

Slang Usage amongst Students in Urban Areas: An Insight of Warri Metropolis

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of slang expressions among students in urban areas in Nigeria in general and the city of Warri (a town in Delta State of Nigeria) in particular. Slang is an informal expression used by a particular group of people such as teenagers, young and adults. The paper sets out to identify slang expressions used amongst these students, the conversational patterns and the effects of slang on the students' academic performance. This paper adopts communication accommodation theory as a theoretical framework in its analysis. This study reveals that people in Warri city use slang a lot to communicate with one another. The frequent use of slang has effects on the academic performance of the students and in their conversational pattern. It also reveals that students use slangy expressions for secrecy and easy form of communicating with one another. The use of slang affects the use of Standard English language for communication. Students encounter and retain slang in the same way as other languages mostly through repetitive and contextual learning. There should be a balance between slang usage and the use of standard language for communication.

Keywords: language, slang, warri, communication accommodation theory

Introduction

Language can be used both in formal and informal setting. According to Agbedo (2015), language is defined as a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals or symbols. The use of language in a formal setting is what we referred to as official language. Language is an indispensable tool for communication. In human communication, the ties between meaningful elements and their meanings are arbitrary and a matter of convention (cf. Agbedo, 2000). Slang is

an informal expression used by different groups of people such as students, teachers, peer group, age group etc. slang, according to Ahamefula (2016) is used most importantly to eliminate communication barriers. Slang is used for secrecy. It is gradually becoming an official language especially in Warri metropolis. Settlers in Warri, delta state feel more comfortable and at home to use slang to communicate.

Slang is an informal language which might be impolite, used by a particular group of people which may stay in use only for a short period of time. It is usually spoken more often than written, though emails and texts often contain many conversational slang terms. It is the vocabulary that is used between people who belong to the same social group and who know one another well. It can offend people if it is used about other people or outside a group of people who know each other well. Slang normally refers to particular words and meanings but can include longer expressions and idioms. They are not considered appropriate for formal occasion. It is a subset of a language used by one particular group. It consists of words and expressions which will not be found in the dictionary, and can be distortions existing words or entirely invented terms.

Slang is used by all kinds or groups of people who share situations, interests or common goal. The group which uses these words for example, Students in Warri, is always in the minority and often use slang to set them apart or make it difficult for ordinary people to understand them. When a particular new expression is known and used by a large majority of the population, it is no longer slang but part of the regular language usage. It is like a linguistic laboratory where new words and forms can be tested out, applied to a variety of situations and then either abandoned or incorporated into regular language. It is used by limited groups with something in common. Slang promotes cohesion within a community. Language is an integral part of culture, and slang helps identify those who are native to that particular culture. Slang is particularly popular among teenagers and college students in general (Finegan, 2008). Akmajian et al (1998) also added that slang has some salient features; first, slang is part of casual informal styles of language use, second slang is like fashions in clothing and popular music, changes quite rapidly, third 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. The speaker uses slang in order to achieve social dynamics with the people to whom he/she is speaking and slang outlines social spaces, and attitudes towards slang helps identify and construct social groups and identity (Adams, 2009:57). It means that when someone uses slang, he/she exposes ideas, feeling, attitude as how she/he wants to perceive the people that talk to and how he/she wants those people to perceive her/him, to infer what she/he means. Learning slang in language allows you to remain current in your spoken ability, and makes it possibly to hold fluent conversations with people of all generations such as Warri people. Warri is a city in Delta State, [Nigeria](#), with a population of over 300,000 people. Warri is an oil [rich city](#) and part of the Niger-Delta region. The people of Warri are mainly the Urhobos, Itsekiris, and Ijaws, but other ethnic groups also live within the city. Warri is predominantly Christian, as is most of Southern Nigeria. The city is known nationwide for its unique [Pidgin English](#).

Linguistically speaking, slang may help convey ideas more efficiently. Slang becomes the part of language variation because of the need to adapt to new or different aspects of society and factor of social prestige. A slang word is formed by linguistic process that is found in morphology study such as: coinage, compounds, acronym, clipping, back-formation, abbreviation, blends, cockney, public-house slang, workmen's slang, commercial, and also standard slang. The popularity of slang nowadays makes it an interesting object to study. It is seen from a social point of view. It

will be interesting to find out what types of slang words that students especially in Warri usually use, their conversational pattern and the effects of slang usage on the academic performance of students in Warri, Delta state. This work will use 10 respondents in gathering data for the analysis. The scope of the study is within the sociolinguistic area of Warri, a city in Delta state. The work is purely descriptive. The significance of this work is to make available slang expressions for students who want to engage in secrecy and use of some educative tips to pass examinations and tests on regular basis. The study adopts the communication accommodation theory (CAT) for analysis of data.

