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SLANG OF MODERN CHINESE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article is devoted to slang as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, which reflects changes in social, economic and cultural spheres of the Chinese society. The vocabulary of the Chinese language, like any other language, is constantly changing, which allows us to perceive the language as a living and developing system, slang is of particular interest among such changes. We select slang items from different sources such as paper dictionaries of modern Chinese slang, internet dictionaries of modern Chinese slang and Internet resources. We analyze slang expressions, which, in our opinion, represent life in the Chinese community, its realities and features. Selected slang expressions were divided into groups, each of which covers a significant part of the Chinese social processes, is separate and at the same time has an intersection with other groups, because of the interconnectedness of all spheres of social life. We determine the mutual influence between social processes and changes as the characteristics of the Chinese society and slang as the part of language.

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Keywords: Slang, Chinese language, dictionary of the Chinese slang, Internet dictionary, sociolinguistics, slang expression.



1. Introduction

In recent decades, the major changes, which take place in the social, economic and cultural spheres of Chinese society, have had a significant impact on the spoken

language, in particular, on slang.

Slang is used not only in the speech of representatives of different segments of the population, especially young people, but also in literary works, in periodicals, in advertising, etc.

At the present stage of cultural development, much attention is paid to the study of youth and phenomena related to youth. 20-25 years ago, when such a concept in the language as "youth slang" was not so widespread, it could not be assumed that slang would win the media.

Knowledge of slang is a necessary element of knowledge of sinologist, as the slang as an integral part of spoken language reflects the mentality of the Chinese nation. If the knowledge of one of the dialects in addition to the literary language is desirable, but optional, the knowledge of slang reflects the level of sinologist's training and its value as a specialist.

2. Problem Statement

This study aims to consider the problem of Chinese slang, its functioning and classification not only from the point of view of linguistics, but also from the point of view of sociolinguistics.

3. Research Questions

In accordance with the problem statement, the following research questions were developed:

- 3.1. What is the definition of slang?
- 3.2. What is the sociolinguistic aspect of slang?
- 3.3. How does slang function on the Internet?
- 3.4. What are the areas of use of slang?
- 3.5. Does slang reflect society and culture?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to research social phenomena, processes that characterize the slang of the Chinese language and to identify areas which the slang of the Chinese language operates in.

5. Research Methods

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the following research methods were used:

- 5.1. Descriptive methods (methods of observation, generalization, typologization of the analyzed material)

5.2. Analysis of lexical units on the basis of the component analysis method

6. Findings

Slang is an open subsystem of the non-normative lexico-phraseological units of the colloquial language, it serves to express strengthened expression and a special, usually negative estimation colouring (Alekseeva, 2009).

Slang is focused on the sphere of everyday life and relationships between people and can be used for oral and written, contact and distant ways of communication. It is the element that is capable of destroying the status distance and uniting, bringing together representatives of different social strata, differing in education level, occupation, etc. It is used in various situations (for example, in the situation of a family breakfast, at a party, on a date, etc.). In other words, slang vocabulary is treated as a socially unmarked part of the daily vocabulary used to unite all the speakers of the literary language.

Slang is a dynamic lexical system in which there is a continuous process of emergence of new words. Press, television, Internet are valuable sources of reflection of the actual state of the lexical system of language and slang. The Internet has won all spheres of public life by providing a convenient way to communicate, exchange information and publish materials.

Social events immediately cause a wave of discussions in newspapers and Internet sites, lead to emergence of new names. This happened with the events in November 2012, when in the city of Wenling, Zhejiang Province in China, the construction of a new road led to curious incident. The road had to pass through a densely populated area, all owners of which agreed to a new housing, except one. The authorities decided to leave the house in place. The result was a house in the middle of the road (Ivanov, 2013). The Chinese immediately came up with a new slang expression: 钉子户 [dīngzihù] "nailed down house." Meaning: a householder who refuses to vacate his home despite pressure from property developers. 钉子墓 [dīngzi mù] "nailed down tomb." The story of the house in the middle of the road continued when the Chinese developer in December 2012 decided to build a skyscraper in place of the old cemetery in Taiyuan City, Shanxi Province. All graves were moved after payment of compensation to the families of the dead. But one family refused to sell a small piece of land with a grave, demanding an explanation why the building was decided to be built on the site of the cemetery. According to another version, they were waiting for an increase in the amount of compensation. Anyway, the untouched piece of land continued to stand between the scaffolding.

