SLANG AS A "DIALECT": A STUDY OF THE USE OF LANGUAGE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, NIGERIA

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Forward

The power of language to exclude and include, and to convey meanings is well known. Yet, language use is best appreciated in its specific contexts, especially in plural settings such as the University campus. For, in spite of the extensive use of the formal language of communication and instruction (English, in the Nigerian case) on University campuses, language use is conditioned by the commonality of interests and identity, and can be a weapon of self-preservation and identity formation. This is clearly illustrated by this volume authored by Dr. Emmanuel Adedun, who has undertaken a painstaking analysis of the use of slang by undergraduates at the University of Lagos. Adopting a socio-semantic approach. Adedun’s study has made a notable contribution to our understanding of this neglected subject. His research shows how slang use by students serves as a means of declaring and celebrating their linguistic autonomy on campus.

This scholarly analysis of an important aspect of socio-linguistics is a challenge to similar studies which explore the vast prospects of language use in specific and comparative settings. Consequently, slang as a “Dialect” is highly recommended to the scholarly and general readership in Nigeria and abroad.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, scholars have indicated an unusual interest in the use of language by undergraduates. This is understandably linked to the creativity that is embedded in the usage. Students see their peculiar language, generally known as slang, as a tool for liberation from the constraints of standard language, especially in its most prescriptive form. They do not want to be hemmed in by the norms of the standardized language use; they want to be in charge of language. They want to declare, like Humpty Dumpty, their mastery of language:

A: When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less”.
B: The question is, said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things”.
A: “The question is, said Humpty Dumpty, which is to be master”. Alice in Wonderland (Yule, 1985).

Language is a vital force in the life of every man. Its importance cannot be over-stressed in the daily interactions. In Nigeria, apart from English, there are three major indigenous languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and slang can be etymologically traced to these languages.

The aim of this study is to identify the slang used by undergraduates of the University of Lagos, categorize them according to subjects/field, analyze and interpret them. Twenty students in Semantic Theory class were selected to freely interact with undergraduates in the Akoka campus of the University of Lagos. They were each instructed to bring five tape-recorded conversational interactions. It was from the collection of one hundred tape-recorded conversational interactions that we
generated our data which consisted of more than five hundred samples of slang. The data were analyzed using a simple socio-semantic approach. We categorized the slang into five groups according to

1. Persons (male/female, student/lecturer)
2. Academics
3. Socio-economic status
4. Politics
5. Religion

Each slang listed under each category was interpreted in its social context. To underscore the significance of each listed item as slang, we juxtaposed its social-context meaning with its standard usage/dictionary meaning.

2.0 SOCIO-SEMANTIC THEORY AND PRAGMATICS

Semantics and pragmatics are concerned with aspects of meaning in language. Generally, works in semantics deal with the description of word and linguistic-meaning, and pragmatics, deals with the characterization of speaker-meaning.

Semantics, according to Yule (1985), refers to those aspects of conventional meaning which, we assume are conveyed by the words and sentences of a language. These meanings include the conceptual meaning and the associative or stylistic meaning or the denotative or connotative levels of meaning. For example, the conceptual meaning of needle includes thin, sharp, steel, instrument; while the associative meaning arouses ‘pain or discomfort’. Semantic meanings, conceptual or associative, are always text-oriented. That is, their meanings are always embedded in the text or discourse. For example, a man who has been
offended by his friend, tells him in annoyance: ‘You could be such a needle’.

A reader understands the meaning of the sentence above based on anaphoric references and events in the text which indeed reveal an unpleasant experience. This evaluation is made via a socio-semantic relation. On the pragmatic level, in a situation where a man succeeds in helping his friend pull down his (the friend’s arch enemy, the friend, in gratitude, may say:

“I didn’t know you could be worse than a needle, you know”. Here, it isn’t semantics anymore but pragmatics – the speaker-oriented meaning.

Nonetheless, semantics can be regarded as an off-shoot of pragmatics. It is so because a text involves the speaker, the discourse and the hearer. Semantics actively involves harmony between discourse and hearer, whereas in pragmatics, the harmony is between speaker, discourse and hearer. For instance, driving by a parking lot, one sees a sign:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heated</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendant</td>
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<td>PARKING</td>
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Now, one knows what each of these words means; not even the sign as a whole. One would not normally think that the sign is advertising a place where one can park one’s ‘heated attendant’. (i.e. one takes an attendant, heat or beat him up, and this is the place to park him); or alternatively.

It might indicate a place where parking will be carried out by attendants who have been heated. Indeed the words may allow these interpretations, but one would normally understand that one
park one’s car in this place, that it is a heated area, and that there will be an attendant to look after the car. How then does one decide that the sign means this? (Even when the sign does not have the word car on it). Well, in combination, and in the context in which they occur one tries to arrive at what the writer of the sign intends his message to convey. The notion of the speaker’s or writer’s intended meaning is crucial in socio-semantic relations or pragmatics as it is the basis of encoding stylistically (Woodward, 1980:23)

3.1 DEFINITIONS AND NOTIONS OF SLANG

Walt Whitman, in his book *Slang in America* (1985) says:

Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and close to the ground.

*A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (1860) says, ‘slang is the language of street humour, of fast, high and low life. Phillip Howard in his book *The State of the Language* (1984) says, ‘slang is the special vocabulary or phraseology of a particular calling or profession .... , a district bound on the north by jargon and on the west by poetry’. Slang, according to the American poet, Carl Sandburg (1878 – 1967) is ‘language which takes off its coat, spits on its hands and goes to work’. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides a more judicious description:

Language of a highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of educated standard speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense.
The dictionary also describes slang as ‘language of a low or vulgar type … the special vocabulary or phraseology of a particular calling or profession. This, indeed, sums up the paradox of slang: very many people look down on it yet cannot avoid using it. There is upper-class slang alongside lower-class’, the slang of doctors and of lawyers, the slang of footballers and accountants as well as slang which cuts across social class and occupation, available to anyone as the most colloquial variety of language.