Literature review

That slang is a prominent language variety is no longer contested. Fishman (1972: 166), for example, states that "in a very real sense, a language variety is an inventory of the concerns and interests of those who employ it at any given time". Slang is highly informal and is often used in colloquial speech. It is a part of a language that is usually outside of conventional or standard usage and that may consist of both newly coined words and phrases and of new or extended meanings attached to established terms (Chen, 2006: 260).

Agbasi (1993) observes slang used by students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka under five priority areas. These include: food, personal appearance, students' life, secret cult and sex and sex life. The findings reveal that slang in use condemn poverty, laziness, the abnormal, the uncivilized, lack of respect and physical Violence as society does and hold wealth, intelligence, moderation and normal in all its ramifications. The most recent comprehensive scholarly examination of slang is found in Eble (1989, 1996). Eble (1989) focuses on the University of North Carolina slang repertoire. The importance of this treatment of slang is that it highlights the fact that slang is intricately woven into college students' academic and social life, a view that Alimi and Arua (2006, 2008) support. Eble (1996) is even more comprehensive, as it brings together the work that the scholar has done for more than a decade (for example, Eble 1984, 1990, 1991, 1994a, b). It shows that slang can be studied in multi-dimensional ways. Thus, in examining its formal and functional characteristics, she shows its relationship with grammar, morphology, lexicology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and other important fields of study. In so doing, she vigorously argues that slang is part of everybody's everyday life and that it is not confined to the hallowed walls of universities.

Agbedo (2000) brings to the knowledge that speech act theory by Austin (1962) which notes 'how to do things with words'. The work observes that only sentences or utterances pass information. But rather they are used in certain acts to play together with the observer so as to interact with each other. The work further reinstates that language which exists has been identified as common, locutionary, Illocutionary and perlocutionary. In each of these, performative are words that perform certain functions in an action, constatives are the mere saying of those words or sentences which doesn't involve any action. This explains when a speaker uses slang and it also performs the function as the performative and constative verbs in important roles because slang is a language which necessitates action. Umeokoli (2002) investigates slang expressions in Ariaria international market, Aba speech community. The work reveals that food, fashion, economic life, religion and sex life have slang expressions for them. Okon (2003) discusses slangs used by the students in tertiary institutions in Calabar using as a framework the distinction made by Halliday (1985) between language as a

system and language as an institution. The work finds out some logic in the coining of slang terms. The work further discovers that the use of slangs is a healthy development in language use such as Calabar which could be of benefit in educational planning and decision.

Studies by Thorne (2004, 2005) are examples of efforts to sustain a scholarly examination of slang. Thorne (2004), for example, examines students' slang terms in the United Kingdom and shows that some semantic clusters correlate with students' preoccupations. In a subsequent study, Thorne categorises slang terms amongst students in Kings College and various other higher institutions in the Greater London area. His findings confirm that slang terms are a reflection of "actual students' behaviour" (Thorne 2005: 4). In terms of their forms, he reports the presence of relexicalisation, overlexicalisation (cf. Halliday 1978), figures of speech and some word formation processes (2005: 4).

Alimi and Arua (2006), already mentioned, identify and discuss the labels with which students describe their academic life at UB. The labels reveal students' primary academic preoccupations: excellent and poor performance, good and poor teaching, difficult and easy courses, truancy, illegitimate relationships, cheating and passing and failing. The study also reveals a rich and extensive variety of students' labelling of various aspects of their academic life. In another study, Alimi and Arua (2008: 51) investigate gender bias in the slang expressions that students at UB use to describe female and male lecturers, on the one hand, and female and male students on the other, based on the sexual relationships they contract across teacher-student boundaries." Their findings show that in terms of endearing slang terms, female students and lecturers are discriminated against while both genders are treated alike in terms of disparaging slang expressions.

Similar to the above, Nnorom (2012) assesses slang expressions as used in UNN Community by instigating the kind of slang expressions used in the university community. The study reveals that students' use slang expressions and that slang expressions can be identified in the use of Standard English language. Furthermore, Onyia (2013) examines the linguistic phenomena known as slang. The objective of the study is to ascertain if the decline in the standard language is as a result of the dominant use of slang expressions. This study reveals that slang expressions are mostly used by the young because it is normally an air of importance as they see slang as a display of intellect and dominion over others who do not understand their vocabulary. This study also observes that the knowledge of slang has the tendency to link one to the global communicative trend. Ugwoke (2017) studies the structural analysis of the Nigerian English slang expressions which is a sociolinguistic variant of communication. The study finds out that slang in as much as it has its positive side, also affects its users negatively especially students in that their formal English use is affected.

