

Slangs Usage among the Students of Selected Tertiary Institutions in Ebonyi and Enugu States.

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Abstract

Every society is characterized by diversities of language, class and sex, as well as religious, social, economic and cultural divides. For the fact that no two groups are entirely similar, their modes of interaction would also differ significantly; the differing is to make the group distinct on their operations. Whenever students of tertiary institutions come together, they always device some means of communicating with one another. They borrow; coin or formulate words connotatively from the language or languages they use to refer to persons, places, things, processes within their environment. This paper seeks to explore this kind of language with specific references to slangs among students of Ebonyi State School of Health Technology, Ngbo and Federal college of Education, Eha-

Amufu, A list of slang was distributed to the students, most especially, the final year students to verify their familiarity within the campus context. Findings reveal that slang formation is inevitable whenever people of same interest (such as students) come together.

Keyword: Slang, Language, Students, Tertiary Institutions and Society.

Introduction

Language is generally seen as a “human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols”. Nonetheless, multiple opinions on the concept of language approached from different metaphorical perspective abound, which portrays it as too far complicated, intriguing, and mysterious to be comprehensively explained. Agbedo (2015:14) sees language as a culturally established rules which govern all forms of linguistic knowledge, which any given community of speakers that share common linguistic knowledge which de Saussure referred to as langue, as a passively accumulated culturally-inherited and institutionalized instrument created through time by any given speech community to enable its members use their faculty of speech to achieve their communicative needs. In a kind of explanation of the uniqueness of language to man, Haugen (1971:281), views language as an innate property of man. That is to say that man is born with ability to acquire language made possible by his endowment with a language acquisition device. Language is here seen as internal not external device that can be manipulated. Haugen therefore, views language as a delicate instrument which cannot be reshaped or reorganized at will. In other words, language according to him cannot be isolated to be modernized, amended and evaluated using a particular

parameter with the view to transferring the “improved product to the language users”. Language interacts with every other aspects of human life in the society, this is why Ndukwe (1984:5) believes that, the existence of language is assumed to be dependent on the social possibilities of its users as the values speakers attribute to it depend on the nature and quality of these possibilities.

In a bid to describe language, scholars have had divergent opinions; some say that language is a representation of an arbitrary symbol used in communications. Some talk of language as a convention of culture which is meant to be used as a means of interaction within the milieu. Nevertheless whatever is said about language one thing stands out, and that is communication. Therefore, the intent of every language is communication. Every language has a vocabulary and this vocabulary is the vehicle of the language.

Slang is a vocabulary that is used between people who belong to the same social group and who know each other well. Slang is something that everyone can recognize but no one can vividly conceptualize. It is a type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people. Be that as it may, slangs can offend people if used outside its domain or outside a group of people who know each other well. However, it could be a source of humour if well channeled among users. A language becomes slang when used in subversion of the standard use of the language. Slang emanates from conflicts in values. When an individual applies language in a way to express hostility, ridicule, contempt, he is used or involved in slang derivation which makes it cut across every land and clime. In view of this, the present study will examine a kind of slang vocabulary used in an academic setting mostly by students of Ebonyi State

Health Technology, Ngbo and Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu.

Conceptual Clarification

Scholars have written at various times on slang use and its dominance in some quarters. It is on this note that this work thrives. Based on the fact that the students of the two tertiary institutions under study have not been captured in the past, it becomes imperative that their use of slangs in their environment should be x-rayed.

Waziri (2016) posits that slang consists of a lexicon of non-standard words and phrases in a given language. The use of these words and phrases is typically associated with the subversion of standard variety (such as Standard English) and is likely to be interpreted by listeners as implying particular attitudes on the part of the speaker. Harris (1994) on the other hand sees slang expressions as terms that are made up or one given new definitions in order to make the terms novel or conventional in a way that people outside the social group (or age bracket) are excluded from the groups discussion. This goes in line with Crystal (1997) who says that slang is a colloquial departure from standard usage; it is often imaginative, vivid and ingenious in its construction.

Akmajian et al (2007: 303) says that slang vocabulary often consists of regular vocabulary used in specific ways, for example, the word turkey and banana are regular vocabulary items in English (and can be used in formal styles with literal meaning), but in slang they can be used in formal styles with literal meaning) but in slang they can be used as insults (referring to stupid or foolish people). Speakers show enormous creativity in their use of slang (it is indeed, one of the most creative areas of language), and it is often the source of good deal of humour. Akmajian et al go ahead to classify

and identify certain salient features that must be met for any utterance to be tagged as slang. These features include:

- a. Slang is part of casual, informal styles of language use. Further, the term slang has traditionally carried a negative connotation. It is often perceived as a “low” or vulgar” form of language and is deemed to be out of place in formal styles of language.
- b. Slang, like fashion in clothing and popular music, changes quite rapidly. Slang terms can enter a language rapidly, then, fall out of fashion in a matter of a few years or even months. This rate of turnover is much greater than for other areas of the vocabulary of a language.
- c. Specific areas of slang are often associated with a particular social group, and hence one can speak of teenage slang, underworld (criminal) slang, the slang of the drug culture, and so on.

