

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF SLANG USAGE ON CAMPUSES

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Abstract

The ultimate goal of language study is to develop language users' linguistic and communicative competence. To this end, it is highly effective to investigate slang usage in order to reveal its linguistic ingenuity. Adopting Hymes' "situational context" as the theoretical framework, this paper seeks to examine the ingenuity of linguistic revolution among students on Nigerian campuses. To achieve this, data were collected from recorded utterances and the researchers' participatory observation in natural settings over the course of three years. These settings are "school bus parks", "kegite ceremonies", "students' hostels" and "students' protests". Three tertiary institutions were randomly selected: one each from colleges of education, polytechnics, and universities. Over forty recordings of slangy expressions were documented, out of which twenty-one were used for analysis. Slangs that bordered on "internet fraud", "kegite clubs", "prostitution" and "students' unionism" were investigated. The findings revealed the ingenuity of language use among students while they are on campuses. There were the use of "semantic extension", "semantic shift", "coinages", acronym, and "loan words" in the slangs examined. Each of the slangs examined had its underlying representation in the context of usage. "Bad market" whose contextual representation is "unsuccessful illegal deal" is a good example of internet fraud slangy expression. Some slangs are also used figuratively. The slangs "eke" and "alutagbo-gbo" are examples of metonymy and onomatopoeia. This study, therefore, recommends that linguists should endeavour to research on other areas where slangs are used as this will expand frontiers of knowledge in language study.

Keywords: Slang, Sociolinguistics, Situational Context, Students, Campuses.

Introduction

The classification of slang as a dialect is somehow difficult because it is not restricted to any linguistic region. However, slangs are used for communication at different settings on Nigerian campuses. Webster's *Dictionary of the English language* defines slang as:

a means currently widely used and understood language, consisting of new meanings attributed to existing words or wholly new words generally accepted as lying outside standard polite usage.

The Oxford Dictionary describes slang as an utterance applied much generally to any language of high colloquial type. *The Encyclopaedia Britannia* Vol. 16 claims that slang emanated from conflict in value, sometimes superficial, often from fundamental use of ridicule, hostility, contempt etc. Farinde and Ojo (2005, p.90) defined slang as "words, phrases, or meaning of words commonly used in talk among friends or colleagues, but not suitable for good writing or formal occasions especially the kind used by and typical of only one class of persons". The scholars claimed that slang is an expression coined, or an

existing expression that has a special sense or meaning. They also noted that slangy expressions are very common among the youths who by inclination are revolutionary in the use of language. According to them, slang is transient in that the slangy expressions of the 60's, 70's, and 80's have become obsolete as new ones have since replaced them. From the definitions above, the term "slang" could be described as a coinage or existing expression used by a group, specifically the youths, in which such an expression has a special sense or meaning to the identified users (the youths). Slangy expressions are often used figuratively. For instance, expression like "awonomosakusaku" (useless ladies) is used metaphorically to describe the attitude of some immoral ladies in the street. This type of ladies are seen as ladies without good future or plan. It must be mentioned here that the slang *omo-sakusaku* emanated from Nigerian hip-pop musicians. However, it is now being used on Nigerian campuses.

Slangy expressions are also esoteric. The word "esoteric" here means that only the members of the group understand the underlying meanings of the slangs used. For instance, the phrase "bad market" is a slangy expression often used by internet fraudsters to mean an illegal business that is not successful. That is, when an expected victim discovers the pranks of the fraudsters and then withdraws from the proposed transaction.

Conceptual Literature Review

Having examined the concept of slang, it is important also to briefly examine some concepts like "register", "jargon" and some other semantic related concepts that will form the theoretical background upon which data analysis shall be based.

Register

The term "register" has various dictionary definitions or interpretations. However, register has a clearly distinctive meaning in the field of linguistics. *The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English* defines register as "a vocabulary, grammar etc. used by speakers in particular circumstances or context e.g legal or family context". Similarly, *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines register as "the words, style and grammar used by speakers and writers in particular conditions. Oluga (2002) defined register as "contextual usage determined by the lists of related words specifically used to express ideas, notions, or concepts in a given situation, discourse, circumstances, discipline or field of study." Halliday et al (1964) simply defined registers as "varieties according to use.". Also Hymes (1964) described slang as a linguistic usage for reference to specific situation. In their own perspective, Gregory and Carrol (1978) viewed register as what can be meant in situation. Similarly, Farinde and Ojo (2005) simply described register as the situation in which language is used to determine the extent the meaning of what is said or written. One thing paramount in the definitions given above is "situational context". Therefore, register could be described as the use of technical lexemes related to a field of discourse or subject matter.

