

SLANG USE AMONGST SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ORUMBA

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Abstract

This study focuses on sociolinguistic study of the academic related slang expression as used by secondary school students in Orumba with the aim of finding its contextual meaning and as well its derivations. Data was collected through recording of conversations. The results were categorized according to various thematic groups. A descriptive method of data analysis was adopted. It was observed from our analysis, that the use of academic related slang expressions is purely used in informal context, and that slang expressions are mostly used for in-group identification as well as to hide meaning. Secondly, it was observed that there are code-mixing, inflections, etc in the slangs. The language variety could be as a result of the fact that students come from various language backgrounds. This research concludes that academic related slangs used in secondary school students in Orumba are not language of the underworld, but expressions used among students to hide literal meaning from outsiders.

Keywords: slangs, secondary school, Orumba, literal, contextual

1.0 Introduction

It is not gainsay that language is the bloodstream of the society. In that regards, the most important tool of communication that individuals have at their disposal is language. Essentially, people communicate in many ways, a tone of voice can indicate that a speaker means the opposite of what he/she is saying and a touch sometimes say more than a look can. Often also, two people will sometimes speak to each other quite differently when they are alone than when a third person is present. Hence, the most important tool of communication that individuals have at their disposal is language. As slang being a sociolinguistic concept, Trask (1999) defines sociolinguistics as the branch of linguistics which studies the relation between language and society. However, in the words of Johnson and Shirley (2005:107), slang can be described as “informal, nonstandard words or phrases (lexical innovations) which tend to originate in subcultures within a society”. Some definitions seemed not to see slang from the negative perspective such as Hartman and Stork (1972:302), who opine that slang expressions is a “variety of social and professional group for in-group communication and thus tending to prevent understanding by the rest of the speech community”. There definition brought a shift of mindset of those who view slangs as language of low class citizens or the uneducated.

There are works on slangs which have been conducted by scholars; for instance, use of slang amongst undergraduate students of a Malaysian public University (Namvar, 2014), the Sociolinguistics of slang among students of University of Ilorin, Nigeria (Adamu, 2015), etc. However, this paper tends to explore the slang expressions used by the secondary school students of Orumba.

The Igbo language is one of the three main Nigerian languages (the others being Hausa and Yoruba). Majority of the native speakers of the language are located in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, precisely in Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Imo and Enugu states; while a few other speakers reside in Delta and Rivers states. Slangs have evolved to almost being accepted as norm even in some formal settings including schools. In this paper, the slangs used by the secondary school students in Orumba will be examined. However, the researchers choose New Bethel Secondary School, Isulo and Community High School, Nawfija both in Orumba South local government are of Anambra state as data source. It is also to interpret the identified slangy expressions using context as cue and to interpret and analyze the identified expressions. This paper further hopes to find out when, where and why farmers use slang expressions.

Data were obtained through oral interview of some of the selected senior students from the both chosen schools and also through careful observation of the researcher. The research concept was explained to the students and through which results were gotten from them. The data are analyzed using the descriptive approach. Descriptive approach is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way. In section two, slangs are discussed and also review of relevant empirical studies. In section three is data presentation and analysis; while section four presents the findings, summary and conclusion.

2.1 Slangs

Slang expression has attracted many views and opinions of various scholars in the view of bringing different perspectives. Harris (1994) opines that slang expressions are “terms that are made up or are given new definitions by a social group in order to make the terms novel or conventional such that people outside the social group are excluded from the group’s discussions”.

In the words of Kristin and Anne (2010:190), “slang words or phrases are typically very informal, and they are usually restricted to a particular group-typically teens and young-adults as a marker or in group status”. In the same vein, Hartman and Stork (1972:76) say that slang is a variety of speech characterized by newly coined and rapidly changing vocabulary used by young or social or professional groups for ‘in-group communication and tending to prevent understanding by the rest of the speech community ...’ for Hartman and Stork slang is used by young or social or even a professional body. Crystal (1997:53), states that slang is “a colloquial departure from standard usage: it is often imaginative, vivid and ingenious in its construction so much that it has been called ‘the plain man’s poetry’. Merriam-Webster dictionary, defines slang as “an informal non-standard vocabulary composed typically of coinages, arbitrary changed words, and extravagant, forced or facetious figures of speech”.

