

## SLANGS USE AMONG IGBO FARMERS

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### **Abstract**

*This study focuses on sociolinguistics study of the slang expression used by the farmers in Orumba community of Anambra state. The aim is to find out slang expressions used by farmers and their literal meaning. Oral interview method and observation was used to elicitate authentic information needed. A descriptive method of data analysis was adopted. Slangs used by the farmers were presented and analyzed. It is observed from our analysis, that the use of slang expressions is purely in an informal context, and that slang expressions are mostly used for in-group identification as well as to hide meaning. This research concludes that slangs and slang expressions are variety of language used by the farmers in Orumba and as such should not be seen as the language of the underworld or illiteracy, but a secret informal language which the farmers use in preservation of the meaning of their conversation from outsiders or a way of making one to think deeper before understanding a statement. This also has also contributed to language growth.*

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, Slangs, Farmers, Orumba, Communication

### **Introduction**

The most important tool of communication that individuals have at their disposal is language. Slang is a sociolinguistics study. Firstly, in the words of Syal and Sindal (2010), sociolinguistics is “the branch of linguistics that deals with exploration of the relation between language and society”. Slang as in the past, was viewed as informal and associated with the less privileged and with persons of a low or disreputable character (Johnson and Shirley, 2005; McGregor, 2009).

According to Johnson and Shirley (2005:107), slang can be described as “informal, nonstandard words or phrases (lexical innovations) which tend to originate in subcultures within a society”. On the other hand, there are some definitions that seemed not to see slang from the negative perspective. The definition by Hartman and Stork (1972:302), says that slang expressions is a “variety of social and professional group for in-group communication and thus tending to prevent understanding by the rest of the speech community”. From this notion, the belief or idea that slang is a language for lowly placed and indecent people in the society has been flawed.

There have been misconceptions on the issue of slangs and their literal meaning. Several works have been done on slang expressions by scholars for instance Igbo slang in Otu-Onitsha: towards enriching the Igbo language (Nkamigbo and Eme, 2011), the use of slang amongst undergraduate students of a Malaysian public University (Namvar, 2014), the Sociolinguistics of slang among students of University of Ilorin, Nigeria (Adamu, 2015), etc. However, to the best of our knowledge, no work has been done on slang expressions used by the farmers in Igbo community.

The Igbo language is one of the three main Nigerian languages (the others being Hausa and Yoruba). Majority of the native speakers of the language are located in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, precisely in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states; while a few other speakers reside in Delta and Rivers states. The language has so many dialects (including Orumba dialect). In this paper, the slangs used by the farmers in Orumba dialect will be examined. It is also to interpret the identified slangy expressions using context as cue and to interpret and analyze the identified expressions. This study further hopes to find out when, where and why farmers use slang expressions.

Orumba variety is a satellite of Aguata main dialect of the Inland West Igbo Dialect Cluster following Ikekeonwu’s (1987) classification. It is spoken in amongst various towns which cut across Orumba South and North local government community of Anambra state. Data were obtained through oral interview of one adult male and two adult females of between sixty years and above, and one youth of thirty years old and also through careful observation of the researcher. The researcher restricted his researcher to Nawfija farmers for data collection. Nawfija is a town in Orumba South local government area of Anambra state. The research concept was explained to the farmers and through which results were gotten from

them. The data are analyzed using the descriptive approach. Descriptive approach is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way. Emenanjo (1978) and Williamson's (1984) tone-marking convention of marking the low and downstep tones and leaving the high tone unmarked is adopted in tone-marking the data.

Section two discusses slangs. It also reviews relevant empirical studies. In section three is data presentation and analysis; while section four presents the findings, summary and conclusion.

