

A Sociolinguistic Study of Youth Slang in Nenwe Community of Enugu State

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Abstract

From the perspective of sociolinguistics, this work sets out to investigate the phenomenon of youth slang in a mainstream Igbo speaking community. The study seeks to examine why young people use peculiar socially-situated language in the form of slang outside the established traditional linguistic order and how these innovations have form part of their everyday language. Theoretically, this study is rooted in the conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) which involves the mapping of meaning between the source and the target domains. Every youth slang is metaphorical in nature, which processes the experience of one kind of thing in terms of another, thereby creating a new meaning. Sixty youth and twenty adults were interviewed and observed through participant observation in eliciting data for this research. The study reveals that youth slang in Nenwe, which is a mixture of Igbo, English, Nigerian Pidgin and specific youth sociolect, is part of the social engagement of the youth in that community in the process of identity construction, enhancing solidarity, fostering integration and gaining independence. This provides the impetus for the creation of a youth sub-culture.

Keywords: Youth; Slang; Identity; Creativity; Nenwe

Introduction

Kerswill (1996) argues that youth is the stage in life in which language change is most clearly visible. The orthodox linguistic convention of the community is usually distorted or manipulated to create an entirely new meaning or widen an existing one. This is why Eckert (1997) maintains that youths are the linguistic movers and shakers of the society and prime sources of information about linguistic change. Youth slang usage and its

hybridity is a global phenomenon, starting from the traditional medium like the whistled speech to the contemporary media depending on the complexity of each society. Bardill (2014,178) observes that “youth are the ones making their languages relevant in the current moment, giving those languages uses for the future through form and model, such as text messaging and other technological applications”. This indicates that youth slang is sustained through youth culture which is constantly renewing itself.

Studies on youth slang in indigenous communities in Nigeria have not caught the attention of scholars like in other part of Africa. In Nairobi, Kenya, Sheng has been raised to the status of an urban youth language. In Dakar, Senegal, Wolof has been developed as a sophisticated form of communication among the city youth. In Cameroon, there is Camfranglais and Rastaferi in Ethiopia. Significantly, Tsosistaal has established itself as a prominent urban youth language in South Africa. The absence of research interest in youth slang in Nigeria has therefore been summarized by Beck (2010, 29) thus:

It is noticeable that there are also cities that have not developed any urban youth slang of their own. This is true of not only Lagos – actually, the Nigerian cities in general are hardly ever mentioned in the literature on the subject.

I agree with Beck that there are no established urban youth slang in Nigeria but it must however be stated that there exist microcosm of youth slang which are effectively differentiated from town to town or village to village which are adapted for valuable traditional and modern uses by young people. A case in point is Mensah (2012) study of the language of Agaba Boys in Calabar South, Cross River State, which highlights how youths reinforce their marginal or deviant status through the creative use of language. This evidence justifies Halliday’s (1976) conceptualisation of youth language as ‘antilanguage’. The present study aims to extend the literature on youth slang in Nigeria to cover the situation in Nenwe Community in Enugu State, South-Eastern Nigeria. The study investigates the motivations for youths’ exclusive specialized language, their linguistic features, and some of the impacts of slang in the Nenwe social space. The study has implications for multilingualism as a potential site for youth language creativity.

The Nenwe people

Nenwe town is one of the largest communities in Aninri Local Government Area of Enugu State, second only to Oduma. Nenwe is situated in the tropical rain forest of South Eastern Igbo plain of Igboland. It is bounded to the north by Mgbowo in Awgu Local Government Area and to the east by Nome in Nkanu East Local Government Area; to the South by Oduma and Ndiabo both in Aninri Local Government Area. Nenwe Community comprises four villages which are: Uhueze, Emudo, Amorji and Agbada. The people of Nenwe Community speak a dialect of the Igbo language. The Igbo language, however is a class of Niger-Congo language and belongs to the Kwa sub-group of languages. There are a wide variety of dialects, most of which mutually intelligible with each other (Nweke, 2011).

