

Occupational Slangs: Their Socio-cultural Effects on some Igbo Community Markets.

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Abstract

As the world gradually progresses towards the promotion of creativity, the invention of lexical items and expressions is paving way for the indigenization and appropriation of such expressions to meet the intended communicative purposes. This paper highlights the effects of the invention of new lexical items on the socio-cultural system of Nigeria, using two markets: Emeka Offor phone and phone accessories plaza in the main market and Ochanja footwear market in Onitsha as case studies. This research emanated from the bid to look out for the reasons behind the extensive use of slangs among the traders in the various markets. The objective is to show the effects of these slangs on language users, examine the extent to which the slangs used among the traders in the various markets affects their social life and to also examine the extent to which the slang affects the customers. This research adopts the use of questionnaires, spontaneous interviews and non-participatory observation for the collection of the data. The findings from the analysis show that there are slangs peculiar to the different markets and not only do they use them as powerful means of communication and identity enhancement, also, as a way of shutting out those whom they do not want to be part of their in-group communication. The findings also shows that those who were mostly excluded from the in-group communication of the subjects of this study through the use of coded slang words were potential customers and suppliers from outside the market. This paper provides insight on the effects of occupational slang on the socio-cultural system of Nigeria in the metropolitan area of Onitsha markets.

1. Introduction

Language is a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary. It is the primary means by which humans convey meaning, both in spoken and written forms, and may also be conveyed through sign language. Language is one of the characteristics of every nation. Different people from different geographical regions communicate with language. Language is an important culture of any given nation. Culture is a way of life which includes arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that is passed down from generation to generation. It's safe to say that culture and language work hand in hand. Culture is important in a nation because it gives a certain country her identity, while language shows that a certain group of people belongs to a particular tribe or country. The need to have a special or unique communication with a subset of people gives rise to "slangs". Therefore, we would have to dig into the definition of slangs.

Martin and Nakayama (2005:32) defines slang communication as "a symbolic process whereby meaning is shared and negotiated". In other words, slang communication occurs whenever someone attributes meaning to another's words or actions. This is to say that communication is a two-way process involving a sender and a receiver and in which case, the symbols we send only make meaning because the other person shares our symbolic system as a process. Nkamigbo and Eme (2011) examines the use of slang in Onitsha (Otu Onitsha) but didn't narrow it down to the market place because slang do vary from markets.

This paper focuses on slang expressions used by traders in the various markets of Onitsha, Anambra state. These markets include Ochanja Market and Emeka Offor phone accessories plaza, Main market Onitsha. In these various markets they consist of the main traders, customers, job men, hawkers and the middlemen who they normally call "ndi oso afia". The middlemen are the major problem customers encounter most times when they come to the market. They are highly deceitful and tend to dupe customers in so many ways, either by giving them low quality products or by giving them lower quality products at a higher rate or giving them fake product as the original products and sometimes they do switch the product purchased by a customer with another product.

Therefore, the reason for this research is to carefully do some investigation with the traders in the various markets, discuss the slangs and find out why traders use slangs in the market, the effects it has

on the traders and their buyers, how it enhances the relationship between the middlemen and the product owners; most importantly, the effects it has on language users.

2.0 Literature Review

In this section, related concepts as well as similar works will be reviewed.

2.1 Meaning of Slang Communication

Martin and Nakayama (2005: 32) defined slang communication as “a symbolic process whereby meaning is shared and negotiated”. In other words, slang communication occurs whenever someone attributes meaning to another’s words or actions. This is to say that communication is a two-way process involving a sender and a receiver and in which case, the symbols we send only make meaning because the other person shares our symbolic system as a process. According to Yule (2006), words or new words are created by combining some morpheme with other morphemes, (the smallest meaningful grammatical unit of language) which these processes are called the word-formation process. Slang communication may refer to an act or a process that not only involves common experience but also mutual influence. Coleman (2012) posits that slang is created by transforming the previous existing word which is created by accidental mistake, and deliberately and creatively changing its normal meaning and use. Therefore, it can be assumed that using slang means speaking different forms of the word to convey a similar meaning to the previous existing word. In terms of language form, the processes of forming slang words are the same as forming other sorts of words in a language. Linguistically, this process is called the morphological process. Morphological processes are a mechanism for the development of vocabulary because it is a process of creating words and establishing words into a new version.

