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Common Youth Argot in Teaching of French as a Foreign Language in Higher Education

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the description of the status of French common youth argot and to the substantiation for including specific lexical continuum elements in French language teaching for future specialists in the field of translation, theory and methodology of teaching foreign languages and cultures. The relevance of the present research is due to the fact that the development of methods for working with argotic vocabulary is becoming increasingly important: specialized editions are published on a regular basis; textbooks of French as a foreign language contain a significant number of non-conventional lexemes, including argotisms.

The purpose of the study is to determine the mechanism for identifying the elements of an uncodified vocabulary and the most demanded content of the French common youth sociolect for its subsequent inclusion in the teaching of French as a foreign language in higher education. Corpus linguistics methods, including automated information retrieval, text searches in large corpora (concordances), as well as the comparative method were used. At the same time, the leading one was the matrix clustering method, developed on the basis of the sequential filter method, but differing from it by a convergent approach to language material collection.

The results obtained in the research allowed us to identify the most demanded common youth argotisms. The formed representative corpora of the French common youth argot lexemes can be successfully used to improve the level of professional skills of future teachers and translators of French. The collected language material will form the basis for the development of an elective or optional "French common youth argot" course at the language faculty.

Keywords: French as a foreign language, French common youth argot, elective course, convergent approach to collecting language material, method of matrix clustering.

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Introduction

The focus of this work, on the one hand, is on the common youth argot as a key component of the modern French language and, on the other hand, on the introduction of specific lexical continuum elements into the process of teaching French at the language faculty. The relevance of research is conditioned by the fact that the development of methods for working with the non-conventional lexical fund is now quite important, as it is evidenced by the regular publication of specialized editions (Petitpas, 2016; Venderesse, 2013, 2016) and the increasing volume and range of argotic lexemes, incorporated in textbooks of French as a foreign language.

It should be emphasized that the French common youth argot is primarily a form of youth protest against standardization. At the same time, by resorting to the argotic lexicon, young people are trying to gain popularity in their surroundings, to show an ironic attitude to the adult world, to create their own unique world. The vocabulary of this sociolect differs significantly from codified vocabulary and includes foreign-language and dialectal loanwords, general and professional argotisms.

Beregovskaya, the founder of the Russian school of argotology, noted at the beginning of the XXI century that in order for "students to understand today's lively French speech of their peers and the language of modern novels saturated with argotisms, that is, to master French argot at least passively, their teachers must know it very thoroughly" (Beregovskaya, 2011, p. 5).

According to the current recommendations of experts from the Council of Europe, including Russian specialists, the professional level of French (B2, C1-C2) should include the ability to read and understand substandard vocabulary. However, to date, there is still a problem of complete or partial misunderstanding of common youth argotic units related to the lexical fund.

It is this lexical fund that future French language teachers face in the context of dynamic intercultural communication. In terms of direct contacts and remote formats of communication, background knowledge and mastering of French common youth argot become even more actual and in high demand. Bachelor's and Master's students who study professionally French as a first or second foreign language encounter the problem of translation of argotisms in the process of communication with young native speakers, reading authentic texts, listening to songs, watching movies and broadcasting talk shows and other TV and radio programs. All of the above proves the need to include a common youth sociolect in the process of teaching French as a foreign language in higher education program in order to achieve a professional level of knowledge of the national language at the current stage of its development.

Purpose and objectives of the study

Purpose of the study is to determine the mechanism for identifying the elements of an uncodified vocabulary and the most demanded content of the French common youth sociolect for its subsequent inclusion in the teaching of French as a foreign language in higher education.

Literature review

The comprehensive nature of such a sociolect as common argot can be traced in the definition first introduced in 1990 by the authoritative French argotologist Denise François-Geiger: "This common argot adds another register of familiar sound to the national language, and we strongly doubt that there is even one person among those for whom French is the native language, 1) who has never used any of these words with the intonation of quotation marks; 2) who does not know these words" (François-Geiger, 1990, p. 33). It is interesting to mention that in 1991 the thesis of the Hungarian linguist David Szabó (Szabó, 1991), a disciple and follower of François-Geiger, was devoted to the common French argot.

It should be noted that the common argot is the basis for the formation of a common youth argot (*argot commun des jeunes*), which was first described by Alena Podhorná-Polická (Podhorná-Polická, 2007) and Anne-Caroline Fiévet (Fiévet, 2008). We share the conviction of these sociolinguists that the French common youth argot correlates with a layer of lexical units equally understood and used by young people, with a palette of local microargots. It is characterized by the following specific mechanisms of word formation: verlan, i.e., "the system model of argotic word formation" (Retinskaya, 2016, p. 245), syllables truncation, pun, abbreviation, word fusion, enantiosemy, synonymic substitution, and zero verbal flexion (Retinskaya, 2004). It is the lexemes formed by means of marked methods of argotic vocabulary formation that are encountered by students from language department who discover directly or indirectly French youth community.

