

# Subcultures jargon

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## **Subcultures Jargon**

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## Abstract

This thesis describes a special bond created between the members of various subcultures and the language they use. Special jargon expressions can be associated with particular marginal social groups.

There are four major subcultures discussed in this thesis with a special reference to the jargon expressions they use in their everyday communication. These subcultures are: football hooligans subculture, heavy metal subculture, biker subculture, and homebrewers subcultures. What connects these four groups is the abundance of the jargon expressions they operate with.

In order to use jargon appropriately, one must acknowledge the difference between the jargon and the slang, so that this issue will be taken up in the thesis as well.

Key words: *jargon, subculture, slang*

## 1. Introduction

The main object of this thesis is to acknowledge the importance of jargon expressions for the communication of most subcultures. By defining jargon and discussing the main behavioural patterns of subcultures, this thesis proves that there is a great bond between the members of those marginal social groups and the language they use.

In chapter 2, the main purpose is to define jargon and distinguish it from the slang.

Chapter 3 deals with non-normative social groups, i.e. subcultures. It covers some of the reasons for the existence of those groups in the contemporary society, and also explains some of the typical patterns of behaviour which can be associated with subcultures.

Chapter 4 defines four major subcultures and lists some of the expressions they usually use.

## 2. Defining Jargon

Jargon is, by definition, "terminology associated with a particular academic, professional or other area or activity" (Murray, 2012:147).

Although similar to slang, jargon can be distinguished by its more formal use of language. The main reason for that is its usage – it is widely used among members of a certain trade or a profession, and therefore it conveys more formal connotations.

Most jargon expressions are cryptic to those who are not members of that particular group. Therefore, "the excessive use of jargon may cause irritation of the outsiders if they feel that they have a right to understand the speech of the professionals (e.g. in law or medicine) " (Masaitiené, 2009:35). Some people use jargon to show their dominance and superiority over those who are ranked lower on the social or professional scale.

Jargon has a particularly interesting role in the social life of subcultures. It bonds members of those sub-groups together, and provides the generally appreciated sense of belonging and unity.

Some subcultures, for example the hacker subculture, even have their own dictionaries that show the variety of the jargon expressions they operate with.

### 3. Subcultures

"Subcultures are groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do and where they do it." (Gelder, 1997:1)

Most members of various subcultures are fully aware of their marginalism, and they tend to emphasize, either by clothes or behaviour, that they are not conventional in any sense.

New types of subcultures usually emerge during some social crises – such as inflation, war, or increasing poverty. They are created in order to express the growing dissatisfaction with people who currently rule the society, and with the decisions they make. The most obvious example of such strong social response in form of a subculture is the hippie movement of the mid 1960's. Their anti-war protests increased the public awareness of the cruelty of the war in Vietnam.

However, most subcultures were created because of the simple human need – to belong to a group of people who share the same views on life. For instance, punk subculture emerged as a social protest – its members are usually young people who do not want to follow conventional patterns of behaviour. They disrespect authorities and have different goals in life. They also have nonconventional taste in music and clothing, and they are quite expressive when it comes to language.

Some subcultures that are prone to violence usually have a specific usage of language. In that case language becomes "a performative description: that act of speech which both articulates and acts, such as the violent language of the skins or punks that is both violent in its expression and in its action" (Scott-Myhre, 2008:37).

Due to their non-conformist behaviour, most members of the contemporary subcultures have to fight prejudice and rejection. They usually feel secluded from the rest of the society that does not want to accept their differences. That can lead to social anxiety and deviant behaviour.

All subcultures have an expressive and unique style – whether associated with music, clothes, language, or behaviour.

Language is particularly important for social interaction between members of the same subculture. By creating unique and distinctive expressions, those members express unity and the sense of fellowship.

Jargon and slang, for example, have an enormous impact on the social structure of most subcultures. They provide a unique code of communication and emphasize subculture's individuality and distinctiveness.