Slang develops variously, notably because we like to play with words. We put old words to new uses or coin new expressions, largely for the sake of novelty or cleverness. The results vary. Occasionally, a slang expression fills a genuine need, persists, and is accepted as part of the language e.g. ‘go on s’ohun’, ‘bo ya l’omo’, b’ose wa ni’yen’, are expressions peculiar to language (Yoruba) use in Lagos. Often it is accepted by limited groups and remains current in non-standard or standard colloquial use. Using slang indiscriminately, especially if one makes it up on one’s own, can be amusing, and can have a vivid result, but for two reasons, it is limited in its usefulness. First, it is usually known to so few people, in such a restricted group, geographically or socially, and for so short a time, that it can be used for only the most local and ephemeral purposes. Second, some slang expressions are so general that they mean almost nothing. The user of slang often does not know what he wishes to say, and the listener to slang does not know what, if anything at all, has been said. But these inadequacies are associated with a unipolar slang users and are not applicable to a situation in which the users are many and have a good knowledge of their slang repertoire and their environment. For instance, in the University of Lagos environment, even a hundred level student knows the meaning of ‘aristo’ because it is a familiar term known to every student of the University. Hence, its
usefulness and meaning will endure for a considerable length of time on the campus.

The notion of slang as language or idiom that is not appropriate in formal or literary contexts is probably the dominant meaning today. It is likely to be restricted in social status or regional distribution. It tends to be more transitory and metaphorical than standard language. The problem here might be our idea of what standard language really is and what is appropriate to it. We know, for instance, that novelists and other creative writers use English in a way that is often far from being standard. For instance, in Okot P’ Bitek’s poem ‘Song of Malaya’ the slang used were far from being standard language e.g. ‘time bomb’ to represent ‘penis’; ‘red meat’ to mean ‘vagina’ and the clause “…load your trays with fresh fruits, fresh vegetables and plenty of fresh meat... the hungry lions of the world are prowling around ...hunting” to mean that the women should be proud of their profession – prostitution. The above underlined expressions are slang in the poem which are indicative of the ladies’ instruments of work – their vagina, while hungry lions refer to their male customers. We may then agree that slang is colloquial language of an undignified kind, but we find it hard to agree on what is colloquial, and we no longer rate dignity highly as a linguistic virtue in many registers and contexts in which we use language.

It can be seen that slang is a shameless Humpty-Dumpty word, used to mean just what the speaker chooses it to mean – neither more nor less. It has become a strong value word, which contains more judgment about the language and prescription than factual description. One person’s slang is another person’s colloquialism, another person’s vernacular, another person’s everyday speech. For example, some expressions may be colloquial
but not slang “Let’s dip the bill” [Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sheep*], which means the same thing as ‘let’s drink’ is both colloquial and slang. However, before we can judge whether an expression is slang, we need to know whether we are speaking or writing, where they come from and what they are trying to do with the language.

3.2 Slang and Identity

Speakers are aware of the social significance of competing varieties. Indeed they can produce the high prestige varieties as well as the low prestige varieties. Yet one is tempted to ask why anyone should persist in using forms of varieties which one recognizes as being of low prestige? This question gains more force when we realize that, for example, students regularly characterize their own speech as ‘not very good English’ and do not often admire it generally but a different reaction is seen when they make conscious efforts to speak ‘very good English’. This is easily seen when we consider a hypothetical example: a student who is from Lagos State and has Lagosians too as his room-mate on campus. All of them speak, in their room, the typical Lagos English peculiar to students like: ‘my brother, how far now, which one you dey, hunger de waya me here o’, and supposedly discovers he was dissatisfied with his own speech and impressed by the high prestige English of television newsreaders, and decides to abandon his ordinary speech in favour of the high class speech when conversing with his friends. What would be the reaction of his friends? Would they be impressed? Are they likely to admire his high level of speech and even try to copy him? Certainly not, instead, they would become increasingly annoyed, distant and may be even hostile towards him. The student will likely find himself with no friends anymore. But the question is why would his friends
abandon him because he spoke prestigious English? After all, everyone likes and enjoys prestige. Language is not solely about prestige or communication but identity. Everyone needs to have and maintain an individual identity. One of the most important parts of such identity is membership of a group, and language provides a powerful way of maintaining and demonstrating group membership. R.L. Trask (ND) says;

Our plumber will belong to a group of family friends with whom he has shared experiences, shared interests, shared circumstances and shared values. In order to remain a member of that group, he must speak like the other members of the group. For this purpose, it doesn’t matter whether the group’s speech is independently regarded, by him, or by anybody else, as of high or low prestige. What’s important is to speak the way the others do, because doing so carries the clear message: ‘I regard myself as a member of our group’. But when our plumber deliberately tries to change his speech to something quite different, he is announcing in the clearest possible terms ‘I no longer regard myself as a member of your group.

Language, slang in particular, is a very powerful means of declaring and maintaining one’s identity, and this identity function of language is as important as its communicative function.

### 3.3 USES OF SLANG

The complexity of slang is immediately seen when we examine its varied functions. Patridge (1933) says, ‘the chief use of slang is to show that you are one of the gang’. Slang is one of the defining characteristics of in-group identity. As such it comes close to
Jargon, language that sounds ugly and is hard to understand. The lexicographer, Eric Patridge, says people use slang for any of the following reasons:

1. In sheer high spirits, by the young in heart as well as by the young in years, ‘just for the fun of the things’, in playfulness or in waggishness.

2. As an exercise either in wit and ingenuity or in humour. (the motive behind this is usually self-display or snobbishness, emulation or responsive delight in virtuosity).

3. To be ‘different’, to be novel.

4. To be picturesque (either positively or – as in the wish to avoid insipidity – negatively).

5. To be unmistakably arresting, even startling.

6. To escape from clichés or to be brief and concise (Actuated by impatience with existing terms).

7. To enrich the language (the deliberateness is rare except among the well-educated, Cockneys forming the most notable exception; it is literary rather than spontaneous).

