

SLANG TERMS FOR DRINKS, DRUNKS AND HABITS OF DRINKING

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The processes by which words become slang are the same as those by which other words in the language change their form or meaning or both. Some of these are the employment of metaphor, simile, folk etymology, distortion of sounds in words, generalization, specialization, clipping, the use of acronyms, elevation and degeneration, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, borrowings from foreign languages, and the play of euphemism against taboo.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the vocabulary of drinkers by bringing into discussion powerful and fresh words that function within the sphere of slang, idioms, colloquialisms and clichés.

It has been said that alcohol is as old as man is. Long before Biblical times, the stone-aged man has discovered the intoxicating effects and pleasant taste grapes left to ferment offered. The British Isles were introduced to wine as early as the first-century, but they were already busy consuming another alcoholic beverage before this time. On special occasions they would consume a kind of fermented liquor, made of barley, honey of apples', clearly referring to ale, mead and cider. Ale changed in taste and recipe over the next 16 centuries and other alcoholic beverages, like gin, began to rise in consumption. Ale-houses and other drinking establishments continued to rise with the increase in consumption. The government responded to this surge in drinking by raising prices and passing legislation to exercise control over this new industry. The alcohol industry responded and the volume of spirits manufactured actually rose enormously. By the early 19th century trade further increased the power of alcohol in society. Brewers and establishments that specialized in the sale of alcohol were able to import from Scotland and Ireland. New restrictions were put on alcohol consumption as the 19th century rolled in. Drinking beginning to be looked down upon in many circles instead of celebrated as it was in the prior century. Times were changing and so was alcohol.¹⁶²

All the changes that took place till present: trends in drinking a specific alcoholic drink, the appearance of new drinks, prohibition due to drinking in excess and its consequences are all recorded by the language in its sectors that are continuously updated and refreshed that is slang and colloquial speech.

Almost all the expressions coined to denote intoxication and intoxicated are among those that best highlight the creativity of slang. The boundless inventiveness in expressing the ordinary in not-so-ordinary ways led Walt Whitman to describe slang as "an attempt of common humanity to escape from bald literalism, and express itself illimitably."¹⁶³

¹⁶² Cf. *History of Alcohol*, see: www.ttb.gov/index/htm

¹⁶³ Walt Whitman, *November Boughs. Slang in America*; see: www.uiowa.edu/html

Colloquial and slang expressions meaning “intoxicated” can fill several pages in slang thesauruses. Most fall into a few general groups. Common are expressions that originally meant “damaged, badly affected by something,” such as *trashed*, *smashed*, *crooked*, *blitzed*, *hammered*, *wasted*, *messed up*, and *blasted*. Cooking-related terms are also common, such as *baked*, *fried*, and *boiled*. Terms relating to liquids or being filled are a natural source of metaphors for filling oneself up with drink or drugs: *sloshed*, *oiled*, *tanked*, and *loaded*. Then there are the words *pickled* and *stewed* that remind us what alcohol may well be doing to our internal organs. An unexpected member of this set is *soused*. Because it sounds like *doused*, it is easy to think that it's part of the group of words that really just mean full of drink - *tanked up*, *sauced*, *loaded*. Actually, it is not. *Soused* means “steeped in pickle” - and thus, also steeped in alcohol.

Some terms are not easily classified or have origins that are not fully clear, such as *tight* (first recorded in the 1830s)¹⁶⁴, *plastered* (first recorded around 1912)¹⁶⁵, *blotto* (perhaps from *blot*, first attested in 1905)¹⁶⁶, and *stoned* (apparently taken from such expressions as *stone-drunk*, *stone-cold*, and first recorded as *stone* in 1945)¹⁶⁷.

Another example is the term *booze*, whose origin is uncertain. One theory is that it comes from Old Dutch “buyzen” via Old English “bouse”. The literal meaning of these two words is “to drink deeply”. Another assumption is that it is a corruption of a German root for “to drink”. Still another hypothesis is that it comes from the name of Edmund G. Booz a Philadelphia importer and dealer of spirits who sold his goods in a distinctive bottle that resembled a two-story log cabin. These bottles came to be known as Booz bottles. This last theory is doubtful, as “booze” or some variant thereof has been around as far back as the 1500s.¹⁶⁸ A term that derived from *booze* is *boozy*, and it is one of Benjamin Franklin’s 228 synonyms for drunk. Both terms are still in use and they have preserved their initial meaning, fact that seems unusual for slang terms that often remain in the spoken language just for a few months or years.

