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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN OF IT-SLANG

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Анотація

У статті розглянуто історію виникнення та походження сленгу айтішніків як окремого культурного феномену. Наведено приклади сленгових слів у сучасному IT-середовищі та описано їх контексти і використання.

Ключові слова: інформаційні технології, сленг, субкультура, лінгвістика.

Abstract

The article considers the history and origin of IT slang as a separate cultural phenomenon. Examples of slang words in the modern IT environment are given and their contexts and uses are described.

Keywords: information technology, slang, subculture, linguistics.

Nowadays it is hard to argue about the fact, that IT sphere is influencing everything around us, including our daily routine, work, communication and even mentality. On the other hand it is also true without a doubt that our language responds to ever-present scientific progress, social and cultural changes and even some memorable events in the world. Amount of information which circulates among people, media and organizations is enormous and it only grows, skyrocketing each time new social media, popular web resource or international database is created. So, in response to all this, society adapts by inventing new language elements, which reflect modern tendencies, shorten long descriptions, simplify scientific terms and provide more variety for general public to express themselves while keeping up with the flow of never-ending change and modernization. This leads to important topic of discussion – slang.

Slang as a term came up in 18th century [1] and at that time usually was used to signify vocabulary of "low", "uncultured" and "disreputable" people. One century later it changed general meaning from exclusively negative to neutral, but still meant "uneducated non-standard speech". Today linguists yet don't have clear and simple definition of slang, but all of them can agree that this phenomenon is present in every subculture worldwide and it represents words, phrases and language usage preferred over the common vocabulary and standard language in order to establish group identity, shorten or simplify phrases, make it harder to understand for "outsiders" or everything above. And if during last millennia this was more like something special and rare – today it is hard to avoid using or confronting such a thing.

Rapid growth of slang usage started with emergence of so called "subcultures" and development of information technologies. Numerous groups united by for example taste for music, sharing same philosophy, participating in same activities, etc. began to amass their own vocabulary. With time passing these terms and phrases became more and more spread outside and even away from these groups, infiltrating common language and thus becoming part of general standard language, sometimes even officially.

One such example would be the story of term "spam", which started as a sketch of the BBC television comedy series Monty Python's Flying Circus which had a waitress reading out a café menu where almost every item included Spam canned luncheon meat which is the reference to excessive amount of canned food imported to UK after World War II. And what began just as a smart joke nowadays is used in IT terminology - everyone has "spam-box" on their e-mail website or smartphone.

Second example would be yet another IT term "bug" which today is used for describing software error due to something being coded wrong, some unexpected results, were program can't continue scheduled task or does it incorrect. This term most likely comes from early computer times where cards were used to make a program and actual alive bugs

could make them malfunction. Today this term is used in all software creation tools, videogames development and IT companies. It also led to creation of another term – debug, which means "removing errors".

Huge amounts of slang terms were created by software developers and companies to point some objects or actions more precise and in a simple way. Examples would be words like "feature" which means something software should be able to do or have, "crash" which describes system error leading to shutdown or "root" that is for denoting user with all administrator privileges.

Also great numbers of slang words exist in gaming, where depending on game genre and audience hundreds and sometimes thousands of terms can emerge. But there are a lot of them common and known among most gamers. For instance "Sandbox" sounds like something usual, but in gaming this marks genre where players are not restricted in their freedom by rules and can do whatever they can in whatever order they decide choosing among huge number of activities game provides. Or "cheese" which defines some cheap strategy in competitive games.

When speaking about slang it is hard not to mention not only games, but Internet at large as a place where people communicate. It gave birth to dozens of new meanings and they include such as "flaming" (online act of posting insults) and "trolling" (intentionally upsetting people).

There are many slang and non-slang abbreviations in IT and Internet as whole like: GUI (Graphical User Interface), OSS (Open Source Software), AI (Artificial Intelligence), TLDR (Too Long Didn't Read) or PEBKAC (Problem Exists Between the Chair and the Keyboard). And there are many of abbreviations which "work" only for some special type of software, gaming or social media, being special for only that area.

In 20th century there were a lot of subcultures who had rich slang, but most of it either disappeared or is already part of common spoken language. But after internet was established worldwide slang expansion only started. It seems to be impossible to track and record all the new words and meaning which came with era of countless videogames, thematic websites and social media. And one of the main points here is that it is hard to acknowledge some parts of such slang as slang at all, because of how widespread they became. People all around the globe are using slang terms and phrases while attending important meeting on the job, studying and university, passing border control, ordering food, making new contacts, etc.

It is also important to mention that a lot of universal slang comes from English language, since in is international, main language of IT sphere and is general for most worldwide websites, social media and gaming.

Slang is very interesting as phenomenon both social and linguistic. It should not be treated as something coming just from uneducated people (like it was centuries ago) or from some edgy teenagers (like it is often now). Slang is part of natural language development. Everything today is accelerated: kids learn faster using the internet, science develops rapidly, social and cultural standards rise and die every year – so does the language. And slang is just an instrument for people to adapt and improve their communication to perpetual mutations of modern society.

References
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