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YOUTH AND DIGITAL SLANG: A FRENCH-UZBEK CONTRASTIVE STUDY

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Annotation. This article examines youth and digital slang in French and Uzbek from a contrastive sociolinguistic perspective. Through the analysis of word formation mechanisms, communicative functions, and contexts of digital use, it shows that these two languages, although typologically distinct, share convergent trends in the evolution of their contemporary slang. The globalizing influence of English, the principle of linguistic economy, and the identity-forming function of slang are universal features observable in both systems. Conversely, significant structural differences, notably the absence of verlan (backwards slang) in Uzbek and the agglutinative morphology specific to this language, reveal the culturally embedded dimension of the slang phenomenon. This study also proposes a three-pronged classification of digital slang according to its formation mechanism, its sociolinguistic function, and its dissemination platform.

Keywords : juvenile slang, digital slang, contrastive sociolinguistics, French, Uzbek, verlan, netspeak, lexical formation, digital communication, code-switching

The digital transformation of the 21st century has profoundly reshaped the language practices of contemporary societies. The rise of social networks, instant messaging, and content creation platforms has generated a new linguistic ecosystem, within which youth slang occupies a central place. Long confined to the margins of society (criminal circles, the working class, marginalized communities), slang has gradually established itself as a mass phenomenon, a vehicle for generational identity and lexical innovation. The value of a contrastive study of French and Uzbek lies precisely in the asymmetry of these two linguistic traditions with regard to the phenomenon of slang. French possesses a body of slang documentation dating back to the 15th century , with specialized dictionaries, progressive cultural legitimacy, and partial integration into mainstream media. Uzbek, on the other hand, is undergoing a period of orthographic and sociolinguistic restructuring following the post-Soviet transition, which gives its contemporary youth slang a particularly dynamic and little-studied character.

The concept of slang encompasses realities that vary according to national linguistic traditions. In the French tradition, Pierre Guiraud distinguishes slang in the strict sense, a secret language with a cryptic function, from popular French and informal French, which constitute less socially marked registers. Colin, Mével, and Leclère (in their work * *Dictionnaire de l'argot français et de ses origines* *) adopt a broader definition, encompassing any socially differentiated lexicon fulfilling an identity-forming or expressive function. From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang falls under the category of sociolects: linguistic varieties defined not by geography, but by social class. Labov demonstrated that sociolectal variations are systematic and governed by rules, just like standard phonological or syntactic variations. This theoretical framework fully applies to youth slang, whose internal variation obeys precise social logics (age, background, ethnic origin, cultural practices). In Uzbek linguistics, the term *argo* was introduced under the influence of Soviet terminology, alongside *jargon* and *slang* . Uzbek linguists Sh. Shoabdurahmonov, M. Mirzayev, I. Rasulov, S. Usmonov, B.O'rinboyev, M. Tursunpo'latov, and G. Sattorov analyzed argot as a social dialect and

a language specific to particular groups, such as merchants or athletes. They demonstrated that these slang terms, although limited to spoken language, constitute essential stylistic tools for characterizing and typifying characters in literary works.

linguistics emerged as an independent discipline with the pioneering work of David Crystal, who coined the term *Netspeak* to describe the linguistic features specific to computer-mediated communication. Netspeak is characterized by the hybridization of spoken and written language, graphic compression, neologisms, and the integration of visual paralanguage (emojis, GIFs, memes). Susan Herring proposed a classification of digital discourse based on situational and social parameters that account for the internal variability of digital slang across different platforms.

In terms of word formation mechanisms, truncation is the most productive process in both languages. In French, apocope produces *appart'* (appartement), *sympa* (sympathique), *resto* (restaurant), *prof* (professeur); in Uzbek, the same phenomenon generates *kilo* (kilogramm), *tel* (telefon), *admin* (administrator), *univ* (universitet), *avto* (avtomobil). Borrowings from English represent, in both cases, the most dynamic source of slang enrichment in the digital age: *like* , *post* , *story* , *selfie* , *vibe* , *slay* , *flex* , and *noob* circulate in both linguistic spaces, while undergoing distinct morphophonological adaptations. In French, *liker* , *j'ai liké* , *and un like* are integrated according to the rules of French verbal morphology. In Uzbek, *layk bosmoq* , *post joylamoq, and share qilmoq* combine the borrowed term with an Uzbek support verb, in accordance with the agglutinative structure of the language. Metaphorization produces highly expressive slang in both languages: in French, *se planter* (to fail), *péter les plombs* (to lose control), *avoir le cafard* (to be depressed); in Uzbek, *bosh qotirmoq* (to rack one's brains), *ko'z tikmoq* (to stare intently), *and ichi kuymoq* (to be jealous, literally "one's insides are burning"). These formations reveal partially divergent cultural imaginaries, while obeying the same universal cognitive mechanism. Numerical abbreviations and acronyms constitute a rapidly expanding category: in French, *mdr* (mort de rire - laughing out loud), *stp* (s'il te plaît - please), *jpp* (j'en peux plus - I can't take it anymore), *and tkt* (t'inquiète - don't worry). In Uzbek, *ln* (lekin), *nm* (nima), *sn* (sen), *qnq* (qanaqa), *mn* (mumkin), *bdi* (bo'ladi), *bb* (bo'lib). These forms reflect the principle of linguistic economy theorized by André Martinet (in the work *Économie des changements phonétiques,* 1955) and find their preferred domain in mobile communication.