A similar term is *juice* that is recorded as *juicy* by Benjamin Franklin. It is first attested in 1828 as meaning “liquor” but *juicy* has undergone a change in meaning and beginning with 1838 it means “lively, interesting”.¹⁶⁹

It is interesting to notice that almost all the terms included in *The Drinker’s Dictionary* written by Benjamin Franklin in 1733 are not considered slang anymore: either because they disappeared or they have got new meanings by undergoing different changes of meaning. A few of them (Robert Chapman appreciated that at present there are only 15 slang terms in use)¹⁷⁰ succeeded in surviving and they still can be found in slang dictionaries.

Most current terms for “intoxicated” are not very old, as one expects of slang terms generally; of those in the lists above, *blotto*, *crooked*, *fried*, *loaded*, *plastered*, *tanked*, *tight*,

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Online Etymology Dictionary; see: www.etymonline.com

¹⁶⁵ *Idem, ibidem*

¹⁶⁶ *Idem, ibidem*

¹⁶⁷ *Idem, ibidem*

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *The Drunktionary*, see: www.freaky-freya.tripod.com

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Online Etymology Dictionary; see: www.etymonline.com

¹⁷⁰ Robert Chapman, *Thesaurus of American Slang*, William Collins and Sons Co.Ltd, Glasgow, 1989, p. 191

and *oiled* are recorded in the first half of the 20th century, and of these only *tight* and *oiled* are known to have existed before then.

Some of these, such as *loaded* and *full*, are a little old-fashioned now; but they are still understood. Others, such as *cock-eyed* and *oiled*, which are included in *The Drinker's Dictionary* compiled by Benjamin Franklin seem to be enjoying a new popularity. It is interesting to note that one hears nowadays rarely of people going on *sprees*, *toots*, *tears*, *jags*, *bats*, *brannigans* or *benders*. All these terms suggest, not merely drunkenness, but also an exceptional occurrence, a breaking away by the drinker from the conditions of his normal life. It is possible that their partial disappearance is mainly because this kind of fierce and protracted drinking has now become universal, an accepted feature of social life instead of a disreputable escapade.

On the other hand, the vocabulary of social drinking, as exemplified by this list, seems to have become extremely rich: one gets the impression that more nuances are nowadays discriminated, than it was the case before Prohibition. Thus, *fried*, *stewed* and *boiled* all convey distinctly different ideas; and *cock-eyed*, *plastered*, *oiled*, *embalmed* and *ossified* evoke quite different images. *Featured* is a theatrical word, which here refers to a stage at which the social drinker is inspired to believe strongly in his ability to sing a song, to tell a funny story or to execute a dance; *organized* is properly applied to a condition of thorough preparation for a more or less formidable evening; and *blotto*, of English origin, denotes a state of blank.

There are hundreds of slang words to describe the state of inebriation, perhaps more than there are for anything else. Mostly, it's easy to see where they come from due to their feature of being descriptive. *Pie-eyed*, for example, indicates being so intoxicated that your eyes are popping. *Jarred* and *canned* both refer to the act of drinking, while a great deal of vocabulary is mobilised to depict the physical wreckage of anyone who has seen the bottom of too many bottles of wine. But slang consists not only in single words but also in expressions that are loaded with metaphorical meanings. *Three sheets to the wind* means as somebody to be very drunk. In nautical speech, *sheets* are ropes attached to sails and are let out or pulled in to adjust the sails' positions. If they (and therefore the sails) are flapping loose they are said to be *in the wind*; the result is the loss of control. A drunken person, experiencing a similar disorientation, was therefore said to be 'a sheet in the wind'; if one was *three sheets in the wind* the state of drunkenness was deeper.¹⁷¹

It was an ancient notion that drunken persons exhibited the vicious qualities of beasts. Thus the association with animals in the expression *bestly drunk* is not arbitrary. In fact, *bestly* functions more like an intensifier and it can be considered synonymous with *blind* and *dead* from the similar expressions: *blind drunk* and *dead drunk*.

The picture which slang and colloquialisms create for semi-professional alcohol users is mainly negative: references to such creatures as *barfly* and *booze*, *hooch*, *gin hound* are just a few common examples; and the connection between heavy alcohol use and poor financial status is pointed out with expressions using "bum", such as *rumbum*, *barrel house bum* and *stewbum*.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *The Drunktionary*, see: www.freaky-freya.tripod.com

The expressions *power drinker* and *big drunk* are about the closest thing to describing a person's excessive alcohol consumption in a positive light, and even if they do not exactly claim respect.