Bethany and Jonathan (1978) argue that for an expression to be labeled as “true slang” it must meet at least two of these criteria.

- a. It lowers, if temporarily, “the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing”, in other words, it is likely to be considered in those contexts a “glaring misuse of register”
- b. Its use implies that the user is familiar with whatever is referred to, or with a group of people who are familiar with it and use the term.
- c. It’s a taboo term in ordinary discourse with people of a higher social status or greater responsibility”.

- d. It places “a well-known conventional synonym”. This is done primarily to avoid annoyance caused by having to elaborate further.

Emeka-Nwobia (2007) is of the opinion that slang words are just like every other words which are formed by the same morphological processes and are subject to the phonotactic constraints of the language that they are part of. She notes that slangs are special due to how and when we use them and how we feel about them as words. The following features or prospects must be possessed by slang words;

- a. Group identification:- Slang expressions are means of identification of membership in a particular group that is, outside the mainstream adult society. As a matter of fact, if you do not know slang term, you are clearly alienating yourself as a nonmember of that particular group, where as your ability to flow with the expression makes you a part of that group.
- b. Informality: Slangs are almost inevitably used in every informal context or setting. For instance, “dub from him” instead of “copy from him”, ‘yarn’ instead of “inform them” “zip up” instead of “abstain from sex”, she is correct” instead of “she is beautiful” are common expression among the youngsters.
- c. Short span: Slang terms are often short lived. That is to say that they have short life span, though not in all cases, some slang terms appear and then disappear from the language, especially when the originators are no longer there.
- d. Slang expressions are scalar: Slang terms actually seem to fall along a continuum of slanginess. Slang terms most often when used for a long period of time

in a language lose their slanginess and become more accepted as a part of the standard use of the language. In most cases, they still feel informal to some degree but they do not feel like slangs anymore.

Dickson (2010) is of the opinion that a general test for whether a word is a slang word or not is whether it would be acceptable in an academic or legal setting, as both are arenas in which standard language is considered necessary and/or whether the term has been entered in, for instance, The Oxford English Dictionary, which some scholars claim changes its status as slang. Still, while a great deal of slang takes off, even becoming accepted into the standard lexicon, much slang dies out, sometimes, only referencing a group. An example of this is, the term “groovy” which is a relic of 1960’s and 70’s American “hippy” slang. Nevertheless, for a slang term to become a slang term, people must use it, at some point in time, as a way to flout standard language.

From the foregoing, slang as a term poses much difficulty to vividly conceptualize, the difficulty however, does not deny its existence. This has made many scholars to capture the term as they deem fit. In other words, the trickish nature of slang has denied it a uniform definition. There seems to be a free license given to Nigerian students to create and recreate the languages of their immediate environment. This nonetheless is not surprising; what is surprising is how these slangs get infiltrated into the domain, widely used and gain general acceptability by all. Hence, the present study sees slang as a social transaction which involves getting one’s idea across informally by communicating within the same peer group or social class.

Methodology

A list of slang words were sourced from the students of the two institutions under study. A total of 38 slang words were administered to the students to verify their familiarity within the academic context. These students were randomly selected from second and third year respectively, because they were thought to have stayed long enough in the university to be familiar with most of the slang expressions they use to describe their academic and social lives.

Data presentation

Table 4.1 List of slang words used by the students of these institution.

S/ N	Slang Word	Source Language	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Sentential Example
1	Bank Alert	English	Information from the bank notifying a customer of a transaction	Arrival or availability of money	I have gotten a bank alert
2	Baby oku	English/Igbo	A hot girl	A classic or happening girl/lady	The baby oku is in town
3	Book worm	English	A person usually devoted to reading	One who is always reading /studying	Ada is a book worm

			and studying		
4	Clash	English	To argue/con flict	Having more than one exam/lectur e at a time	We shall have a clash on Monday
5	Driver	English	One who drives a vehicle	One who leads/motiv ates others to action	Oduma is the driver of the student's union
6	Fada- fada	Nigerian music	Sponsor/ Benefact or	God/god	Mr Eze is fada-fada
7	Fly over	English	To fly to past above	Toilet for the students in the hostel that have no good toilet system	Let me go and do some flyover
8	FAA	Acrony m	Fine and Applied Art	A lady student that makes up so much	Jenny is an FAA
9	Gigo	Compute r language (Acrony m)	Garbage in garbage out)	Those that copy from other students verbatim,	Amoge is a gigo

10	Hard ware	English	Component of a computer	Gun, macho man	You don't need hardware to silence him
11	Software	English	Computer accessory	A girl	Nwanneka is easily attacked by a virus she is a software
12	Passenger	English	People that board a vehicle for traveling	Inactive person	Leave him alone he is a passenger
13	Larvae	English	A developing insect	A new student in school of health	That one is a larvae
14	Pad	English	Material used by women in menses	A man that yields to women easily	John is a pad
15	Purse	English	Lady's hand bag	A man that yields to women easily	He has become her purse

