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**SLANG IN THE COMMUNICATIVE SPACE
OF SOUTH-AFRICAN LINGUISTIC CULTURE**

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Южно-Африканской лингвокультуры]**

The article deals with the problem of ethnospecific peculiarities of slang in the communicative space of the South-African Republic. The following features can be recognized as very important and essential ethnospecific qualities of South-African communicative space: alliteration; metaphors; metonymies; acronyms; stylistic antonymy; euphemistic denotation of unpleasant things in life, for example death, diseases, socially disapproved states of mind; frequent use of hyperbole; creating neologisms, abundantly accompanied by phonetic distortions with accompanying spelling problems; rhythmical synonymy; phonological reduplication; contractions or abbreviations; usage of Standard English lexeme for denotational change.

Key words: slang, communicative space, the South-African Republic, ethnospecific.

The South African Republic is one of the most multiethnic countries of Africa. Its population presents a vivid pallet of white, Indian and mixed races. New SAR is often called a “Rainbow Land” – the metaphor of the new multicultural and multiethnic society. According to the Constitution of 1996, eleven official (state) languages are spoken in the Republic of South Africa.

This unique multicultural situation could not but stimulate the penetration of the native tribal languages into South-African English, making it really encoded: each native language made contribution to the phenomenon of the encoded speech of the English-speaking inhabitants of the country.

It would be appropriate to mention a very interesting fact connected with the study of South-African slang: Eric Partridge devoted not more than a page and a half of his monograph to the investigation of this variant of Modern English Slang. The reason for such a laconic description may be the following: the scientist didn't have an opportunity to pay more attention to this type of slang due to the lack of authentic

material or even its complete absence. It was next to impossible to get more or less reliable linguistic data from a country which was torn apart by wars and ethnic conflicts, a country which was despised by the civilized world and which was isolated for quite a long time, till the end of the 20th century, when the regime of apartheid was destroyed. That is why the characteristics of South-African slang given by Eric Partridge in his fundamental work is so unclear. Thus he writes:

«South Africa has twice influenced the English language: at the time of the Boer War, as we have already seen, and, though then much less, during the Great War. Most of the words introduced on the former occasion have, despite their still slightly exotic air, entered the language, but those of the second occasion were the slang of the South African troops and, so far from coming into the limelight of the Press and general public, exercised their influence only on the troops whom they met in camp, in billet, and the field. This second influence was confined almost wholly to slang, and the few traces it has left are visible chiefly among ex-Servicemen» [1].

Anyway, the scientist points out the fact that our knowledge of this type of English slang is far from being full or even satisfying. He stresses that a set of colloquialisms and slangy words («colloquial and slangy Africanderisms») influenced the colloquial speech of the English-speaking inhabitants of the country. Unfortunately, not a single example of such kind of borrowings can be found in Partridge's book. That is why it still remains unclear what served a reason for his conclusion concerning the nature of this type of slang:

«The truth is that South African slang, as distinct from indispensable Africanderisms, is not intrinsically so vivid, humorous, witty, or divinely earthy as Canadian or Australian slang, nor is it nearly so extensive, nor has it, except during the Boer War, succeeded in imposing itself upon English slang, much less upon Standard English: and therefore, while anybody writing a book on English as She is Spoken in the Dominions would necessarily devote several pages to the essentials of South African slang, the present writer is bound to preserve a certain proportion by concluding with the remark that this particular colonial slang atones for its negative defects with a sunny manliness, a fresh-air directness, an open-space simplicity,— which is not the same thing as saying that it is, in the worse sense, ingenuous! In point of fact, true Colonials rarely become sophisticated, however intelligent or however dissipated or however cultured, cultivated, and widely travelled they may be. And in this enduring boyishness, in this invincible freshness, this un-

flinching gaze on life, and this quiet sense of (a very often dry and whimsical) humour, South African slang takes second place to none of the Colonial slangs, all of which retain the unblinking objectivity of Cockney» [1].

