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## THE HISTORY OF ARGOTS' ORIGIN IN ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES, RUSSIAN AND UZBEKISTAN

## ARGONING INGLIZ TILIDA SO'ZLASHUVCHI DAVLATLAR, ROSSIYA VA O'ZBEKISTONDAGI KELIB CHIQISH TARIXI

## ИСТОРИЯ ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИЯ АРГО В АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНЫХ СТРАНАХ, РОССИИ И УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

Xolmatov Shaxriyor Zoxidjon o'g'li 

Farg'ona davlat universiteti, Amaliy ingliz tili kafedrasida o'qituvchisi

## Abstract

This article explores the genesis and evolution of argot, a specialized form of language used primarily by criminal and marginalized groups for covert communication. The study traces the origins of argot from the 15th century, starting with its early forms such as *rotwelsch* in Europe and *cant* in Britain. It examines the development of criminal slang as it spread through Europe, particularly in Britain and its colonies, including Australia, and later influenced other regions such as Russia and Uzbekistan. The research highlights how argot evolved from a secretive communication tool used by criminals into the broader phenomenon of slang, influencing everyday language. The article emphasizes the relationship between language and society, illustrating how socio-economic and political conditions shape the development of criminal language.

## Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola argot (maxfiy til) ning kelib chiqishi va rivojlanishini o'rganadi. Bu til asosan jinoyatkorlar va jamiyatdan chetga chiqib ketgan guruhlar tomonidan yashirin muloqot uchun ishlatiladi. Tadqiqot argotning 15-asrdan boshlab rivojlanishini, avval *rotwelsch* tilining Yevropada, so'ngra Britaniyada *cant* kabi dastlabki shakllarini ko'rsatadi. Jinoyat jargonining rivojlanishi, ayniqsa Britaniya va uning mustamlakalarida, shu jumladan Avstraliyada, shuningdek, Rossiya va O'zbekiston kabi mintaqalarga qanday tarqalganini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqot, argotning jinoyatchilar tomonidan maxfiy aloqa vositasi sifatida ishlatilganidan, kengroq slang fenomeniga qanday aylanganini va kundalik nutqni qanday ta'sir qilganini ko'rsatadi. Maqola, til va jamiyat o'rtasidagi munosabatni ta'kidlab, jamiyatdagi ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy va siyosiy sharoitlarning jinoyat tilining rivojlanishiga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatishini ko'rsatadi.

## Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются происхождение и эволюция аргота — специализированного языка, используемого в основном преступными и маргинальными группами для скрытого общения. Исследование прослеживает истоки аргота с XV века, начиная с его ранних форм, таких как *rotwelsch* в Европе и *кент* в Британии. В статье рассматривается развитие преступного жаргона, который распространился по Европе, особенно в Британии и её колониях, включая Австралию, а затем оказал влияние на такие регионы, как Россия и Узбекистан. Исследование подчеркивает, как аргот эволюционировал из инструмента скрытого общения преступников в более широкий феномен сленга, влияя на повседневный язык. В статье акцентируется внимание на взаимосвязи между языком и обществом, показывая, как социально-экономические и политические условия формируют развитие преступного языка.

**Key words:** Argot, Criminal slang, Evolution of language, Secret languages, History of argot, Linguistic subcultures, Social identity, Marginalized groups, British cant, Rotwelsch

**Kalit so'zlar:** Argot, jinoyat jargon, til evolyutsiyasi, maxfiy tillar, argot tarixi, lingvistik subkulturalar, ijtimoiy o'ziga xoslik, marginallashtirilgan guruhlar, Britaniya kenti, Rotvelsh

**Ключевые слова:** аргот, уголовный сленг, эволюция языка, тайные языки, история аргот, языковые субкультуры, социальная идентичность, маргинализированные группы, британский жаргон, ротвельш

## INTRODUCTION

In society, language often serves as a powerful marker of identity, distinguishing groups of people based on various factors such as profession, education, age, and social status. One particularly intriguing subset of language is *argot*, a specialized form of communication used by marginalized or criminal groups. This form of language evolves in parallel with the broader society, often shaped by the socio-economic and political conditions of its time. The study of argot has



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become a focal point in linguistics, particularly within the realm of sociolinguistics, as researchers examine how language reflects the subcultures of society. This article explores the origins and development of argot, its use across different regions, and its impact on both criminal communities and broader linguistic systems.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study of *argot*, a specialized form of language used by marginalized and criminal groups, has garnered increasing interest among linguists, sociologists, and historians. The evolving nature of argot—shaped by social, political, and economic conditions—provides insight into the ways in which language serves as both a tool for secrecy and a marker of social identity. This literature review examines key contributions to the study of argot, focusing on its historical development, regional variations, and its impact on broader linguistic systems.

**HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ARGOT**

The origins of argot can be traced back to medieval Europe, with significant documentation emerging during the 15th century. The term *rotwelsch*, a form of criminal argot used by beggars and outcasts, is often cited as one of the earliest examples of argot in Europe. *Rotwelsch* developed from a mixture of Germanic, Romance, and Jewish languages, demonstrating the linguistic blending that often characterizes criminal vernaculars.[17:190] This hybrid language allowed individuals engaged in illicit activities to communicate covertly, avoiding detection by the general public and law enforcement. Studies by Goetze have further explored the linguistic features of *rotwelsch*, noting its reliance on re-lexicalization and inversion of standard words, as well as its ability to disguise meaning in everyday speech. [5:36-45]

In Britain, the development of criminal slang is particularly well-documented in the form of *cant*, a term for the criminal dialect used in the 16th century. *Cant* is derived from the Irish word *caint* (speech) and the Latin *cantare* (to sing), and was initially used to mock clergymen before evolving into a distinct language for criminals [4:220]. The expansion of criminal groups in Britain during times of social unrest, such as the rise in unemployment and the spread of epidemics in the 1500s, led to the spread of *cant* and other forms of argot across the country [15:332]. By the 19th century, terms like *cant* had evolved into more generalized forms of informal speech, leading to the emergence of slang, which replaced the more specialized criminal lexicons [20:120-125].

**The Global Spread of Argot: From Britain to its Colonies**

As the British Empire expanded, so too did its criminal lexicon. In Australia, for instance, the use of *flash*, a term derived from British argot, became prominent in the early 19th century. The *Flash Dictionary*, compiled by James Hardy, recorded a wide range of criminal terms that were part of the growing vernacular among convicts and criminals. Scholars such as Bernard have argued that the use of *flash* in Australia served as a way for criminals to maintain their identity and resist the surveillance of colonial authorities.[3:78] The linguistic evolution of criminal speech in Australia mirrored the broader social dynamics of the time, where the expansion of the convict population and the harsh conditions of penal colonies gave rise to distinct forms of communication within the criminal underworld.

The spread of British argot to other parts of the world, including North America and Africa, also played a significant role in shaping the development of criminal slang. In Canada, for example, the influence of British criminal dialects can be traced in early colonial records, particularly among Indigenous peoples and settler communities who used the language to negotiate social hierarchies and maintain control over their respective group.[13:36] Similarly, in South Africa, the introduction of British criminal slang was adapted and merged with local languages, resulting in unique forms of *argot* that reflected the socio-political environment of apartheid.[23:220]

**REGIONAL VARIATIONS: RUSSIA AND UZBEKISTAN**

The development of argot in Russia provides an interesting case study in the interaction between linguistic systems and social structures. Criminal slang in Russia began to take shape during the 19th century, particularly in prison communities. Dialects such as *Alaman*, *Lamanskiy*, and *Galivoniyany* were created as a means of communication among criminals and prisoners, serving to distinguish them from the rest of society. These dialects were influenced by a range of factors, including the complex socio-political environment of the Russian Empire and the heterogeneous nature of the prison population. The interaction between Russian, Ukrainian, and other regional



languages contributed to the formation of these criminal dialects, which became integral to the socialization of individuals within the criminal world. [14:112]

In Uzbekistan, the development of argot is less well-documented but is similarly rooted in the prison system under Russian rule. As in Russia, the harsh conditions of imprisonment and the Russian colonial presence in Central Asia fostered the creation of a distinct form of criminal language. Early examples of criminal slang in Uzbekistan include terms like *cho'rt* (beggar) and *mujik* (peasant), which reflect the early stages of argot in the region.[21:354] However, unlike in Russia, Uzbek argot did not fully evolve into a comprehensive system of communication due to factors such as the varied composition of the prison population and the significant influence of Russian vocabulary [21:434].