#### 4. Methodology

Four major subcultures discussed in this paper – hooligans subculture, heavy metal subculture, biker subculture, and homebrewers subculture - were chosen because of their popularity among various social groups, and because they operate with significant number of jargon expressions. All these subcultures have had an important role in shaping contemporary urban society.

The main sources for collecting the corpus used in this thesis were various films, documentaries, songs, or forums which depict lives of these marginal groups.

Jargon expressions typical for hooligans' subculture were collected from movies such as: *The Football Factory*, *Green Street Hooligans* and *The Firm*.

The main sources for heavy metal corpus were movies: *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, *The School of Rock*, and *Hesher*. However, most expressions were conducted through personal experience and appreciation of that particular music genre.

Biker subculture was explored through the classic movie *Easy Rider*. Additionally, various biker forums and cyber communities have helped to expand biker glossary, but also through personal experience and connections with the local biker community.

The information needed for the homebrewers subculture and its jargon was conducted through American Homebrewers Association.

I have chosen those specific lexemes, discussed further in the paper, because they provide basic introduction to these four subcultures. They also show how highly developed and interesting these subcultures are. I will provide my own explanations of those jargon expressions, along with the sociolinguistic background.

## 5. Different Subcultures and Their Jargon

### 5.1. Football Hooligans Subculture

For most men football is the sport of honour, passion, and devotion. However, one cannot ignore the ever-present violence that is commonly associated with this particular sport. Football fanatics, also known as football hooligans, are known for their violent behaviour during, or after football matches. "The word itself, hooligan, was coined by a journalist who played on the name of a particularly violent Irish family of the Victorian era – the Hoolihans – to designate the violent behaviour then observed. After the word-play, a printing error slipped in, replacing the *h* by a *g*, the two letters being side by side on the keyboard, and the term hooliganism was born." (Bodin, Héas, Robène, 2004:2)

Some football fans become so enchanted with this lifestyle that they are willing to sacrifice everything they have in order to show their dedication to their favourite football team.

Although this type of hooliganism is considered to be a disease of the modern society, it is evident that the violent behaviour of football fans is as old as the game itself. "The idea of football hooliganism might seem to be a new phenomenon, yet it has roots in the age-old masculine pursuit of revelry." (Armstrong, 1998:6)

Football was even banned several times in the past few centuries, for example in 1314 when it was "banned in London in an attempt to preserve public tranquillity, for it was feared the tumult and disorder surrounding these games might well give occasion to the forces of sedition and treason" (ibid.:6). However, this, and similar attempts to ban football have been futile due to the passionate devotion of football fans. Armstrong explains why this particular game is so popular even after all these years by saying: "Football is the arena wherein men can hold opinions on everything, enact various levels of emotional turmoil and shout at the TV with mates" (ibid.: 13).

In a contemporary world, football hooliganism is wide-spread and highly influential type of deviant behaviour. Many young people often decide to join football firms in order to construct a sense of identity – this behaviour being typical for all subcultures.

## 5.2. Football Hooligans Jargon

Like all the other subcultures, throughout the years, football hooligans have developed their own language. It represents an important part of their identity, especially in England where football is the part of the nation's tradition.

This paper will present some of the most common expressions used among British football fans.

*A game of two halves*: expression used to describe games that have a different character in the two halves.

*A man's game*: alternative name for football. Related to beliefs coined in patriarchal society – that men are stronger and more capable than women. It also has a historical reference, because football was originally played by men.

*Away game*: if a team plays in a city/town other than their own, the game is called the away game. Football fans expose themselves to a great danger if they follow their team to the away games. On those occasions they are usually outnumbered by the local fans, and therefore more likely to suffer from injuries if the cheering turns to violence.

*Derby/local derby*: a sports match between two rival teams from the same area. (OXFORD) It usually includes strong emotions between the two rivals, and often has violent outcome.

*Draw* - The process of placing various teams in groups before a certain competition, such as The Champion's League. Football fans consider this to be a crucial process which determines the course of the competition.