English of The South African Republic as well as its slang variant started to draw scientists' attention not earlier than at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. It is the period of the country's maximum openness to the outer world, when it is actively visited and investigated. The pioneers in this field of knowledge are R. Baily, V.de Klerk, Tweedle, R. Anthrobus. John Ayto contributed much to the study of South-African Slang as he included plenty of slangy items into his thematic dictionary. On the other hand, his contribution is rather of the lexicographical character, than a scientific research.

Linguists pay attention to the basic ethnospecific characteristics of the encoded English-speaking communication in the Republic of South Africa. Particular attention is given to the abundance of 'ethnisms' – tribal vocabulary of those languages which are widely-spread on the territory of the whole country. Almost all of them are borrowed and reconsidered thoroughly in the English speech of different sub-groups under the influence of the semantic 'emotionalization'. Thus, N.Tweedle points out a close connection of the encoded English-speaking communication in the RSA with the process of ethnic borrowing. He gives a list of numerous examples illustrating cultural adaptation (semantic and phonological) of the tribal languages of Xhosa and Afrikaans:

Borrowing and adapting from other languages is also a rich source of ideas, and in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa slang words in Xhosa abound (e.g., *fotloza*– ugly girl), often reflecting a blend of the phonetic properties of each language. For example, the word *costile* (a costly mistake or failure) (pronounced /khosti:le/), is actually derived from the English word *cost* and has the past tense verbal suffix from Xhosa (*-ile*) added, to indigenize the word so that it fits in with the sound and rhythmic structure of the "other" language, thus disguising itself as a non-English word. In the same way *wacooka* is based on the English word *cook*, with a Xhosa prefix. Similarly, *nqooze*, pronounced to rhyme with *booze*, is a Xhosa-ization of this English slang word itself, and *mnca* (nice) and *nqube* (a party) are pronounced with an alveolar and palatal click, respectively. *Borrowings from Afrikaans* are just as frequent (*gaar* – drunk; *jol* – party; *klap 'n*

dos – have a snooze; *blom* – enjoy oneself) The examples are taken from The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English.

V de Klerk points out that objects of the South-African every-day life were not interesting for semantic interpretation, that is why the main target of encoding are the socially marked phenomena, objects, conditions, actions, which reflect the real interests of in-group members and subgroups:

«While it is conceivable that slang terms could be coined to refer to trees, doors or teaspoons, it is interesting to note that such unexciting areas of life do not contain many slang terms. These semantic areas are typically immune from the influence of slang because they refer to commonplace, unexciting areas of life that have no emotive connotations whatsoever. Slang augments the lexicon in those areas in which existing words aren't enough to accommodate the needs of speakers, particularly areas of life that hold a fascination for the subculture that creates and uses these words. If this happens to be a group of motor-bike enthusiasts, one expects many words for motor-bikes, and in teenage groups, these words revolve around typical teenage interests, especially taboo areas. Thus, one finds an abundance of slang terms in semantic areas relating to (often illicit) enjoyment, fun and pleasure: eating and drinking (often to excess), sleeping, money, cigarettes and drugs, and sexual activity (in the broadest senses). All of these are interesting, enjoyable, exciting and often forbidden to the young. There are also usually slang terms for words that are high-frequency words, such as nice and unpleasant. Another semantic area in which slang flourishes is the area of social taboo, relating to the embarrassing or sensitive aspects of life: genitalia, scatological terms, mental and physical deficiencies, racist terms, conflict, and death» [2].

Historically South-African English is based on the languages of Boors and Afrikaners – Afrikaans: as a result of communication between English –speakers and Afrikaans-speakers a great variety of ethnic sings were borrowed and adopted into English variant as well as into Afrikaans.

This is the way how many *Afrikanerisms* appeared. As R.Bailey remarked: «Afrikanerisms comprise slang borrowings influenced by [Afrikaans](#). Typical users include people with Afrikaans as their first language but who speak [English](#) as a second language; and people living in areas where the population speaks both English and Afrikaans. Many of these terms also occur widely amongst Durban [Indians](#)» [3].

The domineering ethnospecific feature of slangy africanerisms is their evident racist nature that can be easily explained by the history of the country and peculiarities of its past.

