A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF SLANG AMONG STUDENTS OF KWARA STATE UNIVERSITY, MALETE, NIGERIA

ZAKARIYAH, MOSHOOD

Department of Linguistics, African and European Languages,

Kwara State University,

Malete

zakariyah2009@yahoo.comzakariyah.moshood@kwasu.edu.ng

+2348036355550

Abstract

Slang and colloquial expressions are rich linguistic resources through which human beings express their thoughts. This is particularly true of the youths who derive delight in this manner of communication. Therefore, the thrust of this study is to examine the use of slangy expressions among the students of Kwara State University, Malete. The study aims to explore the linguistic option in addressing the youth-related social vices in Nigeria. The study adopts Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003) conceptual metaphor theory (CMT). It has been found that most of the slang expressions used by the students of Kwara State University, Malete are formed from Yoruba and English languages, being the two major languages in the speech community of this study. In addition, the study shows that sex and sexuality, drug abuse, internet fraud and abusive expressions are related social vices associated with the youths and they constitute the thematic concern of the data analysed. The study concludes that slangy expressions deserve adequate research attention in a bid to address youth related social vices that may mitigate against the peaceful co-existence of the teaming populace in Nigeria. It is only when this is done that the drive towards national integration can be successful.

Introduction

Language as a means of expressing human’s feelings can be used in either a formal or informal setting. The formality of language use is evident in instances such as courtroom conversations, teaching/learning situations, legislative discussions, bank transactions, etc. While the above-mentioned examples are concerned simply with speaking, instances of writing include newspaper/magazines reports, application letters of different kinds, manuals of electronic gadgets, to mention but a few. Simply put, any form of language use (written or spoken) is either classified as formal or informal depending on the context of use.

However, research attention on language generally has focused more on the formal use than the informal. This trend is connected with the wrong assumption that only the formal use of language is decent, healthy or responsible enough to attract the attention of researchers in linguistics. It is also erroneously believed that slangy expressions, sometimes referred to as SE in this study, is the linguistic preference of mostly the adolescent, and that no serious attention needs to be accorded to it. The above stated reasons are responsible forthe low appetite for research interest in the informal use of language. Informal use of language is usually short-lived, and it bears some logical mappings involving the cognitive domain with the socio-cultural realities of the users.

The use of slang is, to a very large extent, peculiar to the youths, particularly those going through the transition from childhood to adulthood. This transition stage is often referred to as the adolescent stage, and one basic characteristic of the stage is deviant or unconventional way or style of language use. This unique pattern of language use often reveals a lot ofinformation about the language users such as cultural identity, worldview, ideological position, to mention but a few. Hence, slangy expressions are potent communication weapons to address some societal issues related to the youths, mostly in an informal speech situation. According to Zhou and Fan (2013), an informal style of speech often sees the frequent occurrence of slang, which may be a single word, a group of words or a sentence.

Therefore, this paper examines the use slangy expressions by the students of Kwara State University, Malete with a view to determining the impact of the society on this unique manner of communication. This is to ensure, among others, a better understanding of the working of the minds of the teeming Nigerian youths which the sampled data represent; to proffer solutions to some endemic societal vices affecting the youths; and ensure the sustainability of national integration drive in the country. It is believed that if social vices such as drug abuse, illicit sexual acts, quest for illegal wealth and kidnapping, as evident in some of the data for this study are critically looked into, the country (Nigeria) will be a better place for all.

The above submission is not unconnected with the increase in crime and criminality among the youths in Nigeria. The crises across the length and breadth of Nigeria are, more often than not, being perpetrated by the youths. In view of this, failure to pay adequate attention to youth-related vices is like a time bomb that can explode at any time. Therefore, this study is considered as a right step in the right direction towards solving the problem of security and national disintegration in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

The data for this study were sourced from some of the students of Kwara State University, Malete. A total of fifty (50) students, comprising twenty-five males and twenty-five females, were sampled. Each student was asked to state four slangy expressions known to them with their meaning. Of the samples collected, only slangy expressions that appeared more than once with uniformity of meaning were considered for analysis. This generated a total of one hundred and fifty-six (156) data, made up by only forty-five different slangy and expressions. To test the validity of the sampled data. The data were re-subjected to discussion, through participatory observation method. The study adapts Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003) Conceptual Metaphor theory (CMT) with some modification.