### **Concept of Slangs**

Slang expression as an interested area in the study of different linguistic means of communication, have been defined and treated from different perspectives by different authors. According to Kristin and Anne (2010:190), "slang words or phrases are typically very informal, and they are usually restricted to a particular group-typically teens and young-adults as a marker or in group status". Crystal (1997:53), defines slang as "a colloquial departure from standard usage: it is often imaginative, vivid and ingenious in its construction so much that it has been called 'the plain man's poetry'. Supporting these definitions, Merriam-Webster dictionary, defines slang as "an informal non-standard vocabulary composed typically of coinages, arbitrary changed words, and extravagant, forced or facetious figures of speech". On the other hand, Concise Dictionary of Linguistics (CDOL), Defines slang as "Antilanguage', used especially of vocabulary specific e.g., to a particular generation of younger speakers, also, as in ordinary usage, specific to a group or profession (e.g. 'Army slang'), to colloquial styles, etc." Microsoft Encarta premium (2009) posits slang as "informal, nonstandard words and phrases generally shorter lived than the expressions of ordinary colloquial speech and typically formed by creative, often witty juxtapositions of words or images." Hartman and Stork (1972:76) say that slang is a variety of speech characterized by newly coined and rapidly changing vocabulary used by young or social or professional groups for 'in-group communication and tending to prevent understanding by the rest of the speech community ..." for Hartman and Stork slang is used by young or social or even a professional body.

Still on the definition of slang, Robert, Fromkin and Hyams (2003:489) says that "slang is not often used in formal situation or writing, but is widely used in

speech.” It has been said that slang is something that everyone can recognize but no one can define (Robert, Adrian, Richard and Ann, (2012:301). This is why so many authors have in one way or the other presented their definition(s) the way they viewed slang. Nkamigbo and Eme (2011) submit that slangs are those informal linguistic expressions created by a certain group to fulfill their immediate communication needs, irrespective of the existence of the equivalent in the formal variety of the same language.

Slang expressions are “terms that are made up or are given new definitions by a social group in order to make the terms novel or conventional such that people outside the social group are excluded from the group’s discussions” (Harris, 1994).

Furthermore, Adeyanju (2007:267) observes that slangy expressions could be defined as substandard but widely understood expressions with or without the attributes of existing expressions employed to facilitate communication in a new sense. A slang expression may last for a while in a sociolinguistic environment and later disappear if not widely accepted and used.

Judging from the above views, it could be said that slangs are informal speech which could be a variation from a standard language form for communication of in-group members for certain reasons such as restraints from general understanding.

### **Definitions of other Related Terms**

i. Argot: Concise Dictionary of Linguistics defined argot as “special vocabulary used by criminals which is designedly unintelligible to outsiders. Thus one form of antilanguage.”

ii. Jargon: Kristin and Anne (2010:190), sees jargon as “words or phrases used by a particular group, but jargon is not informal; rather, it is associated with particular profession, trades, sports, occupations, games, and so on.” Example of jargon is the linguistic jargons: phoneme, allophone, morpheme, etc. Yule (1996:246), defined jargon as “a technical vocabulary associated with a special activity or group.”

iii. Jive: according to Merriam Webster Dictionary (MWD), jive is an “informal language that includes many slang terms: deceptive or foolish talk.”

iv. Colloquial: Robert, Adrian, Richard and Ann (2012:302) define colloquialism as “referring to informal conversational styles of language.”

v. Patois: Merriam Webster Dictionary, define patois as “a form of language that is different from the main form of the same language”. Example: a dialect other than the standard or literary dialect.

vi. Dialect: dialect is “language variants spoken by entire groups of people.” While Merriam Webster Dictionary defines dialect from geographical points of view as “a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional variety and constituting together with them a single language.”

### **Distinction Between slang and other related Terms**

This session tends to draw some distinctions between slang expression and other related terms. Though the distinctions between slang and other related terms are difficult to draw, the researcher shall briefly discuss some of these differences from Kristin and Anne (2010:190). Kristin et al (2010:190) explained the distinction between slang and jargon. “Jargon is also words or phrases used by a particular group, but jargon is not as informal; rather, it is associated with particular profession; trade, sports, occupation and so on.” Examples; the linguistic jargons: jargons: phoneme, diphthong, allophone, syntax, etc. while slang is characterized by informality.

Slang should not be confused as dialect. While, dialects have their own unique phonetics, morphology, phonology, and vocabulary, slang terms can be shared across dialects and dialects are not short-lived like slang terms. Slang also should not be confused with style or register. Everybody exhibits or performs the act of communication in different ways; formally and informally, though these styles can vary a lot across speech groups. We shift registers easily and unconsciously from job interview to a conversation with friends (even to a close friend), using different vocabulary (style), more or less prescriptively correct forms, and even with different intonation.