Jargon

Many problems have arisen from various attempts to describe what the linguistic jargon is. Differentiating between jargon and register is somehow cumbersome to the non-linguists. Oftentimes, one hears expressions like "Junior, don't write jargons in your book"; "Get out, you are

speaking jargon". These utterances are better expressed as "Junior, don't write rubbish in your book" and "Get out, you are speaking nonsense" respectively. A non-linguist will describe a jargon as an expression or writing that is meaningless. Some linguists too, in showing the relationship between "register" and "jargon", have described these concepts as synonyms. Register and jargon are related because the two terms are professional terms. However, the terms have slight differences or distinctions. "Register" and "jargon" are professional lexeme. Register are words peculiar to a given field, discipline or profession. It is made up of common and general vocabulary that can be understood by virtually everybody especially those conversant with such a field, subject, discipline, or profession. Jargons are made up of highly technical, specialized or esoteric lexemes in a given subject, discipline or field of study (Oluga, 2002). In a nutshell, registers are technical words that can be decoded by professionals and non-professionals, while jargons are highly technical lexemes whose meanings are usually decoded by professionals.

Register, Jargon and Slang: Their Similarities and Differences

The three terms above are used by humans to communicate ideas, or feelings. They are varieties of language, and their meanings are situational context-based. However, these terms (register, jargon, and slang) differ according to users and use. While jargon is a variety according to users, Register and Jargon are varieties according to use. Also, register and jargon are professional or specialized language, but this is not so in slangs. Slangs are non-professional language. In fact, slang is a language variety usually used by the youths. While slang

is transient, register and jargon are permanent.

Some Semantic-Related Concepts

Semantic Extension: This semantic concept is seen as the additional meaning attached, or given, to a word or an expression. The kinship terms and other metaphoric words or expressions like "kolanut", and "long-leg" have been broadened in meaning to accommodate new realities. For instance, the kinship term "mother" may not necessarily refer to one's female biological parent but any woman from one's tribe old enough to be one's mother (Ogunsiji, 2004, pp. 89-90). Also, the English word "tortoise" which refers to a "slow-moving shelled reptile" is used metaphorically to mean a very cunning person in Nigerian context. The same goes for "kolanut", which refers to a fruit which now stands for a bribe in a driver-police discourse (Omolaiye, 2021 pp. 163).

Semantic Shift: Semantic shift is an act of shifting the meaning of a lexeme from its original meaning because of the contextual usage of such lexeme. Some English lexemes domesticated in Nigeria have been given new meanings. Words like "garage", "daily bread" and "dowry", whose original meanings are limited to the English dictionary meanings, have been given new meanings in the Nigerian context. For instance "dowry" is commonly used in the Nigerian socio-cultural context to mean money paid by, or on behalf of, a man for a woman as her bride price. However, the meaning is not in the British English. "Dowry" in the context of British English means property that a woman packs to her husband's house in marriage (Odebunmi, 2006).

Coinage: This is an invention of new words to express socio-cultural

realities. Examples of coinages include traditional medicine “juju”, “long-leg”, “bottom power”, “bush meat”, and so on. All these words or phrases do not exist in the British lexicon but they are commonly used in the sociolinguistic context in Nigeria to fill the semantic gaps that exist between the English and the Nigerian cultures (Omolaiye, 2021 p. 163).

Acronym: Ojo (2011) described an acronym as the initial letters of words combined to make up the name of a body/organization/institution. Some examples as listed by Omolaiye (2017, p. 74) are:

NAFDAC	- National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control.
JAMB	-Joint Admission and Matriculation Board
ECOMOG	-ECOWAS Monitoring Group
COEASU	-College of Education Academic Staff Union
FEDPOLE	-Federal Polytechnic, Ile-Oluji
LAUTECH	-Ladoke Akintola University of Technology.

Linguistic Borrowing or Loan

Words: Here, words are borrowed from other languages to express socio-cultural realities. Some of the examples of these linguistic borrowings in Yoruba are *sosi* (church), *tabili* (table), *bibeli* (bible) etc. These words are usually fused into utterances to reflect Nigerianism in the speech event.