Literature and theoretical Review

This section reviews some related concepts underpinning the study, particularly meaning, features and functions of slang and colloquial expressions. Slang and colloquial expressions are used in this study as synonyms, hence there is no need to review colloquialism separately. Slang is part of casual styles of language use, which has traditionally carried a negative commutation. It is usually labelled as a “low” or “vulgar” form of language and is considered out to place in formal styles of language (Akmajian, 2001, p.303). 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 any new or extended meanings attached to the established term (Zhou & Fan, 2013). In line with the related definitions above, Adamu (2015, p.121) citing Eble (1996) defines “slang as an ever changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social or cohesiveness within a group”. In a more elaborate sense, slang is typically informal, spoken, found in words, but not in grammar, and sometimes, it could be regional based (El-Falaki, 2015, p.76).

All the definitions above stress the fact that slang and colloquial expressions are informal and often used by particular group of language users. However, El-Falaki’s (2015) definition covers the aspect of regional coverage and the grammatical component of slang which earlier quoted definitions are silent about. Muhammad (2016, p.46) posits that “the usage of domain of slang is not limited to a small geo-political entity but pervades across the world.” What this implies is that even though slang and colloquial expressions are found everywhere in the world, there is no likelihood of finding the same set of slang and colloquial expressions across different cultures and linguistic boundaries. So far, the above review on the meaning and features of slang and colloquial expressions has demonstrated that slang and colloquial expressions are not only informal but are also age-graded and used by members of a particular group. In this study, our focus is on the students of Kwara State University, Malete.

To achieve the objective of understanding the mindset of the sampled respondents towards addressing youth-related social vices, the study adopts some aspects of sociolinguistics as its tool of analysis due to its relevance to this study. Sociolinguistics is concerned with how the society influences the use of language. (2018, p.32) Odogwu, quoting Adeyanju (1998) asserts that “the moment we delve into the question of why we speak in certain ways, we are in the ambits of sociolinguistics. Demographic variables such as the interlocutors, sex, gender, social status, age, socio-cultural inclinations/belief, settings, literacy and how these variables influence linguistic behaviour lies within the realm of sociolinguistics”. In other words, sociolinguistics is the study of the influence that the society exerts on the way language is used. The study of sociolinguistics is partly cultural because diverse cultures exert different influence on the people and how they use language.

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), often referred to as cognitive metaphor theory was propounded and modified by Lakoff and Johnson in (2003). The theory views that metaphorical patterns are a fundamental component of human thought process and not simply a linguistic device to enhance language beauty especially as found in literary discourses. CMT is particularly useful in this study because issues that generate the conceptual domain(s) of metaphorical linguistic patterns are ideologically motivated societal matters. In view of this, the significance of cognition in determining conceptual domain should be done in connection with the underlying social issues which are often embedded with ideologies. It is against his backdrop, that the definition of conceptual domain by Kovecses (2002, p.4) cited in Norgard, Montoro, and Busse (2010, p.60) is very significant as it emphasises a strong connection between the socio (linguistic) matters and the conceptual theory. Kovecses (2002, p.4) posits that “a conceptual domain is any coherent organisation of experience. Some of these rich mental frames are ‘journeys’, ‘war’, ‘games’, ‘money’, on the one hand, and ‘love’, ‘argument’, ‘thought’ ‘morality’, on the other”. It can be argued that most of the experiences listed above are more related to the youths than any other age bracket, hence targeting a particular pattern of language (slang) use by the youths, in relation to the above experiences, is worthwhile.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data for this study are divided along their thematic relevance and analysed one after the other as presented below.