Verlan is undoubtedly the most characteristic slang mechanism of contemporary French. Emerging in the suburbs of major French cities in the 1970s and 80s, it consists of reversing the syllables of a word with additional phonological modifications: *l'envers → verlan* , *femme → meuf* , *flic → keuf* , *louche → chelou* , *fou → ouf* . This process exploits the phonotactic properties of French to produce forms that are both recognizable and opaque to the uninitiated. Albert Valdman (in his seminal article * *La langue des faubourgs et des banlieues : de l'argot au français populaire**, 2000) emphasizes that verlan has followed a dual trajectory: born as a cryptic language, it has gradually become commonplace to the point that some forms are now understood by the entire French-speaking population. The structural absence of an equivalent process in Uzbek is explained by the typological constraints of the language: as an agglutinative language with obligatory grammatical suffixes, Uzbek does not allow syllable inversion without destroying the morphological structure of the word. On the other hand, Uzbek agglutinative morphology offers resources for hybrid word formation that French does not possess to the same degree, notably the free combination of a borrowed root with native grammatical suffixes, producing forms like *kompyuter-lash-tir-moq* or *telelfon-lash-moq* .

From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang operates in both languages as a marker of group belonging. In French, slang greetings (*Wesh!,* Yo *!,* Frère *!,* Mon *reuf!*) and expressions of solidarity symbolically delineate the peer community. In Uzbek, terms of address like *aka* , *uka* , *bro* , *do'st, jigar* fulfill the same identity-defining function. Furthermore, slang amplifies the expression of emotions beyond the resources of standard language: in French, *c'est trop bien!,* grave *!,* c'est *ouf!* intensify approval; in Uzbek, *juda zo'r!, o'ta go'za* !, *vov! gap yo'q!* fulfill the same function of expressive intensification. Wordplay (puns, semantic shifts, and fanciful creations) constitutes a third fundamental dimension, particularly visible in digital meme culture, where image and slang text combine to produce statements that are both comical and identity-defining. Finally, in the digital environment, the economy of communication becomes a major constraint to which both languages respond by developing parallel abbreviation systems adapted to mobile interfaces and high-frequency exchanges.

The unique sociolinguistic situation of Uzbek (the alphabetic transition from Cyrillic to Latin since 1993, and the coexistence of Russian, English, and Uzbek in the digital sphere) generates a graphic alternation characteristic of youthful digital discourse. Young users freely combine Latin and Cyrillic characters with approximate phonetic transcriptions, producing a slang-like spelling specific to messaging apps. This code *-switching phenomenon* , theorized by John Gumperz (in * *Language and Social Identity*,* 1982), takes on an unprecedented scale in the Uzbek digital context: a single utterance can mix Uzbek, Russian, and English, generating hybrid units at the intersection of several linguistic systems. In French, the same dynamic can be observed in bilingual and multilingual communities, particularly in the suburbs where Arabic, Berber and sub-Saharan African languages feed into the Francophone juvenile slang with terms like *kiffer* (to like), *wesh* (hi), *bled* (country of origin), *kif-kif* (same).

In conclusion, the contrastive study of youth and digital slang in French and Uzbek leads to three major findings. Universal trends run through both languages: the principle of linguistic economy, the identity-forming function of slang, metaphor as a driver of lexical creation, and the globalizing influence of English are shared traits that transcend typological and cultural boundaries. At the same time, profound structural differences reveal the culturally embedded dimension of the slang phenomenon: the absence of verlan (backwards slang) in Uzbek, due to the morphological constraints of the agglutinative language, illustrates how linguistic typology determines the creative possibilities of slang, while Uzbek's agglutinative resources allow for a morphological hybridization of English loanwords that French does not achieve in the same way. Finally, digital technology accelerates and democratizes slang in both languages: units once reserved for restricted groups now circulate widely, and new units are emerging at an unprecedented rate. This observation calls for further research from a longitudinal perspective and the creation of annotated digital corpora to document this evolution in real time.

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