

CYBERCRIME; IDENTIFICATION AND EXCLUSION: A STUDY OF LANGUAGE USE OF YAHOO-BOYS IN AWKA METROPOLIS

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Abstract

Generally, the major aim of this article is to investigate the identification and exclusion role of language using select Yahoo-boys in Awka metropolis. Specifically, it focuses on investigating how possible they identify themselves, exclude non-conformist, and elude the eyes of others through their use of language. To achieve a reliable result, a qualitative research design was used by the researchers and the conversations of select Yahoo-boys were recorded and analysed. The research findings show that their use of language enhances great rapport and creates a sense of oneness amongst them as they identify themselves with it. Again, the use of language excludes those who do not belong to their group through the use of slangs and coinages. The article concludes that their slangy expression for EFCC, Police, and their presence shows the extent to which their use of language keeps them off the eyes of the public. Again, it is pertinent for the National Orientation Agency of Nigeria, the government agency charged with the promotion of values, morals and patriotism among Nigerians to champion the cause for values reorientation among Nigerians by consistently launching massive public campaigns against youth involvement in cyber fraud perpetration while simultaneously promoting the value of hard work.

Keywords: Language, Identification, Exclusion, Yahoo-Boys, Cybercrime, Slangs.

Introduction

Language, without doubt, is an indispensable factor of society. When we talk about society it cuts across every society. Although society varies from one to another, but no society exists without a given language. The language we talk about has always been expressed by human beings who are higher animals. This is possible because of man's reasoning faculty that makes him to ascribe conventions and symbol to the language. Human Beings are social animals and language is an instrument of the society which is acculturated into a given society. Through the instrumentality of language, man identifies and makes findings about his environment.

Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntary produced symbols (Sapir, 8). Crystal further affirms that language is referred to as human vocal noise or the graphic representation of this noise in writing used systematically and conventionally by a community for purpose of communication (252). Generally speaking, language is a basic tool of socio-cultural communication; it specifically deals with the human capacity for using and acquiring complex systems of communication (Bloomfield, 18).

Language is one of the peculiar characteristics of man as language is unique to every human being. No other species possesses a truly symbolic means of communication and no human society, however simple its material culture, lacks the basic human heritage of a well-developed language. Language therefore is very vital to the existence of any group as a human community. It also serves as a means of identification of any people as a unique entity and a unifying factor. Often, language is also used as a means of tracing common ancestry of a group that shares the

same language. Different peoples have also regarded their languages as one of the most valuable aspects of their heritage and own them as the vehicle for expressing, preserving, and propagating their culture and civilization. They work hard at developing and preserving their language in the face of any threats. However, as language plays the identification role, so it excludes people who cannot identify with such language. Even in a nation like Igbo, that might have a general Igbo language, there are still dialects that separate and distinguish people.

This research work seeks to investigate the use of language for identification among a speech community or a particular social group and the exclusion of those who do not belong to such community, using Yahoo Boys as a study. Languages symbolize identities and are used to signal identities by those who speak them and also exclude those who do not speak them. People are also categorized by other people according to the language they speak. People belong to different groups and have various social identities. Each group has its own language or variety of a language e.g. a regional group will have a regional dialect (which is a language variety), or a football team supporters club will have its own jargon. Speaking that language/variety/jargon gives a sense of belonging to the group. People communicate with each other using the shared language of their group. The group might be as small as a couple (married or unmarried partners, twins, mother and daughter etc. who share a 'private' language where only they know the meaning of some words) or as large as a nation, where everyone understands the allusions in their shared language (often allusions to shared history, to contemporary events, to media people of fact or fiction etc.). The 'secret' language of the smallest group and the 'public' language of the national group are two 'varieties' of the same language.