1. Slang Expressions on Drug Abuse

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N  | SCE  | Literal Meaning  | Meaning as Slang  |
| A1  | Baba oja (2)  | Market’s father  | Don of drug addicts  |
| A2  | Skuchies (4)  | No literal meaning  | Highly intoxicating drug  |
| A3  | Loud (8)  | High volume  | A very powerful drug  |
| A4  | Refnon (3)  | Medication  | Another brand of drug  |
| A5  | Tramol (6)  | Medication  | A brand of drug  |
| A6  | Jogor (2)  | No literal meaning  | Drug addict  |
| A7  | Kush (2)  | No literal meaning  | Any intoxicating drug  |
| A8  | Fa inawole (4)  | To light up a house  | To smoke  |
| A9  | Awoneyanfela (2)  | Disciples of Fela  | Smokers of marijuana  |
| A10  | On a codein diet (2)  | Cough medication  | Constantly on drug  |
| A11  | Kai kai (3)  | No literal meaning  | A powerful local drug  |
| A12  | Wobe (2)  | Enter  | Enter the temple of drug  |
| A13  | Aremosango (4)  | Son of the god of thunder  | A marijuana addict  |
| A14  | Colorado (2)  | Name of a place  | Highly intoxicating drug  |

The above 14 samples have multiple entries in the data collection as they are listed more than one time. The expressions “Tramol” is listed six times; “loud”, listed eight times, while skuchiesis listed four times. The preponderance of use of these slangy expressions underscores the provenance of drug abuse in our society. In addition, the ingenuity of the language users in creating absolutely new words from nowhere is amazing. An example of such instance is the expression “loud” which ordinarily is expected to be connected with high volume of sound. In this context, it means a very powerful drug (even considered more powerful than “Refnon” and “Tramol”). However, there is a logical connection in the slang in the sense that there is a conceptual mapping of the high intoxicating power of the drug with the idea of loudness. Hence, the slang “Loud” is rather used not just as a noun, indicating the name of the drug but also as an adjective to describe its efficacy. It can further be argued that from the source domain of conceptual metaphor theory, “Loud” could be understood to be excessive or high, a careful transfer of this to source domain “highly intoxicating drug” sheds light on the expected abnormal behaviour expected of drug addicts once they have taken drugs. There is another instance of such conceptual mapping in “Aremo Sango” (son of the god of thunder). Sango, the god of thunder in the Yoruba mythology is said to possess power to emit fire from his mouth at will and with ease. Against this backdrop, calling a person the son of the god of thunder implies that the person is a replica of the god of thunder by emitting smoke in the course of smoking marijuana and related highly intoxicating drugs. The above data typify clear use of metaphor as the slang expressions are coined from a different source conceptual domain to represent some ideologically influenced societal issues in the target domain.

1. Sex/Sexuality Related Slang Expressions

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N  | SCE  | Literal Meaning  | Meaning as Slang  |
| B1  | Moti di gbajumo (2)  | I have become popular  | I have contacted HIV/AIDS  |
| B2  | Ponke (4)  | To climb or mount  | A particular sex positioning  |
| B3  | Joko leso (5)  | Sit on nail(s)  | To have rough sex  |
| B4  | A nimasahun (3)  | A generous person  | A flirtatious lady  |
| B5  | You don go falash (2)  | No literal meaning  | You have had sex  |
| B6  | Soapy (4)  | Related to soap  | Masturbation (male)  |
| B7  | Pansh (4)  | No literal meaning  | Sex  |
| B8  | Doggy (6)  | Related to dog  | A sex style  |
| B9  | Zaddy (4)  | No literal meaning  | Boy friend  |
| B10  | Toto (2)  | No literal meaning  | Virgina  |
| B11  | Merule (2)  | No literal meaning  | Have sex  |
| B12  | Nussle (4)  | A long thick pipe  | Dick  |
| B13  | Titties (4)  | Nil  | Boobs  |
| B14  | Oloso (6)  | No literal meaning  | Prostitute  |
| B15  | Mo folenu (4)  | I destroy her mouth  | I have rough sex with her (male)  |
| B16  | Dispense (5)  | Release cash  | Related to male sexual organ  |
| B17  | Nak (3)  | No literal meaning  | Sex  |
| B18  | Red flag (2)  | Nil  | Menstruation  |
| B19  | Shaku shaku (3)  | No literal meaning  | Loose girl  |
| B20  | Hotiehotie (4)  | Related to hot  | Sexually enthralling  |

The above data constitute the largest percent of data in this study, representing 48.8%. All the slangy expressions have more than one entry. The data show that there are far reaching societal effects on how the youths use language. For instance, nearly all the above data are directly related to sexual intercourse. This reveals that one of the things that pre-occupies the mind of the youths is an insatiable appetite for sex. It is equally linguistically amazing how some of the slangy expressions are coined in a metaphorical sense through conceptual mapping. For instance, the expression, “dispense” is literally connected with the automobile machine for cash dispensation, petrol or water dispensation, etc. This constant and spontaneous ability of the machine in dispensing cash is likened to the readiness and ability of continuous sex making, particularly related to the spontaneous nature of the male sexual organ (penis)’s ability to release or discharge sperm at will. It is also of concern that certain topical issues like sex has become a free for all topic among the youths, not minding the sociocultural restriction that such a topic is known for.