Furthermore, on the definition of slang, Robert, Fromkin and Hyams (2003:489) opine that “slang is not often used in formal situation or writing, but is widely used in speech.” It has been said that slang is something that everyone can recognize but no one can define (Robert, Adrian, Richard and Ann (2012:301). This is solely why so many authors have in one way or the other presented their definition(s) the way they viewed slang. From their perspective, Nkamigbo and Eme (2011) submit that slangs are those informal linguistic expressions created by a certain group to fulfill their immediate communication needs, irrespective of the existence of the equivalent in the formal variety of the same language.

Adeyanju’s (2007:267) view is slangy expressions could be defined as substandard but widely understood expressions with or without the attributes of existing expressions employed to facilitate communication in a new sense.

From the above views, one could draw a conclusion that slangs are informal speech which could be a variation form a standard language form made for communication of in-group members for prescribed reasons like; restraints from general understanding.

2.1.1 Related Terms of Slangs

i. Dialect: dialect is “language variants spoken by entire groups of people.” While Merriam Webster Dictionary defines dialect from geographical points of view as “a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional variety and constituting together with them a single language.”

ii. Patois: Merriam Webster Dictionary defines patois as “a form of language that is different from the main form of the same language”. Example: a dialect other than the standard or literary dialect.

iii. Jive: Merriam Webster Dictionary defines jive as an “informal language that includes many slang terms: deceptive or foolish talk.”

iv. Argot: Concise Dictionary of Linguistics defined argot as “special vocabulary used by criminals which is designedly unintelligible to outsiders. Thus one form of anti-language.”

v. Jargon: Kristin and Anne (2010:190), see jargon as “words or phrases used by a particular group, but jargon is not informal; rather, it is associated with particular profession, trades, sports, occupations, games, and so on.” Example of jargon is the linguistic jargons: phoneme, allophone, morpheme, etc. However, Yule (1996:246), states that jargon is “a technical vocabulary associated with a special activity or group.”

vi. Colloquial: in the words of Robert, Adrian, Richard and Ann (2012:302), colloquialism is defined as “referring to informal conversational styles of language.”

2.1.2 Characteristics of Slang

Dumas & Lighter (1978:14-16) present some conditions that qualify an expression to be referred to a slang. According to them, an expression must meet at least two of the four conditions before it qualifies as slang:

i. It should be informal;

ii. It should imply user’s familiarity with its referent or co-interlocutor;

iii. It is a tabooed term when used with people of high social status;

iv. It is used to substitute a well-known conventional synonym.

Furthermore, Robert et al (2012:301) put it thus;

i. Informality: informality has been used by different authors in the definition of the term ‘slang’ this issue of informality can be used as a means one use in categorizing any language variety.

ii. Casual: slang is a part of casual, information style of language-use; “it is often perceived as a low or vulgar form of language and is deemed to be place in formal style of language”.

iii. Change quite rapidly: Robert et al (2012:301), say that “slang like fashions in clothing and popular music, changes rapidly.” Slang terms enters a language fastly, then fallout of fashion or become outdated in few years or even month before the very eyes of the speakers/users.

iv. Unintelligent to outsider(s): slang is known to a particular group (of people that shares occupations or profession). According to Robert et al (2012), specific areas of slang are often associated with a particular social group, and hence one speaks of teenage slang, and so on

In deviation from features of slang, Mathiello (2008), states that slang can be divided into general and specific. The former constitutes expressions used generally by people irrespective of their age, group, social identity, education, and so on in order to deviate from conventions, formality and instead of using the standard form of a language. The latter, likewise, is used only by people who share certain commonalities: age, social identity, social status, education, occupation, and lifestyle. Examples; homosexual slang, military slang, student slang, criminal slang, drug addict slang, etc.

2.1.3 Reasons for Slang

There are various reasons for using slangs. Rullu (2017) provides the possible reasons for using slangs which includes: represent the certain sub social group’s identity, because it is cool, it seems like a fashion when everybody likes it, for joke, for interaction, etc. In the same vein, Crystal (1997:530) provides an almost exhaustive list of the reasons thus: for the fun of it; as an exercise in wit or ingenuity; to be different; to be picturesque; to be arresting; to escape from clichés; to enrich the language; to add concreteness to speech; to reduce seriousness; to be colloquial; for ease of interaction; to induce intimacy; to show that one belongs; for exclusion/inclusion; and to be secretive.

2.2 Empirical Review

Works on slang and slang expressions have been on course for a period of time. Various researchers have explored so many areas in the study of languages especially in slang expression, to ascertain the authenticity of the existence of slang. This section reviews some of the past research works that have been done on slang expressions.