The contemptible attitude of the whites to the coloured inhabitants is reflected in different nominations which are of evident denigrative/derogatory character: *geelbek* – derogatory term for a coloured person; *gam* – a name given to the coloured people in South Africa, particularly in Cape Town; *ghoffel / goffel* – derogatory term for a coloured person; *hotnot / hottie* – derogatory term for a coloured person e.g. *get the kaffir! oh no he's a hot-not!*

Among denigrative slangisms of racist character a group of special signs which encode a highly scornful attitude to the coloured people: *groenewald* – referring to a black person (racist); *kaffir* – extremely offensive word for a black person (e.g. *Shoot the kaffir!*); *meid* – derogatory term for a black woman; *spies gooier* – literally ‘spear thrower’, a derogatory term for a black person.

White South-Africans of Anglo-Saxon origin express their negative attitude towards white Rhodesians –Africaners – using various derogatory terms. Among them there is one widely-used and well-known: it is nomination *plank* – derogatory term used by English-speaking people to refer to Afrikaners (stems from people with a thick Afrikaans accent sounding ‘*as thick as two short planks*’ when speaking English).

Scornful attitude towards ethnical Indians is also encoded in South-African slang. This part of the population is regarded as a low-paid working class engaged into metallurgic industry (usually in steel-production). The trademark of *Mittal* company has become symbolic/ The nominations of this group are of a mixed-racist and professional- character: *kokolol* – an offensive word referring to low-class workers of an Indian origin, e.g. *Iskor kokolol* referring to common low-paid operator of [Mittal Steel](#).

The absence of nominations reacting to the racist attitude towards coloured population would seem strange. So, it is quite logical that nominations depicting negative attitude towards the Whites are fixed in English lexicography and their number is sufficient. The following examples illustrate the idea perfectly well: *rooinek* – red neck, derogatory term for English person; *rooipiel* – literally red penis, derogatory term for English person; *soutpiel, soutie* – Afrikaans ‘salt penis’, derogatory term for English-speaking white South African on account of his sup-

posed divided loyalties: one foot in South Africa, the other in England, and genitals in the sea; *vaalie* – derogative term used by colored people on the coast to describe a white tourist from inland.

Contemptuous treatment of ethnic South-Africans is also spread on white Australians or white Rhodesians who left for Australia or support the economy of the country. In the following item such an attitude is expressed: *skaapfokker* – derogatory term for Australian, means ‘sheep-fucker’; also used to describe South Africans who fled to Australia and who support the Australian economy.

The low standard of ethnic South-Africans’ life, poverty, diseases, lack of rights provoked the outburst of crime, violence and vice in the XIX-XX centuries. The situation couldn’t help influencing the formation of a special encoded and semi-hermetic slang of lower classes in the RSA. Thus, due to the poor fame of the Rhodesian police who were known as cruel chastisers, who suppressed ethnic conflicts and rebellions of the coloured population against the white minorities, their representatives are also derogatorily nominated. The examples of such items are *boere* – the derogatory term for police; *kêrels* – the derogatory term for police. Among antisocial slang nominations based on the language of Afrikaans we can distinguish linguistic signs which name prostitution (*tollie-lekker* – a prostitute who gives oral sex; from Afrikaans ‘penis licker’; *moffie* – male homosexual prostitute);

alcohol-addiction (*gesuip* – very drunk, intoxicated, plastered; original Afrikaans meaning for an animal drinking water; *dronkie* – drunkard);

drug-addiction *ge-urt* – on a drug high; *ge-goef* – smoked silly due to illegal substances; *dagga* – most common word for marijuana; pronounced with a bit of phlegm at the end).

Among ethnic nominations registered in South-African slang and formed on the basis of tribal languages a group of items borrowed from such languages as Xhosa, Zulu and Nguni outstands. Traditional medicine, healing and similar phenomena of tribal life which are widely-known are encoded by Anglo-Saxon population with the help of such borrowings. The examples of such slang nominations are the following: [muti](#) – traditional medicine, from Zulu umuthi; [sangoma](#) – traditional Xhosa healer or diviner; *inyanga* – traditional herbalist and healer; *jova* – injection, to inject, from Zulu.