Another slangy expression in respect of sex are Data B2 “ponke”, B3 “jokoleso”, and B7 “pansh”. While the last of the above three slangy terms is a coinage whose source is unknown, the first two are Yoruba words, used in a very unique way to express a special meaning among the youths. The word “ponke” ordinarily means to climb or mount but it is used as a slang to express the willingness of somebody to occupy the top position during sexual intercourse. The expression “jokoleso” literally means to sit on nail(s). However, as a slang, it means a very tough and injurious style of sexual intercourse. On the basis, of this analysis, one can conclude that the youths do not only prioritise sex but they are also prepared to explore different possible styles of it, no matter how dangerous or injurious. In addition, the youths are also observed to be very expressive in matters of sex and sexuality as evident in the avalanche of slangy expressions that are sex related in this study. The above data indicate a connection between sex and the need to be rough about it. Data B3 “jokoleso”, B7 “pansh”, B15 “mofolenu”, and B17 “Nak” are slangy expressions that illustrate the above assertion. B15 is a boastful expression through which men reveal their pride after having sexual intercourse with women. The logical connection between “I destroyed her mouth” which is the literal meaning of the datum and “I had rough sex with her” which the slang is often used to mean shows the tendency that the youths have unconsciously added the ideal of roughness to love making or sexual intercourse. Datum B17 “Nak” is another slangy expression that describes how woman are usually, often intentionally, given deadly blows by men during sexual intercourse. It is quite linguistically revealing that expressions that have no logical bearing with love making in the literal sense could be used in relation to sex and sexuality discourse. This is achievable through the conceptual mapping of the metaphorical process of slang as experiences are transformed from the source domain to the target domain. (C) Slang Expressions Related to Insult/Abuse

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N  | SCE  | Literal Meaning  | Meaning as Slang  |
| C1  | Ologo 2g (4)  | A fortunate person  | A person of low profile  |
| C2  | Omo soakaway (2)  | Child of a slum  | A nonentity  |
| C3  | Bolo (2)  | No literal meaning  | Fool  |
| C4  | Iya e (4)  | Your mother  | Insult  |
| C5  | Na dem o! (2)  | They are the ones  | Gossips  |
| C6  | No manners (2)  | Uncultured person  | A disrespectful person  |

The above example illustrates the ingenuity of the youths in finding a rather unique way to insult one another. A very enthralling example is Datum C1 ”ologo 2g” through which the unstable or erratic nature of 2g mobile telecommunication internet service is likened to a person of low profile; such as person could also be said to be poor and of no value. The same sentiment is also expressed in Datum C2 as the slang is used to express how worthless a person is by associating the person with a soakaway. A soakaway is disgusting and stinking and relating it to a person is an attempt not only to ridicule the person but also to express the hopelessness in the life of the person. These instances of conceptual mapping through which undesirable things (2g telecommunication network, soak away) are metaphorically conceptualised to represent a low-profile person is fascinating. The youth are usually fond of using abusive words to address one another even when they do not necessarily wish to be disrespectful. A good example of this is datum C5 “iya e” which literally means your mother. In a different situation, the expression may not be an insult, but as a slang, it is an insult usually aimed at scolding or rebuking a person by taunting him or her through being disrespectful to the person’s mother.