Drunk is considered by Robert Chapman to be one of the "most prolific of slang concepts, probably because drunkenness has proffered the most persistent need of euphemism, both clever and defensive"¹⁷². In fact, it is a measure of the robustness of the drinking culture that they invent new synonyms all the time.

Thus a drunk person can be called: alkied, aped, bagged, basted, belted, bashed, blotto, bender, bombed out, bombed, blasted, baxed, buzzed, buzzy, banjo'd, bevved, bobbed, basted behind the corn, bloated, blowed away, blue, boracho, bottled, baxed, bunned, crocked, corked, cocked, coaked, caged, canned, clobbered, cock-eye, corned, crashed, cronk, crumped out, edged, embalmed, fried, full as a boot, feel no pain, flying high, fried to the gills, fuzzled, groggified, ginned, glassy-eyed, glazed, gone, gouged, grogged, half seas over, half-cut, half-pissed, half-cracked, half-lit, half-shot, half-stewed, half-bagged, half-corned, half in the bag, have a skinful, intoxicated, inebriated, illuminated, juiced, juicehead, knocked out, lashed, loaded, lubed, muddled, mulled, mortalled, ossified, oiled, on the shikker, palatic, pissed, pie-eyed, plotzed, skunked, snickered, soused, steamed, stinko, smoked, steamboats, steaming, stewed, stinking, seeing pink elephants, shaved, slugged, trashed, totaled, toasted, twisted, three sheets to the wind, tight, under the influence/the table, up to ears/eyeballs/gills, zorched, zonked, zonker, walloped, waxed, wiped, wiped out, woozy; and the list can continue.

But there are certain degrees of drunkenness.

After *chugging* (drinking quickly) or *downing a half-rack* or maybe a whole *two-four* (a whole case of beer, 24 beers) with a couple of friends, one can assume safely that he / she will be well on his / her way to becoming *loaded*. A few more hours of *boozing*, *hitting the bottle* and *throwing them back*, and he / she is probably rather *fucked up* or *86'd*, *wrecked* or *sloshed* (very drunk).

The state of being very drunk develops also a large number of terms: arsehole, bladdered, blid, blind drunk, blitzed, blotto, battered, bollocks off, caned, cunted, cunt-face, rat-arsed, shashed, shedded, slaughtered, trolleyed, wankered, well gone, wellied, kaylied, legless, munted, out of it, plastered, polluted, pissed. It is not the same situation with the terms expressing the state of extremely drunkenness; and this is because that not too many drinkers succeed in reaching that level: glorious, hammered, mauled, paralytic, wasted, fool as a goog, go over the edge with, off one's head.

In most countries, the alcoholic drinks are consumed within a pub or restaurant. Pubs have much to do with habit and repetition and they may offer a real sense of continuity, regularity and order. They are the "third place" which is not work and not home: rather a public place where people can easily meet, relax and interact. For some people, the pub is the epicenter of social life, reflecting the socio-economic ethos of its host community. Thus, the pub both helps to create and to reflect the society around it.

While pubs may be seen as many things, they are pre-eminently places where alcohol is consumed. This helps to define the meaning of pubs. Furthermore, they have tended to be associated with the consumption of particular types of alcohol being named *ale house*, *gin*

¹⁷² Robert Chapman, *op. cit.*, p.190-191

palace or *gin parlor*, but during the time they have got interesting and sometimes strange names: *ballon car*, *bloodhouse*, *boozier*, *beanery*, *bean wagon*, *chilli joint*, *dog wagon*, *doughnut factory* (variations: *doughnut foundry*, *doughnut house*, *doughnut joint*), *dump*, *eatery*, *fillmill bar*, *gargle factory*, *gin palace* (variations: *gin parlor*), *groggery*, *grog-mill*, *guzzlery*, *guzzle shop*, *greasy spoon*, *grease joint*, *hoochery*, *hashery*, *hash foundry*, *hashouse*, *waterhole* and *watering place*.

The members of the community that a pub gathers around have also special names: *brandy-face*, *boozehound*, *boozier*, *bar fly* (heavy drinker), *booze-fighter*, *booze-freak*, *bottle-man*, *caner*, *dipso*, *elbow bender* (heavy drinker), *geek*, *ginhead*, *ginhound*, *hooch-hound*, *loadie*, *lusher*, *lushwell*, *piss artist* or *merchant*, *piss-head*, *roistered*, *sponge*, *shikker*, *stewbum*, *sot* and *wino*.