The four villages that make up the Nenwe Town (Uhueze, Emudo, Amorji and Agbada) have similar customs and tradition. The Nenwe people believe in Chukwu (Supreme Deity) as well as lesser deities such as 'Ala' (mother earth), and 'ofo na ogu' (god of equity). The Nenwe people engage in recreational activities like the village boxing (*mgba obodo*), cultural festivals (*oriri - ala*) and the *ikoro odabara* and *akpakora* music and dancing. They uphold good moral ethics and sanction whoever goes against the laws of the land and commits 'nso ala' (sacrilege). For instance, on the 'oriri-ala' festival, a woman suspected to be unfaithful to her husband is commanded by the chiefs to cook for her husband while wearing no foot wear so that she will have direct contact with 'ala' (mother earth) who will either acquit her or condemn her. If the woman is guilty, her tongue will gradually pull out until she confesses and then dies. But if she is innocent, she will be compensated and celebrated with her friends and well-wishers at the *Orie-agu* market square followed with dancing and merriments. The Nenwe tradition prohibits incest, bestiality, murder and stealing. Such acts are regarded as 'aruru ala' (taboo against the mother earth), and warrant total banishment from the entire community (Chukwubuike, 1984). Until recently, an average Nenwe man was a polygamist. Nenwe men believe in marrying more than one wife because having many children will help them improve their social and economic conditions.

Understanding the dynamics of youth slang

Slang is a style category within language which occupies an extreme position on the spectrum of formality. Slang is the end of the line that lies beyond mere informality or colloquialism where language is considered too racy, raffish, novel or unsavoury for use in

conversation (Thorne, 1995:1). Slang has been identified as a special genre of language mostly used by a group of young people (Ukpong, 2010). It is used as a mark of intimacy and performs other social functions like exclusion of children and adults from the intimate circle by using forms of language through which speakers function within social sub-groups. In her study of slang expressions in Ibibio, Ukpong (2010) maintains that slangs are used to induce humour, introduce informality and showcase style. She further maintained that there is a transition of slang to idiom which are in the infinitive forms. This claim goes to show that slangs are constantly self-reviewing. Okon (2003) also undertakes a study of slang among students of higher institutions in Calabar, Cross River State. She maintains that such language use are very creative yet constantly changing based on emerging trends within the students' social universe. Since young people are the drivers of innovative language use in any particular social environment, it is obvious that university campuses are veritable sites for the development and circulation of slang.

McCrindle (2012) argues that slang may be characterized as an informal language variety that include new and impolite words and meanings, usually used among particular group of people, example, youth, teenagers and professional groups. He cites examples of slang usage as follows from the British perspective:

kiddie fiddler	–	a paedophile
knocking shop	–	a brothel
kooky	–	crazy, eccentric
khyber	–	buttocks, anus

It is evident that these words and expressions may contain ordinary words in the English language or may be newly created. They have acquired new meanings which are based on metaphors and metonymies. Slangs are generally words and expressions outside conventional use that is unique to a particular social group

Gonzalez (1994, 201) maintains that “slang is an area of lexis in permanent state of flux consisting of colourful words and phrases which characterise various social and professional groups, especially when these terms are used in in-group communication”. Slang provides and reinforces social identity but it is also used in the society at large to achieve an air of informality and relaxation. He further argues that of all social groups, young people are the most prone to the use and renovation of slang and unconventional language. They exhibit great social dynamism and are receptive to changes in fashion:

clothes, look, styles, music, sports, and in speech. Young social actors may have little political power but they can use slang as a counter-cultural tool against established authority and conventions. Mccrindle (2012, 53) argues that young people's choice of slang is quite often an extension of the particular youth subculture they belong or identify with while new words are created with each generation, young people often adopt terms and concepts to exclude others from their social space. Sometimes, young people change the meaning, spelling and pronunciation of these words and expressions within their linguistic ecology as an exclusion strategy. They mix slang up and personalize it. Youth slang is therefore deliberately created to exclude people outside the group. It is notorious for baffling parents and is a tongue reserved for peer-on-peer communication. Sometimes youth slang may also be referred to as youth lingo or sociolect. Significantly, youth slang is a unique means of identity construction which also contains important cultural meaning (Mensah et al., 2019).

The study of youth slang in an urban-rural setting like Nenwe community has been completely overlooked in the literature. This provides the motivation for the present study. No research has been undertaken to shed light on youth slang in Nenwe which is growing as part of identity formation indices in the community. This is why Nelsen and Rosenbaum (1972, 273) maintain that the study of slang is a starting point to clarify the role of unconventional language in socialization which situates it within distinct subcultures. The slang of youth serves to identify youth as culturally distinct, to transmit values and norms, to express approval, hostility and other attitudes, and to reinforce the selective perception and categorization of the social environment (Nelsen & Rosenbaum 1972, 273).