Summary of literature review

This section reviewed scholarly works on slang expressions. Objectively, the review shows that much has been done on slang expressions in other areas. Credence has not been given to slang usage in Warri city, using the communication accommodation theory for analysis of data. It is a known fact that Warri is known for slang usage in almost all forms of expression. Parents use slang to communicate with their children and children use slang to communicate with their peers. Only few researchers have tried to document this fact. This work stands among others to fill the gap and

also to add to scanty literature in the area. This work adopts the Communication accommodation theory as a theoretical framework for the analysis of data.

Theoretical framework

Communication accommodation theory (CAT) is a theory of [communication](#) developed by [Howard Giles](#). This theory concerns the behavioral changes that people make to attune their communication to their partner, and the extent to which people perceive their partner as appropriately attuning to them. This theory is concerned with the links between language, context, and identity. It focuses on both the intergroup and interpersonal factors that lead to accommodation, as well as the ways that power, macro and micro-context concerns affect communication behaviours. Communication accommodation theorists focus on the patterns of convergence and divergence of communication behaviors, particularly as they relate to people's goals for social approval, communication efficiency, and identity. Convergence refers to strategies through which individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviors to reduce these social differences. Meanwhile, divergence refers to the instances in which individuals accentuate the speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and their interlocutors. Sometimes when individuals try to engage in convergence they can also end up over-accommodating, and despite their good intentions their convergence can be seen as condescending.

Communication accommodation theory emphasises on the adjustments that people do while communicating. The theory was evolved from speech adjustment theory, which demonstrates the value of psychological concepts to understand the dynamics of speech. It expands the human tendency to adjust their behaviour while interacting. People accommodate their communication activities to get approval and to set a positive image in front of the interactant (Agbede, 2015). The environment of interaction affects their communication behaviour. This theory sprung from the awareness that speakers are not merely incumbents of roles imposed on them by society but rather as inquirers attempting to comprehend themselves and others. This framework is adopted to study how students in Warri metropolis use slang in their conversation amongst one another.

The use of slang expressions among students in Warri City

Slang used in conversation by Students in Warri

Slang is an informal expression used by people especially students in Warri to communicate with one another. Warri is known for Slang usage. There are different examples of slang used by students in Warri. They are discussed below:

Crash

This term is used connotatively by students. It means to sleep. Students use this to know if their colleagues want to go to bed. For examples:

1. I won go crash abeg ' please, I want to go sleep'
2. Joy crash for my house yesterday ' Joy slept in my house yesterday'
3. The girl just dey crash anyhow for class. ' the girl was sleeping excessively in class'

4. Come, make we go crash for bed. ‘ come, let’s go sleep on the bed’

Who you help?

This slang is used by students in Warri to tell someone indirectly that he/she ain't relevant, for example if I ask Onome to show me some respect, he might just say ‘Tega who you help self’ meaning ‘Tega, you are not relevant’. Other examples are listed below:

1. Who school help? - This means school is irrelevant to my success
2. I go help your generation – this means I will render assistance to your generation
3. Who Obasanjo help? – This means obasanjo is irrelevant to my life.

Jack

This expression means to study. Students use this expression when they want to study. For example: you hear a student telling his fellow student that: I won go jack abeg, leave me jor. This means ‘I want to go and read, please, leave me alone’. Other examples are:

1. O boi, exam don reach o, I won go jack abeg – my friend, this is examination period, and I have to go read please.
2. Joy too dey jack – Joy reads a lot
3. The boi no like jack oo – The boy does not like to study
4. My pikin must jack wella o so he go better for am- My child must study hard so he will succeed.
5. No dey take jacking worry me jare – Don’t disturb me with reading.

Your way nor pure.

This is used to tell someone that he is not a straight forward person. Examples are:

1. Your way no pure – you are not straightforward
2. The gal way nor pure- the girl is not truthful

Cabash

This statement is used to refer to those who love Prayer so much. If a pastor loves praying, Warri boy will say something like “Pastor, you too like to dey Cabash”. More examples are:

1. The man sabi cabash oo – The man knows how to pray.
2. Abeg no cabash for my head jor. – Please, don’t pray for me.
3. Na everytime you dey cabash. – You pray all the time
4. Na cabash sure pass o. – prayer is the key.