8. To lend an air of solidity and concreteness to the abstract; of earthiness to the idealistic; of immediacy to the remote. (In the culture, the effort is usually premeditated, while in the uncultured, it is almost always unconscious when it is rather subconscious)

9a. To lessen the sting of, or on the other hand, to give additional point to, a refusal, a rejection, a recantation.

9b. To reduce, perhaps also to disperse, the solemnity, the pomposity, the excessive seriousness of a conversation (or a piece of writing).

9c. To soften the tragedy, to lighten or to ‘petrify’ the inevitability of death or madness, or to mask the ugliness or the pity of profound turpitude (e.g. treachery, ingratitude); and/or thus to
enable the speaker or his audience or both to endure, to ‘carry on’.

10. To speak or write down for an inferior, or to amuse a superior public’, merely to be on a colloquial level with either one’s audience or one’s subject matter.

11. For cases of social intercourse. [Not to be confused or merged with the preceding].

12. To induce either friendliness or intimacy of a deep or durable kind.

13. To show that one belongs to a certain school, trade, or profession, artistic or intellectual set, or social class; in brief, to be ‘in the swim’ or to establish contact.

14. Hence, to show or prove that someone is not ‘in the swim’.

15. To be secret – not understood by those around one. Children, students, lovers, members of political/secret societies, and criminal in or out of prison, innocent persons in prisons are the chief exponents.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

The gathered data were analysed based on the correlation between the meanings of the slang and the experiences of the students. There are certain words or utterances which naturally synchronize with some experiences or ideas. For instance the term ‘suzzy’ is used to refer to a beautiful young lady. As earlier said, socio-semantic theory is the fulcrum upon which the analysis is based. The slang terms are viewed from their etymological roots and related to the contexts and circumstances of their usage.
4.1 ANALYSIS OF SLANG USED FOR PERSON

4.1.1 Slang Used for Males

(a) “That guy is really a hunke’.
[That guy is handsome and attractive].

The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995) defines a hunk as ‘a large thick piece...’ Physiologically, young men are expected to be heavily built, large and strong. These features, thus, add to their attractiveness which wins the admiration of the opposite sex. The dictionary also defines a hunk as ‘an informal way of approving a large strong man especially one that is attractive’. Thus, the students take the word ‘hunk’ with all the literal meanings it carries, attach the letter e and the schwa sound /ə/ at the end of the word.

(b) ‘Don’t mind that idiot, he’s a bloody player.
[the guy is a casanova]

Physiologically, males have the stamina to engage in playful or sporting activities for a long stretch of time than the females.

When people play, they just play for the fun and not for anything serious or important. Therefore, a boy/girl relationship for the male, most of the time, is somewhat a thing of leisure and recreation. The guy is termed as being a ‘player’ instead of being a ‘partner’. He is referred to as a Casanova because all he needs is to play with the girl, after having a ‘fill’ [sex], he goes away and “plays” with someone else.

(c) ‘See this shameless Aristo’
[the man is an adulterer].
Etymologically, the word relates to a class of people who hold high social rank, that is, the aristocrats. They use their high social status and material wealth to oppress the working class by coveting the latter’s wives or girlfriends. The Aristos are those rich married men who drive into campus at nights and take campus girls out to have fun with them and give them money. The students delete “crat” from the word aristocrat and make use of the aristo. Morphologically, this process is known as shortening.

(d) ‘This one na Osama o’.
[the guy is mean and dangerous]
Osama Bin Laden is believed to be the patron of terrorists. The recent bombing of the World Trade Centre and the United States’ Pentagon has brought him into limelight and shown the extent of his terrorism. Thus, anyone referred to by his name is believed to be as mean and dangerous as himself. The term is also used to refer to cult members on campus.

(e) ‘Don’t mind that Okadigbo’
[the man in question is haughty and corrupt]
Etymologically, the term is associated with the former Senate President, Chuba Okadigbo, of Nigeria who was impeached as a result of his high handedness in carrying out his official responsibilities. Students use this term to refer, especially, to lecturers who are very strict with them, more so with the male students and quite lenient with the females.

(f) ‘My guy Toronto – how you dey?’
[the guy in question is a lay about – an academically unserious student].

The term is historically linked to the former Speaker of House of Representatives of Nigeria, Senator Buhari, who unleashed a scandal on the Nigerian nation by lying that he was a graduate of Toronto University, Canada, whereas he was not. Thus, the stigma had followed him ever since. Any student who hardly comes to class is therefore referred to as a Toronto because when such a student leaves school, he would want to claim that he is a graduate but his intellectual ability will be suspect.

(g) ‘My man, you be egbe jo’.

[the guy is not cooperating].

Etymologically, egbe is traceable to the Yoruba language which means a somewhat timid or dull person who is slow in making decisions or someone who is a non conformist, jo is a phatic or an attitudinal term in Yoruba. Thus, if a group of students are on the verge of carrying out a project and one of them shows any form of hesitation, he is described as an egbe.

(h) My person, na USA you be o’.

[the guy is looking smashingly dressed].

The term USA is a designer logo alongside Tommy Hilfiger, Nike, Christian Dior, YSL and a host of others. They are all Western fabric designers whose attires are gorgeous, well-fitting and expensive. Therefore, anyone who is fantastically dressed is referred to as a USA guy.
(i) ‘Jide is an *Esin*.

[student is admirable.

Esin is a Yoruba word for a horse. A horse is admired for its strength and vitality. Hence, when a guy is referred to as an esin, it means he has some admirable traits.

(j) ‘Those guys are agbalagba’s.

[they are cult members.

