



The use of Argots by Political Thugs

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ABSTRACT

Urban youth languages in Africa are usually characterized by illicit codes which form part of youth languages. These secret codes do not only identify the group but also a reflection of deviant linguistic behavior. The language is informed by the use of graffiti in various platforms to showcase their illicit activities. The paper seeks to identify the use of secret language called argot used by political thugs in Nigeria, and the linguistic strategies used by youth in increasing the vocabulary size of their secret code. The study will be guided by Interactionist Theory (Rudd & Lambert, 2011) and Word Formation Processes of Finegan (2012). The study will cover 3 states which includes Bauchi, Gombe and Kano and purposive sampling will be used to select the participants. Participants will be drawn from members of three political thugs (Sara-suka, Kalare and Yan daba). The researchers will select 36 respondents based on data saturation. Qualitative research paradigm will be adopted. Data will be analyzed based on themes and objectives of the study.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: August, 2023
Received in revised form: November, 2023
Accepted: January, 2024
Published online: March, 2024

KEYWORDS

Argot, Political Thugs

INTRODUCTION

There are several factors responsible for the emergence, growth and development of urban youth languages in Africa. These include: migration, urbanization, globalization and multilingualism (Mensah, 2016: 1), Young people on the continent have continued to migrate to urban cities in search for greener pastures where they adopt urban languages or perhaps create a new form of communication (Alim, 2009). Youth urban languages in Africa is now assuming new roles and functions and interest in research in the languages is also increasing as a fertile area of study. Sheng in

Kenya is an example of urban youth language in Africa which acquires new roles and functions. The language is used as a lingua franca particularly amongst the youths which attracted the attention of advertising industries to shift from English or Kiswahili to Sheng in advertisement. Mutonya (2008) reveals that print and electronic media in Kenya are also using Sheng particularly in advertisement. In fact, the language is growing significantly to other domains. Similarly, Kariuki,

Kanana and Kebeya (2015: 245) further affirm that Sheng is now regarded as a viable means of communication in public domains such as: media both print and electronic banking and advertising industries in Kenya.

It should be noted that not all urban youth languages evolved from thugs or gang, there are other urban languages like Nigerian Pidgin which originated from contact between European traders and Nigerian people; and later sprang up to major urban cities in Nigeria as language of wider communication (Abdullahi-Iidiagbon, 2010: 52 & Ojarikre, 2015: 9). Youth languages in Africa have some peculiarities of various forms of linguistic components like taboo, slangs, non-standard form and metaphor. These forms of expressions are constructed for pleasure, identity and solidarity (Mensah, 2016).

The polemical issue is that some youth languages in Africa originated from gang such as: Agaba Boys (Nigeria) and Nouchi (Ivory Coast). Certainly, there are urban youth languages in Africa that are characterized by illicit codes (Mensah, 2012) such as nicknames as used by

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the youth which form part of youth languages. This behavior of nicknaming does not only identify the group but also a reflection of deviant linguistic behavior. The language is also informed by the use of graffiti in various platforms to showcase their illicit activities (Jørgensen (2008:237). and hence, the quality of graduates produced in the educational system. Similarly, Atakpa (2011) remarked that business education is an embodiment of vocational knowledge and skills needed for employment and advancement in a broad range of business careers.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, youth age is usually characterized by innovations in language use so as to excommunicate the out group members. They use several devices to manipulate the language alien to its formal linguistic order to meet their communicative needs. This linguistic pattern helps them to create identity, solidarity and mutual understanding (Eckert, 1997:52). The use of specific codes different from formal linguistic system is part and parcel of the intuitive nature of young people in their language use. They restructure the source language words and provide new connotation and sometimes invent new words and meaning through various strategies. (Wyman, 2012; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Mugaddam, 2009; Kießling & Mous, 2004). Therefore, the creativity in the argots used by the political thugs should not be ignored. There is the need to understand the linguistic strategies used by the thugs in increasing the vocabulary size of the languages.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the argots used by the political thugs in Nigeria.
2. To examine the linguistic strategies used by the political thugs in forming new words.

