

The Classification of Jargon Units: Theoretical Approaches and Criteria

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Abstract: The article examines the classification of jargon units as a multidimensional problem in contemporary linguistic research. It is argued that jargon represents a socially marked and functionally specialized layer of non-standard vocabulary whose linguistic status can only be adequately established through a multi-criteria approach. The study systematizes the principal theoretical approaches to jargon classification and identifies six basic criteria for its analysis: sphere of use, function, language source, method of formation, degree of circulation and structure. On the basis of the sphere-of use criterion, jargon units are differentiated into professional and social types, while remaining criteria allow for a more precise description of their internal heterogeneity. The analysis demonstrates that jargon is characterized by the interaction of semantic, functional, sociolinguistic, derivational and structural features, which precludes its reduction to a single classificatory principle. The study concludes that a multi-criteria model provides a more consistent and theoretically substantiated framework for the classification of jargon units and offers broader prospects for their further investigation in sociolinguistics, linguoculturology and lexicography.

Keywords: Jargon, jargon units, jargon classification, professional jargon, social jargon, non-standard lexis, sociolinguistic differentiation, word-formation, lexicography.

Introduction: In modern linguistics, increasing attention is being paid to the study of non-standard lexical units, particularly jargon, as an important component of informal communication. Jargon units reflect not only the expressive and evaluative potential of language, but also the social, cultural and communicative characteristics of particular speech communities. Their active use in everyday speech, youth discourse, professional interaction and digital communication has further increased the relevance of studying their linguistic nature.

Despite growing interest in jargon, the issue of its clarification remains insufficiently systemized. In linguistic literature, jargon is often discussed alongside related notions such as slang, argot and colloquial vocabulary, which leads to terminological ambiguity and difficulties in establishing clear classificatory boundaries. Moreover, existing studies tend to classify jargon units according to single criterion, such as meaning, function, social sphere or stylistic coloring. However, the complex nature of jargon suggests that

its classification requires a broader and more integrative approach. This state is familiar with other phenomenon like slang or argot. According to Asif Agha, studying the repertoires of an object discourse can reveal important features of slang, yet it does not adequately answer the question what is slang? This idea is particularly relevant to the present study, as it confirms that jargon cannot be understood or classified solely through the inventory of its lexical units. Rather, it should be approached as a multidimensional phenomenon requiring analysis on the basis, if several interrelated criteria.

According to Kropacheva and Litvinova, the difficulty of distinguishing between slang and jargon is primarily обусловлена terminological and semantic ambiguity, since the same linguistic unit may be classified differently by different scholars. This also suggests that the distinction between slang and jargon cannot be made solely on lexical grounds, since their classification often depends on context, function, and the theoretical approach adopted by the researcher.

In this regard, the analyses of theoretical approaches to the classification of jargon units and the identification of the main criteria for their classification become particularly significant. A systematic understanding of these approaches makes it possible to clarify the linguistic status of jargon and to determine the most productive principles for its classification. Such an analysis is also important for further research in sociolinguistics, stylistics, linguoculturology and lexicography.

Linguist M. Ahmedova considers the lack of terminological differentiation between argot, jargon, and slang to be one of the pressing problems of linguistics. In modern psycholinguistics, there is still no consensus in the interpretation of these terms, and their distinctive features have not yet been clearly identified.

The aim of this article is to analyze theoretical approaches to the classification of jargon units and to identify the principal criteria for their classification. In accordance with this aim, the article reviews the main scholarly views on jargon, examines the approaches used in its classification and highlights the role of semantic, functional, sociolinguistic and stylistic criteria in organizing jargon units into a coherent system.

METHODS

This article is based on a qualitative analysis of theoretical sources dealing with jargon and its classification in modern linguistics. The descriptive method was used to examine and systemize scholarly view on the nature of jargon, while the comparative method made it possible to identify the common and distinctive features of the main approaches to its classification.

