

ANTHROPOCENTRIC APPROACH TO SLANG AS A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON

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Abstract. This article examines slang as a cognitively and socially embedded linguistic phenomenon through the lens of the anthropocentric paradigm. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory and mental model analysis, the study demonstrates that slang functions not as linguistic deviance but as a systematic expression of human cognitive and evaluative activity. Comparative material from Spanish and Russian slang corpora reveals universal anthropocentric mechanisms alongside culturally specific metaphorical mappings.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, slang, conceptual metaphor, mental models, cognitive linguistics, comparative linguistics, Spanish, Russian.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada sleng antroposentrik paradigma nuqtai nazaridan kognitiv va ijtimoiy jihatdan shakllangan lingvistik hodisa sifatida o'rganiladi. Konseptual metafora nazariyasi hamda mental modellarning tahlili asosida slengning lingvistik og'ish emas, balki insonning kognitiv va baholovchi faoliyatining tizimli ifodasi ekanligi ko'rsatib beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: antroposentrizm, sleng, konseptual metafora, mental modellar, kognitiv lingvistika, qiyosiy tilshunoslik.

Аннотация. Статья рассматривает сленг как когнитивно и социально обусловленное лингвистическое явление через призму антропоцентрической парадигмы. На основе теории концептуальной метафоры и анализа ментальных моделей доказывается, что сленг функционирует как системное выражение когнитивной и оценочной деятельности человека, а не как языковое отклонение.

Ключевые слова: антропоцентризм, сленг, концептуальная метафора, ментальные модели, когнитивная лингвистика, сопоставительная лингвистика.

Introduction. The anthropocentric turn in modern linguistics has fundamentally reoriented scholarly inquiry from the structural properties of language systems toward language as a reflection of human cognition, experience, and social identity. Within this framework, slang — long dismissed as marginal or deviant speech — emerges as a remarkably rich object of study. Far from being a collection of arbitrary nonstandard forms, slang encodes evaluative attitudes, social group boundaries, and conceptual structures that illuminate the deepest mechanisms of human language production and comprehension.

The present article argues that slang is inherently anthropocentric: it is created by humans, for humans, and about the human world. Its vocabulary is shaped by the cognitive categories, mental models, and metaphorical mappings through which speakers perceive and organize their experience. This claim is grounded in comparative material drawn from contemporary Spanish and Russian slang corpora and analyzed through the integrated framework of conceptual metaphor theory [Lakoff & Johnson, 1980] and mental model theory [Johnson-Laird, 1983].

Anthropocentrism as a Foundational Paradigm. The anthropocentric paradigm positions the human being — with all their cognitive, emotional, and social complexity — at the center of linguistic analysis. As Kubryakova notes, this paradigm proceeds from the assumption that language cannot be understood independently of the person who creates and

uses it [Kubryakova, 1995]. Language is not a self-contained formal system but an instrument through which human beings conceptualize, evaluate, and communicate their understanding of the world.

This perspective is especially productive when applied to non-standard registers such as slang. Whereas traditional structural approaches treated slangy vocabulary as noise in the linguistic system, the anthropocentric paradigm reveals it as a signal: a systematic manifestation of cognitive and social processes that are universal in nature yet culturally specific in their realization.

Slang as a Cognitively Motivated Phenomenon. From a cognitive linguistics perspective, slang vocabulary is not arbitrary. Its creation and adoption follow regular cognitive patterns, chief among which are conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Conceptual metaphor theory, as developed by Lakoff and Johnson, holds that abstract or complex domains of experience are systematically understood in terms of more concrete, bodily-grounded domains [Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3]. This principle operates with full force in slang lexicogenesis.

In Spanish youth slang, for instance, the domain of INTELLIGENCE is consistently mapped onto the source domain of PHYSICAL SHARPNESS or BRIGHTNESS: expressions such as *estar muy puesto* ('to be very set up / sharp') and *tener mucha chispa* ('to have a lot of spark') deploy spatial and luminous image schemas to conceptualize cognitive acuity. The parallel Russian slangy construction *быть в теме* ('to be in the topic/loop') maps intellectual awareness onto spatial CONTAINMENT, reflecting the universal cognitive preference for locating abstract states within bounded regions.

These cross-linguistic parallels point to what may be termed universal anthropocentric mechanisms: cognitive strategies grounded in shared human embodiment and experience that manifest across typologically distinct languages. At the same time, culturally specific mappings reveal the role of particular historical, social, and evaluative contexts in shaping slang lexicons.

Mental Models in Slang Production and Comprehension. The notion of mental models, introduced by Johnson-Laird [1983] and further developed within cognitive semantics, refers to the internal representations speakers construct to understand situations, discourse, and social contexts. In the domain of slang, mental models function as the cognitive scaffolding that enables speakers to produce and interpret lexical innovations rapidly and with shared understanding within their social group.

Slang words and expressions are not decoded compositionally but holistically, through activation of stored social and situational scenarios. A Spanish slang term such as *flipar* ('to freak out / to be amazed') activates a mental model of intense, disorienting positive or negative affect, drawing on embodied experience of being overwhelmed. The Russian equivalent *ловить кайф* ('to catch a high / to enjoy') similarly activates a mental model of pleasurable altered experience, structured by the ACQUISITION metaphor (positive experience as something caught or seized).

This model-based processing explains why slang comprehension is deeply context-dependent and socially gated: access to the relevant mental models is conditioned by membership in the social group that employs the slang, confirming the anthropocentric view that language is always language-in-use, inseparable from the cognitive and social identity of its speakers.

Comparative Evidence: Spanish and Russian Slang. A systematic comparison of Spanish and Russian slang corpora reveals both convergences and divergences in

anthropocentric patterning. At the level of conceptual domains, both corpora demonstrate a strong preference for mapping onto the human body, spatial relations, temperature, and social hierarchy — domains directly rooted in embodied human experience. The domain of SOCIAL EVALUATION, in particular, generates highly productive metaphorical series in both languages: Spanish *molar* ('to rule / to be great,' lit. 'to grind') and Russian *зачётный* ('outstanding,' lit. 'count-worthy') both recruit everyday material processes to evaluate social worth.

Divergences, however, are equally instructive. Russian slang exhibits a notably higher frequency of military and bureaucratic source domains, reflecting the historical and institutional experience encoded in Russian collective memory. Spanish youth slang, by contrast, draws heavily on popular culture, digital media, and Anglophone contact domains, indexing the particular sociolinguistic ecology of contemporary Spanish-speaking communities. These divergences underscore that while anthropocentric cognitive mechanisms are universal, their lexical realizations are always culturally mediated.

Conclusion. The anthropocentric paradigm provides a theoretically coherent and empirically productive framework for the study of slang. Analyzing slang through the integrated lenses of conceptual metaphor theory and mental model theory reveals it as a systematic, cognitively motivated, and socially grounded dimension of human linguistic creativity. The comparative Spanish-Russian evidence presented here supports the existence of universal anthropocentric mechanisms while simultaneously demonstrating that their surface realizations are shaped by culture-specific experience and social history.

These findings have implications beyond slang studies: they contribute to the broader project of an anthropocentric world linguistics that takes human cognition, embodiment, and social identity as the irreducible starting points for linguistic analysis, and that recognizes non-standard language varieties as legitimate and theoretically significant objects of scientific inquiry.

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