Obikwelu (2004) tries to ascertain those factors that give rise to the extensive use of slang expression among traders and motor-park touts in Onitsha speech community. She uses sociolinguistic approach (aspect of people’s lives: social, economic, and religious). Some examples of slang expression observed from the research works are listed below.

Table 1: Slang expression among traders and motor-park touts in Onitsha speech community

| | Slang | Meaning |
|----|--------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Ino mma | You are rich |
| 2. | Eke | The police |
| 3. | Bochaa | Escape from the police |
| 4. | Onye mmacha | A pompous person |

Adopted from (Obikwelu, 2004)

She notices that slang words are formed in the same way English words are formed, and they that also substitutes for tabooed words. She also observed that slang is frequently used by those between the ages of 16-30 years. She concludes that some speakers are ignorant of the difference between slang and standard Igbo.

Subsequently, Adamu (2015) explores the Sociolinguistics of slang among students of University of Ilorin, Nigeria. He administered 100 questionnaires through accidental sampling to collect the data from his respondents upon which 349 slang expressions were collected and subsequently analyzed. In his findings, it was observed that Unilorin students use slangy expressions to refer to/describe so many things and they do so for various reasons; their use of slang is determined by the situations in which they find themselves; they use slang in many forms of communication including conversation, text messaging, and social networking; and the use of slang has some negative effect on their academic performance. Furthermore, he grouped the slang expressions into: Lecturer-Related, Student-Related, Course-Related, Exam/Test-Related and Miscellaneous. Below are some of his collected data according to their groupings:

Table 2: Lecturer-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slang Expression | Meaning |
|-----|--|-------------------|
| 5. | Mother fucker, Oga-ade, sadist, mean, No mercy, devil, aloof, boss, Barbie doll, mad guy, Indian Idol, evil spirit, Mogana, Lion, Wikipedia, Tortoise, Margaret Thatcher, Emperor Nero | Strict lecturer |
| 6. | Confirm lecturers, doves, diplomatic, lenient, de well, daddy, easy going, | Friendly lecturer |
| 7. | Sure man, eru-iku, I don't care lecturers, segbe, ole, snail, Juman, Big Drum, | Lazy lecturer |

Table 2.1: Student-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slang Expression | Meaning |
|-----|--|----------------------------|
| 8. | Back benchers, slow learners, dolly P.,dumb, doro dull, Double Digit, Follow Come | Academically weak Students |
| 9. | Scholar, constant, Mr. one in all, Mr. Senior, early bird, janitor, Head Master, Bookworm, Time Keeper, Landlord | Punctual students |

Table 2.2: Course-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slang Expression | Meaning |
|-----|--|----------------------------------|
| 10. | Beans, Igbo, ajeseke, C.O., spilo, banged course, reference, Take Away | A carry over Course |
| 11. | Nice course, onjemi, eko, Acourse, cheap, vegetable, panadol Extra | A simple course |
| 12. | Stupid course, same, ewa, banger, dere is God o | A course which most usually fail |

Table 2.3: Exam/Test-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slang Expression | Meaning |
|-----|--|---------------------|
| 13. | Oloriburuku exam/test, apata, NECO | Difficult exam/test |
| 14. | Sure course, scape 2ru, wash, flash, to kill exam, to clear exam | To pass exam/test |
| 15. | Rubbish exam, O karry, bang, to Breakdown | To fail exam/test |

Table 2.4: Miscellaneous Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slang Expression | Meaning |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 16. | To go shaye, to go shayoo, to go shack, to go brew, sharp up, | To go for beer |
| 17. | Hangover, tipsy, de well, to be high, to get junkie, | To get drunk |
| 18. | Rock, outing, bash, buga, Y.Y., surf, stream, groove, | Party |

Nkamigbo & Eme (2011) examine Igbo slangs in Otu-Onitsha where their data were collected through tape-recording the speeches of different inhabitants of Otu-Onitsha.