*Football firm/Hooligan firm*: an organized group of football supporters known for their aggressive attitudes towards rival fans. (OXFORD) Members of these firms are devoted fans of their favourite football team, and their membership is usually life-long. They usually meet at the local bars/pubs to discuss their team's previous or upcoming games. Some football firms are notorious for their violent behaviour - for example Gooners who are Arsenal F.C. supporters.

*Goalie*: informal name for a goalkeeper.

*Ground*: alternative name for the football stadium.

*Home game*: if a team plays in their own town/city, the game is called a home game. The team serves as a host, and is therefore called home team. It is usually believed that the home team is more likely to win, due to the number of fans cheering for it, and the general domestic atmosphere.

*Off-the-pitch contest*: a term used for a fight between the two rival groups of football hooligans, which takes place off the field, usually after the game.

*PMS* (pre-match stress): anxiety experienced both by the players and the fans on the day of the match.

*Their boys/lads*: an expression used to address the fans of the rival football team. Some football fans tend to address their rivals with more derogatory names. For example, fans of the Sheffield United FC call their rivals, the Sheffield Wednesday fans, the Pigs.

*The twelfth man*: football fans/hooligans usually use this term to refer to themselves. Since football game consists of eleven players on each team, being the twelfth man means that there is a great bond between the fans and their favourite team.

*The old guard*: a term used for football players who have been members of a certain team for a long time, and have a strong reputation among the audience.

*Thug*: a term for football hooligan used in Britain.

*To be robbed*: phrase used to express disapproval of the game's final result.

### 5.3. Heavy Metal Subculture

This controversial music genre emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s combining various genres of rock music, such as garage, psychedelic, and blues rock. Because it developed from the music of the youth culture of the 1960s, "heavy metal carried forward the attitudes, values, and practices that characterized the Woodstock generation. It appropriated blue jeans, marijuana, and long hair. It put rock stars on pedestals, adopted a distrust of social authority, and held that music was a serious expression and that authenticity was an essential moral virtue of rock performers" (Weinstein, 2000:18).

Although it has been widely acknowledged by music critics and audience all over the world, heavy metal is usually associated with Satanism, violence, and danger. Its fans are therefore considered to be social outcasts and they fight prejudice on daily bases.

"The level of mistrust and panic that heavy metal caused in America even resulted in the prosecution of Heavy metal musicians." (Sinclair, 2011:4) This happened because many people believe that the lyrics of heavy metal songs bear cryptic subliminal messages that are created to control the minds of the masses. Such paranoid statements are usually created by worried parents, or more likely, by the commercial music machinery that resents anything that does not appeal to the masses.

However, some experts on social behaviour claim that metal music is generally beneficial for those who enjoy it. It is believed to provide a crucial sense of belonging to the group, especially for teenagers who are still on the quest for personal identity. In his study of this particular subculture, Gary Sinclair claims that the behaviour of heavy metal fans on concerts is in a way cathartic because "the combination of internal and external controls allows for the fans to generate and release tension" (ibid.:13).

Whether approved by society or not, heavy metal subculture is strongly present throughout the world. Its fans have created a unique jargon, which concentrates mostly on heavy metal music and behaviour related to that music.

#### 5.4. Heavy Metal Jargon

Some of the most popular expressions used by heavy metal fans are:

*Band's logo*: "Logos serve to identify the band both visually and verbally, since most of them present the band's name in stylized letterings." (Weinstein, 2000:27). Although each band has a unique logo, they follow a certain pattern. Dominant colours are black and red, and certain typefaces, such as round ones are avoided because they "communicate an image of softness" (ibid.:27).

*Button pin*: a necessary addition to every metal fan's apparel. These button pins usually depict album covers of various metal bands, or their official logos.

*Cloth patch*: fans often wear cloth patches on their jackets, bags or trousers in order to show their dedication to a certain band.