Theoretical framework

The conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Turner, 1989), forms the theoretical framework for the present study. Metaphors are said to be conceptual, and part of thinking, which is essential part of everyday experience (Gibbs, 1999). This is because the metaphorical nature of concepts would structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world and how we relate to other people (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Tsang (2009) maintains that since the use of metaphor is popular in our daily communication, people's shared beliefs and behaviour can be revealed by carefully looking at the metaphorical linguistic expressions used in their culture. Metaphors are used to understand and process experience of one kind of thing in terms of another, for instance when argument is symbolized as war or time as

money. These concepts are metaphorically structured for mapping of meaning across different conceptual domains. Considering the importance of youth slang which is basically ingrained in metaphors, metaphor is a way not only with words but with thought because it leads us to go beyond what a word or expression means or what we know and what we can imagine. For instance, by referring to penis, a body organ as mgburu ‘plantain’ by Nenwe youth, there is established conceptual correlation between the two objects in terms of physical appearance and size. The literal entity which is penis is now assigned some of the character of plantain which is the metaphorical attribution given that the source domain can only be understood in the context of the target domain (Lakoff & Turner 1989). In this respect, the transition from penis to plantain has brought about the reconceptualization of plantain which now carries new information content, meaning and creates new expectations. In other words, a new name and meaning has been given to plantain. This kind of conceptual experience can help to build single ideas in many ways and open the door to new discovery (Hines, 1999). Youth slang is a subject of transiting metaphorical messages from one cognitive domain (source domain) to the other (target domain).

Hines (1999) uses Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) cognitive metaphor theory to describe the portrayal of women as animals (filly, chick, bunny etc.). Her position is that in mapping the source and target domains to establish a conceptual parameter in which semantics plays a crucial role in highlighting a rule-governed pattern of lexicalization. Baider & Gesuato (2003) also adopted this theory in analysing English-based metaphors depicting women as objects of sexual desire cross-linguistically. They maintained that the ideological significance of metaphor in mapping between its source and target domains and its specific lexical encoding, can be better assessed when explored in relation to complementary or neighbouring domains of experience. The study concluded that metaphors can best be conceptualised by providing account of their linguistic, social and cultural imports. Undie et al. (2007) explore the conceptualisation of sex among young people in Malawi using Lakoff and Johnson’s cognitive metaphor theoretical framework. The study reveals that the use of metaphors reveal the utilitarian approach of young people towards sex, which they conceive as natural and routine activity of which pleasure and passion are essential components.

Lakoff & Johnson (1980, 22) maintain that “...the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concept in the culture”. The socio-cultural environment provides the resources for the creative use of slang in the discourse of youth in Nenwe. Young people generate and share meaning within

the social system. They also share communication styles, habits and cultural norms in spite of their cross-cultural borders. The implication is that there is cultural adaptation and integration pattern which has facilitated cooperation between young people with different sociocultural backgrounds. Metaphors vary among cultures based on the realities or experience of these cultures. Youth are largely dependent on group identification in the form and context of communication and such an identity is usually defined in culture-specific terms. Every successful communication requires a shared conceptual system between the speaker and listener. In other words, there is necessity for mutual understanding (Mensah & Nkamigbo, 2016; Mensah 2021; Uwen & Mensah 2022).

Methodology

This section explains the approaches that were adopted in collecting data for the research. The study utilizes qualitative sociolinguistic methods of data collection that include the use of oral (informal) interviews and participant observations since it is concerned with language use and youth slang practices. Twenty participants were selected from each age grade. 7th age grade (*uke asaa*) 30-39 years, 8th age grade (*uke asato*) 20-29 years and 9th age grade (*uke itolu*) 13-19 years. Another 20 participants who were the elders between the ages of 80 years were also selected. The following socio-biographical data were obtained from the participants reflecting their age, occupation, education, knowledge of language and religion. These are the demographic variables that determine how the youth indigenous identity can be fostered. This was calculated using simple percentage based on statistical analysis.

Since sampled age-groups were the subjects of this study, 20 participants were selected from each group amounting to 25% sampled age for the different age group. It is also noted that all the participants were males since females are not members of the age-group system in Nenwe community. Each group has members profile that ranges between 100-150. Student had the highest sampled population which translate into 35% followed by artisans who were mainly traders with 25% of the total population. Farmers and civil servants had 21.3% and 18.7% respectively of our study population. An examination of the literacy level of participants indicates that holders of West African School Certificate constituted the highest population of 31.3% followed by first school certificate holders with 20%. The remaining qualification was shared by first degree holders, NCE holders, postgraduate degree holders and people that have not attained formal learning in the following order

15%, 18.7%, 20% and 7.5%. Linguistic resources of participants included Igbo, English, Nigerian Pidgin and Youth Sociolect. Alternatively 2 respondents are competent in other languages, Ibibio and Ubrobo. People who are competent in 4 codes with 51.2% constituted the highest population. This is followed by participants with 3 and 2 codes with 18.8% each and respondents with 5 codes which had 11.2%. Forty participants constituted the highest number of our study population with 50% of the total sampled population. Seventeen participants claimed to be worshippers of African traditional religion constituting 21.2% while 23 participants said they do not have any religious inclination which was 28.8%.