However, the work was classified contextually which includes; economic life, social evils, social talks, transportation, social relation, eating and drinking, social stratification, miscellaneous. In the analysis, the first is literal meaning which is enclosed with an inverted comma whereas the second one is contextual meaning.

a. Economic life

rachaa ọkwa “lick the wooden plate” Make much profit
 mgbago “going up” Overseas, used by traders who usually travel overseas
 i bugonu “you have grown” You have got much money

b. Social evils

eke “python” The police, cops, law enforcement officer (used to refer to policemen)
 pjakaa “open something by hitting” Destroy
 tikara Run away

c. Social talks

ọ chara acha “it is ripe” Is beautiful
 saa isi “wash the head” Try to convince somebody

From the above reviewed works, the researcher tends to discuss the slangs as being used by the secondary school students in Orumba which is located in Anambra state, Eastern part of Nigeria.

3.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the presentation is made in a tabular form, the literal, contextual meaning, and language use of the slangs is stated side by side.

3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Teacher-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slangs | Gloss | Contextual meaning | Language use |
|-----|-----------|----------------|---|--------------|
| 19 | Óbì àkpó | Strong heart | This means that a teacher is wicked or strict. So, ‘àkpó’ in this context means ‘wickedness/strict’ | Igbo |
| 20 | Brain box | | Describing an animate with inanimate. From the word components, this is a description of an intelligent teacher. | English |
| 21 | Ónyé mgbū | A crazy person | The students use this for a teacher whom they do not like his/her way of doing things; which is always judged from their perspective. | Igbo |
| 22 | Ènwú ọkū | Burning light | Contextually, this is a description of an intelligent teacher who teaches well. | Igbo |
| 23 | Guru | | An intelligent teacher | English |

From the above, we present few sentences where the slangs were used by the students in discussions.

- i. That Biology master nwere *obi akpo*. ‘That biology master is heartless’
- ii. We no need any person to reason us, that the Maths man na confirm *guru*.

Table 2: Student-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slangs | Gloss | Contextual meaning | Language use |
|-----|---------------|---|---|--------------|
| 24 | Correct acada | | This is used to refer to a serious student who is intelligent. Acada as short-formed is from the word 'academic'. | English |
| 25 | Araldite | | Contextually, it entails a student who does not share academic materials with others and ultimately never share answers in the exam/test hall. | English |
| 26 | Ụtụ ákwúkwo | Book worm | As worm is meant to spoil a book after biting it, so is a student is made reference to, when he/she is a hyper lover of academic; who is found studying most of the time. | Igbo |
| 27 | Book worm | | Version of a student who is diligent in his/her studies. | English |
| 28 | Ìtā mgbè | To chew time | As the name implies 'chewing time', this is being used to refer to an unserious student who play away with his/her time and never or barely pay attention to his studies. | Igbo |
| 29 | Ínū mgbè | To drink time | No man literally drinks time; but in this context, it refers to a student who wastes his/her time in frivolities and pays no attention to studies. Not attending lectures is part of the outcome. | Igbo |
| 30 | Òlódō | | A student who is not smart. | Igbo |
| 31 | Ónyé párà | A fearful person | This is a description of a fearful student. It could be fear of cheating in examination/test hall or otherwise. | Igbo |
| 32 | Kpóòtí | Derived from 'àkpá òtí' (bag of maggot) | Bag of maggot is not a positive description of an entity. This means that a student is not being liked by | Igbo |

| | | | | |
|----|--------------|--------------------|--|----------------|
| | | | his mates as a result certain behaviour which the mates do not like especially to regards academic matters. | |
| 33 | Áfọ̀ n̄sī | Feaces' stomach | This describes a wicked student from the perspective of the mates. | Igbo |
| 34 | Over sabinus | Too much knowledge | This is not basically a student who knows much or have much knowledge; it is a student who always feel to have known most things whereas it could just be ignorance. | English-pidgin |

Few sentences where the slangs were used by the students in discussions.

- i. Every time, Chike ana efili *over sabinus*. Tufiakwa. "Every time, Chike feels to know everything".
- ii. *Ita mgbe* atogbugwo m na this school. "Being unserious with studies has sweetened me in this school".

Table 3: Subject-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slangs | Gloss | Contextual meaning | Language use |
|-----|-------------|------------------|--|----------------|
| 35 | No be beans | It is not beans | This is an expression of something that is difficult/hard. Cooked bean is soft in nature. But when it is said that a subject is not beans, it entails the course is quite hard or difficult. | Pidgin English |
| 36 | Ṣpíáwá āzū | Breaking of back | From the name 'breaking of back', it shows in this context that the subject is difficult. | Igbo |
| 37 | Rock | | Even as the name implies 'strong', it is not the same in this context. When something is said to rock, it means 'beautiful/nice/positivity'. So, in this context, it entails that a certain subject is easy or simple. | English |
| 38 | Na die | It is death | Death is already portraying danger/difficulty and otherwise; which introduced the fact that in this context, a subject is not easy. | Pidgin English |
| 39 | Confirm | | This is a neutral word; which contextually means an easy subject. | |
| 40 | Ó sò | It follows | This shows that a subject is easy to understand | Igbo |
| 41 | Bèhúgè | - | Very nice or beautiful | Igbo |

Few sentences where the slangs were used by the students in discussions.