The linguists consider free syntactic framing of slang words to be an important ethno specific characteristic feature of South African English-speaking coded com-

munication. V.de Klerk calls this phenomenon «the syntactic versatility (or vagueness) of South African slang»: «From a linguistic perspective, slang and expletives are typically the lexically full or content words of language: the nouns, verbs, and adjectives and adverbs; the grammatical skeleton (e.g., determiners) are seldom tampered with. But what is more interesting is the syntactic versatility (or vagueness) of South African slang and expletives, the words frequently acting on demand as adjectives, verbs or nouns» [2].

Indeed, south African polysemantic sleng unit *arb* – unexciting, ordinary, not worthy of much comment, boring, whose origin is unknown, may on demand appear in a sentence as a subject – I saw this arb walking towards me, predicate – we were just arbing around, attribute – this arb person suddenly came up or expletive – arb man.

The phenomenon of English-speaking coded communication in the South Africa is totally supported by all possible language resources, which according to W. de Klerk's witty observation «...naturally add to the delicious confusion wrought by the use of slang, in which the secret code is only shared by those in the know, as it were» (De Klerk V, 1990, 589); and, because it is emotion what this code is based on, lingua-creative conspiracy-oriented activity of South African community has a powerful stylistic base, including:

- alliteration (*boingboing* – fat person; *numbnuts* – unlikeable male);
- metaphors(*swamp donkey* / *cow* / *gravel* – unattractive female);
- metonymies *fluff* / *meat* – attractive female);
- acronyms (*NBS* – nearest bottle store);
- stylistic antonymy (*beaut* – unattractive woman; *bitching* / *blind* – nice);
- euphemistic denotation of unpleasant things in life, for example death (snuff it, kick the bucket), diseases (cheese burgers; warheads –pimples), physiological phenomena (spray paint; throw chungies – vomiting), socially disapproved states of mind (running a temperature –being drunk);
- frequent use of hyperbole (*drop Garth from the team* – vomit; *pick up stompies* – butt into a conversation);
- creating neologisms, abundantly accompanied by phonetic distortions with accompanying spelling problems (phonetic distortions with accompanying spelling problems – *knarley* / *fantabulous* – nice, *babinski* / *schweet* – attractive girl);

- wide use of onomatopoeia - of English origin (Ralph - vomit), as well as of native origin, which copies the sounds of tribal languages (f.e., English neutral lexeme overated turns into a slang unit nqovarated, as soon as it is pronounced in the manner of the cosa tribe`s language, for which the clicking sound at the beginning of the word is quite characteristic; one more example of the kind is – overboard > nqovaboard);
- rhythmical synonymy (cruising for a bruising – looking for trouble; *going like a Boeing* – moving fast);
- phonological reduplication (*goodie-goodie* – prefect; *mshi mshi* – clothes);
- contractions or abbreviations (*woosie* – effeminate person; *civvies* – clothes);
- using of standard English lexeme for denotational change (*channel* – vomit; *tanked / toasted* – drunk).

Summing up, it would be appropriate to stress the fact that lingua -semiotic features of South-African slang obviously manifest its multicultural character as the fundamental factor which structures communication as a whole. This character makes the society follow the patterns which were formed during its history. The linguistic analysis of South-African slang gives an opportunity to make a convincing conclusion concerning its basic elements. These elements of the studied phenomenon of slang communication can be classified as linguistic units (signs) which emotionally encode different social changes and reflect the corresponding reaction of the ethnic society to these changes in the course of human communication.

The following features can be recognized as very important and essential ethnospecific qualities of South-African communicative space: alliteration; metaphors; metonymies; acronyms; stylistic antonymy; euphemistic denotation of unpleasant things in life, for example death, diseases, socially disapproved states of mind; frequent use of hyperbole; creating neologisms, abundantly accompanied by phonetic distortions with accompanying spelling problems; rhythmical synonymy; phonological reduplication; contractions or abbreviations; usage of Standard English lexeme for denotational change.

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