According to Horia Hulban, “in the field of slang words, the law of synonymic attraction is very active. According to this law, certain subjects, and especially those denoting things which provoke very different connotations, attract several words to denote the same thing.”¹⁷³

Due to this law, the number of slang terms in this field increases every day, because the speaker has the possibility of choosing from rather similar terms consisting sometimes in very delicate nuances. Thus, the action of drinking is seen as: *all-day sucker*, *bung one's eyes*, *bend an elbow*, *booze*, *can*, *chug-a-lug*, *croak the elbow*, *drink with the flies*, *dip the bill*, *down a few*, *fight a bottle*, *gargle*, *have a few*, *have a dram*, *have a gargle*, *hit the booze / the bottle / the sauce*, *have a bag on / an edge on / a load on*, *irrigate*, *lap up*, *liquor up*, *on the razz / razzle / razzle-dazzle*, *swill*, *swill like a tinker*, *sup*, *swig*, *slug down*, *slurp*, *souse*, *tank up*, *tip the elbow*, *toss off*, *wet one's whistle*.

Most of the expressions mentioned above are beautiful euphemisms that are meant to replace inappropriate expressions.

The language of special fields contains a great deal of euphemisms, especially if the field in question is involved in criminal activities or has something else to hide. Hundreds of euphemistic expressions have developed to refer to things like drunkenness. These expressions are mainly a source of humor: *drink with the flies*, *dip the bill*, *down a few*, *fight a bottle*, or *wet one's whistle*.

Euphemisms also help us to cope with troublesome situations, and many of them are a source of laughter. As euphemistic expressions evolve in the course of time and new euphemisms emerge to replace the old ones, they also help to keep the language diversity alive.

Sound is sometimes used as a basis for slang, as for example in various phonetic distortions, but it is also used in rhyming slang, which employs a fortunate combination of both sound and imagery. Thus: *elephant's trunk* (drunk), *Jack Tarr* (bar), *near and far* (bar), *Wally Grout* (shout) or *rub-a-dub-dub* are a colourful presence in the language used by drinkers.

Phonetic distortions can be found in expressions, such as: *brew-ha-ha* (meaning can of beer) that comes from *brouhaha*, first attested in 1890 and said to have been, in medieval

¹⁷³ Horia Hulban, *Syntheses in English Lexicology and Semantics*, Editura Spanda, Iași, p. 214

theatre, "the cry of the devil disguised as clergy."¹⁷⁴ A series of reduplicative and repletion compounds include words in which, with the shifting of a consonant, some special rhyme is obtained: *have-a-dub-dub* and *hob-nob*.

Clippings are also numerous within slang, mainly because it represents a modern way of creating new words: *dipso* comes from *dipsomania*; *barkeep* for *barkeeper*, *bo* for *hobo* and *hoak* for *hoakum*.

Other slang popular terms are those created by blending which became a very productive means of word creation in modern English: *blotch* from *blot* + ***botch*** or ***patc***; *doggerly* from *dog*+*groggerly*.

Abbreviations are also present as a means of verbal economy, being used by persons who have a taste for expressing themselves very quickly and in a very succinct way: BYOB for Bring Your Own Bottle or Bring Your Own Booze; CBW for Cold Beer and Wine; B&W for Beer and Wine, etc.

Finally, clichés and expressions give us many wonderful figures of speech and words in the English language: *aqua vitae* (metaphor) is a general term for distilled beverages, usually brandy; *hot waters* (metaphor) used to be grain whiskey and other distilled drinks; *blind drunk* is an expression for very drunk; *drunk as a skunk*, *drunk as a sailor* *drunk as a Cooter Brown* (similes), *too drunk to drive* are all clichés for being drunk.

The origin and derivations of clichés illustrate the ever-changing complexity of language and communication.

As a conclusion, I may say that slang expressions are created by the same processes that affect ordinary speech. Expressions may take the form of metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech (*drunk as a skunk*, *drunk as a newt*). Words may acquire new meanings (*slops*, *slosh* - by degradation of meaning). Words may be clipped, or abbreviated (*dipso*, *pub*), and acronyms may gain currency (BYOB). A foreign suffix may be added (the Spanish suffix "-o" like in *stingo* or *bosko*) and foreign words adopted (*boracho* from Spanish). A change in meaning may make a vulgar word acceptable or an acceptable word vulgar, and sometime words are newly coined (*bluuuuggghhh* for to vomit). All these new words are nothing else than the constituent elements of a specific vocabulary that actively brings its contribution to the development of a well-established culture – that of drinkers.

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¹⁷⁴ Cf. *The Drunktionary*, see: www.freaky_freya.tripod.com
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