

# THE ENGLISH SLANG TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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## Abstract

Our article aims at focusing on words or phrases belonging to the slang linguistic compartment, which is a section less approached by linguists, precisely because of its moral character, since the slang expressions designate some intriguing aspects of language that might seem filthy or vulgar. Modern dictionaries based on slang have tried to eliminate this preconception and to highlight the argotic expressions, as slang is nothing but a phenomenon of speech, usually associated with a particular group. Slang words generally replace some unanimously accepted synonyms, in an attempt to emphasize social and contextual understanding. As regards the slang expressions related to science and technology, they are numberless, as for a certain scientific or technological word or expression we can find a deprecatory meaning that generates a slang phrase. We have arranged the expressions systematically, starting from a certain root word and giving all the slang expressions connected to it.

**Keywords:** *expression, slang, derivatives, meaning, language.*

## Résumé

Dans cet article on discutera sur les mots et les expressions qui appartiennent au domaine linguistique des mots argotiques. Cette section est moins abordée par les linguistes, juste à cause de son caractère moral, parce qu'assez souvent, les expressions argotiques se réfèrent à certains aspects intrigants de la langue qui peuvent paraître obscènes ou vulgaires. Les dictionnaires modernes des termes argotiques ont essayé d'éliminer ce préjugement et de les mettre en lumière, parce que le jargon n'est autre chose qu'un phénomène de la langue, associé plusieurs fois à certaines catégories sociales. En général, les mots argotiques remplacent certains synonymes unanimement acceptés, dans l'essai d'accentuer la compréhension textuelle et sociale. En ce qui concerne les expressions argotiques concernant la science et la technologie, celles-ci sont innombrables. Pour un tel mot ou une telle expression, on peut saisir un sens dépréciatif qui génère une expression argotique. On a systématiquement arrangé les expressions, en partant de la racine du mot analysé et discutant toutes les expressions argotiques générées par celui-ci.

**Mots-clés:** *expression, jargon, mots dérivés, sens, langage.*

One of the most interesting and constantly evolving chapter of the English grammar is represented by the linguistic domain of the slang words. Jargon words are part of every language and knowing them can be useful in keeping up with everyday conversations. There are a lot of slang expressions related to science and technology which have made their mark not only in the British English but also in the other Anglophone countries – The American English, the English spoken in Canada, Australia or New Zealand. The headwords are given in alphabetical order and they are written in capital letters, while the slang words or expressions connected with them are placed in italics. Unless a word is used in all parts of the English-speaking world, the country of origin or the country in which the word is most prevalent is given between brackets. If a certain slang word or expression has more than one meaning, the meanings are all listed and separated by semicolons. If a word or phrase is used, with different meanings, in more than one country, the meanings are numbered: e.g. 1. (American English); 2. (British English). We have had as a reference book, among others, Volceanov's, Nicolae's and P. Volceanov's "*Dictionar de argou englez- român*"<sup>1</sup>. Here are some examples:

ACID:

- *acid* = 1. LSD; 2. (British English) banter, snook, irony;
- *acid freak* = someone who uses LSD regularly or who is frequently under the influence of this drug;
- *acid funk / mung* (American English) = depressed state after LSD consumption;
- *acid house* = 1. (British English, musical term) a style of pop music characterized by a special focus on the bass and synth loops; 2. a teenagers' cult for this musical genre combined with psychedelic drug use;
- *acid rock* (American English) = a musical genre associated with LSD consumption;
- *acid ted* = a teenager with aggressive behaviour, who is a fan of the *acid house* type of music and a drug addict;
- *acid test* = LSD consumption;
- *acid trip* (American English) = hallucinations caused by LSD consumption;
- *blue acid* (American English) = LSD;

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<sup>1</sup>Volceanov, George, Nicolae, Raluca, Volceanov, Paul George, *Dictionar de argou englez- român*, Niculescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015.

- *come the acid* (British English) = 1. pretend to be tough; 2. make a mountain out of a molehill, exaggerate; 3. play the fool; 4. be sarcastic;
- *drop acid* = consume large quantities of LSD;
- *full of acid* (American English, sport terminology) = someone who is doping with anabolic steroids;
- *put the acid on somebody* (Australian English, English spoken in New Zealand) = try to extract a loan or favour from someone;
- *super acid* = street names for ketamine;
- *tric acid* = a high-quality LSD.