Agbalagba is a Yoruba word meaning the elders. Elders in the sense that they are associated with skill and wisdom. The ‘s’ is a plural morpheme in English. Cult members too are termed Agbalagba’s because they do not always think like other students. Their thoughts could be destructive. They are termed Agbalagba’s because every action for them, has a motive. A fellow student cannot step on their toes as a mere sign of error without them reading meanings into it and retaliating. They are Agbalagba’s because life is not really important to them. They like to prove at all times that they are ‘in charge’.

(k) ‘That guy is *Tommy guy*.

[that guy is rich.

Tommy Hilfiger is a very rich American fashion designer. Thus, any rich guy on campus is named after him.

(l) ‘*Hulk Hogan* don land o’.

[a troublesome student is around.

Hulk Hogan is the famous American wrestling champion. A student is referred to as Hulk Hogan not necessarily because he is physically strong but because he loves to create an atmosphere of physical combat
even though in the end he is going to be beaten up. Students believe that one must really have something in common with the legend, Hulk Hogan, for one to love a troublesome environment but it is not always so because some weak students love fighting even though they know they will lose in the act. Hence, the term is used ironically.

(m) ‘The guy na Don’.
[the guy is a leader of cult] A don literally means a university lecturer but the students extend its meaning to encompass a campus cult lecturer cum leader. He teaches them how to behave in public and how to plan their escapades.

4.1.2 Slang Used for Females
(a) ‘Aristress’
[a girl who sleeps around with rich men for money] The term is linked to aristocrats. She becomes an aristocrat because she behaves haughtily and behaves like a rich girl so as to oppress other girls whereas the money she has is obtained from a foul means. She is the female equivalent of an Aristo – a male.

(b) ‘That babe na cowbell’.
[the girl has very large breasts] Cowbell is a brand of milk. In advertising this brand of milk, a very big cow is shown on screen and a man extracting milk from the cow’s breast; so also it is for a girl who has very large breasts, as a whole lot of milk is believed to reside therein and guys cannot help but dream of extracting such milk.
‘Opeke’
[a girl who has a lovely figure or shape]
Phonologically, opeke is a word pronounced with some feminine touch and an ideal feminine is a girl who wins the admiration of every guy. Thus, opeke is pidgin for a wonderfully looking girl.

‘Lepa’.
[a thin looking girl].
The term is traceable to the Yoruba language. ‘Le’ in Yoruba means a frail substance. ‘Pa’ means in totality. Thus, the term Lepa means a totally frail substance; but students use it to refer to thin girls on campus. Besides, the new trend on campus is that guys prefer thin girls to fat girls. Lepa is a girl looking extremely thin. It was a derogatory term but it is becoming complimentary now.

‘Aproko’
[a prostitute]
Some students believe some female students are professional prostitutes and that their being in a university environment is merely an added advantage to their work and the price they place on their ‘wares’ (prostitution). The term is a Nigerian pidgin coined from the English and Yoruba languages, ‘apron’ and ‘oko’, respectively. The former means a piece of cloth won over another to protect it from dirt while the latter means penis. Hence, a girl who cannot detach herself from a penis, a prostitute, is known as aproko.

‘Chicken’
[a girl who follows her boyfriend everywhere he goes with the aim of monitoring and preventing him from having another girlfriend].
A chicken literally means a kind of bird that walks around too much in order to keep its young ones in check and to search for food. In this case, a girl is a chicken if she keeps hanging around her guy to keep an eye on him without allowing him some room to himself and attending to his other affairs. The term is derogatory because, for students, it is a sign of distrust. Guys also claim that girls look like chickens when they do such because their legs and voices get thinner.

(g) ‘Correct babe’
[respectable and admirable girl].
In English, ‘correct’ means accurate while ‘babe’ refers to a child. The two words are combined to affectionately refer to a beautiful girl who is admirable, amiable, smashing and dignified.

(h) ‘A chick’
[a sexually desirable girl].
A chick is a young chicken, and a chick is generally more endearing than a chicken. So also is a young girl looking fresh and desirable. Guys use it to refer to first-year students as they are new and vulnerable.

(i) ‘A baffer’
[a girl who dresses well]
The term is realized from the word baff, a Nigerian pidgin, which means to take a bath or clean oneself up. Thus, a baffer is one who looks cleaned up in a neat and nice dress.

(j) ‘A formistress’
[A girl who pretends to be what she’s not or have what she does not].
The term is derived from the English base word ‘form’, and ‘to form’ means to become something, but here, the students
mean ‘form into something which is not’. The term mistress ordinarily means a woman. The term is often used by guys to taunt girls who think or behave like they have some grand qualities or things.

(k) ‘A deckitress’
[a girl who wears expensive things].
A term derived from the English base word deck which means to decorate or add something for effect. Thus a girl who decorates herself in expensive apparel is a deckitress. A deckist is the term to describe a male.

(l) ‘Wifey material’
[a well-behaved girl – good enough to be married].
The term is a coinage derived from the English language. Wifey is derived from wife which means a married woman. Material is a substance needed for another substance. Thus, guys on campus at some point go in search of wifey materials as they are believed to know how to treat a man well and take care of him as opposed to the aristresses who want nothing from them but sex and money.

(m) ‘Anakonda’
[a girl who wears too much make-up]
‘Anakonda’ is a film which shows the life of a historical water queen who hates men because when she came to land she was cruelly treated by them. She then vowed to get even with men by going back to the water world to make herself up in such an enticing way that men would desire her. After wearing make-up, she would go to the men who would not be able to resist her. When she got close to them, she killed them. Thus, guys on campus term any girl who is excessively made up an Anakonda because they feel she is out to kill them, thus they avoid such girls.
(n) ‘Maradona’
[a girl who maneuvers her way through prostitution and academics].
Maradona is the famous football legend who is known for his expertise in dribbling and getting the ball into the net. Girls who can maneuver and balance the academic and prostitution jobs are also referred to as Maradona because they end up ‘scoring goals’ in their academics and in their prostitution without one suffering for the other; both jobs operate on an equal frequency.