The study further employs classificatory analysis to determine the principal criteria according to which jargon units are grouped in linguistic research. In these process semantic, functional, sociolinguistic and stylistic criteria were taken as the main analytical parameters. Interpretative analysis was also applied in order to explain the role and relevance of these criteria in the classification of jargon units.

The research materials include scholarly publications on jargon, slang, argot and other forms of non-standard vocabulary. The analysis of these sources provided the basis for outlining the dominant theoretical approaches and for identifying the most productive criteria for the classification of jargon units.

RESULTS

In lexicographic interpretation, jargon is understood as a set of special words and expressions characteristically used by a particular social or professional group,

especially within a specific field of activity. The results of the study show that jargon units cannot be adequately described through a single classificatory principle. As N.V.Astaxova notes that the jargons of declassified social groups, despite some territorial variations, retain internal unity and often function as a secret code marking both group membership and hierarchy. Their linguistic nature is multidimensional, since jargon reflects not only the sphere in which it is used, but also its communicative function, source of origin, word-formation-pattern, degree of circulation and structural organization. For this reason, the classification of jargon units become more systematic and linguistically grounded when several complementary criteria are applied.

1. Classification according to the sphere of the use

According to the sphere of the use, jargon units may be divided into professional jargon and social jargon. This criterion is among the most fundamental, since it reveals the primary communicative environment in which jargon emerges and functions.

Professional jargon includes lexical items used within occupational, technical or institutional communities. Such units arise from the practical needs of a given field and are mainly employed for brevity, efficiency and in-group communication. For example, in medical discourse, the unit “stat” is used to mean “immediately”, while in computing “bug” denotes a software error, and in military usage AWOL refers to a person absent without official leave. These examples show that professional jargon is closely tied to a specific field or activity and often remains opaque to outsiders. According to S.O.Daminova professional jargon is an important component of a specialist’s linguistic competence, since it helps learners to understand the norms of informal communication in their professional field and prevents communicative failures in interaction with foreign colleagues. This suggests that professional jargon is not a marginal but an essential component of linguistic competence, since it supports natural and effective communication in real professional contexts.

Social jargon by contrast is associated with informal communication within age groups, peer communities, subcultures or digital environment. Its main functions are often expressiveness, evaluation, social solidarity and identity making. Examples such as lit, cringe and ghosting illustrate the active role of social jargon is less dependent on institutional context and more strongly connected with everyday interaction and collective social behavior.

This result suggests that the sphere-of-use criterion

provides the broadest initial distinction in jargon classification; however, it does not by itself explain the internal diversity of jargon units. This classification is particularly useful for distinguishing jargon from both professional and social perspectives, as the authors associate professionalisms with narrowly specialized occupational groups, whereas jargonisms are linked to particular social groups. In this respect, professional jargon may be understood as vocabulary characteristic of occupational communities, while social jargon is associated with specific socially marked groups.

2. Functional classification

The analysis further demonstrates that jargon may be classified according to the communicative function it performs. From this perspective, jargon is not merely a lexical category but also a functional instrument of social interaction.

A number of jargon units perform a nominative function, that is, they serve to name a specific phenomenon in a concise and convenient way. For example, *bug* in IT discourse or *desk* in skateboarding names a concept in a manner conventional within the group.

Other units carry a strong expressive and evaluative function. Words such as *awesome*, *cringe* and *salty* do not simply refer to an object or state, but also express the speaker's emotional or evaluative attitude toward it.

Jargon may also perform an identificatory function, helping speakers signal membership in a particular group. For instance, the use of units such *noob* in gaming or *stan* in fan communities immediately indexes participation in a certain discourse community. In some contexts, jargon fulfills a euphemistic or dysphemistic function. Certain units soften or indirectly refer to sensitive topics, while others intensify emotional or negative evaluation. This shows that functional classification reveals the pragmatic force of jargon and explains why jargon units remain highly context-sensitive.