Meaning in Context

Meaning and context are dependent on each other in linguistic exchanges. Hence, Odebunmi (2006) claimed that context is a determinant of meaning. Alo (2004) considered context to be what is seen in terms of what immediately precedes and what

follows in an expression in a text. This scholar further stated that no word can be fully understood independent of other words in the same context without recourse to a situational, linguistic, or cultural context in order to understand its meaning. In the same manner, Malinoski (1923) observed that for adequate description of any linguistic event, the factor of context and practice is paramount. This observation has brought about notion of situational context as it affects meaning within the theory of language. Hence, linguistic context could be described as how meaning is understood without relying on intent and assumptions while situational context is referred to as the environment, time, and place etc. in which an utterance occurs, and also the relationship between the participants. So, linguistic context and situational context are dependent on each other for meaning realization in a discourse (Farinde & Omolaiye, 2021 p. 96).

Scope of Investigation

This study limits its investigation to slangy expression used by students on campus settings. Some of the slangy expressions to investigate border on “prostitution”, “kegite club”, “internet fraudsters” and “Students’ unionism”. It is imperative to submit here that the listed areas of focus above have linguistic implications. Investigating them, therefore, will reveal the ingenuity of linguistic revolution among the youths.

Data Base of Study

This study is empirical in nature. Thus, primary method of data collection were adopted. Data were collected from recorded utterances and researchers’ participatory observation in natural settings over the course of three years. These activities took place on campuses. Three tertiary

institutions in Nigeria (one from Universities, one from Polytechnics and one from Colleges of Education) were randomly selected. The fact that the interlocutors were not conscious that their utterances were being recorded made the data original and standard. Since the focus of this study is on slang usage on campuses, interlocutors were selected based on their being students of the institutions selected. The recorded utterances were all slangs or slangy expressions as they occurred freely in the dialogic or conversational outlets. Some of the recordings rendered in indigenous language were retained in their original form to preserve their originality. However, all of the utterances were also translated to English in the process of analyzing the data. Over forty recordings of slangy expressions were documented out of which twenty one were used for analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on Situational Context Theory. The proponent of this theory is Hymes (1964) who identified a number of features considered to be features of situational context. Hymes describes situational context as an environment, place, or time in which an utterance occurs, and also the relationship between participants. Thus, situational context is meaning determinant. Hymes further identified “participants”, “topic”, “setting” “channel”, “code”, and “message form” to be features of situational context. “Participants” are referred to as the addressors, addressees and the third party listening or overhearing the conversation. They play a contributing role to the context of situation. “Topic” is what is being talked about so that exact interpretation could be given and this is based on the familiarity an listener or addressee has with the topic

of discourse or subject matter. “Setting” here is concerned with the place, and the time an utterance is uttered. Even, the physical relations of participants with regard to facial expression, gesture and postures are also considered to be features of setting.

“Channel” is referred to as the medium being employed in the conversational event. This medium could be speech, written sign or even totemic signal. “Code” is the language, dialect or style of language being used in the speech event while message form is the form a message or an utterance takes. An utterance can be in form of chat, debate, storytelling, sermon etc. The realization of the form helps interpretation. Hymes further added “key” and “purpose” to features of situational context. “Key” is the tone or manner of performance while “purpose” is the reason for using a word or an expression. The relevance of this theory to this study lies in the fact that slangy expressions have meanings that are context-based. The meaning of slangs cannot be known until they are locatable in the situational context. For instance, one of the kegite’s slangs “Holy Water” which is referred to “palm wine” can only be understood in the context of the kegite register. Otherwise, the expression “holy water” could be interpreted to mean religious water for cleansing and baptism. Adopting situational context as the theoretical framework seeks to reveal the ingenuity of linguistic revolution among students on Nigerian campuses.

Data Analysis

Slangy expressions in the recorded utterances are subjected to sociolinguistic analysis. As mentioned earlier, the recorded utterances that have been selected are utterances that emanated from the prostitutes, kegite members, students protests and internet fraudsters. It must also be

mentioned here that each of the utterances was taken from different natural settings. The recorded

utterances were selected and categorized for ease of analysis and discussion.

Illustration I
Slangs Elicited from Internet Fraudsters

S/NO	Slang	Meaning/Underlying Expression
1.	G-Boys	Male internet fraudsters
2.	Bad market	Unsuccessful illegal deal
3.	Client	A fraudulent person
4.	Eke	A police officer
5.	Agbaawo	The most superior fellow in cybercrime activities
6.	Bomb Site	Bulk sms sent in order to scam.