As an established trend in the study of the oral speech of argotiers, the application of the method of successive filters (*méthode des filtres consécutifs*) is observed, the essence of which is to categorize registered argotisms belonging to a certain social group. This method was first proposed by Patricia Lambert (2000) and tested by Cyril Trimaille (2004), who called it (*méthode des filtres successifs*). Supporters of this method include Podhorná-Polická (2007) and Fiévet (2008), who, in the course of a comparative study of French and Czech youth argot and analysis of an argotic vocabulary recorded on French radio broadcasts, passed through several filters the entire corpora of the collected lexemes.

Sequential filtration of the non-conventional lexical fund by Podhorná-Polická (2007) includes five stages: 1) exclusion of normative lexical units from the registered lexical fund; 2) selection of expressive axiological and contextual lexemes; 3) selection of word forms fixed in dictionaries of common argot; 4) definition of lexemes related to the modern French language of suburbs (Podhorná-Polická (2007) calls it "common socioethnique argot" (*argot commun socio-ethnique*) to identify the first and second groups of argotisms, both dictionaries of youth argot from suburbs and dictionaries devoted to an inventory of common youth argot elements are used); 5) identification of lexical units created by representatives of the reference group under study.

Fiévet (2008), in her turn, using the method of successive filters, divided the fixed substandard layer of lexicon into four groups: 1) words, presented in "Le Petit Robert" dictionary; 2) words, fixed in traditional argot dictionaries; 3) words, reflected in modern French dictionaries of urban margins; 4) words, not presented in any of used dictionaries. The fourth group of lexemes is "a filtered sediment": neologisms not included in the argotographic works, or so-called situational (ad hoc) neoplasms.

As a brief excursion into the methods of collection and analysis of non-conventional lexical units used by European argotologists shows, the study of youth vocabulary must include field studies.

Methodology

The analysis of the above works on this problem has led to the recognition of the need to identify the most used lexical units of the French common youth sociolect, which could fill the gap in the education of future specialists of French.

In our work, we follow two directions of studying French argot identified in 2011 by Beregovskaya (2011). In the first one – lexicological direction, as a supporting reference material we applied the field work carried out within the framework of a large-scale linguistic project led by French sociolinguist Françoise Gadet (2019) thanks to which the young people's oral corpora "Multicultural Paris French" (*Français Parisien Multiculturel*) was collected. The corpora described above represents data on the living French language of young people that have been collected to study the impact of immigrants' languages on French. It is the result of the work of 24 interviewers who, by the end of 2019, interviewed about 230 speakers between the ages of 12 and 37 living in the Ile-de-France region and 4 Parisian districts. In terms of linguistic characteristics, the recordings were divided into 3 categories: traditional interviews, frank interviews, as well as conversations about environmental events (without interviewers). The received corpora have 133 records lasting from 6 to 153 minutes. Approximately 1.100.000 words were decrypted, anonymised and verified several times.

In the second – linguostylistic direction of the present study as a lexicographical source was taken "Glossary of verlan in French rap" by the Russian argotologist Debov (2015), who collected the corpora of oral (rap audio), script (cover, web sites) verlanisms found in the author' rap texts in French. The examples in the dictionary are represented by numerous quotes taken from the huge number of rap performers songs studied by the author. It should be noted that it is in the author's texts of rappers reflects, in our opinion, the whole spectrum of common youth argotisms, moreover, modern French rappers can be called with full confidence arbiters of verbal fashion among young people.

The specifics of processing the language material determined the novelty of the study, which manifested itself in two aspects:

1)   convergence of the above-mentioned directions of studying the argotic fund,

2)   comparison of two corpora of lexemes recorded in argotographic publications and collected in the course of field experiments. Subsequently, the sample of argotisms can be integrated into the process of teaching French as a foreign language in higher education in such disciplines as special course "Problems of social divergence", practical course of the French language, practical course of translation, and so on.

In this paper, corpus linguistics methods, including automated information retrieval, text searches in large corpora (concordances), as well as the comparative method were applied. At the same time, the leading one was the matrix clustering method, developed on the basis of the sequential filter method, but differing from it by a convergent approach in the choice of registered material and other list of criteria set by the vector of the study purpose. Here is a list of criteria used to create a representative corpora of French common youth argot:

-    frequency criterion (i.e., detection of the frequency of using common youth argot in communication with informants),

-    concordance criterion (identification of the part of the text or environment in which the described argotism occurs, and thanks to the environment of this word one can draw conclusions about the context of its use),

-    thematic criterion (identification of the most demanded argot attractive concepts),

-    youth argotism prevalence criterion (argotism is used in the speech of 2 or more social groups of youth environment).

