

personal english



Word #14

Slang



The first recorded use of slang to indicate **'very informal language characterized by vividness and novelty'** was in **1818**. Earlier than that, this word had meant **'jargon of a particular profession'** (recorded in **1801**) and, earlier still, **'special vocabulary of tramps and thieves'** (**1756**).

The origins of the word slang prior to these occurrences is a matter of debate among linguists. Some trace it back to Norwegian ***slengenamn***, **'nickname'**, ***slengja kjeften***, **'to abuse with words'** (literally 'to sling the jaw', related to Old Norse *slyngva* *to sling*). This hypothesis would account for the 19th-century American derogatory noun ***slang-whanger***, indicating a **ranting partisan** or an **abusive speaker / writer**.