*Combat boots/combat*s: boots that resemble those worn by professional soldiers. They often have steel inserts in their soles. Most popular shoe brand among heavy metal fans is Dr. Martens.

*Crowd surfing*: the activity of being passed in a prone position over the heads of the audience at a rock concert, typically after having jumped from the stage. (OXFORD)

*Gig*: smaller show usually performed by less popular bands. Gigs usually mark the beginning of certain band's career.

*Metal fist/devil's horns/sign of the horns*: a hand gesture made by raising the index and pinkie finger, while other fingers are pressed to the palm. This gesture was popularized by Black Sabbath.

*Metalhead/headbanger/thrasher*: different terms used for fans of heavy metal music.

*Moshing*: an activity that occurs in front of the stage at a rock/metal concert, and consists mostly of fans pushing and slamming into each other.

*Mosh pit*: an area in front of the stage at a rock concert, where moshing occurs. (OXFORD) Many people argue that mosh pit is dangerous, even life threatening, because of the amount of violence that occurs in that particular area. However, fans are aware of the unique code of behaviour which prevents them from doing anything that could really hurt people around them. If one should involve in *moshing*, he/she must be fully aware of the rules that have to be obeyed. The most important rule is that anyone who falls during moshing has to be picked up by the fans that surround them. "This idea looks to ensure the safety of the pit whilst concurrently it reinforces the sense of comradely fans feel by partaking in these rituals together." (Sinclair, 2011:10) Furthermore "spitting, elbowing, punching and trying to hurt anyone in anyway are not allowed" (ibid.:10).

*Poser*: a derogatory term used for a person who only appears to be a true metal fan.

*The wall of death*: a pattern of behaviour at heavy metal concerts where bands, through tempo of the songs they play, dictate the behaviour of the crowd. Some bands have certain songs that evoke this type of behaviour. Throughout this ritual, the strong bond is created between the crowd and their favourite band, and that creates a special atmosphere that all successful heavy metal concerts have. "The fans may know how to act in certain parts of songs through experience but the band has the responsibility of orchestrating the rituals through their music." (ibid.:12) However, in small uncontrolled spaces, the wall of death can be lethal. Therefore it is officially banned in the United States.

*To sell out*: an expression used by heavy metal fans when they want to criticise a certain band for abandoning their principles in order to gain wealth or popularity.

## 5.5. Biker Subculture

"The motorcycle roared into life in 1884, with the three-wheeled variety the first to hit the road, followed by its two-wheeled cousin, a motorised bicycle, the following year." (Veno, 2010:15) Since then, throughout the world, motorcycle lovers have formed interesting and rather complex subculture which is tightly bound to rock and roll music, freedom, and speed. Some people even believe that the act of riding a motorcycle is a form of spiritual ceremony because "motorcycling forces riders to transcend their egos—to empty themselves and exist in the world around them" (Holmstrom, 2002:6).

In the 1950's motorcycles were usually connected with outlaws and violence, and were considered socially unacceptable. Even in the contemporary society many people believe that only gang members and social outcasts ride motorcycles. However, films such as *From a Wild One* and *Easy Rider* contributed to positive social affirmation of the biker subculture.

Some advantages of choosing a motorcycle over a car in urban areas are its size, mobility, and fuel efficiency.

Whether riding on chopper, sportbike, or dirtbike, all bikers have one thing in common – their passionate love for motorcycles. There is a great bond between a motorcycle and its owner. "Owning a motorcycle is a much more intimate experience than owning a car or pickup truck, perhaps because you meld into the machine when you ride, your body encasing the mechanical heart of the bike. You become part of the machine. You ride just inches away from the engine, the source of your bike's power, and you feel and hear the internal-combustion event more directly than is possible in an enclosed vehicle." (ibid.:45)

The most important part of the biker community are motorcycle clubs which emerged shortly after the World War II. There are many advantages to being a club member because "structured clubs allow motorcyclists to pool resources and achieve things individual bikers could not" (ibid.:260). Biker subculture is one of the most important social groups of the modern world. It has a unique code of behaviour, and, more importantly, a unique language which will be discussed in this paper.