The primary methods of data collection for this study were informal oral interviews and participant observations. Interviews were arranged with participants randomly to elicit information on why they use slang, the motivation for such language use, and how meanings of forms and expressions are constructed. Responses from the subjects were recorded in a tape recorded and field notes, which were the primary tools for data collection. The researcher also observed some of the participants in their natural environment where data on youth slang use were also recorded. Such sociolinguistic domains included playgrounds, market stalls, new yam festival, village squares, homes, traditional marriages and farmlands. In this way, natural data were recorded from subjects. This was done with their initial consent, and were aware of how and when they were recorded. Data were also obtained from secondary sources such as libraries, journals, textbooks and lecture notes. Internet sources were also invaluable materials of information for the research. The descriptive method of analysis has been employed in the analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the field. I used this method to obtain detail description of language use by Nenwe youths and document the effect of such language use in Nenwe community. The method also enables us to report the various linguistic processes found in youth slang formation in Nenwe Community.

Data analysis and description

In the following analysis, I categorise and analyse youth slang in Nenwe from the account of conceptual metaphor theory. Youth slang in this community exhibit high degree of innovation which results in the creation of new lexical items or the new meanings for existing lexical items. In this regard, I examine the general use of slang among Nenwe youth based on identified social categories.

Address terms

Slang is informal lexical item used by a specified social group, especially the youth (Ukpong, 2010). It is ubiquitous and is used across time, space, language and culture. In Nenwe community, slang are used to fill a niche in everyday language practice, occupying a middle ground between standard and informal expressions. Among the youth of this community, slang affect a lot of subject including the way people are called or addressed as we can see in example 1 below:

1. (a) Old Show – Someone with a good talent
- (b) Onyéñké Ànyi – Someone that belongs to a group
- (c) Ézé N̄zū – A rich person
- (d) Obátá Ósú – A rough person
- (e) Nwókē Íkē – A gallant male fighter
- (f) Irish Potato – A young woman
- (g) Tomato Jos – A beautiful woman or girl
- (h) Ekelebe – Police
- (i) Maga – Paymaster
- (l) Pale – Father
- (m) Male – Mother

The data in 1(a-m) represent various slangy address terms used by the youth in the community. These are specially constructed terms which are only accessible to the youth. They demonstrate local realisations of the linguistic needs and aspirations of these youth. In 1(a) for instance, the slang *Old Show* is metaphorically used to refer to someone who is greatly talented. The everyday expression for such a gifted person in Igbo is *ónyéñkē* ‘a talented person’. The expression *old show* implies that the person is an old hand in what he or she does. In (1b) the expression *Onyenkeanyi* represents a member of a group metaphorically but literally, it stands for our person. Hence, going by the conceptual metaphor theory, a correspondence has occur which did not exist before thus allowing new

meaning to occur. This suggests that new meaning has been achieved through a mapping from the concrete source domain to the abstract target domain in the conceptual system (Tsang, 2009). In 1(c) *Ézè Ñzū* ‘rich person’, is used by the youth to refer to a rich person who is not mean in the distribution of his resources. Anyone who lavishes his wealth indiscriminately or wastefully is called this name. Similarly, *Óbátá Ósú* ‘a rough person’ is a slang word for a rough person or Area Boy in 1(d). The expression connotes the idea or situation changing at the entrance of someone. In Igbo, such a person is called ‘*Onye Di aghora*’ but the youth have been able to establish a relationship between the source domain in standard Igbo and the target domain in youth sociolect, hence, there is the creation of new lexical item and meaning. The reference to a young beautiful girl or woman as *Irish Potatoes or Tomatoes Jos* in 1(f) and (g) is direct metaphorical reference within a particular space and time. The freshness of these food items (potatoes and tomatoes) and their colour are conceptually linked to typify the beauty of a girl/woman. In this way, metaphors extend the lexical resources of the prevailing linguistic resources to adjust the change in the conceptual system.