3. Classification according to language source

This result indicate that jargon may also be classified according to its language source. This criterion helps identify whether a jargon unit is native, borrowed, or hybrid in origin. Some jargon units are formed on the basis of native lexical resources and reflect internal language development. Others arise through borrowing, especially from English, which has become one of the major sources of contemporary jargon in many languages, particularly in the spheres of youth discourse, media and technology. Examples, such as *chat*, *link*, *login* or *like* demonstrate how borrowed

elements may function as jargon in many communicative settings.

In addition, some jargon items display hybrid character, combining foreign roots with local morphological adaptation. This type especially productive in modern informal speech, where borrowed units are reshaped according to the grammatical and phonetic patterns of the recipient language. The source-based criterion is important because it highlights the interaction between jargon formation and language contact. It also demonstrates that jargon is highly receptive to external linguistic influence, particularly in globalized and digital communication.

4. Classification according to the method of formation

Another productive criterion is the method by which jargon units are formed. The analysis show that jargon emerges through several word-formation process. One common type is semantic shift, in which existing words acquires a new non-standard meaning. For example, *ghosting* developed from the noun *ghost* but came to denote the act of abruptly ending communication.

Another productive pattern is shortening or abbreviation. Units such as *bro*, *app* and *DM* illustrate how shortened forms become established as jargon due to convenience and frequency of use. Jargons may also develop through compounding, blending or affixation. Items such as *hashtag*, *smartphone*, or *stan culture* illustrate the role of structural innovation in jargon formation.

Finally, some jargon units arise through borrowing or adaptation, especially in areas influenced by technology, mass culture and youth interaction. This criterion is significant because it demonstrates that jargon is not only socially marked but also morphologically dynamic.

5. Classification according to the degree of circulation

The study also shows that jargon may be classified according to the degree to which it is widely-used or beyond a given group.

Some jargon units are narrowly distributed, functioning only within a limited professional or subcultural community. For example, a highly specialized medical or military term may be readily understood by insiders but remain obscure to the general public. Other jargon units show medium circulation, spreading from one group into related environments. For instance, gaming vocabulary such as *noob* may move beyond gaming itself and enter broader youth speech. Some jargon items become widely-distributed and may even approach general colloquial usage. Words such as

cringe, cool or viral have expanded far beyond their original narrow environment and are now recognized across wider speech communities. This result is particularly important because it shows that jargon is not static. Its circulation may change over time, and some units gradually lose their strongly marked group character as they become socially widespread.

The terms “jargon”, “argot”, “slang” are frequently used interchangeably in Russian linguistics. Scholars differ in their interpretation of slang: some view it as equivalent to jargon, while others define it as a layer of colloquial neologisms that may gradually enter the literary language. In this respect, slang is generally treated as a socially marked variety of speech characterized by specific vocabulary, phraseology and word-formation patterns

6. Classification according to the structure

According to the structure, jargon units may be divided into simple words, derived forms, compound nouns, abbreviations and multi-word expressions.

Simple units include one-word forms such as stain, cringe or bug.

Derived forms may include affixed or modified units that emerge through productive morphological processes.

Compound units include forms such as chatroom or smartphone, where two lexical components are combined.

Abbreviations such as DM, OMG or AFK are particularly frequent in digital discourse. Multi-word jargon expressions such as boots on the ground or frequent flyer illustrate that jargon may also be phraseological in character. This criterion shows that jargon is not limited to isolated lexical items but may also appear in more complex phraseological and abbreviated forms.

The six criteria used in this study—sphere of use, function, language source, method of formation, degree of circulation and structure reveal different but interconnected dimensions of jargon. Such an approach allows the researcher to move beyond narrow definitions and to describe jargon as a heterogeneous, dynamic and socially conditioned lexical layer.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study confirm that the problem of classifying jargon units cannot be solved through a simplified or one-dimensional model. The main reason is that jargon itself is a complex linguistic phenomenon situated at the intersection of lexical innovation, social identity, communicative practice and stylistic markedness. Therefore, the six criteria applied in this study should be viewed not as competing but as

complementary.