## 5.6. Biker Jargon

*Ape hangers*: term used for motorcycles that have high handlebars. On such bikes, riders are forced to raise their hands toward the sky, which results in riders adopting an ape-like posture. This term was copy-righted by the major chopper producer – Harley-Davidson.

*A touring bike*: motorcycle devised for a long-distance rides. These bikes often include additional equipment, such as saddle bags.

*Chopper*: although this term was originally used for motorcycles who were faster because their superfluous parts have been chopped off, today it "refers to a type of custom that usually has an extended fork, no rear suspension, and high handlebars" (Holmstrom, 2002:31).

*Dirtbike*: motorcycles produced solely for the off-road purposes. They are mainly used in off-road races, and are not recommended for beginners.

*Dual-sport motorcycles*: "Street-legal motorcycles with varying degrees of off-road capabilities." (ibid.:28) These bikes are produced mostly by Japanese motorcycle companies, such as Honda or Suzuki.

*Fairings*: "The devices mounted at the front of a motorcycle to protect the rider from the elements." (ibid.:37) Fairings add up to the bike's practicality, as well as its appearance.

*Gearhead*: alternative name for motorcyclist, especially one that is highly interested in mechanics. "Motorcyclists tend to be *gearheads*. We love looking at our motorcycles almost as much as we love riding them." (ibid.:4)

*High-siding*: a type of motorcycle crash where a person riding the bike starts to slide in one direction, than flips over in the opposite direction. " When you high-side the bike, you flip it by releasing the brake while skidding and allowing the tire to regain traction, jerking the motorcycle in the opposite direction. " (ibid.:147)

*Knucklehead*: a type of a motorcycle that has valve covers that look like knuckles. They were first introduced in 1936.

*Lane splitting*: "Refers to the practice of riding between lanes of traffic on a freeway. While this practice may sound dangerous, studies indicate that it might actually be safer than idling along in a traffic jam." (ibid.:11) This practice is of great help to most experienced riders. By lane splitting, riders can avoid traffic jams and travel faster. However, it is illegal in many countries and should not be practised by less experienced riders.

*Laying the bike down*: a type of motorcycle crash where a person riding the bike slides down on one side of the bike. This type of crash is usually less dangerous than the others.

*Leviathan*: term used for multi-cylinder dual-sport motorcycles because of their magnificent size and weight.

*Orphan bikes*: rare old-timers that are no longer produced. These bikes are of great value to all motorcycle lovers.

*Panhead*: a type of a motorcycle that has valve covers that look like upside-down cake pans. They were first introduced in 1948.

*Shovelhead*: a type of a motorcycle that has valve covers that look like shovels. They were first introduced in 1966.

*Sissy bar*: "The backrest put behind the passenger's portion of the saddle." (ibid.:408) Sissy bars are usually placed on choppers or touring bikes where comfort is highly valued.

*Sportbike*: a high-speed motorcycle that weighs less than other types of motorcycles in order to maintain speed. This type of motorcycle is usually produced by Japanese manufacturers, and is often used in professional motorcycle races.

*The contact patch*: the area of motorcycle's tire that is in direct contact with road during the ride.

## 5.7. Homebrewers Subculture

In the last fifteen years, homebrewing has become America's greatest leisure activity. Vast numbers of beer lovers all over the world have decided to brew their own beer, due to the simplicity and affordability of this interesting hobby.

Although it may seem that homebrewing is an activity performed by only small number of devoted beer appreciators, American Homebrewers Association in Boulder, Colorado estimates that there are 1 million Homebrewers in the United States.

The art of homebrewing is ancient – its roots can be traced to the great Egyptian civilisation which believed that "beer was invented by Osiris, one of the most important of their deities, whose principal associations were with fertility, death and resurrection" (Hornsey, 2003:33).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century homebrewing was especially popular in England, where ale consumption became part of the English tradition.