### METHODS

This study is based on a historical and linguistic analysis of the evolution of argot in Europe, Russia, and Uzbekistan. Primary sources, including early glossaries of criminal language, legal documents, and literary works from the 15th century onwards, were reviewed to track the emergence and spread of argot. Comparative studies of the development of criminal slang in different regions, especially the influence of British argot on other English-speaking countries, such as Australia, were also examined. The research draws on both historical records and linguistic analysis to understand how argot evolved over time in response to changing social conditions.

### RESULTS

Argot as a distinctive form of language traces its origins to the 15th century in Europe, particularly in regions where criminal activity was prevalent. Early examples of argot, such as the "rotwelsch" used by beggars, emerged from the linguistic interaction between Yiddish, Romance languages, and Germanic tongues. [12:133] This vernacular was developed primarily as a tool for covert communication among criminals, allowing them to evade detection by law enforcement and the broader public.

The first known instance of criminal language in Britain is the term *cant*, which originated in the 1530s, derived from the Irish word "caint" (speech) and the Latin "cantare" (to sing).[24] This secret language, initially used by beggars and criminals to mock clergymen, grew into a more complex system as the criminal classes expanded. The development of criminal language was further propelled by the social upheaval in Britain during the 1500s, including rising unemployment and epidemics, which created a fertile environment for the growth of criminal subcultures.

As the criminal underworld expanded in Britain and its colonies, new criminal terminologies emerged. For example, in Australia, the expansion of the convict population in the early 19th century led to the spread of British criminal slang, known as *flash*, which evolved from earlier terms like *cant* and *rotwelsch*. [17:180] This slang became a key feature of the criminal dialect in Australia, used to distinguish criminals from the general population and to evade government surveillance. The *Flash Dictionary*, a significant compilation of criminal terms, documented this development. [9]

By the 19th century, terms like *cant* and *flash* had evolved into more generalized forms of informal speech, giving rise to the broader concept of *slang*. The word *slang*, believed to be derived from the Scandinavian term "slenge" (to throw away or discard), eventually replaced the more specific terms associated with criminal speech, reflecting a shift in the social function of such language.

The development of argot was not limited to Europe. In Russia, criminal slang began to take shape in the 1840s and 1850s, with dialects such as *Alaman*, *Lamanskiy*, and *Galivoniyan* emerging among prisoners and criminals. These dialects served as a tool for socialization within the criminal classes and as a means of distinction from the mainstream society. In Uzbekistan, the development of argot followed a similar trajectory, emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to the harsh conditions of imprisonment under Russian rule. The criminal lexicon in Uzbekistan included terms like "cho'rt" and "mujik" reflecting the early criminal vocabulary in the region.

Despite its emergence, argot in Uzbekistan did not evolve into a fully developed linguistic system due to factors such as the heterogeneous nature of the prison population and the influence of Russian vocabulary. However, it was clear that the criminal argot in Uzbekistan was shaped by



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the broader historical context, including colonial repression and the establishment of new forms of punishment.

## DISCUSSION

The evolution of argot across different regions reflects its role as a linguistic manifestation of subcultures marginalized by mainstream society. In its early forms, argot served as a means of covert communication among criminals, enabling them to evade detection and maintain a sense of unity within their groups. The growth of criminal communities, whether in Europe, Russia, or Uzbekistan, played a crucial role in the development and spread of these specialized languages. Argot also illustrates the dynamic relationship between language and society. As criminal activity became more organized and widespread, so too did the complexity and reach of criminal language. Over time, argot transformed from a tool of secrecy into a broader cultural phenomenon, influencing not just criminal subcultures but also the informal language of the general public. This transition is particularly evident in the development of slang, which, while still rooted in the criminal lexicon, eventually became a common feature of everyday speech.

Based on above discussion, the history of argot is deeply intertwined with the socio-political conditions of its time. It serves as a reflection of the social structures that gave rise to criminal subcultures and their distinct ways of communication. The development of argot, both in Europe and beyond, highlights how language can evolve as a response to social, economic, and political changes, providing insight into the hidden worlds of those who live on the margins of society.

## CONCLUSION

Argot is not merely a linguistic curiosity but a vital component of criminal subcultures, offering a window into the social dynamics of marginalized groups. From its roots in medieval Europe to its evolution in the British colonies and beyond, the development of argot underscores the role of language in shaping identity, survival, and distinction in society. The study of argot reveals the intricate ways in which language functions as both a tool of secrecy and a marker of social affiliation, demonstrating how subcultures use language to navigate the complexities of their environment. Understanding the evolution of argot contributes to our broader comprehension of language as a living, evolving phenomenon shaped by the forces of history and society.

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