Slang should also be distinguished from taboo words. “Many (if not all) languages have taboo words, and they typically refer to things that are forbidden or unmentionable in the culture” (Kristin and Anne 2010:190). Examples of taboo words are sex and excrement. It is also taboo or blasphemous to use words affiliated with religion in an offensive way. For this reasons, taboo words are substitute using a non-offensive one, which may have the same meaning and are clearly a substitute. The substitute is assumed not to convey the same as the taboo

words themselves. An example of such substitute are; shoot for sheet, heck for hell, etc. the distinction between slang words or expression and taboo words is that while taboo words can stay for long period of time and retain its meaning, slangs do not have such ability.

### **Features of Slang**

Slang as a variety of language, do have similar features with language excepts on some divergent as will be discussed below following Robert et al (2012:301)

i. Informality: informality has been used by different authors in the definition of the term 'slang' this issue of informality can be used as a means one use in categorizing any language variety.

ii. Casual: slang is a part of casual, information style of language-use; "it is often perceived as a low or vulgar form of language and is deemed to be place in formal style of language" Robert et al (2012:301)

iii. Change quite rapidly: Robert et al (2012:301), says that "slang like fashions in clothing and popular music, changes rapidly." Slang terms enters a language fastly, then fallout of fashion or become outdated in few years or even month before the very eyes of the speakers/users.

iv. Unintelligent to outsider(s): slang is known to a particular group (of people that shares occupations or profession). According to Robert et al (2012), specific areas of slang are often associated with a particular social group, and hence one speaks of teenage slang, and so on. In this respect, slang servers or is a kind of jargon, and its use servers as a mark of membership and solidarity within a given social group.

### **Reasons for Slang**

Slangists have identified different reasons for using slang, but Crystal (1997:530) provides an almost exhaustive list of the reasons thus: for the fun of it; as an exercise in wit or ingenuity; to be different; to be picturesque; to be arresting; to escape from clichés; to enrich the language; to add concreteness to speech; to reduce seriousness; to be colloquial; for ease of interaction; to induce intimacy; to show that one belongs; for exclusion/inclusion; and to be secretive.

## **Sociolinguistic Theories**

This section focuses on the theory of sociolinguistic differences. When we talk of sociolinguistic difference, we are talking about differences that are based on sociolinguistic enquired on the social changes in human language.

This research work will study sociolinguistic differences that are necessary in the understanding of language use in the society. Differences like; differences in class, age group, and gender. There are numerous factors influencing the way people use language, and these have been investigated by sociolinguists over the years. They include:

- i. **Social class:** the position of the speaker in the society, measured by the level of education, parental background, profession and their effect on syntax and lexis used by the speaker.
- ii. **Social context:** the register of the language used, depending on changing situations, formal language in formal meetings and informal during meeting with friends, for examples:
  - a. Geographical origins: slight differences in pronunciation between speakers that point at the geographical region which the speaker comes from.
  - b. Ethnicity: difference between the use of a given languages by its native speakers and either ethnic groups.
  - c. Nationality: clearly visible in the case of English languages: British English differs from American English or Canadian English; Nigerian English differs from Ghanaian English.
  - d. Gender differences in the patterns of languages use between men and women, such as quantity of speech, intonation patterns.
  - e. Age: the influence of age of the speaker on the use of vocabulary and grammar complexity.
  - f. Occupation: difference in language use with regard to professional jargons, slang, and professional codes and signs.

## **Empirical Review**

Works on slang and slang expressions have been on course for a period of time. Various researchers have explored so many areas in the study of languages especially in slang expression, to ascertain the authenticity of the existence of slang. This section reviews some of the past research works that have been done on slang expressions.

Okeke (2006) re-examines slang expression and their contextual usage in Federal University of Technology, Owerri. Her main aim of the study includes:

- i. To identify how slang phenomenon developed in Federal university of technology, Owerri.
- ii. To identify the difference purpose slang serves the student and with whom slang is used.
- iii. To find out what extend communication among students will be hindered without the use of slang expression.
- iv. To find out if the use of slang expression affects the academic performance of students in the institution.