Processing of the electronic corpora of youth speech "Multicultural Paris French" was carried out by means of the software program of Japanese developer Anthony Lawrence under the title AntConc (version 3.5.8, 2019). It's quite often used by the linguists working in the mainstream of corpus linguistics recognized in the modern scientific community. This software allowed us to go beyond the method of material systematization by means of manual filing and classifications traditionally used, for example, in Russian dialectology.

Results

The data obtained by the applied method of matrix clustering by AntConc provided an opportunity to quantitatively count the frequency of common youth argotisms, including their word forms. The following stages have been completed in order to achieve the above objective of the study:

1) compilation of a sample of clusters (reference words) most in demand in the oral speech of Parisian youth – Figure 1;
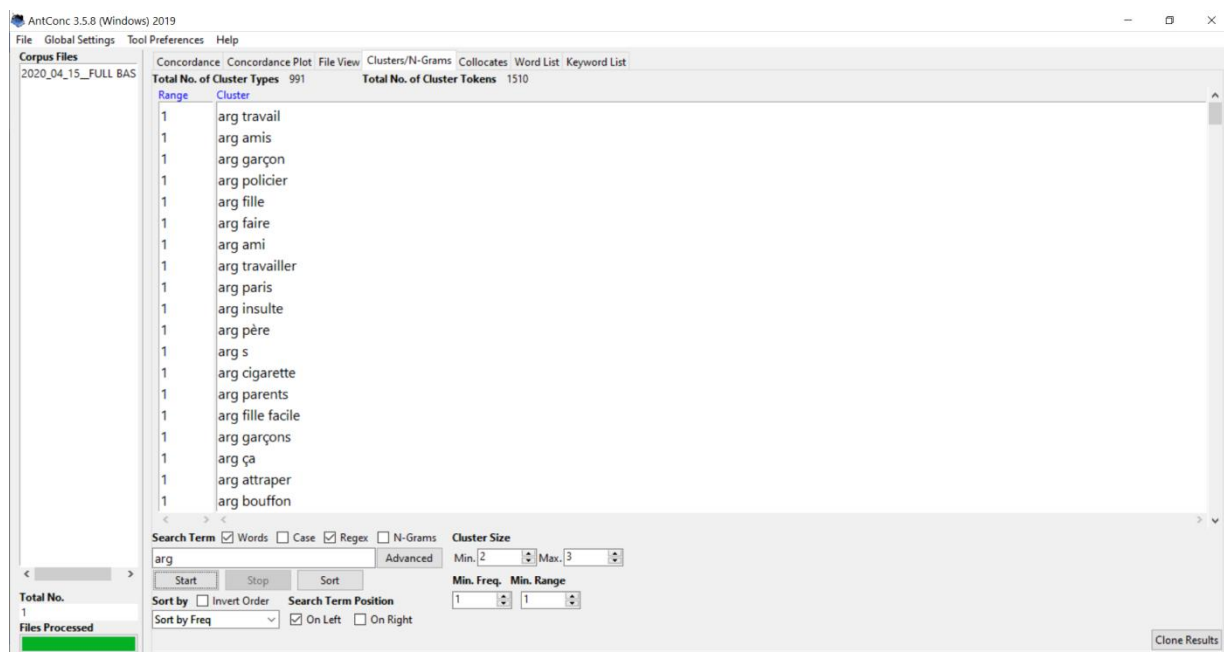

Figure 1. Selection of clusters (reference words and word groups) obtained through the AntConc software

