

The Sociolinguistics of Prison Slang

Authors : Jonathan M. Watt, Regina L. Sturiale

Abstract : The linguistic idiosyncrasies of prison populations have been studied with great interest by scholarly and popular writers alike, whose interests range from curiosity to a disciplined understanding of its function. This paper offers a formalized nomenclature for the four relevant terms (slang, jargon, argot, and cant) and brings together key sociolinguistic concepts such as domain and register with research on institutional dynamics as well as culture and identity. It presents a fresh body of data drawn from interviews with prison staff in the American NE and with awareness of selected publications. The paper then draws a correlation between a person's competence in prison antilanguage and their status as part of the in-group. This is a distinctive marker of identification that is essential to inmate survival and staff effectiveness.

Keywords : slang, jargon, argot, sociolinguistics, antilanguage, identity

Conference Title : ICLLL 2024 : International Conference on Languages, Literature and Linguistics

Conference Location : Sydney, Australia

Conference Dates : December 02-03, 2024