Slang
of
the
1920s

A

1. ab-so-lute-ly: affirmative, yes
2. absent treatment: dancing with a timid partner
3. air tight: very attractive
4. Airedale: an unattractive man
5. alarm clock: a chaperone
6. all wet: incorrect
7. And how!: I strongly agree!
8. ankle: to walk, i.e., "Let's ankle!"
9. applesauce: flattery, nonsense, i.e., "Aw, applesauce!"
10. Attaboy!: well done!; also, Attagirl!

B

11. baby: sweetheart. Also denotes something of high value or respect.
12. baby grand: heavily built man
13. baby vamp: an attractive or popular female, student.
14. balled up: confused, messed up.
15. baloney: Nonsense!
16. banana oil!: I doubt that!
17. Bank's closed: no kissing or making out i.e. "Sorry, mac, bank's closed."
18. bearcat: a fiery girl
19. beat it: scram, get lost.
20. beat one's gums: idle chatter
21. bee's knee's: terrific; a fad expression. Dozens of "animal anatomy" variations existed such as: elephant's eyebrows, gnat's whistle, eel's hips, etc.
22. beef: a complaint or to complain.
23. beeswax: business, i.e. "None of your beeswax."
24. bell bottom: a sailor
25. bent: drunk
26. berries: (1) perfect (2) money
27. Bible Belt: Area in the South and Midwest where Fundamentalism flourishes
28. big cheese: important person
29. big six: a strong man; from auto advertising, for the new and powerful six cylinder engines.
30. big timer: A charming and romantic man
31. **billboard**: a flashy man or woman
32. **bimbo**: a tough guy
33. **bird**: general term for a man or woman, sometimes meaning "odd," i.e. "What a funny old bird."
34. **Blind Date**: going out with someone you do not know
35. **blooey**: the condition when one has gone to pieces
36. **Bluenose**: An excessively puritanical person, a prude, Creator of "the Blue Nozzle Curse."
37. **blotto**: drunk, especially to an extreme
38. **blow**: (1) a crazy party (2) to leave
39. **blue serge**: a sweetheart
40. **bootleg**: illegal liquor
41. **breezer**: a convertible car
42. **Bronx Cheer**: A loud spluttering noise, used to indicate disapproval. Same as raspberry
43. **bug-eyed Betty**: an unattractive girl, student.
44. **bull**: (1) a policeman or law-enforcement official, including FBI. (2) nonsense (3) to chat idly, to exaggerate
45. **bump off**: to murder, to kill
46. **bum's rush, the**: ejection by force from an establishment
47. **bunk**: nonsense
48. **bunny**: a term of endearment applied to the lost, confused, etc. Often coupled with "poor little."
49. **bus**: any old or worn out car.
50. **Butt me**: I'll take a cigarette.

51. **cake-eater**: a lady's man
52. **canceled stamp**: A shy girl at a dance or party
53. **caper**: a criminal act or robbery.
54. **Carry a Torch**: To have a crush on someone
55. **cash**: a kiss
56. **Cash or check?**: Do we kiss now or later?
57. **cast a kitten**: to have a fit. Used in both humorous and serious situations. i.e. "Stop tickling me or I'll cast a kitten!" Also, "have kittens."
58. **cat's meow**: great, also "cat's pajamas" and "cat's whiskers"
59. **Cat's Pajamas**: Same as cat's meow
60. **Charlie**: a man with a mustache
61. **chassis**: the female body
62. **cheaters**: eye glasses
63. **check**: Kiss me later.
64. **chewing gum**: double-speak, or ambiguous talk.
65. **chin music**: gossip
66. **choice bit of calico**: attractive female, student.
67. **chopper**: a Thompson Sub-Machine Gun, due to the damage its heavy .45 caliber rounds did to the human body.
68. **chunk of lead:** an unattractive female, student.
69. **ciggy:** cigarette
70. **clam:** a dollar
71. **coffin varnish:** bootleg liquor, often poisonous.
72. **copacetic:** excellent
73. **crasher:** a person who attends a party uninvited
74. **crush:** infatuation
75. **cuddler:** one who likes to make out