Research Questions

1. What are the argots used by the political thugs in Nigeria?
2. What are the linguistic strategies used by the political thugs in forming new words?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anderson and Bourne (2013) studies gang formation in Latin America and Caribbean. They note that there is a hierarchical command structure of gangs in the Caribbean and Latin America. Additionally, there is a clear leadership at the top and few senior people who stipulate the functions, responsibility, duties and direction of the organization make those decisions at the apex of the pyramid. In furtherance, they document that the *Los zetas gang* in Mexico began out of the need to be a drug kingpin and later mutated to a transnational drug, gun and other criminal activities network. The works of these scholars are relevant to this study since they study the factors that account for the emergence of gangs in the world. They also document some of the changes that gangs undergo. Adejumobi (2002) studies ethnic militia group and national question in Nigeria and sees these youth based formations that emerged with the intention of promoting and protecting the parochial interests of their ethnic groups and whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence. This differ from the proposed study in term of focus, that is Adejumobi's work focuses is on ethnic groups while the proposed study is on the secrete language used by political thugs in Nigeria.

Awodiya, (2006) articulates that a common factor in the growth and proliferation of ethnic militia groups in Nigeria is the increase in the number of small arms. There is an estimated 3 million small arms and light weapons in Nigeria, most of these arms are in private hands, and more than 80 percent of these privately owned arms were acquired illegally. In this way the author agrees with Obasi, (2002) who notes that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has not only given rise to a culture of violence; it has encouraged disaffected groups into mounting direct challenges to legitimate authorities. Their idea informs this study on the factors for the rise of movements in Nigeria, which is also the focus of this study.

Chigunta, (2002) argues that unlike their contemporaries in many developed countries, the lives of numerous adolescents and youths in developing countries, are threatened by violence,

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unemployment, poverty, and limited future opportunities. He notes that this paradox has led to an unprecedented rise in the number of young people who are turning to security movements as a means of coping with frustration arising from their inability to access resources that would contribute to their basic subsistence. With this the scholars agrees with Gore & Pratten (2003) and Momoh, (2000) all who point out that political violence and poverty are the major drivers behind the evolution of security movements in Africa. Adejumobi 2002 examines ethnic militia group and national question in Nigeria .the activities of the OPC which is concentrated in the south western part of the country, led to the formation of Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) as a direct response to OPC's activities, as well as to defend the entrenched Hausa-Fulani interests in Nigeria

Momoh (2000) study youth culture and area boys in Lagos. They are used by politicians of all shades and they support them indiscriminately giving them token sum to share and to buy drugs. Although the political role of the Areas boys in the struggle for the de-annulment for the June 12, 1993 elections was seen as progressive and commendable.

Winton, (2007) studies gender composition of security movements in the United States of America and Latin America. The research findings revealed that the vast majority of gang members are male. Nevertheless, there is evidence of female gang members and all-female gangs operating in Nicaragua and Guatemala. His study informs this study on the organization of movements. However, the proposed study differs from his works since the current study focuses on the changing trends in security movement something that he has not addresses. Additionally, his study was carried out in United States of America and Latin America while this study will be carried out in Bauchi, Nigeria.

Jega (2007) study democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria, states that in post-colonial Nigerian State, the state plays a leading role in the development process and distribution of resources among her citizens, although with its attendant implications of using all means, including violence and war to have access

to the state powers by the aggrieved groups in the society.

Bates, (2008) notes that Across African states gang have become one of the main agents of violence and is a sign that states with limited capacity are outsourcing territorial control. However, his views differs with Mitchell, and Lowe(2013) who notes that delegating atrocities to gang may be especially useful if the capabilities of the state are limited because gang can operate in geographically remote areas that are otherwise difficult for the state to monitor. The ideas of these scholars informs this study on security movements which is also the focus of this study. However, the author's studies state owned movements while this study focuses on non-state security movements. additionally they do not give they have not given the factors that inform the formation of security movements as well as the changing trends in these gangs and the factors that are informing this changes.