#### BATTERY:

- *battery* (verb, British English) = intentionally apply physical force to another person; knock someone down to the ground;
- *battery girl* = hooker, tramp, prostitute;
- *Battery Operated Boyfriend* (humorous) = dildo, vibrator.

#### BUMPER:

- *bumper* (Australian English) = (noun) stub, cigarette but; (adjective) awesome, terrific;
- *bumper hat* (British English) = safety helmet, hard hat;
- *bumpers* = 1. (Australian English) = boobs, female breasts; 2. sneakers, sports shoes.

#### BUTTON:

- *button* (American English) = 1. highlight, climax; 2. police ID; 3. (plural) remote control;
- *button B* (British English) = broke, penniless, as poor as a church mouse;
- *button it* = keep one's mouth shut, pipe down;
- *buttons and bows* (British English, humorous) = someone's toes.

#### CHEMISTRY:

- *have great chemistry* = get along wonderfully

#### CYLINDER / CYLINDERS:

- *cylinder* (Australian English) = pussy, vagina;
- *run on all cylinders* (American English) = work or function at a peak level of performance; operate sensibly and intelligently.

**DIGIT / DIGITS:**

- *give up the digits* (American English) = give someone one's phone number

**ELECTRONIC:**

- *electronic cadaver* (American English, medical term) = computer programme which stimulates the stages of dissection of a corpse;
- *electronic tag* (British English, judicial term) = a device worn by a convict who is on probation, so that he could be under police surveillance;
- *electronic tagging* (British English, judicial term) = the use of an electronic device that is fastened to a paroled inmate, so that police can know where he/she is;
- *electronic town hall* (American English, political term) = a TV debate on high-profile political issues.

**FUEL:**

- *jet fuel* = a veterinary anesthetic with hallucinating effects;
- *take on fuel* (American English) = drink alcohol to excess.

**FUSE:**

- *blow a fuse* = to become extremely angry, to get mad, to see red;
- *fuse box* (American English) = the head, the brain;
- *have a short fuse* (American English) = get angry very easily.

**GAS:**

- *gas* = 1. trifles, nonsense; 2. (American English) a thoroughly entertaining, enjoyable or amusing experience; 3. small talk, chit-chat; 4. intestinal gas

**GEAR:**

- *cutting gear* (British English) = an acetylene apparatus used for breaking into safe deposits;
- *gear* (British English) = 1. drugs, especially heroin; 2. stolen items; 3. clothing or accessories;
- *gearbox* = 1. (British English) a woman's vagina; 2. (Canadian English) queer, faggot;
- *gearhead* = a person very interested in mechanical devices;
- *gear lever* (American English) = erect penis;
- *get your ass in gear* (especially American English) = a rude way of telling somebody to hurry;
- *laughing gear* (British English) = mouth;

- *swing into high gear* = begin operating at a fast pace; increase the rate of activity.

#### HARDWARE:

- *hardware* = 1. (American English) whisky; alcoholic drink; 2. hard drugs;

#### HAMMER:

- *give someone / something a hammering* = an occasion when someone is defeated completely or something is badly affected or damaged;

- *hammer* = 1. (Canadian English) penis; 2. (American English) a car's throttle trigger; 3. ecstasy; 4. (British English) a part of a gun that hits another part when you pull the trigger to send out the bullet;

- *hammered* (British English) = drunk or intoxicated;

- *hammerhead* = 1. (American English) a stupid person; 2. drunk; 3. drug addict; 4. heroine;

- *put the hammer on somebody* = strike terror into the heart of somebody.

#### IRON:

- *big iron* (American English) = a very big computer

#### MACHINE / MACHINERY:

- *dream machine* = a smoking device that after being used puts the user directly into a dream state;

- *machinery* = a toolbox for injection drug use.