(o) ‘Organizer’
[a girl who leads other girls into prostitution]
The literal meaning of the word is to make arrangements for something to happen. Thus, the girl leader makes arrangement for other girls to make prostitution happen. This kind of girl is also referred to as mama – ‘big’ woman.

(p) ‘The Example’
[a level-headed girl]
At the literal level, it means a girl worthy of emulation by others. One who is content with what she has and never seeks to go beyond her capabilities. Guys love this kind of girl.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF SLANG USED FOR ACADEMICS

(a) ‘Efiwe’
[a student who is diligent and brilliant].
The term has Yoruba origin as it is derived from the term ‘iwe’ meaning book. ‘Ef’ - is just a conjoining prefix.
Therefore, ‘efiwe’ is one who is interested in nothing but books; a bright and scholarly student.

(b) ‘A Jacker’
[a student who reads a lot]
Ordinarily, a jack is a piece of equipment used to lift a heavy weight off the ground, such as a car, and suspend it off the ground. A student who studies hard is believed to be sound in knowledge and has potentials to move even lecturers to his admiration, thereby exalting himself.

(c) ‘Jackometer minus’
[a student who studies a lot but always has woeful results].
A meter is an instrument for measuring while a jack is an instrument for lifting a heavy weight. The idea is that even the meter cannot possibly measure the extent to which the student studies. ‘Minus’ is a negation – which suggests that after all the reading, the student has no good result to show for it. The term is used as subtle mockery on students who do not have an effective way of studying or a student whose result is not commensurate with his/her effort.

(d) ‘Jacking’
[the act of reading]
As a jack lifts heavy weights, so does a student lifts and stores knowledge up in the brain which is quite a tasking exercise.

(e) ‘We have Adedun now’
[We have Eng 407; Semantic Theory of English].
Dr. Adedun is the lecturer for Eng 407 course but students feel that to utter the course code or title is somewhat officious and monotonous; they prefer to say instead, the name of the lecturer. They do this because, for them, it is not so much about the course itself but about how the lecturer
makes the course accessible to them. Students meet the lecturers first before meeting the course. The lecturer is like a direct contact while the course is an indirect one.

(f) ‘Micro-chipper’.
[a student who engages in examination malpractices].
The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines microchips as ‘a very small piece of silicon containing a set of electronic parts which is used in computers and other machines’. Students extend its meaning to embrace or encapsulate very tiny pieces of paper on which students write before-hand answers to examination questions, insert them in their clothing and bring into examination halls. These pieces of paper, they call “microchips”, and anyone who carries any, they call “microchipper”.

(g) ‘Hardware’
[an intelligent student]
As opposed to the dictionary meaning which defines hardware as ‘a computer machinery and equipment’, the students use the term to depict the soundness and brilliance of an intelligent student. ‘Hard’ in the term stresses the form and confident nature of student who is sure about what he knows. ‘Ware’ is just a material. The student is referred to as the ‘ware’. Thus ‘hardware’ is an intelligent student, a sound material, that cannot and must not be wasted. Here, the term can be related to a computer machinery and equipment as a computer is a product of man’s intellectual prowess, so also can intelligent students be likened to a computer.

(h) ‘Software’.
[a dull student]
The dictionary defines software as the ‘sets of programmes [instructions] that you put into a computer when you want it to do particular jobs’. The students do not have this definition or reference in mind when they use the term. Instead, it is the literal meaning of each base word that they have in mind. ‘Soft’ in the term refers to the frail, porous mind. The term is sometimes used also to refer to some lecturers who are not very proficient in the courses they teach. These kinds of lecturers hardly come to class and when they eventually do, they speak in elevated language that leave the students confused and miserable.

(i) ‘Microsoft’
[a student who will not come to class but who will beg lecturers to pass him/her especially after offering cash or kind (inducement).

The term ‘micro’ refers to a small particle. It is the way and manner by which students [especially the female ones] sneak to lecturers subtly and beg them not to fail them that ‘micro’ describes. ‘Soft’ refers to the students intellectual frailty and laziness.

(j) ‘Toronto Students’
[Students who pretend they are members of a class but in fact have neither matriculation numbers nor results]. They are given this name after the former Speaker of House of Representatives, Senator Buhari, who lied that he attended the Toronto University. Students who pretend to belong to a class when they do not are regarded as ‘Toronto’ students because they are living a false life.

(k) ‘Bang’
[to fail a course]
Ordinarily, the term indicates a sudden loud noise caused by something such as a gun or an object hitting a hard surface. In this, there is the possibility of destruction and negation. Therefore, for a student, there is nothing as destructive or negative as failing a course; and not just failing but failing as woefully as to involve carry overs or extra years in school. Thus, it is a very big bang for them to fail a course or courses.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF SLANG USED FOR POLITICS ON CAMPUS

(a) ‘Baba Manifesto’
[someone who speaks eloquently at the manifesto ground prior to elections].
‘A manifesto is an oral or written statement by a person or organized group of persons, especially a political party saying what they believe in or what they intend to do’. [Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English]. ‘Baba’ is Yoruba word for father which connotes wisdom and strength. Therefore, a student who delivers his manifesto fluently and is able to manipulate effectively the feelings of fellow students and win their goodwill is referred to as ‘Baba manifesto’. Such a student almost always wins the election.

(b) ‘George Bush’
[a student who is believed to have won an election by rigging].
The presidential election of the United States of America conducted in the year 2000 of which George Bush emerged as president was believed to have been rigged. Students, therefore, in showing their grievances against such as American act, term every other student who wins election on
campus by rigging as ‘George Bush’. The term carries some derogatory traces in its wake to show that such a presidential position should be attained by nothing but fair play.

(c) ‘Al Gore’
[a student who is believed to have lost an election to rigging]
Al Gore was George Bush’s opponent in the election. He was believed to have lost the election to Bush by rigging. He won the good will of most Americans but he lost the elections anyway. However, he still enjoyed the favour of Americans, especially the African Americans. The term is used honourably to console the losers of elections not to worry but to keep trying until they finally win.