See my period

This means one is broke. When students in Warri are broke, you hear them say ‘I dey see my period abeg. This means I am broke. To be broke is to be in need of cash or one that is cash trap. Other examples are:

1. My period don soak o. – I am extremely broke
2. My period dey smell – I am extremely broke.

No lele

This means no problem. Students use this expression to communicate. For instance, when they engage in a discussion with a friend or group of friends and they reach an agreement. When they are about to disperse, you hear them tell one another ‘no lele now (it means ‘no problem’)

‘H’

This means ‘Hunger’. This is used to tell a friend that you are hungry. For example: I dey H abeg oooo – please, I am hungry.

Make your head dey your neck o

This slang is mostly used to warn a person to use his sense, It is also used for advice, "Ochuko leave that Babe oo, Make your head they your neck o" – Ochuko, leave that girl. Get sense please.

Shima/ Material/ Erema

This is used to refer to a girl or a lady. Guys usually use this to describe their girlfriends. For examples:

1. My shima dey come my house today – my girlfriend is coming to my house today.
2. Your material make sense o- Your girlfriend is beautiful
3. Your material no bad o – Your girl friend is beautiful
4. Ochuko shima make sense – Ochuko’s girlfriend is presentable.
5. I must collect your shima – I must snatch your girlfriend

Kaka

This means ‘to use the convenience. You hear students say ‘I won kaka’ this means ‘I want to use the toilet’. ‘Kaka’ is also used to refer to the backside of a lady. For examples:

1. The gal kaka big o – The girl has a big backside
2. Her kaka make sense – Her back side is presentable
3. Her kaka dey heavy her – Her backside is too big

Oshofree

This means someone that likes free things. For example- you too like oshofree. This means you like free things too much.

Lashing/Polash/Whipping

Lashing is usually used in place of Sex. Since those words are too raw, warri boy might just say, ‘Oboi, I lash Rukky Yesterday O”, the other Guy might say ‘Oboi leh, nor be small whipping

between me and Rukky o'. If ladies are discussing, they don't use sex, they use lash or polash
Example: Babes, Mute was hot, the guy polash me so tey I ... 'Mute knows how to sex me well.

Kpekus

This means 'private part' or vagina. It is usually used to refer to ladies. For examples:

1. Your kpekus no dey stay one side abi? – You sleep with every guy you see
2. Kpekus dey scratch you? – Do you want to have sex?
3. I need some kpekus oo – I need to have sex with some girls

Kpor Kpor

This slang is use to refer to police. We usually know police as Kpor Kpor, if you ask someone from Warri where is police Station? He will reply you 'I nor know wenti be Police Station oo, Na Kpor kpor way i know oo.

Pepper

This expression is used to refer to money. It is used by students in Warri. For examples:

1. Pepper no rest o – I don't have money.
2. Omo, give me my pepper now- Give me my money please.

Soja

This is used to refer to 20 naira note; this is mostly used by conductors and taxi drivers.
Example:

O boi, you get Soja there? Meaning "Do you have 20 Naira?"

Gallant

This is use to refer to a street thug who has made his mark on the street. Example:

Question: Oga Tega, how that Way na? 'Mr Tega, how are you doing?'

Response: O boi, I gallant o. 'My brother, I am fine'.

Pem

This means 'to hide something very well'. Examples:

1. Abeg pem that quay well o. 'please, keep the quay well'. This is mostly used by street boys.
2. Fejiro, Pem well o, Kpo kpo they around – 'Fejiro, stay away, Police is around'.

White house / to see Obama

This means the ‘convenience’ or ‘toilet’. When someone says he is going to the white house or he is going to see Obama, it means he is going to use the toilet.

Public Toilet/ Olosho/ Ayagba

This is used to refer to a woman or a female student who sleeps around with anyone that comes her way. She is termed a prostitute or a cheerful giver.

Sky

This is used to refer to #50.00 notes. When a student says ‘Abeg give me sky make I use enter bus go school’, he means ‘Please, let me have #50.00 for transport fare to school’.

Conversational patterns of slang expressions

In the world of slang, anything goes and rules that apply to written languages are often broken. The most difficult part is that, of course, you can’t just say whatever you want. When you break the rules, you have to break it the correct way. Taking what you learned from textbooks or tutorial classes and applying it to the real world is not so easy because it is impossible to teach all the possible ways things can get jumbled up in the spoken language. Learning how to speak naturally with all the correct idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies in a language is something that requires practice with real people in real-world situations. In this section, we’ll look at some common patterns and themes that will at least help you get an idea of where the majority of slang originates from.