#### SCREW / SCREWS:

- *nails and screws* (British English, humorous) = news;

- *screw* = (noun) 1. sexual intercourse; 2. a sexual partner, especially solely as an object of gratification; 3. a prison guard; (verb) 1. have sex; 2. put someone at a disadvantage or in a difficult position, especially in an unfair or selfish manner;

- *screw around* = 1. mess around; 2. waste time; 3. have a casual sexual relationship with someone;

- *screw around with something* (American English) = engage in aimless recreation or frivolous time-wasting with something;

- *screwball* = a goofy, impulsive or eccentric person;

- *screwdriver* (British English) = 1. alcoholic beverage made by mixing vodka and orange juice; 2. chief warden;

- *screwed, blued and tattooed* (American English) = 1. alcohol intoxicated; 2. badly mistreated, having no chance of success or recovery;

- *screwed tight* = 1. drunk; 2. fooled, scammed, double-crossed;
- *screwed up* (American English) = ruined, messed up, having a confused mental state;
- *screwing* = sexual intercourse;
- *screwsman* = a thief well versed in burglary;
- *screw somebody out of something* (American English) = cheat or unfairly deprive someone out of something that one owns, deserves or has earned;
- *screw someone over* (American English) = scold someone severely;
- *screw someone / something up* (American English) = interfere with someone or something; mess up someone or something;
- *screw the arse off / screw the back legs off* (British English) = have vigorous and enthusiastic sex;
- *screw up* = (noun) a huge mistake or blunder; (verb) 1. to make a big mistake or blunder; 2. to ruin, damage or mishandle something, especially inadvertently;
- *screwy* (American English, adjective) = 1. having an altered or less coherent state of mind; 2. alcohol intoxicated.

#### SPANNER / SPANNERS:

- *crossword spanner* (humorous) = pencil;
- *face like a bagful of spanners* (British English) = (of women) someone who doesn't like happiness, laughter or fun, especially when the person is not involved and comes in to ruin it; a hateful woman;
- *left-handed spanner* (British English) = a non-existent tool;
- *spanner* (British English) = a person who is foolish, careless or incompetent;
- *yaffling spanners* (British English, humorous) = eating implements, like knives, forks and spoons.

#### STEAM:

- *full steam ahead* (American English) = firm and resolute;
- *steam* = (Australian English, English spoken in New Zealand, noun) a wine of bad quality; (American English, verb) 1. to be or become angry; 2. to cause someone to become angry; (British English, teen slang, verb) to rob in an organized group;
- *steamboats* (British English, adjective) = drunk, intoxicated;
- *steamed up* = very angry or upset; heavily intoxicated;
- *steamer* = (British English) 1. a gullible or easily cheated person; 2. a drinking session; 3. a member of a youth gang who engages in *steaming* (robbing and escaping in a large group); 4. a prostitute's client; 5. a homosexual man with a preference for passive partners; (American English) a stolen vehicle;

- *steam packet* (British English, humorous) = a jacket, a coat;
- *steamy* (American English) = lustful or erotic.

#### TROLLEY / TROLLEYS:

- *off one's trolley* = mentally confused or disorganized; insane;
- *trolley and tram* (British English, humorous) = ham, bacon;
- *trolley / trolley and truck* (British English, humorous) = sexual intercourse;
- *trolley dolly* (British English) = a female flight attendant;
- *trolleyed* (British English) = drunk;
- *trolleys* (British English) = men's underpants.

#### TYRE:

- *spare tyre* = 1. a deposit of fat just above the waist; 2. (American English) unwanted guest