2) determination of the most frequent argotisms belonging to the cluster from the list compiled at the first stage – Figure 2;
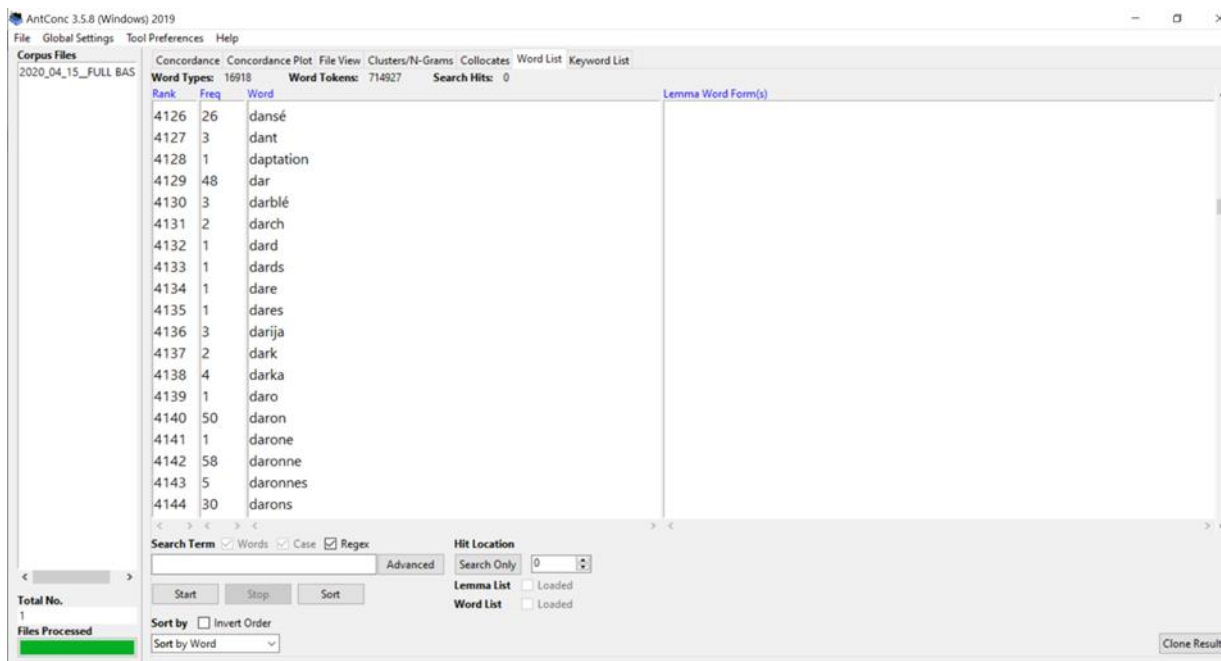
Figure 2. An example of a sample of the most frequent common youth argotism '*daron*(-s)' (m)/ '*daronne*(-s)' (f) obtained through the AntConc software

3) identification of all word forms among the most frequent argotisms found at the 2nd stage and verification of their lexical meaning by means of the concordance sampling - Fig. 3;
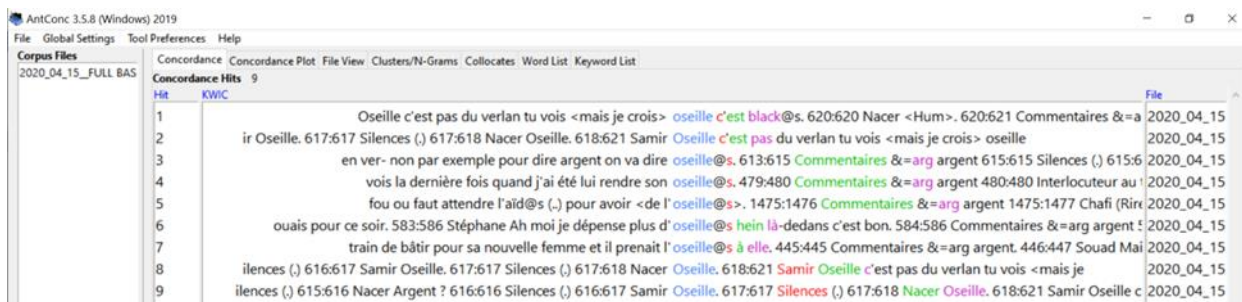

Figure 3. A sample of concordances for common youth argotism '*oseille*', obtained through the AntConc software

4) search for found lexemes in definitions of the rap glossary of Debov or in the examples quoted by him;

5) comparison of the representative French common youth argot with the content of the textbook *Le français informel en classe de langue* by the authoritative teacher of French as a foreign language Petitpas (2018).

Table 1. Matrix for the analysis of French common youth argotisms

№	MPF, 2019		Clusters (reference words)	Argotattractive concept	FVG, 2015	IVFC, 2018
	Lexeme	**Frequency**				
1	mec/ mecs (m)	522	ami/ garçon	Human	*– keum* widely used	+ (p. 162)
2	pote/ potes (m)	496	ami	Human	– cited in quotes	+ (p. 164)
3	wesh (ouèche, wèche)	464	salutation/ que se passe-t-il?	Human	– cited in quotes	–
4	meuf (f)	447	fille /femme	Human	+ very widely used	+ (p. 23, 164)
5	rebeu(-s)	316	arabe	Human	+ widely used	–
6	putain	170	insulte	Human	*– tainp* widely used	–
7	daron(-s) (m)/ daronne (-s) (f)	144	parent	Human	*– ronda* cited in quotes	–
8	bolos/ boloss	86	bouffon	Human	– cited in quotes	–
9	foutre	79	faire	Human	– cited in quotes	+ (p. 106, 118)
10	keuf (m)	71	policier	Human	+ very widely used	+ (p. 23)