In Nigeria, Yahoo Boys refer to youths who make use of computers, phones, and the Internet to defraud unsuspecting victims, especially those outside the country. The term "Yahoo-Yahoo" originated from the fact that the use of Yahoo e-mails and Yahoo instant messenger was a dominant medium of communication between offenders and victims. Those who are involved in "Yahoo-Yahoo" are popularly referred to as "Yahoo Boys". With the popularity of Gmail services and its use, "Yahoo Boys" are now being referred to as G-Boys. With the spread of awareness of "Yahoo-Yahoo" and sensitization of potential victims, a group of "yahoo boys" have resorted to the inclusion of magic and spiritual powers to aid the defrauding of victims (Ayotunde, 6). This phenomenon is referred to as yahoo plus, and perpetrators are referred to as "yahoo boys" plus. All of the above activities have not been given adequate attention in scholarship especially from a linguistic view point. Some of the recent trends in sociolinguistic study have focused on the understanding of the ideologies that underpin linguistic variation and how linguistic behaviour in a multilingual setting makes people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social role. Accordingly, Language scholars have grilled these matters more in face- to-face communication than in imaginary contexts.

The aim of this research is to examine the use of a language amongst Yahoo Boys in Awka metropolis. And to ascertain how they use the language to communicate within themselves and have some conversation when someone who is not among them is in their midst or environment. That's identifying their fellows and excluding others through their use of language.

Apparently, this group of boys nationwide has a different variety of language through which they communicate. And the reason for this innovation remains a puzzle to many; thus, this forms the basis of the problems of this research. They include: the problem of whether they use

this variety of language as means of identifying themselves or excluding others who do not share in their identity and the problem of using language as means of hideout from the legal authorities.

Concepts of Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics, or the study of language in relation to society, is a relative newcomer to the linguistic fold. It wasn't until the early 1960s, largely as a result of William Labov's work in America, and Peter Trudgill's in Britain, that it developed into a recognized branch of linguistics. Before then there had been a long tradition of studying dialects, usually in remote rural areas, as part of language surveys, but with an agenda largely dictated by concerns to record and preserve historical features of the language. This kind of dialectology was inherently conservative and was part of larger, comparative language studies pursued under the discipline of philology. Labov was one of the first linguists to turn his attention away from rural, to urban, subjects, in an attempt to analyse the contemporary features of American speech.

It is an established fact that Sociolinguistics remains one of the fastest growing and most humanistic aspects of linguistics, calling for scholarly investigation, particularly in Nigeria, the most populous nation of the black race (Adeyanju, xi).

Given that Sociolinguistics concept is now a popular and an age long subject of research interest, we shall consider the views of some of these authors on it. Holmes and Wilson in their book, state that sociolinguistics study the relationship between language and society (1). According to Wardhaugh, Sociolinguistics is the study of our everyday life- how language works in our casual conversation and the media we are exposed to, and the presence of societal norms, policies, and laws which address language (1). Hudson defines Sociolinguistics as the study of language in relation to society implying (intentionally) that Sociolinguistics is part of the study of language (4).

Sociolinguistics is in many ways a blend of sociology and linguistics. It is sometimes referred to as the 'sociology of language', although that label suggests a greater concern with sociological rather than linguistic explanations, whereas sociolinguists are principally concerned with language, or, to be more precise, with what Dell Hymes crucially calls 'socially constituted' language: with the way language is constructed by, and in turn helps to construct, society. Sociolinguists, on the other hand, are more interested in 'real' speech, within and among communities. Their overriding concern is with the way in which language varies according to the social context in which it is used and the social group to which it belongs: Labov terms this 'secular linguistics'. The social variables which influence speech include personal factors such as age, and education, as well as more general ones like nationality, race, and sex. All of these have a bearing on language use.

The above understanding of Sociolinguistics brings to light the relationship between language and society, the various functions of language in society, and the way in which language varies according to the social context in which it is used and the social group to which it belongs. Thus it covers the role of identification and exclusion played by language in society which is the main point of focus in this research.

Essence of Speech Community

A speech community is a concept in sociolinguistics that describes a distinct group of people who use language in a unique and mutually accepted way among themselves. According to

Teemant and Pinnegar (10), a speech community is a group of people who share rules for conducting and interpreting at least one variety of a language and dialect.

To be considered part of a speech community, one must have a communicative competence. That is, the speaker has the ability to use language in a way that is appropriate in the given situation. It is possible for a speaker to be communicatively competent in more than one language (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speech_community).