(d) ‘Idi Amin’
[a student who is an oppressive leader]
History has it that one time president of Uganda – Idi Amin was an oppressive and cruel leader who trampled upon his people’s fundamental rights. So also, students who do same in the respective public offices are named after him. Such students loot the students’ treasury for their personal gain and fail to render the services their offices demand.

(e) ‘Agents red’
[agent of the various aspirants who are believed to be dubious].
Agents are people who act on behalf of others. ‘Red’ is a danger sign. It connotes the dangerous activities these agents involve themselves in just to make sure their candidates win elections. The things they do include: getting loans from banks, selling their belongings and promising students benefits like free accommodation once their candidates are installed. The loans they get are used to buy
students’ votes which they will abundantly get back after the elections by looting the students’ treasury and embezzling their funds. Their activities threaten the smooth-running of the Student Union.

(f) ‘Oligarchy’
[a rigid and high-handed student union president or leader]. The Oxford English Dictionary defines oligarchy as ‘government or control by a small group of people’ and ‘a state governed by a small group of people’ or the group who governs such a state. The ‘smallness’ of the people who govern a state is capitalized upon by the students by extending the meaning to encapsulate the ‘smallness’ of effectiveness of the governance of such a state. The ‘smallness’ embraces the rigidity and high-handedness with which student leaders govern on campus which therefore, makes their government to be disliked and assessed as a failure.

(g) ‘Inner Caucus’
[a fraction of students who are seen as the ‘wielders of power’]. (The kingmakers).
A caucus is a group of people in a political party, who meet to discuss and decide on political plans. The term ‘inner’ adds more to the function of a caucus by suggesting that this group of students has some influence of sorts to decide who wins and who loses. The issue with them is that they seem to like some particular aspirants but in the end, they turn around and install someone else, to everyone’s dismay. They are sleeky and diplomatic. The term is always used
derogatorily to emphasize the fact that when it comes to politics, no one can be trusted.

(h) ‘Elders Forum’
[a set of prominent students who designs how and when the elections will be carried out].

These students are peace-loving students who want the elections to be carried out in the best way possible, devoid of rigging and chaos and at a time when students are free from academic work to participate fully in the voting activities. Other students refer to them as elders because their mannerisms and duties are carried out so maturely and smoothly that one would not expect such orderliness from students but only from adults. Thus, their group is referred to as ‘elders forum’. The term is an honourable one.

(i) ‘Elder Statemen’.
[respectable congressmen] A congressman is a student who is a member of a meeting of representatives of different departments of the same faculty. They are the senators of faculty (students’ body). An elder stateman is a student of integrity and truth who condemns any corrupt practices and seeks to move the student body forward by championing a worthy and noble course.

(j) ‘Baba Isale’
[a student who supports and motivates his candidates]
The term has its roots in the Yoruba language and indicates that somebody is a source of inspiration or supporter of another. There are times when aspirants tend to despair; but the ‘Baba Isale’ encourages them not to lose hope, that they stand a fair chance of winning the elections even when all odds are against them. The term is used honourably.
4.4 SLANG USED FOR RELIGION ON CAMPUS

(a) ‘Sharia’
[a female student dressed in the purdah way].

The Islamic sharia law which places various penalties on misconducts like cutting off the hand of a thief and forbidding females to expose any part of their body has been made more visible on the female folk. Most Christians, free thinkers and even some liberal Muslims frown at the idea of Sharia Law especially because they say, its provisions are to the extreme and quite inhuman. Therefore students (especially male) show their displeasure at Sharia law by howling ‘Sharia’ whenever a female student dressed in the purdah system appears. The term is derogatory and aims at eliminating the essence of sharia law.

(b) ‘Born wuruwuru’
[a student who pretends to be religious but actually is not].

The term is named after the biblical phrase ‘born again’ which refers to true repentance from sin and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Wuruwuru’ is merely an onomatopoeic word, which indicates negativity, roughness, falsity and hypocrisy. Thus, ‘born wuruwuru’ is used as the opposite of the Biblical ‘born again’. It is used as an indictment or satire on religious hypocrites especially female students who publicly condemn others for immorality but who themselves encourage immoral attitude.

(c) ‘Born Again’
[a very religious student who would even ignore his/her academics in order to attend to Christian activities].

Here, the students use the term in contrast with the Biblical meaning. It is used to indicate that the student in question is performing the Biblical injunctions externally or even
erroneously. Students claim that true Christianity does not require too much outward show of religiousity. They say that to do too much of work, including Christian work, is to overstretch oneself for nothing. They say that Christ has done all the work there is to be done already, anything outside that is self-glorification. Thus, the term is used to refer to hypocrites and fanatics.

(d) ‘Romans 4:4’
[a student who always quotes the Bible even when discussing social issues]
Many fanatics (religious) find it very easy to make Bible quotations in order to portray themselves as being religious; but it does not always follow. They do this to make people believe they are good Christians yet their social relations with others indicate the opposite. The term is derogatory.

(e) ‘Praise Jamz’
[students who go to Christian fellowships for social interaction and fun instead of spiritual uplift].
The twentieth century trend of Christianity has turned religion almost into a social activity rather than a spiritual one, so it is believed by many people. The trend has also infiltrated into campus sects where students attend fellowships just to make up for the lack of funds that would be expended on parties. Therefore, it is more economical for them to party at churches and fellowships. It is used derogatorily.

(f) Pope John Paul
[a male student that always wears a very religious outlook]. There is the common saying that ‘one cannot be holier than the Pope’. The saying is a subtle mockery on religious hypocrisy and fanaticism. The Pope indeed also wears a very
religious look especially when dressed in his regalia. Thus, any student, especially fanatics and hypocrites, are referred to as Pope John Paul. The term is derogatory.