Michael Adams (2009), in his book, “The People’s Poetry” argues that slang is not merely a lexical phenomenon, a type of word, but a linguistic practice rooted in social needs and behaviors, mostly the complementary needs to fit and to stand out.

Izmaylova, Zamaletdinova & Zholshayeva (2017) defines slang as a kind of speech variety. Speech variety, or language variety, refers to any distinguishable form of speech used by a speaker or a group of speakers.

2.2. Functions of Occupational Slang

The functions of occupational slangs include:

- i. It eases communication between middlemen and product owners in the markets.
- ii. It aids with the free flow of communication between two neighbors when there's a third party in their midst.
- iii. It serves as a means of humiliation/mockery in the market in a not-so-condescending way.
- iv. It creates a close business relationship between product owners and middlemen.
- v. It's also used as dark humor to pass information between business owners about certain types of products or customers.
- vi. It equally serves as a means where middlemen can convey coded messages to the business owner concerning the behavior and need to know details about the potential customer.

2.3 The Characteristics of Slang

Slangs have many features associated with it as highlighted by several authors (c.f. Oluikpe, Anasiudu and Ogboma,1984). Some slang expressions are acceptable while the others are rude and impolite. Words and phrases may be considered as slang if they fulfill one or more of these characteristics below.

a. Slang is creative: Slang is created from a new term, so it needs the creativity of the creator. The creator is encouraged to produce new terms which are imaginative, innovative, productive, even shocking and amusing. The example of teenager’s creativity is creating slang terms from the existing words. In this case, teenagers still use the original words to acquire a new meaning, which is different from its original meaning. Some of them are constructed from the original words so as to give another name but they have the same meaning. For example, in Onitsha, most teenagers rarely ask someone “kedu” instead they will ask the person “K way,” which simply means how are you?

b. Slang is flippant: This simply means that slang produced has irrelevant meaning with the context. This makes some slangs considered as rude. For instance, fucking chicken, bitch, motherfucker and

shit. These words are simply rude and do not have any meaning at all. That is the more reason why it's seen as a curse word and not a slang.

c. Slang is fresh: This simply refers to slang expressions that are produced by new words, which are different from the existing words. For example, 'homie' means 'close friend', 'walkie-talkie' means 'a portable two-way radio', and 'moola' means 'money'.

d. Slang is Onomatopoeic: This simply means that slang can be produced by imitating certain sounds. For example: boo boo, icky, buzz, yucky, dweeb, nwinwo etc. 'Boo boo' is used to express sadness, it is adapted from a sound of crying. The same applies to the sound "nwinwo" which is used to express "man of the moment". It is gotten from the sound made by an entourage.

e. Slang is short lived/transient: This refers to the fact that slang is associated with short duration. This is because, it has a temporary stay and always changes with fashion and events.

2.4. Types of slang

According to Allan and Burridge (2006), there are five different types of slang. There are many different types of slang, but some common categories include:

- a. Regional slang
- b. Ethnolect slang
- c. Internet slang
- d. Occupational slang
- e. Youth slang

Regional slang refers to the informal language or vocabulary that is specific to a particular region or locality. Ethnolects are dialects or varieties of a language that are associated with a particular ethnic or cultural group. Internet slang is also known as "internet short hand, cyber slang, net speak, digispeak or chatspeak". This is a non-standard or unofficial language used by the people in the internet to communicate to one another.

Occupational slangs refer to specialized language or jargon that is unique to a particular profession, trade, or occupation. The youth slang refers to the informal and often ever-evolving language used by young people within a particular cultural or social group.

2.5. Objective of the Study

This aspect of the occupational slangs is the focus of this paper, using Onitsha markets as a case study. It is the informal vocabulary and expressions used by people within a specific field of work to communicate with one another. It is also intertwined with the youth slang which involves the informal language used by young people within a particular cultural or social group. It is characterized by its unique vocabulary, phrases, and expressions that may have different meanings or connotations from standard language or older generations' speech. The paper aims at carefully describing these slangs used in these markets and the effects they have on the buyers who do not understand the slangs.