16	Alo bam	Nigeria music		My dear friend	Chinwe Bu Alo Bam
17	Stuff	English	Materials	Cocaine, Indian hemp	Do you have some stuff with you
18	TDB	Acronym	Till day break	To read all night	They had a TDB
19	Virus	Health	Agent	Mass failure	Fred has virus
20	Plane crash	English	Accident of the plane or aircraft	Mass failure in an exam	We had a plain crash in Edu 214
21	NFA	Acronym	Nigerian football association	No future ambition	Julie seems to have an NFA
22	Umbrella	English	Used for covering under rain/sun	Cult group	Dave is not under any umbrella
23	Oyoo	Igbo		A dear friend	Ngozi bu oyoom
24	Microchips	English	Used to give	“Expo” malpractice in exam	There were several microchip

			informati on		s in the hall
25	Eleganza	English	From the word elegance	Beautiful girl	That girl is an eleganza
26	Aloe vera	Health	Curative herb	Soothing situation or circumstan ces	Having several girlfriends is not an aloe vera
27	Turkey	English	Domestic fowl	Proud, stupid and pompous person	Forget her, she is a turkey
28	Aso rock		President ial lodge	The lodge of the students union president	Meet me at the Aso rock
29	Anini		Name of a person	Armed robber	Trust dick, he is Anini
30	Kolomental	Nigerian music		Useless/sen seless	Ignore her she is kolomental
31	Banana	English	Fruit	Weak person	of the two, Rose is a banana

32	NASU	Acronym	Non Academic Staff Union	Non Academic Students Union	Forget him, he is a member of NASU
33	Jacking	English	To lift something heavy using a device	Reading	I was jacking throughout the night
34	Guru	Sanskrit	A teacher, guider or master	A talented student	He is a guru, he does not read
35	JAMBITO/JAMBITE	English	Term derived from the word Jamb	A pre-NCE student	She is a jambito
36	ADE	English acronym	Adult education	Adult Education Student	He is our Ade brother on the campus
37	Jambul	English	Personal name	An intelligent student	He is the jambul of the class
38	Chikobi	Igbo	Igbo personal name for chika obi	A good mathematics student	Uchenna is chikobi when it

comes to
maths.

Discussion of Data

A careful look at the 38 slang expressions presented above can easily point at some semantic and word processes in the formation of slang in the two institutions under study. These processes would form the analysis of our data and is to be treated one after the other to ascertain the degree of impact they have in slang formation in the institution.

Acronymisation

Acronymisation is the process of creating a new word from the initial letters of a set of other words. Words created by this means are called acronyms. Typically, acronyms often consist of capital letters and are pronounced as self –standing words. Examples of slang acronyms used on the campus from the data above include;

Slangs	Literary meanings	Associated meanings
FAA	Fine and Applied Art	To mean a lady student that makes up so much
TDB	Till Day Break	to mean reading all night
NFA	No Future Ambition	to mean a place where unserious students relax on the campus
NASU	Non – Academic Student Union	to mean people who are not students but claim to be one

process of joining two or more formerly independent roots (or free morphemes) to form one word. The interrelation between or among the constituents words is such that the resultant meaning of the compound does not always correspond to the meanings of the constituent words. In other words, the meaning of a compound word is not always the sum of the meaning of the individual words that make it up. This is evident in the slangs expressions used by the students of these institutions from the data above;

Plane crash	=	plane + crash
Book worm	=	book + worm
Bank alert	=	bank + alert
Fly over	=	fly + over

Eponymy

This is a process of deriving word from names, like names of place, of person etc. such words are often used to relate an object, idea or a concept with the initiator or founder, or to associate a person's trait, quality, act behavior or achievement with that person. Examples from the data include:

Slamgs	literally meanings	Associated meenings
Aso rock	presidential lodge	the lodge of the students union leaders
Turkey	domestic fowl	proud, stupid and pompous person
Banana	Fruit	weak person

Jambul	personal name	an intelligent student
Chikobi	persona name	a good mathematics student
Anini	personal name	a thief

Derivation

This is a process that derives a new word from another word. It is the addition of a derivational affixes (mostly suffixes) to a lexical categories to change it into word of another category. Derivation is one of the vital word formation processes according to Waziri (2016) that is used in the formation of academic slang on campuses. An example can be viewed from the data above;

JAMB = JAMBITO/JAMBITE - to mean a fresher

Conclusion

The study examined the use of slangs among students of Ebonyi State Health Technology and Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, where students' ages range within 18 – 30 years. Most of which predominantly use Pidgin English as a medium of communication among their mates. Living in such institutions, therefore would warrant the students to create a unique code with which to communicate among themselves.

Due to the use of English language as medium of instructions, in the institutions under study, the composition of slang would inevitably include words formation processes such as connotation, compounding, derivation, eponym and acronym with few coinages from other languages. This paper vests significant effort in collecting and tabulating these slang words, their source languages and their denotative and

connotative meanings with a sentential example of each slang word.

The study shows that slang formation is inevitable whenever people of same interest (such as students) come together. This is the reason why students of Ebonyi State School of Health Technology and Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu formed their unique way of communicating with one another, so that the outside world would be excluded. The paper therefore, recommends the introduction of slangs as a topic in these institutions use of English course outlines.

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