Today, the members of the homebrewing subculture have re-invented this interesting beverage, making it more complex and appealing than ever before. The diversity of flavours, enhanced quality, and passionate dedication is what makes home brewed beer so much better than the mass-produced one. More importantly, "as a homebrewer you give yourself and the people who you know a *choice*: not only to brew the kind of beer that *you* like, but also the opportunity to feel and understand what beer is all about" (Papazian, 1991:11).

Since homebrewing is an activity that combines different ingredients and procedures, homebrewers have developed their own language which enables them to communicate more efficiently.

## 5.8. Homebrewers Jargon

*Brewpot*: a pot made of various materials, used for brewing beer. It is best to use 100 percent stainless steel pot, since those made of porcelain-covered steel, or aluminium will "eventually chip and the now-exposed cheaper steel will rust and contribute a metallic taste and possibly contaminate your beer" (Calagione, 2006:31).

*Dry hopping*: in order to achieve a certain hop aroma, one must add hops to the beer. This process takes place after the primary fermentation. It is recommended to use hop plugs instead of the whole hops, since they are more compact, and therefore more convenient to use.

*Hydrometer*: "A hydrometer is an instrument that measures the density (thickness) of liquids relative to the density of water. This measure of density is known as the specific gravity." (Papazian, 1991:25) The specific gravity of the beer becomes lower when yeast eats the sugars, converting them to alcohol. It is important to use a hydrometer not only on the brew day, but also in the final stages of fermentation to see if the beer has reached its final specific gravity.

*Malt*: "The word *malt* generally refers to the natural maltose sugars derived from certain grains (mainly barley) that eventually become beer." (Nachel, 2008:43) The process of malt-making can be quite complicated for the beginners, therefore many homebrewers use commercially produced malt syrup.

*Noble hops*: various types of hop which have been cultivated for centuries and therefore have a great value. They add special aroma to certain beers and are usually very expensive. Some noble hop types are "Hallertauer, Hersbrucker, Spalt, and Tettnanger in Germany; Saaz from Bohemia in the Czech Republic; and Styrian from the former Yugoslavia" (ibid.:57).

*pH papers*: an absolutely necessary item in the mashing process. These papers are disposable, and they measure the acidity and alkalinity of the water used in the process of making beer.

*Specialty grains:* "Specialty grains allow the brewer to add all kinds of colours, flavours, and textures to beer, therefore providing a variety of visual, aromatic, and taste enhancements." (ibid.:45). They are highly important ingredient in the beer-making process, since they provide variety of tastes, flavours, and colours. Without specialty grains there would only be a limited number of distinctive beer styles.

*Specialty grain bags:* bags used when steeping specialty grains in the water. They are quite convenient since they strain out the barley solids after the steeping is done. Usually they come in the form of "little cheesecloth or nylon bags that hold about 1 pound (455 g) or so of specialty grains" (Calagione, 2006:31).

*Stirring spoon:* " (...) a long spoon made from either stainless steel or rigid, unmeltable plastic." (ibid.:31) It is not wise to use the wooden ones, since they can carry various bacteria which can spoil beer.

*Yeast:* "Yeast is the organism that eats sugars in order to create alcohol." (ibid.:60) There are various types of yeast, all of which contribute to specific profiles of beer. "German wheat beer yeasts, for example, give clove and citrus notes to the beer while certain Belgian yeast strains give peppery, spicy notes, and English yeast strains can contribute an estery, fruity profile." (ibid.:60)

## 6. Conclusion

When exploring a certain subculture, one cannot ignore the importance of language, particularly jargon, for the social life of those marginal groups. Although subcultures often develop their own slang, it must be differentiated from the jargon, which is more formal way of communication.

Four major subculture discussed in this thesis have an abundance of jargon expressions which are highly useful in their everyday interaction.

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