(g) Bin Laden
[a muslim student who is fanatical]
Following the recent bombing of the World Trade Centre and pentagon in the United States due to religious fundamentalists’ act of which Osama Bin Laden is believed to be the patron, Muslim students on campus especially those dressed in the purdah system and males who wear the cap are taunted to be fundamentalists and fanatics. Hence, other students do not want to associate closely with them lest they get bombed.

4.5 SLANG USED FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION AND ECONOMIC STANDING
(a) Mellow
[one has become humble or sober after being haughty]
The dictionary defines the term as one being ‘relaxed, pleasant, not severe’. However, the students use the term also in the same way but extends its meaning for subtle mockery especially to refer to a person who is always proud and feels he knows more than others in terms of academics whereas the person’s result reflects something contrary. As a result the person is humbled. The term is used satirically.

(b) ‘Chill’
[one should control one’s temper]
The dictionary defines the term to mean to cause something ‘to become cold but not frozen’. When one’s temper is unleashed, there is a tendency for violence or a heated out-
mosphere. Thus, ‘chilling’ in such environment would ease one’s temper or make it become ‘cold but not frozen’.

(c) ‘Bone’
[to ignore an unpleasant act, or the act of frowning]. Ordinarily, a bone is any of the hard parts inside a human or animal that makes up its frame. Hence, the idea that one should ignore something (especially an unpleasant act) is for one to be hard against that thing in order for one to triumph over it or for there to be peace. The term ‘to bone’ aims at allowing peace to reign because not ‘to bone’ is to give way to violence and destruction. The second idea that ‘to bone’ means to frown also suggests that one is making one’s face look hard or hardened thereby frowning.

(d) ‘Zero Level’
[one is not quite buoyant] Zero means nothingness. Level means a stage or a point on a scale of measurement. Therefore, for a student to be at ‘zero level’ means that student is in a financial crisis or a state of nothingness, is cash-strapped and totally broke.

(e) ‘Paiko’
[one is totally out of finance] Paiko is a product of Nigerian pidgin stemmed out of the Middle Belt region, Edo and Delta languages. The term is an onomatopoeic word which suggests a state of nothingness, especially financial nothingness.

(f) ‘Shot Putting’
[the act of defecating in a wrapper and throwing it in the bush. This is commonly done in students’ halls of residence]. Shot putting ordinarily means the act of throwing a heavy metal ball in a sports competition. But in the students’ case, the heavy metal ball is their feaces which they throw around
even without any sports competition taking place. The term is used satirically to show students animalistic behaviour.

(g) ‘Kolo’
[either means one is not quite mentally healthy or a non-conformist]
A product of Nigerian pidgin, the term is especially used in aspects of the Benin native languages or dialects. A student who behaves strangely e.g. one who does not conform with university standards - partying, having boy friends, boycotting classes, etc. - is termed as a ‘kolo’. There are also some students who get easily and unnecessarily edgy – especially when other students want to socially interact with them; these students are also referred to as ‘kolo’. The term is used satirically and is derogatory.

(h) ‘Carry go’
[one should go away or one should flaunt one’s possession because one is being admired].
To ‘carry’ here means to have something with one. To ‘go’ means to move ahead. Thus, the term ‘carry go’ indicates that one should move ahead, soar and excel with what one has. If used in this sense it is used honourably. It could also be used derogatorily to mean one should go away with one’s ideas because the ideas are not welcome.

(i) ‘Ose’
[a bad encounter]
The term is a Yoruba word which means soap. Soap is used to wash off dirt. Thus, here the students extend its meaning to include that not only is the soap hard on dirt on the skin but also on the skin itself. Thus, the students use the term to indicate negativity.
(j) ‘Yawa’
[embarrassment or disappointment].
The term is a Hausa expression which indicates something undesirable.

(k) ‘Scope’
[carefully looking at somebody – especially the way a guy looks at a beautiful girl].
Scope means range or opportunity or potential; but students have connected its meaning to include the ‘opportunity’ the male students have to pursue the ‘potentials’ or physical endowments of a girl. The term is used satirically to taunt guys who cannot control their sexual appetite.

(l) ‘Unpadded’
[a harlot or a girl who has an uncontrollable appetite for sex].
If something is padded, it means it has some form of shape, protection or strength. Students, especially the male students believe females should always be padded lest they cease to be desirable. A harlot or a girl who has large appetite for sex is unpadded because she would lose all her natural ‘prowess’ and beauty and wear herself out in the course of sex too frequently.

(m) ‘Fap’
[to steal]
The term has a meaning that is close to the English language, yet it is not a word in the language. Students coin the word to mean a clever way of stealing.

(n) ‘Maintain’
[to stay out of trouble].
The term literally means to continue to have, to preserve, to express or to provide something. Thus, students also input
the meanings of their continually having, preserving, expressing and providing peace for themselves and for others. The term is used to indicate positivity.

(o) ‘Obtain’
[to get something from someone in a tricky way]
The dictionary defines the term as ‘to get something by asking for it, working for it or producing it from something else. Yet for the students, it is the act of getting something not by any of the above processes but by tricks and lying. The term is always used ironically.

(p) ‘Sustain’
[to forget or put behind an issue or something especially unpleasant ones].
The term literally means to maintain or to keep something in existence. The term has a relationship with the student’s definition of ‘maintain’ which is geared towards allowing peace to reign. Students who have been wronged by others and who desire to retaliate are usually asked to ‘sustain’ in order to foster peace on campus. The term is always used to placate and appease students who have been offended.

(q) ‘Bulliana’
[a female student who bullies other students, male students inclusive].
A bully is one who can hurt or frighten other people, often forcing them to do what they do not want to do. On campus, male students have often been the bullies, but female students are now coming up. So in order to differentiate between sexes, ‘ana’ is used as an affix to create a feminine sense of the term, hence, ‘bulliana’. Thus, the term is derogatory.
‘Flowing’
[to feel fine and happy].
To flow literally means to move in one direction especially continuously and easily. Thus, for the students, to do this requires that one is highly relaxed and unstressed. When a student ‘flows’, such a student is free, fine and happy especially when the student has money, good GPA and enough parties to go to.

