

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- Multiple definitions
- Staggering number of expressions
- Ephemeral life-cycle:
 - generational
 - vocational-professional

DEFINITIONS

- An ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases generally considered distinct from and socially lower than standard language
- Words or phrases used to establish social identity and cohesiveness: the jargon of a profession, class or group

MORE DEFINITIONS

- Words or expressions used very informally, especially in speech: regionalisms, colloquialisms, argot
- The language of groups who see themselves as distinct from the rest of society: the young, the alienated, members of a minority or ethnic group

STAGGERING NUMBERS

- A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, Francis Grose (1785) – 260 pages
- Slang and its Analogues, Past and Present, John S. Farmer and William E. Henley (1904) – 2736 pages
- A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, Eric Partridge (1984) – 10 volumes

EPHEMERAL LIFE CYCLE

1972-1987 survey conducted by Oxford University Press and University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) showed less than 10% retention of slang terms -

- diligent American college students: grinds and grubs (1972), geeks and nerds (1987)
- students cut class in 70's, blew off class in the 90's

HOW SLANG ARISES ...

- Borrowing from another language, dialect or profession (déjà vu, black-belt lean status, coup de grace, snookered, slam-dunk, silo mentality, media culpa, legacy staff)
- Affixation (megatrends, megawork, fundage, coinage, e-commerce, legalese)
- Compounding (brain drain, data mining, snail mail, spin doctor, infomediary, value-added, think tank, acquirability, fatal model, consumercentricity, reverse engineering)

HOW SLANG ARISES ...

- Adding prepositions (blimp out, onsite, offsite, burnout, outsource, retasking, start-up, rollout, delist, downmarket)
- Using acronyms (CYA, OTL, VJ, GIGO, WOMBAT, IT, Y2K, 24-7)
- Verbing: using nouns as verbs (to impact, leverage, outsource, partner, green light, cost, benchmark, architect, calendar, team, interface, strategize, webify, contextualize)



WHY BE CONCERNED?

According to Trend Letter , Forecast,
March 2002:

English will be the premier language of
global business by the end of the
decade. 70 % of the population in
developed countries already claim it as
a second language...



OTHER REASONS FOR CONCERN...

- Slang makes us struggle to find meaning. It puts the responsibility for clarity on the audience's shoulders – not the speaker's or the writer's.
- Slang can make a lousy idea look good.
- Slang is confusing to non-native communicators because they try to interpret each word literally.

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BUT, MOST IMPORTANTLY...

- Slang is seldom taught in ESL classes
- Slang can cause misunderstanding

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

- Prefer simple, specific, concrete words
- Avoid words with multiple meanings
high has 20 meanings; expensive 1
right has 27 meanings; accurate 1
- Avoid slang, jargon, acronyms

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GUIDELINES, continued

- Use “real” verbs in a simple tense and active voice
- Avoid overlong sentences and paragraphs
- Use correct grammar



GUIDELINES, continued

- Be formal and correct
- Be careful with jokes and humor
- Meet your listener/reader –
adjust your tone and style



English in Intercultural Business: The Issue of Slang

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