During the research, we examined slang expressions in printed and electronic network resources and selected about 120 slang units from 1700. The materials for this study were dictionaries of Chinese slang ("Handbook on New Chinese Slang" by A. Shchukin and "Dictionary of Modern Chinese Slang" by Lee Shujuan, Yan Ligan) and Internet dictionaries of Chinese slang on the websites of Magazeta and chinaSMACK. We considered those slang units that characterize social relations, phenomena, processes, point to social changes, new trends in various spheres of Chinese life.

We have identified 6 groups of slang expressions according to social phenomena that are relevant in Chinese society:

1. Job, profession, business

2. Money, monetary relations
3. Marriage, children, relationships
4. The Internet, social networks
5. Attitude of urban residents to foreigners and migrants
6. Status, reputation, the "face"

In each of these groups, we specify slang expressions, their transcription and translation into English, and also explain what features of Chinese society, what social phenomena are the basis of this expression.

6.1. Job, profession, business

It is very interesting to trace the semantic history of two slang expressions denoting "dismiss, be dismissed":

卷铺盖 [juǎn pūgài] "roll up bed-linen";

炒鱿鱼 [chǎo yóuyú] "fry a squid".

The point is, earlier when a person was fired from a factory, he was forced to fold bed linen and take it home, and as squid, when roasting, wraps inside, like bed linen, hence the meaning of "firing".

Large corporations in China are developing at a rapid pace, they hunt for talented workers, companies compete for the best staff:

猎头 [liètóu] "hunt for heads", search for staff, headhunting, search for talented senior employees in all fields of activity.

It is well known that rice is a traditional Chinese food:

饭碗 [fǎnwǎn] "a bowl of rice" (a metaphor for a stable social guarantees, i.e. public service).

6.2. Money, monetary relations

In real life, the traditional attitude of the Chinese to wealth appears as frugality, even stinginess. At any rate, Chinese nation has the highest savings rate in the world. It is logical that wasting money is considered wrong and strongly condemned:

出血 [chūxiě] "shed blood", squander savings, lay out money.

But a person who knows how to handle money is called 掉钱眼里 [diào qián yǎn lǐ] "get into the hole of the coin".

Financial pyramids appear, develop and disappear all over the world. In China, financial pyramids are prohibited, but continue to thrive. People informally call financial pyramids 老鼠会 [lǎoshǔhuì] "meeting of mice". In China, the mouse is one of the 12 zodiac signs, the Chinese traditionally respect and fear mice, they are considered to be incredibly cunning animals. In addition to the traditional features of financial pyramids, Chinese ones are characterized by a paramilitary organization. Often, new members of the financial pyramids are kept in paramilitary barracks, isolating from the outside world and showering promises of incredible income. The new participant is subjected to psychological treatment, he is forbidden from contacting the outside world.

6.3. Marriage, children, relationships

In China, there is a problem, which is called in Chinese 大男大女 [dà nán dà nǚ] "over age men and women." It refers to unmarried men and women above the average age for marriage. This problem has a social nature in modern China: parents worry, the leadership shows attention, even the government thinks how to solve this problem (Speshnev, 2011, p. 231).

There are more slang expressions describing the same problem towards women:

老姑娘 [lǎo gū niang] "old maid", an unmarried woman over the age of 30;

没主 [méi zhǔ] "without owner", single, unmarried woman; a woman who does not have a boyfriend.

In contrast to Europeans, who foster independence in children, the Chinese believe that close relationship between parents and children should be maintained for the rest of their lives (Speshnev, 2011, p. 155). In modern China, more and more young people are leaving their hometown, and parents are left alone: 空巢 [kōng cháo] "empty nest", a home where the kids have grown up and moved out.