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76. **Daddy:** a young woman's boyfriend, especially if he's rich
77. **daddy-o:** a term of address
78. **dame:** a female. Did not gain widespread use until the 1930's.
79. **dapper:** a Flapper's dad
80. **darb:** a great person or thing. "That movie was darb."
81. **dead soldier:** an empty beer bottle.
82. **deb:** a debutant.
83. **declaration of independence:** a divorce
84. **dewdropper:** a young man who sleeps all day and doesn't have a job
85. **dick:** a private investigator. Coined around 1900, the term finds major recognition in the 20's.
86. **dimbox:** a taxi
87. **dimbox jaunt:** a taxi ride
88. **dogs:** feet
89. **doll:** an attractive woman.
90. **dolled up:** dressed up
91. **don't know from nothing:** doesn't have any information
92. **don't take any wooden nickels:** don't do anything stupid.
93. **dope:** drugs, esp. cocaine or opium.
94. **doublecross:** to cheat, stab in the back.
95. **dough:** money
96. **drugstore cowboy:** A well-dressed man who loiters in public areas trying to pick up women.
97. **dry up:** shut up, get lost
98. **ducks:** very good
99. **dud up:** to dress up
100. **dumb Dora:** an absolute idiot, a dumbbell, especially a woman; flapper.

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101. **earful:** enough
102. **edge:** intoxication, a buzz. i.e. "I've got an edge."
103. **Edisoned:** questioned
104. **egg:** a person who lives the big life
105. embalmer: a bootlegger

106. face stretcher: an old woman trying to look young

107. fag: a cigarette.

108. Father Time: any man over 30

109. fella: fellow. As common in its day as "man," "dude," or "guy" is today. "That John sure is a swell fella."

110. fire extinguisher: a chaperone

111. fish: (1) a college freshman (2) a first timer in prison

112. flapper: the modern woman of the 1920s.

113. flat tire: a bore

114. flivver: a Ford Model T; after 1928, also could mean any broken down car.

115. floorflusher: an insatiable dancer

116. flour lover: a girl with too much face powder

117. fly boy: a glamorous term for an aviator

118. For crying out loud!: same usage as today

119. four-flusher: a person who feigns wealth while mooching off others.

120. Frame: To give false evidence, to set up someone

121. fried: drunk

G

122. gams: legs

123. gatecrasher: see "crasher"

124. gay: happy or lively

125. get-up: an outfit.

126. get a wiggle on: get a move on, get going

127. get in a lather: get worked up, angry

128. giggle water: booze

129. gigolo: dancing partner

130. gimp: cripple; one who walks with a limp. Gangster Dion O’Bannon was called Gimpy due to his noticeable limp.

131. gin mill: a seller of hard liquor; a cheap speakeasy

132. glad rags: "going out on the town" clothes

133. go chase yourself: get lost, scram.
134. **gold-digger**: a woman who pursues men for their money.
135. **goods, the**: (1) the right material, or a person who has it (2) the facts, the truth, i.e. "Make sure the cops don't get the goods on you."
136. **goof**: (1) a stupid or bumbling person, (2) a boyfriend, flapper.
137. **goofy**: in love
138. **greenland**: a park
139. **grubber**: one who borrows cigarettes
140. **grummy**: depressed
141. **grungy**: envious

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**H**

142. **hair of the dog**: a shot of alcohol.
143. **half seas over**: drunk, also "half under."
144. **handcuff**: engagement ring
145. **hard-boiled**: tough, as in, a tough guy, ie: "he sure is hard-boiled!"
146. **harp**: an Irishman
147. **hayburner**: (1) a gas guzzling car (2) a horse one loses money on
148. **heavy sugar**: a lot of money
149. **heebie-jeebies**: "the shakes," named after a hit song.
150. **heeler**: a poor dancer
151. **hen coup**: a beauty parlor
152. **high hat**: a snob, haughty, unapproachable
153. **hike**: a walk.
154. **hip to the jive**: cool, trendy
155. **hit on all sixes**: to perform 100 per cent; as "hitting on all six cylinders"; perhaps a more common variation in these days of four cylinder engines was "hit on all fours". See "big six".
156. **hokum**: nonsense
157. **hooch**: booze
158. **hood**: hoodlum
159. **hooey**: nonsense.
160. **hoof**: to walk
161. **Hoofer**: Dancer or chorus girl
162. **hope chest**: pack of cigarettes
163. **hopped up**: under the influence of drugs
164. **hopper**: a dancer
165. **horn in**: to get into a dance without an invitation
166. **Hot dawg!**: Great!; also: "Hot socks!" Rarely spelled as shown outside of flapper circles until popularized by 1940s comic strips.
167. **hot sketch**: a card or cut-up
168. **Hotsy – Totsy**: Pleasing
169. **"I have to go see a man about a dog."**: "I've got to leave now," often meaning to go buy whiskey.