Wamue, (2001) studies *Mungiki* from re-traditionalisation perspective. She postulates that *Mungiki* is a religio-political movement that resents accumulation of wealth by a small number of individuals especially those in political ranks. The group rose to mobilize the masses against the government that was perceived to plan the 1992 clashes that saw the eviction of many kikuyus from Rift valley. The group, she says, advocates for "*itwika*" i.e. transfer of leadership from the old generation to the new generation of youths. She also demonstrates that *Mungiki* is not entirely a kikuyu affair because the group has membership outside central province from such places like Pokot, Maasai and *luos*. Her ideas are so relevant to this study because she attests that security groupshave a similar history and a common goal to achieve. She also touches on the factors that lead to the rise of *Mungiki*, which is of immediate relevance to the study of the evolution of *Sarasuka* movements.

Jennifer et al (2014) gives a brief analytic description of the origin, evolution and nature of youth gangs in different countries in the globe. They address the emergence and evolution of such groups and note that gangs are universally formed from the same conditions but variable

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across society and changing as the social, political and economic conditions that impact they vary from society to society over time. However, these authors give the emergence of these groups a nationalistic approach.

Orji & Ozudi 2011, discusses the role of gangs in electoral and post-election violence in Nigeria. The author notes that youth gangs are used in the proliferation of violence especially during the electioneering period. In this way, the author agrees with both Ofili (2011), Orji & Uzodi (2011), Campbell (2010) who blames election violence on the increasing trend in youth gang formation in most states in Nigeria. Momoh (2000) study Youth Culture and Area Boys in Lagos groups like Odua People's Congress (OPC), Hisbah and Bakaasi Boys qualify to be vigilante groups and because of the large membership of youths in its activities, provides the bases for youth policing. The work is however limited to vigilante groups. Halliru, (2013) analyses various youth movements in Nigeria. The author joins other authors like Ibrahim, Aken Wale & Aderinto, Yon (2000) and momoh (2000) to give a critical analysis of spec specific youth gangs such as Yandaba, Bakasi boys, areas boys and Egbesu boys. They give the factors of their emergency and some of the activities that these groups engage.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded within the Interactionist Theory. The theory states that young people start learning a language with people who they want to interact and communicate with. Proponents of this theory in language acquisition are Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner (Rudd & Lambert, 2011). They believe that social interactions amongst individuals in a society make them construct a language and generate meaning on the basis of their social relationship rather than conventional usage. Moreover, the research is also supported by Word Formation Processes of Finegan (2012) which provide semantic shift, invention, borrowing and change of sound as a means of enriching the vocabulary size of language(s). Therefore, The Interactionist Theory accounts for the acquisition of argots whereas the Word Formation Processes cover the linguistic

strategies used by the subjects in increasing the vocabulary size of the language.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter will delve into the qualitative data collected from interviews with political thugs in Bauchi, Gombe, and Kano states. Since purposive sampling was used to select participants from three specific groups (Sara-Suka, Kalare, and Yan Daba), the analysis will explore themes within these groups and potentially across them.

Data Analysis Techniques:

Due to the qualitative nature of the data (interviews), thematic analysis will be the primary method used to identify recurring patterns and significant themes within the participants' responses. Here's how the analysis will proceed:

RESEAR METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive survey research design. The design is a method of studying and describing a social phenomenon. This involves detailed description of a phenomenon in words and classify features to explain what is observed (Creswell, 2012; Noor, 2012). The choice of descriptive research model is premised upon its basic tenets of describing, explicating and interpreting contemporary life events, practise or phenomenon at a particular time and place.

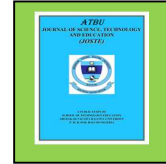
The researchers adopt purposive multistage sampling in which 3 groups of political thugs will be selected. They are Sara suka in Bauchi state, Kalare in Gombe state and Yan daba in Kano state. Systematic random sampling will also be used to select 12 participants from each of the 3 groups. Scheduled interview will be used to elicit the data from the participants and will be recorded by the researchers. The interview will be concerned with secret code used the thugs in order to excommunicate the out group members. The exercise will be conducted in three months. The data obtained from recordings will be listened to and transcribed. The research has also cleaned the data and selected feature of argots hat are

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relevant to the study, identify and analyse them based on morphological processes.