(D) Slang and Colloquial Expressions Related to Fraud Activities

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N  | SCE  | Literal Meaning  | Meaning as Slang  |
| D1  | Yahoo yahoo (6)  | Internet application  | Internet fraudster  |
| D2  | Wire wire (4)  | Related to electronics  | Internet fraudster  |
| D3  | Maga (4)  | No literal meaning  | A fool or a person who could easily be duped  |
| D4  | Scammer (5)  | Related to fraud  | Fraudster  |
| D5  | Patani logo Benz (4)  | Pant is the logo of benz  | Women pants are source of wealth  |

The above data shows the preponderance of internet fraud among the youth in Nigeria. Data D1 “yahoo yahoo” D2 “wire wire” and D4 “scammer” are all related to internet activities. The word yahoo does not depict anything linked to fraudulent activities. It is simply used to refer to internet activities through which a person can be connected with people worldwide, thereby reducing barriers of distance and time. However, when the word “yahoo” is used in repetitive form (yahoo yahoo), it means an internet fraudster. This depicts a sense that some people go beyond the global connectivity with others across the globe, by using the same platform to defraud unsuspecting members of the public irrespective of their location and time. The must enthralling datum in this category is Datum D5 “patani logo Benz”. “Pata” is a Yoruba equivalent of pant in English. As a slang, the shape of a pant is conceptually mapped with the logo of Mercedes Benz (a vehicle). The conceptual mapping of the shape of pants, the Benz’ logo and the desire to be wealthy is socio-linguistically revealing. It is worthy to note the connection between this slang expression and the rampant cases of stealing women’s pants for evil spiritual purpose in Nigeria. This again, emphasises that slang expressions are byproducts of daily human experiences.

Findings and Social Implications

On the strength of the analysis of this study, slang expressions are used in a special way to reveal the societal issues that pre-occupy the mind of the youth. Slang expressions with highest preponderance of use are the ones related to sex and sexuality. These data constitute 46.8% and it clearly indicates that the youths give priority to sex-related discourse as evident in the way they use slang. This is understandable given the fact that public discourses nowadays are mostly centred on vices such as lesbianism, gay, rape, defiling minors, among others. The youths, by nature, are very experimental and are often influenced by things around them. So, when they have access to pornography at will, there is tendency to attempt practicing those things they see on the internet. Data on drug abuse constitute 28.2% and occupy the second position. Drug abuse is a fundamental catalyst of social vices, and since the youths need to operate at some subconscious level to in order to engage in some weird sexual bahaviour, drug abuse becomes imperative to achieve this passionate sexual desire.

Next to these are data on (internet) fraud activities which constitute 14.7% and occupy the third position. The relevance of these data is that neither sexual desire, nor drug abuse are achievable without money. The insatiable appetite for wealth is to help to get access to drugs and be able to do unimaginable things such as sexual romp, fraud, stealing, and kidnapping, among others. Data on insult/abuse are rankedfourth with 10.3%. However, these seemingly abusive words may be used to show pride. For instance, “mofolenu”, (I spoiled her mouth), “jokoleso” (sit on nails), are boastful expressions mostly used by men after sexual intercourse with women. On the contrary, expressions like “oloso” (prostitute), “shaku-shaku” (loose girl) are used to condemn social vices among the youths.

Findings further reveal that of all one hundred and fifty-six (156) entries of data, comprising forty-five slang expressions analysed, a total of 15 expressions, constituting 33% are in Yoruba language; 20 expressions, constituting 44% are in English/Pidgin; 3 expressions, constituting 7% are mixing of Yoruba and English, while 7 expressions, constituting 16 % are unknown. The sociolinguistic implication of thess findings is that Yoruba and English are the two dominant languages among the students of Kwara State University, Malete. Equally competing with the above two mentioned languages is Pidgin. In spite of this, quite a lot of slang expressions’ linguistic etymology cannot be determined.

Conclusion

In conclusion, slang expressions are a rich linguistic pattern of communication particularly among the youths. It is a very convenient way to share information in a way that only an insider of their social group understands. To do this, a subconscious conceptual mapping of source and target domains are explored in a metaphoric sense to convey the intended message. The use of slang and as shown in the analysis of data, reveals that this unique choice of communication could be explored towards the understanding of youths as their patterns of communications say a lot about their personality. Their quest for quick wealth, insatiable appetite for sexual intercourse, and other social vices could be detected early with a view to providing solutions to them. It is, therefore, advised that slangy expressions be accorded more recognition and relevance than it presently receives to ensure a better society for all, and also to promote national integration as well as development in Nigeria.

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