170. **icy mitt**: rejection

171. **insured**: engaged

172. **iron**: a motorcycle, among motorcycle enthusiasts

173. **iron one's shoelaces**: to go to the restroom

174. **ish kabibble**: a retort meaning "I should care."

175. **It**: Sex appeal. Actress Clara Bow was the ‘it’ girl.

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176. **jack**: money

177. **Jake**: great, ie. "Everything's Jake."

178. **Jalopy**: a dumpy old car

179. **Jane**: any female

180. **java**: coffee

181. **jeepers creepers**: exclamation

182. **jerk soda**: to dispense soda from a tap; thus, "soda jerk"

183. **jitney**: a car employed as a private bus. Fare was usually five-cents; also called a "nickel."

184. **joe**: coffee

185. **Joe Brooks**: a perfectly dressed person; student.

186. **john**: a toilet

187. **joint**: establishment or club, usually selling alcohol

188. **juice joint**: a speakeasy

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189. **kale**: money

190. **keen**: appealing

191. **killjoy**: a solemn person

192. **kisser**: mouth

193. **kneeduster**: skirt

194. **know one's onions**: to know one's business or what one is talking about

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195. **lalapazaza**: a good sport

196. **lay off**: cut the nonsense

197. **left holding the bag**: (1) to be cheated out of one's fair share (2) to be blamed for something
let George do it: a work evading phrase
level with me: be honest
limey: a British soldier or citizen, from World War I
line: a false story, as in "to feed one a line."
lip stick: a cigarette
live wire: a lively person
lollygagger: an idle person

mad money: carfare home to be used by a flapper if she has a fight with her date.
manacle: wedding ring
mazuma: money
meringue: personality
Mick: a derogatory term for Irishmen
Middle Aisle: To marry
milquetoast: a very timid person; from the comic book character Casper Milquetoast, a hen-pecked male.
mind your potatoes: mind your own business.
Moll: A gangster's girl
mooch: to leave
moonshine: homemade whiskey
mop: a handkerchief
Mrs. Grundy: A priggish or extremely tight-laced person
munitions: face powder

neck: to kiss passionately
necker: a girl who wraps her arms around her boyfriend's neck.
Nerts!: I am amazed!
nifty: great, excellent
Nobody Home: Describes some one who is dumb
noodle juice: tea
Not so good!: I personally disapprove.
"Now you're on the trolley!" Now you've got it, now you're right.

Oh yeah!: I doubt it!
oil burner: a person who chews gum
229. **old boy**: a male term of address, used in conversation with other males. Denoted acceptance in a social environment. Also "old man" "old fruit." "How's everything old boy?"

230. **Oliver Twist**: a skilled dancer

231. **on a toot**: a drinking binge

232. **on the lam**: fleeing from police

233. **on the level**: legitimate, honest

234. **on the up and up**: on the level

235. **orchid**: an expensive item

236. **ossified**: drunk

237. **owl**: a person who's out late

238. **palooka**: (1) a below-average or average boxer (2) a social outsider, from the comic strip character Joe Palooka, who came from humble ethnic roots

239. **panic**: to produce a big reaction from one's audience

240. **panther sweat**: whiskey

241. **peppy**: vigorous, energetic

242. **percolate**: (1) to boil over (2) As of 1925, to run smoothly; "perk"

243. **pet**: necking

244. **petting pantry**: movie theater

245. **petting party**: one or more couples making out in a room or auto

246. **piffle**: baloney

247. **piker**: (1) a cheapskate (2) a coward

248. **pill**: (1) a teacher (2) an unlikable person

249. **pinch**: to arrest. Pinched: to be arrested.

