subject to thematic classification. Certainly, military slang “is strongly expressed emotional and evaluative” [17]. As we can see in the examples, military slangisms generally display a humorous attitude to the subject of speech, which could be regarded as a type of “in-subordination” to the harsh conditions of war and strict discipline, which are specific to the armed forces. This research is of practical use in the work of interpreters working in the military sphere. Slang analysis, as G.A. Sudzilovskiy says, “will help an interpreter to understand features of the formation of some part of English military terminology better. An understanding of slang’s features helps an interpreter clarify the usage of military terms and distinguish them stylistically without mistakes in work” [1: 6-7]. This means that military slang should be included in the curriculum of future military interpreters.

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