2.6. Empirical Review

Elfrida and Nela (2023) in their work "Linguistics Realization Analysis on Slang Words: Social Media Whatsapp" says that people nowadays use social media as one of the methods to communicate like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Wechat. As an application, it can replace events or activities that should be carried out by individuals or groups. With language, an individual or group can ask another individual or group to do a job. In this world there is always progress and constant development. The development has led to an innovation that is certainly very beneficial to mankind. The aim of the research is to describe the meaning of slang used on WhatsApp based on true meaning.

The authors adopted the qualitative descriptive method (Lambert & Lambert, 2013) and concluded by discovering some words used by teenagers on the WhatsApp application. This is different from the slangs of traders used in their business premise that this present paper intends to investigate.

Nkamigbo and Eme (2011) examines the use of slang in Onitsha, in their work "Igbo slang in Otu Onitsha: Towards enriching the Igbo language". This research investigates the Igbo slang expressions used by the members of Otu-Onitsha speech community. They look out for the contexts in which slangs are used in Otu-Onitsha. The authors pointed out that Otu-Onitsha speech community comprises of Igbo speakers from the different dialect areas of Igbo land. The authors use qualitative analysis, method for this research. Their findings include that there are about eight contexts in which slang is used in the Otu-Onitsha speech community. This is also different from this present study which focuses on the language used in Onitsha markets by the sellers and middle men against the buyers.

3. Methodology

This research adopts the qualitative research method. The researcher collected slangs used in the various markets of Onitsha through the means of interviews, phone recorder, questionnaires and non-participatory observation from randomly selected business owners and middlemen of the two major markets. In the analysis, the literal meaning of the slangs will be given before the contextual or intended meaning.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This section gives a detailed analysis of the data collected from the Emeka Offor phone and phone accessories sellers and Ochanja footwear sellers, their literal meanings and the intended meaning or the contextual meaning of the slangs.

Slang expression as used by Emeka Offor phone accessories plaza and Ochanja footwear market portrays the various aspects of their lives' activities in the marketplace. It also exposes their relationship with customers and people around them. At times they use slang expression to ridicule themselves and settle some dispute between them and their customers. The slangs are grouped according to social and economic life of the users. The slangs will be described using the literal and contextual meanings. The description of the slangs is shown in tabular form below;

4.1 Social life in Emeka Offor phone accessory plaza

There is always a social relation or social interaction in any relationship between two or more individuals. The social life of the traders in Emeka Offor plaza is summarized by the following slang expressions;

Table 1: Slangs used in Emeka Offor Social life.

S/N	SLANGS	LITERAL MEANING	CONTEXTUAL MEANING
1	Ọhì	Short form of a town OHITA	Insanity
2	Bēe ímádù	To cut someone	To make call
3	Kēsi	Container	Scarcity of an item
4	Ntíchá	To dust something	Robbery
5	Gbàdó ányà	To show concentration on what one is doing	Be careful
6	Kwèchírí	To remain adamant	Persistence
7	Úgò	Eagle	Original
8	Nzā	The smallest type of bird, implying a regrettable portion of something	Fake
9	Wāa	Coined from the Yoruba word meaning to go or depart	To leave or go
10	Wùsá àrú	Keep the body	To relax/never mind
11	Ọsèmè	Oseme	Prostitute
12	Nwā mbè	Tortoise offspring	Dwarf implying too small
13	Ásá	A specie of fish	A pretty lady
14	Mpírí	To press something	To stage a fight
15	Ípìòkù	To strike fire	To have sex
16	Ìcho āfò	To feed the stomach	To eat food
17	Ìchā anyā	To wash or sharpen the eye	To smoke
18	Kēe way	What is the direction or path	How are you?
19	Í nā-ájòkwá	Meaning extension	To have fun
20	Ādākā	Chimpanzee	Fake product
21	Wēe	Pathway	General name for sellers
22	Ónyé mgbū	A person that brings regrettable news	Foolish person
23	Bòngó	A wide mouth music drum	Baggy trouser

These are some of the slangs used in the social life of Emeka Offor phone accessory sellers in the market to boost their social status in the market and also to have a good relationship with one another in the market. Some slangs are illustrated in sentences below:

24. Achọrọ m ịbee gị n' ekwentị, mana ị nọzị nso
 Want pro to cut Pro Prep phone but Pro is near
 "I wanted to call you, but you're close."