She adopts a survey research method in which she samples the opinion of some selected of the institute, using an appropriate survey instrument. The result is the table (1) below.

Table 1

Option	No. of respondent	Percentage
From Home	9	20%
From School club	19	42%
It cannot be explained	17	37.80%
Total	45	100%

She found that slang develop out of the different clubs in the institution. She also finds that student use slang mainly for purpose of in-group, and to hide meaning. She concludes that communication amongst students will not be hindered at all without the use of slang expression.

Subsequently, Osajiuba (2010) in his research aims at discovering whether slang expression is very intelligible in Nkwo Nnewi market, and also to find out the extent communication among the traders will be hindered without the use of slang expression. The approach she adopts in the research is in line with those of the scholars that discussed slang from the social function perspective, and as the informal, highly expressive products of peoples' creativity. Examples of slang expression in the research work are shown the table below.

Table 2

Slang	Standard Igbo	Meaning
Ị nọ n'ofe	Ihe adiwooro gi mma	You are comfortable
Ị bu onye egbua	Isi adighi gi mma	You are insane
O yiri ife	Ọ mara mma	She is beautiful
I nweghi ugba	I nweghi nsogbu	You don't have any problem

She reveals the following facts that Igbo slang expressions used by traders in Nkwo Nnewi is a result of the environment they found themselves. She also found out that the major cause of Igbo slang expressions among the traders is as a result of massive uneducated members of the market.

She concludes that "the secrecy the traders want to maintain among them in order to thrive, but all these are to the detriment of Igbo language, and that this have made people not to have regard for the Igbo language". As Osajiuba (2010) restricted his work to the slangs as being used in Nkwo market at Nnewi, this current research focuses on slangs used by the farmers in Orumba.

Nkamigbo & Eme (2011) examine Igbo slangs in Otu-Onitsha where their data were collected through tape-recording the speeches of different inhabitants of Otu-Onitsha.

However, the work was classified contextually which includes; economic life, social evils, social talks, transportation, social relation, eating and drinking, social stratification, miscellaneous. In the analysis, the first is literal meaning which is enclosed with an inverted comma whereas the second one is contextual meaning.

#### **a. Economic life**

mmemme “feast” When many customers are in one’s shop

buba “carry something inside” Make much money

rachaa ọkwa “lick the wooden plate” Make much profit

mgbago “going up” Overseas, used by traders who usually travel overseas

i bugonu “you have grown” You have got much money

kpọkọm Money

#### **b. Social evils**

eke “python” The police, cops, law enforcement officer (used to refer to policemen)

ezi “pig” Used by men to refer to a promiscuous lady

dọọ “stretch” Run away

pịakaa “open something by hitting” Destroy

tikara Run away

onye ọrụ “a worker” One involved in dirty business e.g. dupe, one who engages in extra marital affairs

#### **c. Social talks**

ọ chara acha “it is ripe” Is beautiful

ife aka “to wave a hand” To die

saa isi “wash the head” Try to convince somebody

#### **d. Transportation**

eke “python” Long vehicle, haulage truck

mgbachapu (used by bus drivers) Picking passengers along, not waiting to go with a full-loaded bus

akpuruka An old, poorly maintained vehicle especially buses for public transport

**e. Miscellaneous**

gbado anya “put a stop to the eye” be careful; Continue what you are doing

kwechiri Persist in something

nkonuko Trouble making

Furthermore, Ojei (2019), discusses the slangs amongst Nigerian Policemen using B-Division Awka Anambra state as a case study. She uses descriptive approach and further states the slangs and the contextual meaning.

i. Tapping: it means collecting money illegally

ii. Groundnut: which the contextual meaning is bullet and it is a borrowed word which means literally an edible seed which gives fats and oil to the body.

iii. Yawa dey: this is associated with Yoruba pidgin for ‘there is trouble’. So it can be said that the slang is borrowed and is formed through compounding process whereby two or more words come together to form a complex word.

iv. Kelebe: this slang contextually means illegal duty. This is also a Yoruba. It is used when doing any illegal duty, collecting bribe and any other unauthorized doings.