Demographic characteristics such as areas or locations have helped to create speech community boundaries in speech community concept. Those characteristics can assist exact descriptions of specific groups' communication patterns.

Speech communities can be members of a profession with a specialized jargon, distinct social groups like high school students or hip-hop fans, or even tight-knit groups like families and friends. Members of speech communities will often develop slang to serve the group's special purposes and priorities. This is evident in the use of lingo within sports teams.

Identification Role of Language

Topader, (1) Identity in its simplest definition is 'who I am'. If a person asked me who I am, definitely what comes into my mind is that this person wants to know your name. Assuming that the same person asking me 'who I am' knows my name, then this person is looking for a more profound identity of the real me. The person wants to know who you are deep down. The answer to such a question does not come easily because who one is deep down is never fully captured and expressed in words. This then gives us two basic aspects of a person's identity: their name that single them out from others and the inner, intangible that constitute who one really is. Language plays an important role in defining or describing the identity of a person. Listening to a dialogue by different individuals, our interpretation of their identities will most probably be influenced by their voices, accents and other features of how they speak.

Identity as a Linguistic Phenomenon

One may want to know what this phenomenon of identity is. Identity is realizing who we are at personal level and also at community level. To make such identification, language has been a salient feature of making group membership and social identity. From such group identification, one again is able to know their identity as individual. Through language for example, you are able to know which ethnic group you belong to and from that ethnic group who really are you. A good example is of people who migrate to other social setting, as Vignoles explicates (1-15). These people find it difficult to fit to such setting due to language differences. For such people to identify with people within that social setting, then learning their language becomes vital. After learning their language such individual is able to fit and identify with the rest. With regard to social identification, it focuses on how people understand their interaction to the world, how those relationships are constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future. Social identity is seen as individual's identity made from the language he/she uses within a social group setting. Language is a creator of social identity and a medium to gain self-esteem and power in the society. Communication works as a medium for renegotiating individual position in society and provides an access to power. Gaining power means equal treatment. Through language one is treated as part of that society. This then means that language, the individual, and the society cannot be separated in creation of social identity

Exclusion Role of a Language

Exclusion in its simplest form is the act of excluding or shutting out someone or something from consideration or taking part in any activity. It is a conscious denial of partaking to

individuals well placed to be gathering to an action. Accordingly, there are three degrees of exclusion and they are: the primary, secondary, and tertiary exclusion. The primary and secondary are psychological and more devastating while tertiary exclusion involves physical removal. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_exclusion

People are excluded when they are forced into exile, imprisoned, or placed in asylum. In this case, these set of people are physically excluded and are similar to tertiary exclusion. In a secondary exclusion, this is where persons have all access to facilities for participation but find their ability to exercise their rights limited by regulations and conventions brought about by those who have and use power (authority). The third degree of exclusion is primary which involves persons physically present but are deprived of their meanings, values, and activities. These persons' values and activities are not acknowledged.

Modes of Exclusion through Language

The fact that language separates people into groups makes it a convenient way of identifying as well as excluding. Some measures determine who are shut out or excluded according to Bamgbose, and they are illiteracy, official language, medium of institution in school and language proscription (1).

Illiteracy: This is simply the inability to read and write. And it is a means of exclusion through language. A person who is not able to read and write is at a great disadvantage, because document including personal letters have to be read to him or her by a lettered person.

Official Language: The official language in Nigeria is English. Since this official language is the mandatory medium in practically all official domains, thus who cannot use the official language is excluded from participating in the nation's affair.

Medium of Instruction in Schools: The use of a language other than a child's first language as a medium of instruction particularly in early primary education is a mode of language exclusion, since it ignores the language that the child brings to school, which he or she is already proficient in.

Language Proscription: Language proscription from Bamgbose can emanate from government and its agencies as well as promote organisations. It can also take the form of recognition of certain languages. For instance, some private organisations make rules for language in their establishment.