Another domain of slang use among Nenwe youth is address terms which are mainly borrowed from Nigerian Pidgin. These forms are used mainly in general conversation among the youth:

- | | | | | |
|----|-----|-------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 2. | (a) | Swag | - | Style, mode of operation |
| | (b) | Babe | - | A beautiful girl |
| | (c) | Boko Haram | - | A Hausa person |
| | (d) | Canopy | - | Head gear |
| | (e) | Show | - | Girl friend |
| | (f) | Ókpéké | - | Showy young woman |
| | (g) | Ómó Kirikri | - | Incriminating material in exam |

Based on the findings, these general slang are mainly nouns. They involve widening of the application of meaning of lexical items in Nigerian Pidgin or the creation of new lexical items which help in enriching youth slang vocabulary and expanding its internal resourcefulness and functionality. The form *Boko Haram*, for instance, is a religious sect

which is mainly responsible for the insurgency in Northern Nigeria but the meaning has been expanded to cover every person from the North. This is a case of semantic widening. The form *Òkpékē* is borrowed from the *Keggite* language, a socio-cultural palm wine drinkers club that operates in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The use of these address forms in the language of Nenwe youth generally demonstrates the metaphorical relationship between source domain and target domain. New meanings are acquired by these forms thereby representing new expectations.

Taboo language

Severe, strong or taboo language are forms that relate to sex or seems to diminish one's personality. They are naturally forbidden by social norms in every context, domain or convention. However, youth in Nenwe seem to use this kind of strong language freely with no form of finesse or recourse to social ethics guiding the use of such words and expression. In the analysis that follows, we discuss sexual metaphors, insults, curses and swearwords as the main types of severe language we obtained from the field.

Sexual metaphors

Metaphors provide vivid images that make communication more effective. Sexual insinuations are natural part of everyday discourse. Nenwe youth used sexual metaphor to construct their sexual orientation, enhance intimacy and show their disdain for safe sexual practices. Most times, this verbal behaviour is used to negotiate power relations, especially hegemonic masculinity. Here are examples of sexual metaphors:

3. (a) *ókpòntù* - a good sexual performer
- (b) *itā artry* - (chewing artry) – having sex
- (c) *ókpù útù ákpū égò* - one who has regular erection without money
- (d) *ñiriñwā nono* - large breasts
- (e) *òròbòkibò* - a fat lazy girl
- (f) *éléwé úkwù égbòu éwū* - a lady with large hips.
- (g) *la cream/ásā* - a beautiful young girl

This data reveals that sexual metaphors are important component of cultural communication among Nenwe youth in this case, conventional forms and expressions are semantically recreated to carry vulgarized meanings. Contextually, these metaphors are used to perform certain functions as the expressions below show:

4(a) Fisherman no day wear raincoat - A fisherman does not wear a raincoat.

(b) Enwehu onye na eri ule namkpo ya. - No one eats banana with the peels

The expressions in example 4 are used to demonstrate youths' disdain for the use of condom. In (a), the metaphorical interpretation is that if the fisherman could dare the river or ocean by swimming with bare body, the rain should not pose a threat. He can always defy the rain. In the same vein, the use of condom should not stand on their way of maximum sexual pleasure. In (b), the act of using condom is metaphorically conceptualized as eating banana with peels. Participants argued that the peels inhibit the optimal taste of the banana the way condoms can obstruct maximum bodily contact and gratifying sexual appeal.

Insult words and expressions

Insults are words and expressions that are degrading and injure the psyche of the othered party. These forms are deliberately intended to be rude and may be accompanied by assault or fighting words. These forms do not obey specific codes of verbal and non-verbal behaviour in their interactions with others. Insults words and expressions among Nenwe youth include the following:

- | | | | | |
|---|-----|--------------|---|------------|
| 5 | (a) | álù bula idù | - | 'bushman' |
| | (b) | ézi | - | 'pig' |
| | (c) | ńkitā árá | - | 'mad dog' |
| | (d) | éwú | - | 'goat' |
| | (e) | jaki | - | 'donkey' |
| | (f) | ákpá | - | 'drunkard' |

- (g) *ńwamgbékē* - ‘ugly girl’

From our findings, most times, the people these insults are directed at do not need to do anything particularly offensive to merit these insults. The findings reveal that such insults are used to communicate emotion like anger or frustration more readily. These are common place occurrences which positively correlate with hostility and aggression.