250. **pinko**: liberal

251. **pipe down**: stop talking

252. **prom-trotter**: a student who attends all school social functions

253. **pos-i-lute-ly**: affirmative, also "pos-i-tive-ly"

254. **prune pit**: anything that is old-fashioned

255. **punch the bag**: small talk

256. **Pushover**: A person easily convinced

257. **putting on the ritz**: after the Ritz Hotel in Paris (and its namesake Caesar Ritz); doing something in high style. Also "ritzy."
Q

258.  quilt: a drink that warms one up

R

259.  rag-a-muffin: a dirty or disheveled individual
260.  rain pitchforks: a downpour
261.  razz: to make fun of
262.  Real McCoy: a genuine item
263.  regular: normal, typical, average; "Regular fella."
264.  Reuben: an unsophisticated country bumpkin. Also "rube"
265.  Rhatz!: How disappointing!
266.  Ritz: Elegant (from the hotel)
268.  rub: a student dance party
269.  rubes: money or dollars
270.  rummy: a drunken bum

S

271.  sap: a fool, an idiot. Very common term in the 20s.
272.  says you: a reaction of disbelief
273.  Scram: Ask someone to leave immediately
274.  scratch: money
275.  screaming meemies: the shakes
276.  screw: get lost, get out, etc. Occasionally, in pre 1930 talkies (such as The Broadway Melody) screw is used to tell a character to leave.
277.  screwy: crazy; "You're screwy!"
278.  sheba: one's girlfriend
279.  sheik: one's boyfriend
280.  shiv: a knife
281.  simolean: a dollar
282.  sinker: a doughnut
283.  sitting pretty: in a prime position
284.  skirt: an attractive female
285.  smarty: a cute flapper
286.  smoke-eater: a smoker
287.  smudger: a close dancer
288.  snake charmer: a woman involved in bootlegging
289.  sockdollager: an action having a great impact
290. *so's your old man:* a reply of irritation
291. *speakeasy:* a bar selling illegal liquor
292. *Spiffy:* An elegant appearance
293. *spill:* to talk
294. *splifificated:* drunk
295. *spoon:* to neck, or at least talk of love
296. *squirrel:* to hide
297. *static:* (1) empty talk (2) conflicting opinion
298. *stilts:* legs
299. *streeted:* thrown out of a party
300. *struggle:* modern dance
301. *Struggle Buggy:* the backseat of a car.
302. *stuck on:* having a crush on; in love.
303. *stutter bus:* a truck
304. *sugar daddy:* older boyfriend who showers girlfriend with gifts
305. *swanky:* (1) good (2) elegant
306. *swell:* (1) good (2) a high class person

307. *take someone for a ride:* to take someone to a deserted location and murder them.
308. *tasty:* appealing
309. *teenager:* not a common term until 1930; before then, the term was "young adults."
310. *ten cent box:* a taxi cab
311. *tell it to Sweeney:* tell it to someone who'll believe it.
312. *tight:* attractive
313. *Tin Pan Alley:* the music industry in New York, located between 48th and 52nd Streets
314. *tomato:* a female
315. *torpedo:* a hired thug or hitman

316. *unreal:* special
317. *upchuck:* to vomit
318. *upstage:* snobby
vamp: a seducer of men, an aggressive flirt
voot: money

water-proof: a face that doesn't require make-up
weasel: a young man who steals a girl from her boyfriend
wet blanket: see Killjoy
wife: dorm roommate, student.
What's eating you?: What's wrong?
whoopee: wild fun
windsucker: a braggart
Woof! Woof!: ridicule
wurp: a killjoy

You slay me!: That's funny!

zozzled: drunk

Sources:
http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm;
http://local.aaca.org/bntc/slang/slang.htm;
Flappers 2 Rappers, American Youth Slang, by Tom Dalzell.