Overview of Cybercrime

The term cybercrime can be used to describe any criminal activity which involves the computer or the internet network. This term is used for crimes such as fraud, theft, blackmail, forgery, and embezzlement, in which computers or networks are used. In (Maitanmi and Ayinde, 1) Cybercrime is defined as a type of crime committed by criminals who make use of a computer as a tool and the internet as a connection in order to reach a variety of objectives such as illegal downloading of music files and films, piracy, spam mailing and the likes. Cybercrime evolves from the wrong application or abuse of internet services. The concept of cybercrime is historical. It was discovered that the first published report of cybercrime occurred on the mainframe computer in the 1960s (Maitanmi and Ayinde, 3). Since these computers were not connected to the internet or with other computers, the crime was committed by the employers (insider) in the company, hence it was referred to as computer crime rather than cybercrime. Cybercrime is a new trend that is gradually growing as the internet continues to penetrate every sector of our society and no one can predict its future. The crime usually requires a hectic task to trace. Generally, cybercrime may be divided into one of two types of categories: 1. Crimes that affects computer networks and devices directly. Examples are malicious code, computing

viruses, malware etc. 2. Crimes facilitated by computer networks or devices, the primary target of which is independent of the computer networks or device. Examples include Cyber Stalking, Fraud and identity theft, phishing scams and information warfare.

Yahoo-Boys in Nigeria

The notoriety of Nigerian cyber-fraudsters popularly known as the Yahoo-boys has consistently positioned Nigeria among the major cyber-crime hubs in the world. Yahoo-boyism, a term which emerged in Nigeria in the early 2000s, is locally used to describe a criminal subculture of youths involved in cyber fraud perpetration (Ojedokun, 3). This social tag originated via the mode employed by yahoo boys in defrauding, which involves sending sinister and deceptive e-mails using 'Yahoo mail'. Alubo and Shadare (4) inform us that the web has created a platform for fraudsters to engage in advance-fee-fraud via the sending of spam e-mails. This act, he notes, is called 419, and the perpetrators called Yahoo-boys. They typically utilize free e-mail accounts (e.g., Yahoo or Hotmail) to communicate with their targets.

Ojedokun (10) and Tade and Aliyu (9) separately discover that many youths in Nigeria were attracted to cyber fraud by the desire to get rich and peer pressure. They were mainly motivated to engage in cyber fraud as a result of differentially associating with friends and peers who were also involved in the criminal act themselves and who also attached positive meanings, attitudes, values and orientations (definitions) to cyber fraud perpetration. Equally, they revered their friends and peers who became wealthy through cyber fraud and were consequently inspired to imitate their criminal behaviour. Furthermore, Ojedokun says that yahoo-boys attach serious importance to learning criminal techniques and skills from established cyber-fraudsters because they recognized the fact that cyber fraud is a complex crime that cannot be successfully perpetrated by a novice who has not been strategically initiated and socialized into its intricacies (11).

There are two broad categories of operational tools used by the Yahoo-boys, and they are: (a) tools for facilitating crime commission on the cyberspace (such as laptop, mobile phone, printer, Internet, virtual private network (VPN), Internet protocol (IP) log-ins, and cheque samples) and (b) tools for driving illicit cash flows (such as Bitcoin, Blockchain, Cash App, Ethereum, Paypal, and Zelle). Apparently, both hardware and software tools being utilized by the Yahoo-boys for cyber fraud perpetration were not originally created and/or designed for illegitimate purposes. Rather, Yahoo-boys are converting them from their primary status as legitimate resources to criminal tools. In February 2021, the Central Bank of Nigeria, the apex monetary authority in Nigeria, banned the use of cryptocurrencies claiming that they are increasingly being employed for money laundering, financial terrorism and other criminal 14 International Journal of Criminal Justice activities The rising popularity of this cyber-crime may not be unconnected to the fact that the Nigerian state is currently experiencing economic imbalance with attendant high rate of unemployment among able-bodied youths, erosion of traditional values of integrity, and quick-money syndrome. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has recorded several arrests and prosecution of cyber-crime suspects. Examples of such include the arrest of six "yahoo boys" in Abuja (Daily post, 8); prosecution of an arrested suspect who attempted to bribe EFCC operatives with 6.9 million Naira (19,140 US dollars), and several other apprehensions and prosecutions in the last one year. It is expected that with the apprehensions and prosecutions, more understanding of the "modus operandi" of culprits will emerge. However, crime may not be static as suspects could adopt new methods when the old ones are known to the people and law enforcement agencies.