25. Ekwentị a ị na- achọ bụ kesi
 Phone dem Pro aux look is case
 "This phone you're looking for is scarce".

26. E tichara Nkechi n' ụzọ mbata plaza anyị
 Pro dust Noun Prep mouth door entrance plaza ProN
 "Nkechi was robbed at the entrance of our plaza."

27. Ị bata Emeka Offor plaza ị gbado anya
 Pro come-in Noun plaza pro stand up eye
 "Be careful when you come to Emeka Offor plaza."

4.1.1 Economic life in Emeka Offor plaza

The economic life comprises of all human practices and activities to earn a living which is connected with trade, that is, the act of buying and selling. Phone accessories sellers in Emeka Offor have different slangs which aid them in their business premise. They include the following;

Table 2: Slang used in Emeka Offor Economic life

S/N	SLANGS	LITERAL MEANING	CONTEXTUAL MEANING
28	Lítàs	Measurement	Thousand
29	Òwú	A thread. It is derived from something tiny or slim.	Lack of money or small money
30	Shìshì	Onomatopoeia	Not even a dime
31	Àkàrà òkú	Hot bean cake	Fast moving goods
32	Akpàtì	Box. It is derived from something hidden, not seen	Slow moving goods
33	Mpíawá āzū	To break back	To deceive
34	Ísí ápūtàghì	Head is stuck, could not come out	Not successful
35	Ó gbùrù ózú	Kill a corpse	To make excess profit on an item.
36	Íbú	Load	Goods
37	Isongo	Used to mean payment	Money
38	Íbè onú	To cut mouth	Excess increase in price of goods
39	Ijanja	Noise made by cowries	Money
40	Úkwù òjì	The base of an iroko tree	Inflated price
41	Nkú	Firewood. Something that makes food or a thing to get done or happen fast	Money
42	Ónyé òkùkù	Panel beater	Money spender
43	Òjì ányá ērí	One who eats with the eye	Window shopping
44	Ntú	Ashes	Cheap
45	Mpá nkú	Father of firewood	Wealthy man
46	Íbùbà	To take something inside. Carrying in or stocking money	To make much money
47	Mmēmmé	Feast	When there's a lot of customers in someone's shop.

These are the slangs used in their Economic life of Emeka Offor phone accessory sellers while doing business for the day. They tend to use these slangs to deceive their customers in one way or the

other, they as well use some of the slangs above to motivate the spirit of someone buying from them, to give them assurance and also to motivate one another in the market when business is on-going. Below are some slangs as used in sentences.

48. Piara ya ahĩa IteI n' ọnu litas ise

Press Pro product IteI Prep mouth Litas five

“Add extra five thousand for the IteI product for her”.

49. Owu jigodu Chigozie ofuma

Thread hold-perf Name well

“Chigozie doesn't have money.”

50. Shishị adịrọ m n' akpa

Onomatopoeia exists pro Prep bag

“I don't have a dime in my pocket”.

51. Ahĩa Chinaza a batara ọhuru bu akara oku

Market Name Det come-pst new is hot bean cake

“That Chinaza's new market is moving so fast.”

52. Ahĩa a Chinwe zutara bu akpatị

Market det Name buy-Pst is box

“The market Chinwe bought is so slow”.