One of the noticeable thing in slangy expressions above is semantic shift. For instance, the slang “client” whose dictionary meaning is “a person or organization that receives a service or advice from a professional” has been dislocated to imply a fraudulent person. Also, “bad market” which means a bad product or commodity in the parlance of Nigerian English has been dislocated and extended in meaning to imply unsuccessful illegal deal in the register of internet fraud. The expression “G-boys is a euphemistic expression used to refer to internet fraudsters who go about defrauding account of the gullible. The expression “Agba Awo” is a Yoruba term, meaning the most senior herbalist or cult member. However, this expression has been

extended to mean one of the most superior fellows who scams the gullible with the aid of diabolic powers. The word “eke”, derived from a name of a gun, “Ak 47” is used metonymically to represent a police officer. Also, “bomb site” is derived from the word ‘bomb’ – a war weapon that represents bulk SMS sent for scamming.

The slangy expressions above have shown that through semantic shift or semantic extension, slang usage becomes entrenched. The underlying representations of the slangs become easy because of the features of situational context. For instance, the participants (the students) and settings (campuses) of the slang usage made it easy to locate their contextual meanings.

Illustration II
Slangs Elicited from Kegites Members

S/NO	Slang	Meaning/Underlying Expression
1.	Holy Water	Palm wine
2.	Emblem	Calabash
3.	Zoo	A place where new member are groomed
4.	Transform jara	Initiation
5.	Emusifere	Location of the palm wine club

Illustration II above displays the slangy expressions “holy water”, “emblem”, “zoo” “transform jara” and “emusifere” and their underlying

representations which are “palm wine”, “calabash”, “a place where new members are groomed”, “initiation” and “location of the palm wine club

respectively. “Holy water” is derived from the holy Bible where Jesus Christ turned water to wine in a marriage ceremony in Cana. Though, the Bible does not specify the type of wine, it is believed that the wine is non-alcoholic. So, in the register of the Kegite, palm wine represents holy water. “Emblem”, whose underlying representation is “calabash”, has semiotic representation. Calabash thus becomes a mark of recognition in the kegite’ world. In a traditional setting, palm wine is usually poured in a calabash for drinking. So, the slang “emblem” is figuratively used here. Also, the slang “zoo”, whose underlying representation is “a place where new members are groomed”, has semantic shift. Denotatively, zoo is a place where wild

animals are kept. However, the word has a different meaning in the kegite register. The expression “transform jara”, whose underlying meaning is “initiation” has been coined from the word “transformation”. It is believed that transform jara will bring about new development to the life of a new member. Thus, transform jara becomes a necessity. Also, “emusifere” whose underlying representation is “location” is derived from the Yoruba word “emu” (palm wine). So, emusifere is a product of coinage that is figuratively used. What facilitates the understanding of the slangy expressions in illustration II is the situational context because the participants are kegite members residing on campuses.

Illustration III
Slangy Expression of the Prostitutes

S/NO	Slang	Meaning/Underlying Expression
1.	Call girl	A female prostitute available for sexual companionship in exchange for payment.
2.	Aristo	A prostitute
3.	Lady of the night	A prostitute
4.	Night walker	A prostitute who walks around in the night looking for men for sex
5.	Animasaun	A prostitute who offers her body to men freely.

Item I of the illustration III represents the slangy expression “call girl” as a surface representation of the expression, a prostitute available for sexual companionship in exchange for payment which it connotes, while items 2 and 3 present the slangy expressions “aristo” and “lady of the night” respectively as the surface representation of “prostitutes”. The word “aristo” is the corrupted form of Aristotle – a Greek philosopher. The word is used euphemistically here. The expression “night walker” which literarily means a person that walks in

the night is euphemistically used in order to lessen the derogatory name given to a sex worker. The slang “Animasaun” is a Yoruba term that means “the one who has and is not stingy”. Literarily, it is an expression used to encourage “giving”. However, “animasaun” has been extended to mean a prostitute who offers her body to men freely in the register of prostitution. So, the slang “animasaun” is contextualized in the register of prostitution to mean promiscuity because of the participants involved.

Illustration IV
Slangs Elicited from Students’ Protests

S/NO	Slang	Meaning/Underlying Expression
1.	<i>Aluta continua, Victoria acerta (Is this a slang actually?)</i>	Aluta continues, victory is certain
2.	Kulu temper	To make everywhere peaceful/to decorum
3.	Thirsty	Trying to get attention
4.	GOAT we are	<u>Greatest of all time</u> we are
5.	Alutagbo-gbo, gbo-gbo	serious struggle

The slangy expressions *aluta continua*, *Victoria acerta* whose underlying representations are “aluta continues”, “victory is certain” is derived from the rallying cry of the FRELIMO movement during Mozambique war for independence. This phrase was used by FRELIMO leader to cultivate popular support against the Portuguese colonial presence. So, the lexeme “Aluta” in English means “struggle continues”. The Nigerian Students’ Union borrows the lexeme and uses it as a protest attention getter. The slang “kukuluku, temper whose underlying meaning is “to maintain decorum or make everywhere peaceful” is derived from the English phrase “cool temper”. When the leader of the protest or the addressor says “kukuluku”, the audience then respond “temper”. The response shows that the addressor and the audience are together in the struggle. Also, the response to “aluta continua” by the protest members indicates that the protesters are ready for a protest.