‘Yarns’
[general and interesting conversations].
Literally, yarns are stories, usually long ones with lots of excitement. The students’ idea about yarns are not so different from the literal meaning except that for them, it must include some follies of sorts to make it really interesting and exciting.

‘Jambito’
[a fresh university student].
A jambite is a student who has finally sailed through the difficult JAMB examination and has been admitted into the university. Such a student is also called ‘Jambito’ because he/she is not yet used to campus life and still behaves strangely – like not knowing where registrations take place and bumping into lecture classrooms asking whether the classes are the ones he/she ought to attend. The term was originally ‘jambite’ but students re-invented it to ‘jambito’ for creativity and the desire for change.

‘feeling’
[to be haughty].
To feel is to experience something. Students thus extend its meaning to include being on an ego trip or being proud. The term is used satirically.

(v) **‘IGG’**

[Initial Gra-Gra].
The term ‘Gra-Gra’ is an onomatopoeic term that indicates force or objection. Hence, ‘initial gra-gra’ refers to initial objection to something which one may desire inwardly, but in order not to betray one’s inner pride, one objects but later calms down and capitulates. The term is especially used to refer to female students who at first refuse some male offers – like love affairs/relationships, but later agree because they want the guys to think they have some pride.

(w) **‘butter babes’**

[rich female students].
Students believe that poor and hardworking students cannot be sustained by butter or any light food but by heavy ones like – ‘eba’, ‘yam’ and ‘beans’. They say it is only rich students who have everything at their disposal that feed on light food like butter and such students are mainly female ones even though some males are not left out because they take things so easily and are quite sluggish as they have the means to get thing done without stretching themselves.

(x) **‘floaters’**

[students who squat with other students because they have no accommodation on campus].
To float means to move along the surface of something. Thus, the students say a floater is one who does not live in a hostel but just ‘floats’ along the surface of someone else’s room because such a student can never be comfortable. The term is used satirically.
‘dough’
[money].
The term is an English slang for money and students use it in the same sense just to show that they can control money and down tone its importance.

5.0 FINDINGS
The study has revealed that students use slang essentially for the r
linguistic creativity, freedom, social identity and a need for a peculiar kind of communicative strategy which is quite different from the academic terms and standard usages typical of the University environment. This work has also shown clearly the various kinds of slang students have and use; those used to refer to persons – male and female, academic work, religion, politics, economic standing and social interactions.

The social functions these slang terms perform are especially to enhance the social life of the students and make them relax and unwind a little from their academic responsibilities. However, at a deeper level, slang also hints at various societal issues; for the positive ones, the slang commends, and for the negative, it satirizes and condemns. This reveals that despite the base and vulgar nature of slang, it has a subtle way of correcting societal ills or even nipping them in the bud. For example, the idea that students refer to any student that wins an election on campus by rigging as ‘George Bush’ suggests that the act of rigging is offensive and should be eradicated. It also indicates that many people the world over do not support the idea of persons benefitting from an unfair system, especially elections. Therefore, the slang ‘George Bush’ carries in its wake a wide variety of social injustice and racial bias which should be eradicated. The students’ use of slang is also a manifestation and celebration of their sexuality. This is
seen in their use of slang such as, ‘aproko’, ‘aristo’, ‘aristress’, and ‘slim shady’.

The role of pidgin in the students’ use of slang cannot be overstressed as it gives the slang more glamour and flavour e.g. ‘weting de worry that kolo girl’ is more interesting and socially identifying than ‘what is that kolo girl’s problem’. ‘Wetin’ and ‘dey’ are pidgin words in the first sentence above and they serve to effect more intimacy, informality and accommodation among the users of slang.

The students’ use of slang also brings about the linguistic phenomenon of code-switching which is due to the various languages in contact e.g. ‘The guy is an esin [code-mixing from English to Yoruba language] – meaning the guy is very influential on campus.

Furthermore, slang reflects a high degree of creativity, intellectual exercise, idiosyncrasy, group directedness, solidarity and environmental consciousness. For instance, the Kegites club on campus use slang terms such as ‘baba ne’ (my brother), ‘agbalagba’ (Mr. President) to refer to one another during their meeting sessions. Cult groups also have slang e.g. ‘don’, ‘capoon’ and ‘grandfather’ which refer to their leaders and members. Language is a spontaneous and intelligible act, so is the students’ slang as their use impinges upon the past, present and future e.g. ‘mopo’, ‘sharia’, ‘Okadigbo’, ‘last day’, etc.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Finally, this work has been a sociolinguistic study which reveals that the University of Lagos is a multilingual institution that truly represents the Nigerian nation. Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation and the University of Lagos is a melting pot of the various tribes in the country, and slang reflects the nation’s multi-lingual
character. For instance, slang such as ‘bose wa ni yen’ (that’s the way it is), ‘esa’ (praise singing or the act of teasing), ‘egbe’ (a timid fellow), ‘ora’ (a dull person) are Yoruba oriented slang. ‘Cha-cha’ (something very nice, admirable), ‘iti’ (a fool) ‘ewu’ (a social deviant) are traceable to the Igbo language. ‘Yawa’ (disappointment or embarrassment), ‘salam’ (hello), ‘yayadey’-I no dey’ (I don’t have anything to give you) are etymologically Hausa terms. Therefore, slang in the University of Lagos is a manifestation of the multi-lingual nature of the Nigerian nation.

Being a reflection of the multi-lingual character of the nation, slang could be used as a unifying force among the various Nigerian tribes. It also could be an instrument for the promotion of the English language along with indigenous languages and can also serve as a vehicle for inter-cultural communication and accommodation.
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