v. March: March which is literally the third month in a calendar year, now means three thousand naira. So this slang is borrowed from English language.

vi. January: this is the first month of the year according to English language, but has now be known as one thousand naira among the Awka, B-division Police Force

From the above reviewed works, it is observed that no work on Igbo farmers’ slangs has been done. Thereby, this research tends to discuss the slangs as being used by the farmers in Orumba which is situated in Anambra state, Eastern part of Nigeria,

### Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, haven completed the interview and the data collected, presentation were made and the gloss and the literal meaning of the slangs are stated under it.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

1. Nchì mètè ọkà mụ iwā  
 N-Grasscutter V-do(pst) corn 1sg to break  
 ‘Grasscutter dealt badly with my corn’
2. Ndi ọrụ à kọrọ àlà ahụ jàà jàà  
 People work this V-till-pst ground that RED.-  
 completely  
 ‘The workers tilled the ground completely’
3. Ọkà bù òshì ọbọgwù n’ahwọ nù  
 N-corn V-be feaces N-duck Prep. N-year this  
 ‘There are many/bountiful corns this year’
4. Ọkwùrù wụ aturù tàwa n’ubì mpa ānyī  
 N-English apple be sheep V-chew Prep.N-farm father  
 1pl.  
 ‘There are bountiful of English apple in our father’s farm’
5. Nnùnù nyùrù ègwusi m̄ dị n’ubì ahụ  
 ìkpakwù  
 N-bird V-excrete (pst) melon 1sg. be Prep.farm  
 that farm-palm  
 ‘Bird dealt terribly with the melon in my farm’
6. Ebe edē vùrù ivù, jì wùdzi àshìrì m̄ gị  
 nye m̄?  
 Where cocoyam V-be big, yam V-be ask 1sg. 2sg. give  
 me  
 ‘Whereas cocoyam is much, yam is then very plenty’

7. Ọ kwà ụmụ m̀gbàdà m̀rè ụgụ m̄ ñcha  
 It clitic children N-antelope V-do(pst) pumpkin me  
 terrible  
 ‘The antelopes dealt horribly with my pumpkin’

8. E jì azịzà azā ègwusi n’ubì m  
 n’ahwō à.  
 3sg. hold broom OVS-V-sweep melon Prep. farm 1sg. in N-year  
 this  
 ‘Melon is much more plenty in my farm this year’

9. Ọkà wụ m̀kpọ̀ākīrīkā n’ahwō nù.  
 N-corn V-be wood-weed Prep. year this  
 ‘There are bountiful corns this year’

10. Ishi ụgụ wụ ajā n’ubì mụ  
 Head pumpkin V-be sand Prep. N-farm me  
 ‘Pumpkin heads are in great numbers in my farm’

11. Ọ nwehū ihe ejì jì ñvùnà ème n’ọba m̀pa  
 anyị  
 There V-have(neg.) thing use N-yam done Prep. N-  
 barn father 1pl.

‘Nvuna, a type of yam are in much plenteous in my father’s barn’ (negative  
 positivism)

12. Ejì m ñnọ̀ ọkpà àkpá anyū n’ubì m̀ma mū  
 With 1sg. Ext.Suff. leg V-scratch Fruited pumpkin Prep.N-farm  
 mother Pro.

‘Fruited pumpkin is bountiful in my mother’s farm’

13. M̀gbè m rùtèrè n’ubì m n’ùtùtù M̀ndè, ụgụ wèè wụrụ kwurụ nèwe  
 When 1sg. reach(pst) Prep. farm 1sg. Prep. morning Monday, pumpkin was  
 become(pst) V-stand looking

‘When I got to my farm on Monday morning, pumpkin was blossoming’

14. Ọrụ ụgbō ahwō nù wù ònọ̄ ebe emèdèbèrè

Work farm year this V-be really where end-point

‘This year’s farm work is really not encouraging/ a success’

15. Ndị oshī zùrù okpòrò àbàchà m rii rii n’ahwō  
 gārā āgā

People thief V-steal(pst) stem cassava 1sg. eat-eat Prep.  
 year went past

‘Thieves stole my cassava stems brutally in the past year’