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Data Analysis Techniques:

Due to the qualitative nature of the data (interviews), thematic analysis will be the primary method used to identify recurring patterns and significant themes within the participants' responses. Here's how the analysis will proceed: Demographic Profile of Participants: The demographic profile of the participants revealed important characteristics essential for understanding the composition of the sample. Table 1 below presents a summary of demographic data:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
- Below 20 years	8	22.2%
- 20-30 years	15	41.7%
- Above 30 years	13	36.1%
Gender		
- Male	29	80.6%
- Female	7	19.4%
Education Level		
- Primary	6	16.7%
- Secondary	15	41.7%
- Tertiary	15	41.7%
Socioeconomic Background		
- Low	18	50.0%
- Middle	14	38.9%
- High	4	11.1%

Analysis: The analysis of data collected from the participants provides insights into various aspects related to political thuggery:

DATA PRESENTATION

Table 2: Argots, variant, literal and contextual meaning

Argot	Literary Meaning	Contextual Meaning	Variant
Madara	Milk	A toxic substance	Bauchi
Mazga	Food	Duka	Kano
Kwalawa	People who eat	Police	Gombe
Ganye	Leaves	Weeds	Bauchi/Kano/Gombe
Kaya	Kaya, items or things	All kind of illegal drugs	Bauchi/Kano/Gombe
Alburushi	Bullet	Bullet	Kano
Kaifi	Sharp object	Knife	Bauchi
Ware	Untie	Escape	Bauchi/Gombe
Jarfa	Teenager	Trouble	Bauchi

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Shara	Sweeping	Operation	Bauchi
Dogon barci	To sleep long	Death	Kano
Rumbu	Storage hut	House	Kano
Taka	Step over	Run away	Bauchi/Kano/Gombe
Arne	Pegan	Hero	Kano
Kwaro	Insect	A warrior	Bauchi
Aljihun baya	Back pocket	Non reasonable person	Gombe
Shege	Bastard	Hero	Gombe
Dan Audu	Hausa Name	Police	Bauchi

Data Analysis

This table reveals several interesting insights into the argot used by political thugs in Nigeria across the states of Bauchi, Gombe, and Kano. Here's a breakdown of the key points:

1. Euphemisms and Misdirection:

Many terms employ euphemisms to disguise their true meaning. "Madara" (milk) becomes "toxic substance," "Mazga" (food) becomes "Duka" (corruption money), and "Ganye" (leaves) becomes "weeds" (marijuana). This obfuscates communication from outsiders and potentially helps conceal illegal activities.

2. Regional Variations:

The table highlights some regional variations in the argot. "Alburushi" (bullet) is used in Kano, while "Kaifi" (sharp object) serves the same purpose in Bauchi. This suggests some level of diversification in the slang used across different locations.

3. Functionality of Argot:

The argot serves multiple purposes beyond simple communication:

Exclusion: Terms like "Kwalawa" (eaters) for police create an "us vs. them" mentality and exclude outsiders.

Group Identity: Shared knowledge of argot words like "Arne" (hero) or "Shege" (bastard used as a compliment) fosters a sense of camaraderie and belonging within the group.

Concealing Actions: Words like "Ware" (untie) for escape or "Shara" (sweeping) for operation help mask the true nature of their activities.

4. Power Dynamics:

The use of "Jarfa" (teenager) for trouble suggests a power hierarchy within the thug groups, where younger members might be associated with causing problems.

5. Creativity and Wordplay:

The table showcases the creativity of the argot. "Dogon barci" (to sleep long) for death and "Rumbu" (storage hut) for house demonstrate clever wordplay and metaphorical language.

CONCLUSION

The argot serves as a powerful tool for political thugs, functioning beyond mere communication. It reinforces group identity, excludes outsiders, and potentially aids in concealing criminal activities. This unique language highlights the complex social dynamics within these groups and their attempts to operate under a veil of secrecy.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended that further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Here are some potential areas for exploration:

1. Evolution of the Argot: How does the argot change over time? What factors influence its development?
2. Technology and Social Media: How do social media platforms and evolving technology impact the creation and spread of argot among political thugs?
3. Psychological Aspects: Explore the psychological motivations behind using argot. How does it contribute to feelings of

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group cohesion and power dynamics within the group?

By investigating these aspects, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of argot in the world of political thugs and its potential implications for law enforcement and social intervention strategies.

Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledged the TETFund and management of Adamu Tafawa Balewa College of Education Kangere for financially supporting the research.

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