First, the distinction between professional and social jargon provides a useful macro-level division. It helps establish whether a jargon unit primarily belongs to a specialized occupational environment or to broader informal social communication. However, this division alone remains insufficient, since units within both groups may vary significantly in meaning, function, structure and social reach. Thus, the sphere-of-use criterion serves best as an initial classificatory step rather than as a complete model. Second, the functional criterion reveals the pragmatic value of jargon more clearly than purely semantic classification. Jargon is often used not only to denote but also to evaluate, intensify, identify, or mark solidarity. This explains why jargon remains deeply context-dependent and why jargon items resist straightforward dictionary-style interpretation when separated from their communicative setting. In this sense, functional analysis is essential for understating how jargon operates in real discourse. Third, the language course criterion highlights the openness of jargon to external influence. Modern jargon, especially in youth, media and digital communication, is strongly affected by borrowing and cross-linguistic transfer. This suggests that jargon reflects not only internal language processes but also broader cultural and technological contact. At the same time, source-based classification alone cannot determine the communicative role of a unit; Therefore, it must be integrated with other criteria. Fourth, the method of formation criterion demonstrates that jargon is linguistically creative. The productivity of semantic shift, abbreviation, compounding and borrowing confirms that jargon is one of the most dynamic zones of lexical development. This also explains why jargon often changes rapidly and why new units emerge more quickly in informal discourse than in standardized vocabulary. Fifth, the degree of circulation criterion is particularly valuable for tracing the movement of jargon across speech communities. Some units remain restricted to a narrow group, while others spread into wider colloquial usage. This remains that jargon is not a fixed lexical category with stable boundaries. On the contrary, it occupies a transitional position between group-specific and socially widespread vocabulary. Such mobility complicates classification, but it also makes jargon a highly revealing object of sociolinguistic analysis. Finally, the structural criterion confirms that jargon is not uniform in form. It includes simple lexical items, abbreviations, compounds and phraseological expressions. This diversity shows that jargon should not be reduced to isolated one-word innovations. Its structural variability reflects the flexibility of informal

communication and the adaptability of speakers to different communicative needs.

According to E. M. Khakimova, language standard is essential for preserving culture and tradition, yet language cannot develop through absolute adherence to the standard alone. In her view, the tension between standard and expressiveness reveals the speaker's creative potential, while the use of substandard units in mass communication should be seen not merely as a deviation from the norm, but as a means of paradoxical and playful interpretation of reality. This also suggests that substandard elements should not be viewed solely as markers of linguistic decline. In many cases, their motivated and context-sensitive use enhances expressiveness, attracts attention, and allows speakers to achieve a stronger pragmatic effect in communication.

The discussion makes it clear that the classification of jargon should be based on a multi-criteria principle. No single criterion is capable of fully capturing the linguistic and social complexity of jargon. A more adequate approach is to view jargon as a layered system in which each unit may be described simultaneously from several perspectives: where it is used, what function it performs, where it comes from, how it is formed, how widely it circulates and what structural form it takes. Such a model makes it possible to clarify the status of jargon as a socially marked and functionally differentiated type of non-standard vocabulary. The findings of this study may also be useful for further research in sociolinguistics, linguoculturology, discourse analysis and lexicography. In particular, a multi-criteria classification creates a stronger basis for the lexicographic description of jargon units, since dictionary treatment requires attention not only to meaning but also to usage domain, stylistic, label, source and functional characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that the classification of jargon units constitutes a complex and multidimensional problem in modern linguistics. This complexity is determined by the fact that jargon is characterized not by a single defining feature, but by the interaction of social, functional, semantic, structural and derivational properties. Therefore, its adequate classification requires a multi-criteria approach.

The analysis made it possible to identify six principal criteria for the classification of jargon units: sphere of use, function, language source, method for formation, degree of circulation and structure. On this basis, jargon was systematized not only as a socially marked layer of non-standard vocabulary, but also as an

internally differentiated lexical subsystem. Thus, the application of a multi-criteria model provides a more consistent basis for the classification of jargon units, clarifies their linguistic status and contributes to their more systematic study in sociolinguistics, linguoculturology and lexicography.

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