

American Slang: Perception and Connotations - Issues of Translation

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Abstract : The English language that is taught in school or used in media nowadays is defined as 'standard English,' although unstandardized Englishes, or 'parallel' Englishes, are practiced throughout the world. The existence of these 'parallel' Englishes has challenged standardization by imposing its own specific vocabulary or grammar. These non-standard languages tend to be regarded as inferior and, therefore, pose a problem regarding their translation. In the USA, 'slanguage', or slang, is a good example of a 'parallel' language. It consists of a particular set of vocabulary, used mostly in speech, and rarely in writing. Qualified as vulgar, often reduced to an urban language spoken by young people from lower classes, slanguage - or the language that is often first spoken between youths - is still the most common language used in the English-speaking world. Moreover, it appears that the prime meaning of 'informal' (as in an informal language) - a language that is spoken with persons the speaker knows - has been put aside and replaced in the general mind by the idea of vulgarity and non-appropriateness, when in fact informality is a sign of intimacy, not of vulgarity. When it comes to translating American slang, the main problem a translator encounters is the image and the cultural background usually associated with this 'parallel' language. Indeed, one will have, unwillingly, a predisposition to categorize a speaker of a 'parallel' language as being part of a particular group of people. The way one sees a speaker using it is paramount, and needs to be transposed into the target language. This paper will conduct an analysis of American slang - its use, perception and the image it gives of its speakers - and its translation into French, using the novel *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?* (and other concerns) by way of example. In her autobiography/personal essay book, comedy writer, actress and author Mindy Kaling speaks with a very familiar English, including slang, which participates in the construction of her own voice and style, and enables a deeper connection with her readers.

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