The slang “alutagbo-gbo” whose response “gbo-gbo” as used during students’ protest means “serious struggle”. The lexeme “gbo-gbo” is onomatopoeic (a sound that almost suggests a word’s meaning). It means a thunderous sound. So, the Onomatopoeia used implies that the protest shall be serious. The acronym GOAT used as a slang in the register of students’ unionism whose full meaning is “greatest of all time” is a

solidarity slang to mean that the issues of students is paramount. The acronym is often used at the beginning of a protest.

The word “thirsty” that literarily means “needing to drink” has been dislocated to mean attention getter” in the register of students’ unionism. Hence, semantic shift has occurred here. The underlying meanings of slangs in illustration VI have brought about situational context, in that the participants (students), setting (campus), and situation (protest) enable the researchers locate their underlying representations.

Findings and Discussion

Words are primarily meant to be spoken. The meaning of an expression is usually locatable in situational context. In other words, the context in which a lexical item is used usually determines its meaning. This is why a particular lexeme or word can have different meanings because of its context of usage. For instance, in illustration I “client” that literarily means a person or organization that receives a service advice from a professional has been dislocated whose underlying representation is “a fraudulent person”. Also, “bad market” which means a bad product, or bad sales in the parlance of Nigerian English has been dislocated and extended in meaning to mean unsuccessful illegal deal. Thus, through semantic shift or

semantic extension, slang usage becomes entrenched in the youths' linguistic repertoire. Coinages and alphabetism are also sources of slang vocabulary. These are evident in the slangy expressions like "G-boys" (meaning-google boys), "aristo" (meaning Aristotle) "eke" (meaning Ak 47) transform jara (meaning transformation etc).

The study has also revealed the use of indigenous language in slangy expressions. In other words, some Yoruba words have crept into the slangs used on campuses. These are evident in the expression like "agbaawo" (a Yoruba word – meaning the most superior member of a cult) "animasaun" (a Yoruba word – meaning the one that has and who is not stingy). Also, a kegite slang "emusifere" has been coined from the Yoruba word "emu" (palm wine) to mean location of the palm wine club. Adeyanju (2007) claimed that the contact between English and Nigerian languages had led to a situation where Nigerian bilinguals present a coalition of loan words/expressions that are slangy in several languages.

Lexical borrowing and acronym have been revealed in this study. The use of "aluta continua, Victoria acerta", which is a Portuguese expressions is now borrowed and used in Nigerian students' protests. Also, the acronym "GOAT" whose underlying representation is "greatest of all time" is used as a solidarity. Some of the slangs emanated from students' protest have statement-response format. The statement "aluta continua" with the response "Victoria acerta" is an example of "call and response" format. The data analyzed in this study have revealed the ingenuity of language use among students while on campuses and this has enriched their linguistic repertoire. Therefore, it is not out of

place to submit that slang usage enhances communication, especially, among members of the same social group that have the same background knowledge of the slangs used.

Conclusion

It is often difficult to classify slang as dialect in its entirety because it is not restricted to any particular linguistic region. However, their uses are significant because of their contextual functions. This is why Farinde and Ojo (2005, p. 90) defined slangs as "words", "phrases" or meaning of words commonly used in talk among "friends colleagues". This means that slangs have meaning that can only be locatable in the context of usage. Thus, a slang can be classified as a variety of language according to users. This classification is hinged on the premise that slangy expressions have underlying representations because of the features of situational context. Ogden et al (1923) corroborated this when they see words as linguistic symbols that refer to some external realities. These linguistic symbols are, therefore, referred to as reference.

Slangy expressions are often used among the youths whose inclination in language use has brought about linguistic revolution to different social groups in Nigeria. These are evidences in the data analyzed. Since this paper has made a cursory investigation on the use of slangy expressions in some social context, it is, therefore, recommended that efforts should be made by linguists to explore other areas where slangs are used as this will expand frontiers of knowledge in language study

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