11	chelou	61	louche	Human	+ widely used	−
12	taf (-fe) (m)	57	travail	Work	− cited in quotes	+ (p. 118)
13	Paname	27	Paris	City	− cited in quotes	−
14	clope (f)	26	cigarette	Human	*–peuclo* cited in quotes	+ (p. 32, 123)
15	lâcher	24	laisser tomber	Work	*– chéla* cited in quotes	−
16	chiant	24	penible	Human	− cited in quotes	+ (p. 177)
17	oim	22	moi	Human	+ rare	−
18	kiffer	20	aimer	Human	− cited in quotes	+ (p. 166, 171…)
19	calculer qn	17	faire attention	Human	−	+ (p. 162)
20	pécho	17	attraper/ draguer	Human	+ widely used	−
21	taffer	14	travailler	Work	− cited in quotes	−
22	con	12	idiot	Human	− cited in quotes	+ (p. 27)
23	chouraver	11	voler	Human	− cited in quotes	−
24	ouf	11	fou	Human	+ widely used	+ (p. 23)

25	connard (m)	10	insulte	Human	– cited in quotes	–
26	bouffer	10	manger	Food	– cited in quotes	+ (p. 91, 101…)
27	oseille	9	argent	Money	–*seillo* cited in quotes	+ (p. 68, 76, 85…)
28	baston	8	bagarre	Human	–*stonba* cited in quotes	–
29	tchatcher	5	parler	Human	– cited in quotes	–
30	sape(-s)	4	vetements	Human	–*peussa* cited in quotes	+ (p. 152)
31	teuf (f)	3	fête	Holiday	+ widely used	+ (p. 23)
32	poivrot (m)	3	ivrogne	Human	–	+ (p. 133)

Note. MPF=Multicultural Paris French, FVG= French verlan glossary, IVFC=Informal vocabulary in French class, '–'=absent, '+'=present

The results obtained by proposed method of matrix clustering allowed us to identify the most demanded French common youth argotisms. By means of comparative analysis, 15 out of 32 frequent lexemes related to such argot-receptive concepts as "Human", "Work", "City" and belonging to the French common youth argot were registered, although they were not presented in the textbook on teaching the non-formal French language to foreign students.

Discussions

Analyzing the results we obtained, it should be noted that the representative corpora of French common youth argot formed by the method of matrix clustering can be successfully used to improve the professional level of future teachers and translators of the French language. The content of the study, enriched by a component developed on the basis of the corpora of live speech of young Parisians, has many advantages for students of advanced level of French as a foreign language.

At the same time, through the segment of the specific lexical continuum that interests us, as a rule, not only the peculiarities of the French youth subculture are revealed, but also the daily life of the speakers is characterized, which allows students to master better the specifics of the French linguistic culture.

In addition, in a language immersion situation through international exchange programs, mastering this sub-language will facilitate contact between the student and his or her foreign peer, for whom argotisms are a natural source of word use. Passive knowledge of the most representative linguistic units of French common youth argot is also a positive element in building the linguistic identity of the future professional. This is the most affordable way to think about the norms of the language being studied and the functioning of the various language registers. Teaching French common youth argot at a higher education has a final, important advantage: by systematically converting argotisms into conventional equivalents of the French language, the future specialist not only consolidates the existing knowledge of French, but also improves sociolinguistic competencies and vocabulary, even without the possibility of direct contact with native speakers. In this way, knowledge of this sociolect and its most frequent lexemes will facilitate the student's integration into the French-speaking community.

Conclusion

As a result, the research has provided the basis for teaching, at the language faculty, a common youth sociolect as a constant of French argot. At this stage, it is appropriate to test the implementation of the optional or elective French common youth argot discipline, based on the study of the argotic component included in media and fiction texts, film scripts, sounding in authentic audio materials that reflect the life of modern youth. The development of such control and evaluation tools and technologies as project tasks, situation tasks, simulation games, online tests is preceded by the formation of a glossary, which will include the results obtained by the above method of matrix clustering. Traditional and innovative measuring materials contribute both to the formation of communicative competence of future specialists in the field of translation, theory and methods of teaching foreign languages and cultures, as well as creating the necessary conditions to form the readiness of a language university graduate for continuous self-education and improvement.

Acknowledgments

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