6.4. The Internet, social networks

Due to the emergence of many new gadgets young Chinese spend a huge amount of time on the Internet.

微博控 [wēi bó kòng] Weibo dependence, Twittermania (微博 - abbreviation for 微型博客 [wēi xíng bó kè] "microblog", usually means Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo which are analogues of Twitter in China).

低头族 [dī tóu zú] "looking-down tribe", young Chinese, who continuously look at the screen of their phones, e-books, iPhone, iPad, without looking up. They can use gadgets not only in public transport, but even walking down the street and crossing the road (MaGazeta, 2017).

In 1998, the development of the project "Golden shield"(unofficial name - "the Great Chinese Firewall") was started. In 2003 it was put into operation. It is a system of servers that filter the content on the Internet. Users of the Chinese Internet have learned to bypass the filters due to the homonymy of the Chinese language:

河蟹 [hé xiè] "sea crab", homonym of word 和谐 [hé xié] "harmony". Used to bypass possible censorship, to make fun of the government's policy of "harmonious community" (MaGazeta, 2013).

ZF = 政府 [zhèng fǔ] replacing the word "government" to bypass the Internet filters in China (chinaSMACK, 2017).

6.5. Attitude of urban residents to foreigners and migrants

The Chinese can name a migrant or a person born in another country 二等公民 [èr děng gōng mǐn] "second-class citizen", the residents of Chinese cities call those who live on the outskirts of the city and do not have a residence permit, but lead the urban way of life 亚市民 [yǎ shì mǐn] "second-class citizen".

The relationship between the inhabitants of mainland China and Hong Kong have always been ambiguous. In 2012, there was a scandal: residents of Hong Kong and mainland China stopped even trying

to hide their contempt for each other. After a series of several conflicts, Beijing University Professor Kong Qingdong called on Chinese television to drive out all Hong Kong residents as thieves and dogs. Hong Kong responded by comparing guests from mainland China with locust, flocks of which come from the north to destroy the city. The apogee of history was a publication that was published on February 1 in the newspaper "Apple Daily" with the illustration of a giant locust in the background of the panorama of Hong Kong and with the words 香港人, 忍够了! [Xiāng gǎng rén rěn gòule]"Hongkong residents have had enough!" The illustration not only angered many Chinese, but also gave birth to a series of parodies on the Internet – posters made in the same style and manner. Parodies made fun of the Chinese immigrants in the United States ("The Americans have had enough!"), of incompetent politicians ("The Chinese people have had enough!"), of the people talking on the telephone during the concert ("Real music lovers have had enough!") and so on (MaGazeta, 2013).

6.6. Status, reputation, the "face"

It is known that collectivism is characteristic of Eastern culture, and individualism is characteristic of Western culture. The Eastern people give special significance to collectivism. The Eastern person adapts to society in order to correspond to others, to be in harmony with society. To "adapt" means to attach importance to connections, relationship between people and the "face" (Speshnev, 2011, p. 117). "Face" (a word, difficult for definition, can be correlated with English "honor", "reputation", the concept of "face" is fundamental for the Chinese society) and connections are the main components of life in Chinese society that determine the status of a person.

人脉[rénmài] have a lot of acquaintances

成气候[chéngqìhòu] have power, succeed, achieve success

根儿硬[gēnrìyìng] have a strong support

The Chinese often resort to the help of bribes to solve any problems or achieve social privileges:

奶水[nǎishuǐ] "milk", benefit received by a person after giving a bribe

手榴弹[shǒuliúdàn] "pomegranate", a bottle of wine that you bring as a gift to flatter someone.

In summary, each of the six selected groups covers a significant part of China's social processes, is separate and at the same time has intersections with other groups, which is explained by the interrelationship of all spheres of social life.

7. Conclusion

Thus, in the course of our research, slang acted as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, which is significantly influenced by the changes taking place in the social, economic and cultural spheres of Chinese society. We have concluded that there is a close relationship and mutual influence between the social processes in China and the slang of the Chinese language.

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