16. Nnàa, echèkwè m nà mmirī ezògwo, mànà ànà kà wù  
**kpọkiri kpọ**

Brother, V-think(pst) 1sg. that N-water fallen but N-land still V-be very  
 strong

‘Brother, I thought it has rained but yet the land is still absolutely strong’

17. Ọgù nwa Abā ahù wù ònọ̄ ekwe nchē

N-hoe child Aba Det. V-be actually gong security

‘The Aba boy’s hoe is really efficient’

18. Ezūgwō kpataa n’ubī ānyī

OVS-V-steal(pst) pluck-eat Prep. N-farm 1pl.

‘There have been much theft activities in our farm’

From the data, in sentence 1, we observe that **iwā** which is literally ‘to break’ becomes ‘badly, terribly’. In sentence 2, likewise **jàà jáà** which is reduplicated word means ‘completely, fully, wonderfully, etc’. Sentence 3, where **nshì ọbògwù** which is literally ‘duck-feaces’ becomes ‘bountifully’. In this instance, we see a negative positive shift where something seemingly bad and negative turns to be a representation of excellence. From sentence 4, **aturū tàwa** which means ‘sheep chew’ becomes ‘bountiful’ in the slang use by the farmers. In the same vein, **nyurù ikpakwū** in sentence 5 which is ‘excrete farm-plantation’ turns to ‘dealt terribly’. In sentence 6, yet another shift occurs in the use of the word **àshirì m̀ gị nye m̀** which literally means ‘do I ask you to give me?’ to means ‘very plenty’. **E jì azizà**

**azā** in sentence 8 which means literally means ‘sweeping with broom’ is used in the slang to mean ‘plenteous’. In sentence 9, **m̀kp̀òā̀k̀ìr̀ìk̀ā** literally means ‘refuse dump’ turns to be ‘bountiful’ in the slangy expression. **Ajā** as seen in example 10, which literally means ‘sand’ becomes ‘very much’ as used in slangs. In sentence 11, **Ọ̀ nwehū ihe ejì jì òvùnà ème** which literally means ‘there is nothing to be done with a type of yam/ being useless’ but the pragmatic meaning of the statement as used by the farmers in their slangy expression is ‘that the type of yam is very plenteous’. This shows another example of negative positivism. From the example in sentence 12, **òkpà àkpá** is ‘scratching with leg’ has turned to mean ‘bountifulness’ in the slangy expression. Furthermore, in sentence 13, **kwùrù nèwe** literally means ‘stand and look’ becomes ‘blossoming’ in the slangs. **Ebe emèdèbèrè** which is literally ‘where it stops’ means ‘not encouraging or not successful’ as seen in sentence 14. In sentence 15, **rìì rìì** can be likening to mean ‘eatery’ actually refer to ‘brutality’ in the context of slang expression by the farmers. Observing through sentence 17, we will discover that **ekwe nchē** literally means ‘security gong’ but in the context of the slangy expression by the farmers, it means ‘efficiently’. **Kpataa** which means ‘pluck and chew’ literally in sentence 18 becomes ‘very much’ as used in slangy expression.

### **Summary of the Findings and Conclusion**

This research work is a descriptive analysis of slang expression and its usage by the farmers in Orumba community of Anambra state. It is observed that the farmers use slang mainly for the purpose of in-group so as to hide meaning and protect secrets among themselves or make third person to think deep in order to understand the statement. They use it in communication with one another or mostly in an informal social context for the purpose of identity, to hide meaning from those who do not belong to their occupational group and also to know who might claim to have belonged to their group but is not. Many a times, they make use of these slangs in the public especially when discussing about farming related issued, which have allowed the public especially visitors to have the knowledge of some of the slangs base on the contexts through which they were uttered. Furthermore, it is not gainsaying that some of the farmers utter these words unconsciously.

In conclusion, we have seen that most of the slangs as seen are not really what the general public may have thought. This work will also serve as an instructor to the general public to be in tune or have the knowledge of the slangs spoken by the farmers in Orumba community who might be in their location and make use of the same slangs. Finally, external personnel can understand some of the slangs pragmatically.

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