4.2 Social life in Ochanja Market

In the Ochanja market, they have a social relationship within the traders. Sometimes in the market when there are poor or slow sales, some of the young traders tend to play, have a heart-to-heart conversation and this enhances their social life as traders in the market. In the Ochanja market, they don't have much slang expressions used in the market for communication, the slangs they use are quite few and they include;

Table 3: Slang used in Ochanja market social life

S/N	SLANGS	LITERAL MEANING	CONTEXTUAL MEANING
53	Ọnyé nkú	Firewood seller	A wealthy person
54	Éshị	Onomatopoeia	A fine thing
55	Íbù íwá	To take a girl along	To take a prostitute along with oneself
56	Í nà-ámà tūu	To measure something	To talk rubbish
57	Pīa m òlé	Flog me how many	To tell facts
58	Búdaà	To put something down	To calm down
59	Ọnyé ímì	A nose person	A snitch/pokenoser
60	Kēe wēe	Which pathway	How are you?
61	Í nā-àkú	To hit	To enjoy / to have fun
62	Wàa ọsịsọ	A Yoruba-Igbo word meaning, to go very fast	To walk away fast
63	Í nà-àkpō kásētì	To play a tape	To boost
64	Chanchaji	Onomatopoeia	To convince someone
65	Mpialú	To flog	To steal
66	Ọlé	How many	Truth
67	Mmírì òńúńú	Drinkable water	A fine girl
68	Ìnà ànyúkwa	To urinate	To have sex
69	Ñwá ñmānù	An oily person	A clean person
70	Mólómóló	Onomatopoeia	Brand new
71	Ọnyé ígbù	A person who brings pains or losses or regrets	A foolish person

72	Í pìà kòsí	To flog kosi	To gist about something
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These are some of the slangs used in the social life of the Ochanja market traders, with these slangs listed above, the traders tend to make fun of the customers walking pass them without their notice, make fun of each other and also settle their little dispute between one another in the market. Below are some sentences with some of the slangs, so as to see how the slangs are used in a sentence and their English meaning.

73. Nwoke ahụ kpu okpu mmeemee, ji nkụ, ọ bụ onye nkụ
 Man Det to-wear cap red hold firewood
 “The man on red hat has alot of money, he's a wealthy man.”

74. Ọtutu ụmụ nwoke n' ime ahia na-ebu nwa
 A lot children men Prep market Prep carry baby
 “A lot of men inside the market carry prostitutes”.

75. Chibuike na-ama tuu oge niile
 Name and measure null time every
 “Chibuike talks a lot of rubbish every time”.

4.2.1. Economic life in Ochanja Market

The moment when most people are busy attending to their customers in Ochanja market, there are slangs used by the traders to talk with each other so the customer won't be able to know what they're saying. This occurs mostly in situations where they want to assist each other. A seller who does not have the exact product a customer wants or may not have the quantity the customer wants, will through the use of slang ask his neighbor to give him the product. The use of slangs is to prevent the customer from knowing the main source of the product. Such slangs include;

Table 4: Slang used in Ochanja market Economic Life

S/N	SLANGS	LITERAL MEANING	CONTEXTUAL MEANING
76	Yáwúyáwú	Onomatopoeia	Fake product
77	Ó ghàfugó	To pour something away	It's futile
78	Wadị	Meaning to top up	To add extra money
79	Mgbòrògwù	Root	To influence a customer to buy from you
80	Òlé	How many	Quantity of the product
81	Konde	Gotten from condemn	A damaged product
82	Í gbù ózú	To kill corpse	To make excess profit on an item
83	Íbùbà	To carry something	To make excess sales
84	Íbú	Load	Goods
85	Ñkú	Firewood	Money
86	Àkàrà òkú	Hot bean cake	Fast moving product

These are the economic life slangs used in Ochanja market by the traders for communication when buying and selling is on-going. They make sentences while using these slangs and some of these slangs will be constructed into a sentence and their meanings as well.

87. Biko nye m akpukpu ụkwù a nke yawuyawu
 Please give me shoe dem det which fake
 “Please give me that shoe, the fake one precisely.”

88. Ngwa ahia ahụ m were n' ụlọ ahia gi ayafugo
 Product dem pro take pre house shop pro spilt
 “The product I took from your shop is futile.”

89. Biko tinyere ya ngwa ahia a wadị
 Please put pro product det Wadi

“Add that product extra money for me”.

4.3. The similarities between Emeka Offor plaza and Ochanja market slangs

The research shows some similarities between the Ochanja market sellers and Emeka Offor phone accessories sellers slangs.