Implication on Cybercrimes in our Domain

The followings are some of the identified sources of cybercrime among the Yahoo-Boys:

- a. Unemployment is one of the major causes of cybercrime in Nigeria. It is a known fact that over 20 million graduates in the country do not have gainful employment. This has automatically increased the rate at which they take part in criminal activities for their survival.
- b. Quest for wealth is another cause of cybercrime in Nigeria. Youths of nowadays are very greedy, they are not ready to start small hence they strive to level up with their rich counterparts by engaging in cybercrimes.
- c. Lack of strong cyber-crime Laws also encourages the perpetrators to commit more crime knowing that they can always go uncaught. There is need for our government to come up with stronger laws and be able to enforce such laws so that criminals will not go unpunished.
- d. Incompetent security on personal computers. Some personal computers do not have proper or competent security controls, it is prone to criminal activities hence the information on it can be stolen.

Methodology and Collection of the Data

The method and design adopted for this research is the qualitative research design. It involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (text, audio, or video) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. Thus, it is suitable for the study since the researchers need to record conversations of the Yahoo-boys in Ifite-Awka, Awka. The research area of this study is limited to Ifite-Awka. Ifite-Awka is situated in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The population of the study consists of the yahoo boys in Nigeria, within Awka the capital of Anambra state for this study. By this definition, the research identified the Nigerian youths whose sources of income and means of livelihood depends on the income generated from fraud. In this study, the researchers use the purposive sampling technique and assess participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. This enables the researchers to pick the data based on their relevance to the study. Data were got through tape recording at the three HKs in Ifite. It is pertinent to point out that eliciting data from the Yahoo-boys was particularly challenging because many of them were sceptical about the intention of the usage as a result of the increasing monitoring of their activities by EFCC officials. As regards data analysis, the generated tape-recorded data were subjected to critical discourse analysis involving careful transcription, detailed description and interpretation. Their vocabulary, grammar and conversational codes were examined, and data were thematically analysed, and interpreted in line with the research objectives.

Data Analysis

Slangy Expression

This has to do with the use of vocabularies between people who belong to a particular group, it also has to do with the use of very informal language that is used in spoken rather than in written expression. Slangy expressions normally refer to particular words and meanings used especially by particular group of people. Slang is an informal expression that is restricted to a context. It is an informal, non-standard expression and its usage is common in spoken expressions. It involves humour, and all forms of vocabularies. Slang is usually patronized by the younger generation as a result of their youthful age a type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people. Below are instances of such expressions as manifest in the data:

Use of Slangy Expressions

1. **Maye:** This is a female potential victim. In this case, they (yahoo-boys) create a foreign male Facebook or Instagram account to scour for the “mayes.”
2. **Maga:** This is a male potential victim. Just like the “mayes,” they create foreign female Facebook or Instagram account to get these people.
3. **Ss3 boys:** This denotes the policemen.
4. **Kumash:** This is a slang for smoking
5. **Sapa:** This slang denotes being in financial lack.
6. **HK:** This is a place where a group of Yahoo-boys live and it’s strictly for their fraudulent activities.
7. **Consignment:** This means a sham document sent to “client” so as to gain their trust.
8. **Levels:** This is a slang for weed.

Obviously, the use of slangs by the Yahoo-Boys is of great relevance to the idea of language playing identification and exclusion roles. Most of these slangs are only understood by them. They converse and identify one another with these slangs, at the same time exclude those who are not among them. As a matter of fact, during the collection of this data, they had to patiently explain some of these slangs to the researchers, because they could not be decoded by mere observations.