There is one major driving factor behind the majority of slang in Warri. The primary goal of most slang is to make things easier to say. The conversational pattern among students using slang to communicate is so easy and straightforward. Slang is used for secrecy. People use slang during conversation to hide or divulge certain information from people around. Students in Warri city use slang for easy expression. They also use slang to form acronyms during examination. The acronyms formed help students to be focussed and excel in their academics in Warri city. Slang expressions help to reduce mouth movement.

Effects of slang expression on students in Warri City

Slang has had both positive and negative effects on students in Warri city. One positive effect is that the use of slang helps to informally develop the language. Languages are constantly changing and growing. Slang expressions work in the same way. As society changes and develops, new slang expressions are born. However, one negative effect of the use of slang is that sometimes members of the society become unable to differentiate between when slang should be used and when formal language should be used, allowing slang to infiltrate what should be scholarly, formal language. Recent news reports reveal that students these days are becoming so familiar with using slang in their everyday communications through social media and texting, that slang terms are now making their way into students’ papers. There has been a dramatic decline in students’ writing

abilities. Slang Affects Students in the Classroom. There is such a dramatic decline that, as Wood reports, students do not even capitalise words or use punctuation anymore.

The reason why such a dramatic decline in communication abilities due to the influence of slang is such a problem is because formal language must be preserved within a society. Society, especially multiple societies, cannot share knowledge without having a shared, formal language.

Slang is an insider language. It is a way of being part of a group. If you are using slang in a conversation with someone who is not in your group and does not know the words you're using, such as a person from another region, you will not understand one another, and that person may feel put off. Slang is casual. If you use it in a formal environment, like a job interview, you may be regarded as uneducated, low-class, and not serious. Slang can be offensive. In schools in Warri for instance, students use slang for almost everything. They don't mean to offend, but among them, it is common and accepted. If they are in the habit of saying it all the time, however, they may slip and say it in a situation where offense would be taken. Slang is generational. If you use it when talking with older people, they may not understand you, might be offended, and may look down on you as immature.

Slang changes, sometimes quickly. If you use yesterday's slang, you may label yourself as outdated and out of touch. Slang is not bad or good; it's just a part of the language which can be used effectively or ineffectively. Using slang well, demands an awareness of purpose and audience. Make sure you understand all the connotations of a slang word before using it if you are not familiar with it. Slang is often used as a way to appear friendly to someone or to show that you belong with a certain group of people or that you understand popular culture. It shows that you are part of the crowd and that the slang you share is part of your secret language. Slang words can be a good indicator of what was going on during a specific period of time.

Conclusion

This work is written to identify slang expressions used amongst students in Warri City, Delta state. The work identifies different types of slang used by students during conversation. An example is 'jacking'. This means to read. Jacking is used to refer to someone who likes to read. Another example is 'dey your lane'. This means 'mind your business. The paper reveals a lot of slangy expressions in Warri. Also, students use slang to keep secrets. Whenever people are around them, they use slang in order to confuse their peers. Slang is also used to commit crime. The work further reveals the positive and negative effects of slang. Positively, slang helps students to remember what they read during examinations. Students use slang to remind themselves of the acronyms formed. Negatively, slang affects students when they want to use the official language. Students cannot express themselves without the use of slang. It is a problem. Slang is an informal expression that has affected the students in Warri city.

Every year, numerous new words and abbreviations find their ways into the dictionary. Some may say this is all part of a language revolution while others can't fathom how words, phrases and abbreviations used informally can be given such importance. It appears that slang is commonly used among students in Warri. Students use slang to communicate a lot. They have no regard for the use of English in their conversational pattern. They only use English language because it is an official language used in writing examinations. The students feel more comfortable

in communicating with slang than in the English language. Slang is also very prominent in text messages, where words are commonly abbreviated. This style of writing does not follow the standard of English but instead cuts down words to make the process quicker.

Warri slang is one of the language varieties in Warri city in Delta state. It is the product of culture and society. It is a kind of sociolect. The paper discusses warri slang from sociolinguistic point of view. Slang functions as a pursuit of self-identity which is the symbol for dividing the professional groups in society. It expresses emotive feeling of the slang users for the psychological need. It is also used to achieve politeness which means slang serves the phatic function and it contributes to maintain our positive face in daily communication. The development of slang cannot be separated from the society. As the society highly develops, the use of slang also becomes more complicated as well. It is necessary for students to know more about slang, in order to achieve a better understanding of Warri culture and society.

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