- i. Nwanne e, Igbo ahụ sò. "My brother, that Igbo is simple".
- ii. Most of the subjects we are doing this term, na *confirm*.

Table 4: Exam/Test-Related Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slangs | Gloss | Contextual meaning | Language use |
|-----|---------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 42 | Ọmọ kíkíkírí | Child-pieces | This is answers written in tiny form in a piece of paper for the purpose of passing an examination (expo) | Bi-lingual (Yoruba and Igbo) |
| 43 | Bullet | | This is any external material used in the examination hall in order to pass the exam. | English |
| 44 | Mgbō | Bullet | This is the Igbo native way of expressing an external material used in the examination hall in order to pass the exam. | Igbo |
| 45 | No be moi-moi | It is not moi-moi | This is an expression of something that is hard/difficult. As moi-moi is likened to a soft food, thereby 'no be moi-moi' means 'not soft'. In this context, the exam/test was not easy. | Pidgin English |
| 46 | Átá ígbā | Sting of grass | This is a slang to illustrate a difficult exam/text | Igbo |

Few sentences where the slangs were used by the students in discussions.

i. My guy bugodì enough mgbō bata hall that day. "My guy entered the hall with enough EXPO".

ii. The Chemistry mock I think it will be easy, guy *ata gbara* m bad bad.

Table 5: Other Slang Expressions

| S/N | Slangs | Gloss | Contextual meaning | Language use |
|-----|--------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 47 | Íkpù hard | To peal hard | This is code-mix process that means studying hard | Bi-lingual (Igbo and English) |
| 48 | Jacking | | This is the act of studying | English |
| 49 | Kòóró my way | Bent my way | When someone is being avoided. | Bi-lingual (Igbo and English) |
| 50 | Ónyé ñkpà | A scissor person | It can be a cunning person/ not being straight forward. | Igbo |
| 51 | ítù ékú | To carve a wooden spoon | It is a slang for a male student to woo a female student | Igbo |

| | | | | |
|----|--------------|----------------------|--|------|
| 52 | Íwè nwá | To select baby | A slang for a male student to have a girlfriend | Igbo |
| 53 | Ígbā āsā | To play beauty | For a male student to toast a female student to be his girlfriend. | Igbo |
| 54 | Írī ózō | To eat <i>ozō</i> | To have sex | Igbo |
| 55 | Ónyé égwú | A player | This is a slang for a student who is good at sports especially football. | Igbo |
| 56 | Àkpá àchìchà | Bag of dried cocoyam | This is for a dirty student | Igbo |
| 57 | Ìdù ágwō | Snake life | It is a slang for a student who is always dirty | Igbo |

Below are few sentences that illustrate the slangs as seen in the above table.

i. Obinna bụ baba n' *itụ eku*. 'Obinna is an expert in wooing female students'

ii. *Ụmụ ejima na-ebu ndụ agwọ* na school a. "the twins are always dirty in this school".

Consequently, it is not gainsay that the use of slangs cannot be separated from context of use. It is however the context that gives clear and easy understanding of the slangs, which entails that slang is beyond semantics; as it also incorporates pragmatics.

4.0 Discussion of Findings, Summary and Conclusion

First and foremost, it is observed that the use of slangs among secondary school students in Orumba is context based with its peculiar meaning. It is also observed that code mixing and switching abound in the slangs as there exist languages mixing. As this paper is a centered on slang expression among aforementioned students, it is observed that students use slang mainly for the purpose of in-group so as to hide meaning and protect secrets among themselves. However, as a result of some abusive slang expressions, the students use such in the absence of their superiors such as teachers. That means that some slang expressions are used in the privacy of the students. They use it in communication with one another or mostly in an informal social context for the purpose of identity, to hide meaning from those who do not belong to their in-group.

Conclusively, it is observed that slangs as used by the students to pertain academic and general life issues are coded in language varieties.

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