Pidginization

This is a linguistic process that occurs when people who do not speak the same language come into contact. Herk and Katamba (503) state thus “some contact situations lead to the formation of a pidgin, a language stripped down to its essentials. Such a heavily simplified language is capable of conveying the basic information needed for many cross-linguistic purposes.” It involves the simplification of the contacting language and the exploitation of linguistic common denominators. It is essentially an oral process and limited communication. It involves the use of base forms, a reduction in or elimination of case endings, inflections and prepositions, a simple and unified method of indicating temporal distinctions, negation and interrogation. As Taylor opines that “Pidgins (makeshift languages that emerge between speakers who do not have a language in common) and foreigner talk (the simplified language that native speakers sometimes use when people who have a very limited knowledge of their language) (255)” More so, the meaning of verbal communication is often reinforced by intonation, gestures and, on some occasions, mime. The following are instances of pidginization as found in the data generated for the purpose of this study:

1. **No yawa meaning “no problem:** This has to do with the declaration that there is no misunderstanding among them at the moment. The researchers also noticed that it can also be used ironically, that is, there is problem but it will be attended to later.
2. **Follow who know road:** This expression is an advice that is usually given to newbies. It means that they should board the follow the people with the right information so as to succeed in the game.
3. **Shine your eyes make they no use you:** This is also an expression of advice given to newbies for them to be vigilant and smart else they get cheated by others in the game.
4. **I no grab this your doings o:** This statement is used when fellow thinks that the attitude exhibited by another is quite unpleasant.
5. **Better pikin:** This is a form of hero worship for those who do live up to expectations. This is when the person is highly impressed by the actions of his fellow.
6. **You no show love:** This expression is used to indirectly ask for money from their fellows.

Coinages

Coinages are identified as new terms created for new experiences, especially where the speaker of the language either experiences dearth of correct standard lexical item to express himself or uses a word or an expression to satisfy the communicative purpose of his immediate environment. Such coinages are sometimes metaphorically explainable and could be a result of interference or transfer of traits from a speaker's first language to the target language. Commenting on this mode of expression, Adegbija (24) refers to the sub-standard forms of English as results of 'transfer from culture, sense or meaning from the native language into English, or reinterpretation or extension of an existing meaning in English to cover new areas of experience in Nigerian English'. In this study, we try to provide explanations to some common Nigerian English coinages observable in the linguistic choices and expressions of the yahoo-boys in Awka metropolis.

Use of Coinages

1. Pablo (a description of a wealthy yahoo-boy): This word is coined from Pablo Escobar, a Colombian drug lord and narco-terrorist who was the founder and sole leader of the Medellin Cartel.

2. Red Jacket (a description for EFCC): This is coined from the regalia of EFCC.

3. Client (potential victim who receives their "format" and get scammed if he/she falls to it): This is coined from the literal meaning of a client: a customer, buyer, or receiver of goods or services.

The insinuations above depict coinages and forms of borrowings from other fields to aid the garage boys in their communicative strategies. For instance, text 1 is concept of a Colombian drug lord and narco-terrorist who was the founder and sole leader of the Medellin Cartel. The term Pablo is therefore a coinage from lifestyle of Pablo Escobar to depict a wealthy yahoo-boy. Text 2 depicts a form of coinage from the outfit of EFCC. Text3 is a coinage from the field of business. A client buys receives goods and services.

Again, the use coinage validates the identification and exclusion role of a language, as one who doesn't know these coinages will be valueless to conversations in this context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the kind of research design used to find out the identification and exclusion role of language in relation to its use amongst Yahoo-boys in Awka metropolis is qualitative. The collating data were a bit hectic as the researchers had to convince them enough of their safety and also bought some items like gin and cigarettes in order for them to relax before, during and after the recordings.

It is therefore concluded that the use of language fosters great rapport and creates a sense of oneness amongst Yahoo-boys. And it is a means of excluding those who do not belong to their group. Again, their use of language to a significant extent keeps them off the eyes of the fed. There were tape-recordings of their conversations which were carefully transcribed, analysed, and interpreted in line with the research objective using the critical discourse analysis which revealed the following:

- Their use of language enhances great rapport and creates a sense of oneness amongst them (yahoo-boys) as they identify themselves with it.
- Their use of language excludes those who do not belong to their group through the use of slangs and coinages.
- Their slangy expression for EFCC, Police, and their presence shows the extent to which their use of language keeps them off the eyes of the society.

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