#### WHEEL / WHEELS:

- *big wheel* (American English) = big shot, bigwig, rich guy;
- *cartwheel* = jelly babies, amphetamine pill;
- *Catherine wheel* = LSD;
- *clean wheels* = a vehicle which has never been stolen;
- *eighteen wheeler* (American English) = tractor-trailer truck;
- *fifth wheel / third wheel* = 1. a person who accompanies two (or more) couples in a social situation, who does not have a partner of his or her own; 2. (American English) an unwanted, extra or unnecessary person;
- *four-wheels* (American English, Canadian English) = an automobile;
- *four-wheel skid / three-wheel skid* (British English, humorous) = a Jewish person;
- *front wheeler* (British English, deprecating meaning) = a racial slur for a Jewish person; a derogatory term for someone you dislike;
- *hell on wheels* (American English) = a very impressive person or thing;
- *joy wheeler* (British English) = a girl who loves life and travels;
- *lattie on wheels* = automobile; taxi;
- *low-wheel* (Australian English) = hooker, prostitute;
- *set of wheels* (American English) = a car, a vehicle;
- *shit on wheels* = an arrogant man who thinks he is cool but actually has an intellectual disability;
- *spin one's wheels* = waste time, remain in a neutral position, neither advancing nor falling back;
- *tin can on wheels* (British English) = a clunker, a lemon, a wreck;

- *two wheeler* (British English, humorous, rhyming extraction from the word *Sheila*) = girl, woman;
- *wheel* = (British English, noun) a person with a great deal of power or influence; (American English, verb) to drive a car;
- *wheel and deal* (American English) = manipulate a situation to one's advantage using crafty means;
- *wheeler* (British English) = a person who succeeds at and dominates everything he does;
- *wheeler-dealer* = a person who advances one's own interests by canny, aggressive or unscrupulous behaviour;
- *wheelie* / *wheely* = (American English) a manoeuvre on a bicycle or motorbike in which the front wheel is raised off the ground; (Australian English) a derogatory term for a person who uses a wheelchair;
- *wheelman* = a person who drives the getaway car in a holdup or robbery;
- *wheels* (American English) = means of public transportation.

#### WIRE / WIRES:

- *coconut wireless* (British English) / *mulga wires* (Australian English) = on the grapevine; an unofficial, informal way of getting information by hearing about it from someone who heard it from someone else;
- *down to the wire* (American English) = until the last possible moment;
- *haywire* (American English, adjective) = 1. (of things) out of order, not functioning properly; 2. (of people) erratic or crazy;
- *hot wire* (American English, verb) = start a vehicle without a key by connecting wires that power the ignition;
- *latrine wireless* = the free exchange of information and gossip;
- *no wire hangers!* (American English, teen slang) = don't ever do it again!;
- *sky wire* (Australian English) = radio antenna;
- *under the wire* (Australian English, of men) = just in the nick of time; at the last moment;
- *wire* = (British English, noun) 1. a telegram or cablegram; 2. a hidden microphone, on a person's body or in a building; 3. a pickpocket; (British English, verb) install electronic eavesdropping equipment (in a room, for example);
- *wired* (American English, adjective) = 1. very stimulated or excited, as from a stimulant or a rush of adrenaline; 2. intoxicated from drugs; 3. with high-level connections;
- *wired into somebody / something* (American English) = closely concerned with someone or something; really involved with someone or something;

- *wirehead* (American English) = someone who cares more about computers and gear than anything else.

Within English slang, there are a lot of slang expressions inspired by science and technology which we use to mean other things. In conversation, one is likely to hear quite a number of words or expressions which refer to science and technology. However, such terms are not often used literally. A big number of these words are included in certain colloquial expressions and slang, which have meanings quite different from their original uses.

In conclusion, our article highlighted the fact that the domain of slang words or expressions related to science and technology is bountiful. A particular slang headword, as can be seen in our article, enters a variety of expressions, not only in its singular or plural form, but also as part of different derivatives or compound words. Generally, we invoke different slang expressions inspired by science and technology when we talk about the world of drug addicts and alcoholics, by using various phrases which include words like *acid*, *gear*, *hammer*, *machine*, *steam*, *wired* or *fuel*, *hardware*, *hammer*, *screw* or *trolley*. Likewise, when we want to express different feelings, we make use of different expressions, like *blow a fuse / have a short fuse* ; *steam / steamed up* (when we get very angry) and *off one's trolley*; *haywire* (when we want to tell people they are crazy). The slang expressions connected with science and technology which are based on sexual terminology are also plentiful: *Battery Operated Boyfriend*, *bumpers*, *cylinder*, *gear box*, *gear lever*, *hammer*, *screw* (and many of its derivatives) or *trolley*. People's use of slang expressions is often regarded as a method to release stress or to resist more easily to pain.

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