90. Owu— This is popularly known in Igbo land as thread, a slim and tiny thread, but, as a slang used in the metropolitan area of Onitsha, it is recognized as a period when someone lacks money. Currently there is a slang for “owu” which is known as being broke. Those outside this metropolitan area would mistake “owu” for thread when it is not spoken in this particular context.

91. Nku— In Igbo land, “nku” is recognized as firewood but in Onitsha metropolitan area, it has a corrupted meaning as a slang to refer to money. This manner of adoption is such that firewood makes something to burn fast, just as likened to money which makes almost everything to happen fast. Someone from another area would mistake “nku” for firewood when it is not spoken in that particular context. This does not mean that in Onitsha metropolitan “nku” is not recognized as firewood, rather it shows that they can be used in different contexts, which is either slang expression or as in normal usage.

92. Ibuba— This is known as an act to carry something from one place to another but in another context which is slangs, it is known as to sell plenty market. I realized that this slang is mostly used when there are poor or slow sales for the day and your neighbor is seen having better sales while others are busy hosting and sleeping due to poor sales and they have no customers to attend to.

93. Ibu: Once ‘Ibu’ is mentioned in Igbo land, the next thing that comes to your mind is load because this is what the Igbo tribe recognizes as ‘ibu’. But, for the people in the metropolitan area of Onitsha, ‘ibu’ is known as “goods” to them, that is, a new product. Someone from another area will not be able to recognize ‘ibu’ as goods because the meaning it conveys a totally different from what they have known.

95. Igbo ozu: In Igbo land, this is known as an act to kill a corpse but in Onitsha metropolitan area, traders see it as an act to sell products with plenty profit. The research findings show that this particular slang is normally used when there are lots of customers in a trader’s shop, the person tends to sell the products higher than what others are selling them. Someone from another area may not understand this because “igbo ozu” literally means to kill a corpse and not the act of selling products with plenty profits.

96. Onye nku: In Igbo land, this is known as a firewood seller, but in Onitsha metropolitan area it is used to refer to a wealthy person. Once “onye nku” is mentioned in this area, the hearer would ask for the particular “onye nku” being referred to. “Onye nku” is widely known as a wealthy person in these markets but someone from another area would mistake it for someone that sells firewood.

These are modes of the derivation of some slangs in the Ochanja market and Emeka Offor Phone Accessories Plaza. Their differences as seen in the analysis are quite much because there are some terms that cannot be used in Emeka Offor plaza but can be used in Ochanja market.

5. Findings and Conclusion

In our society, language is regarded as that which influences culture just as culture influences language. Slang is a variety of language and the most creative area of language because people form their own language from an already existing language, giving it another total meaning which is different from the source language. This paper is focused on the identification of the slang expressions used in the various markets by the traders. The findings shows that one major reason for the use of slangs by the traders in the various markets is to use it as a potent tool that empowers them to either open the door to “outsiders” to partake in their conversation or shut it against them through the use of special slang. The effect of these slangs on language users is that most times, as potential customers, they are excluded from the in-group communication of the traders, middle men and suppliers from outside the market. The customers’ inability to understand these slangs make it easier for them to be deceived during the transaction. Another effect of slang expression on language users is the ability to spice up the source language and to construct new slang. Igbo language as the source language and the use of slang with the Igbo spice up the language in a way that makes Igbo fun for speech. This work shows that slang expression enhances language preservation due to the fact that most of the slang expressions formed are gotten from the native language (Igbo) which is the source language. Therefore, this aids to enhance the language preservation.

This study concludes that the use of slang expressions is a reflection of linguistic diversity and cultural identity, as well as a potent tool that empowers to either open the door to “outsiders” to partake in a communication or shut it against them. The findings of this research support the previous research on the slang expression used in Otu Onitsha. It is also important to note that slang expression used by the traders in the various markets can change and evolve overtime. New phrases emerge, and different slangs gains popularity based on current events and trends. These slangs contribute to the dynamic nature of occupational slang used in Nigeria and reflects the ever-evolving linguistic landscape of slangs.

Finally, occupational slang has been used to create a sense of community, expression of cultural identity and as a potential tool for communication. Future research could continue to explore on the usage of occupational slang expressions in Nigeria as well.

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