Curses words and expressions

Another component of youth slang that is popular in Nenwe community is the indiscriminate use of curses. These curses are used by the youth to express wish that adversity or misfortune befalls a person, group of people, animals or object. Through curses, speakers cognitively conjure supernatural powers to inflict spell or execration on their potential victim(s). This is becoming a norm in the social universe and daily life of Nenwe youths. Curse words and expressions which have become common place among Nenwe youths as we can see in example 6 below:

6. (a) *Ódúkwawū vem* - May it not be well with you.
- (b) *Ódúkwawū ka ahuikere gbara idu gbaa okopia* - May you be as worthless as groundnut peels
- (c) *Dabàkwā la yóyó Obulorum* - May you fall into the public toilet of obulorum clan
- (d) *Ájōnwà alá èhé lā Ikpèré ákā* - A totally condemned person.
- (e) *Èkwékē Ikpùrū ényā* - An expression used to curse a sexually attractive young girl’
- (f) *Àli Nenwe tigbuo wu* - ‘May Nenwe deity strike you dead’.

These curses are foul degrading languages that are used to diminish one’s personality. They produce the effect of deliberate disrespect, lack of politeness and ultimately wounding the emotion of others. In 6(c) for instance, obulorum clan is the only one in Nenwe community that still uses public toilet and the reference to it as a form of curse is a protest and disdain

by the youth against this practice and in 6(f) where the name of the deity is invoked helps to add force or solemnity to the curse as I discovered in this study.

Swear words and expressions

Another characteristic feature of Nenwe youth slang is the use of swear words. These are profane or obscene expressions of strong feeling evoked by anger or surprise. Swear words are mostly used when one needs to convince others about the truth of what he had said. Mensah (2012) maintains that swear words constitute one of the communicative styles used in the creation and maintenance of group identity. Nenwe youth invoke the name of gods and ancestors while swearing. Some of their swear expressions are displayed in example 7:

7. (a) Makà Òlúwā - Because of God'
- (b) Évùm áji ádí kwahuya - There is no hair in my armpit.
- (c) Ñnàm la ényi ágbàhūkwā mgbá - My father and elephant have never wrestled.
- (d) Olumgbuom - May I not survive an oath.

Some of these swear expressions appear to be proverbial in nature (example 7b and c). Lakoff and Turner (1989) theory of the ethnography of proverbs treats them as species of metaphor from cognitive and performance-based perspectives. The theory maintains that proverbs use arises in a context of 'cultural specifics' from which it can be abstracted (Mensah, 2013). In 7(b), the expression connotes that one's hands are clean. One does not bear any ill feeling or grudge towards another. In 7(c), the expression implies that there is no relationship between the speaker and the addressee that would cause the speaker to hate or be vindictive towards the addressee. Proverbs in this sense have been used as metaphorical extension of meaning and thought. This is why Gibb (1994:309) maintains that "proverbs appear as special cases of the more general process of metaphorical understanding".

The expressions in 7(a) and (d) involve supernatural forces which are believed to possess the power to bless or destroy. Reverence to the gods or ancestors is an important factor in Igbo worldview, culture and spirituality. They are regarded as the bridge between the living and the dead and are regarded as psychologically superior to living beings (Abunaku,

1999). Using these supernatural forces in swearing reinforces reverence and solemnity to superior powers.

Linguistic processes in Nenwe youth slang

Youth slang is generally said to be creative and innovative linguistic resources given the construction of new lexical items, widening of semantic sense, collocation of forms and so on. In this section, I discuss some of the linguistic processes involved in the creation of youth slang. In this concern, I limit our discussion to compounding, borrowing, code-mixing and reduplication specifically.

Compounding

Compounding is a process where two or more lexemes constitute a stem. Among Nenwe youth, the following exocentric and endocentric compound words were recorded in their language:

- | | | | | |
|----|-----|-----------------------------------|---|---------------|
| 8. | (a) | Éwú Hausa (goat + Hausa) | - | ‘a fool’. |
| | (b) | Òji-Úgwo (holder + debt) | - | ‘debtor’ |
| | (c) | Ónyé-órū (person + work) | - | ‘organizer’ |
| | (d) | Ónyé – Mmemmé (person + activity) | - | ‘entertainer’ |

8(a) is an instance of exocentric compound because none of the lexemes is a head. In other words, there is absence of semantic transparency between the two lexemes. There is no correlation between *ewu* ‘goat’ and *Hausa* that would lead to the derivation of a fool. From the standpoint of conceptual metaphor theory, *Ewu Hausa*, Hausa’s goat’ is the source domain that is signified whereas a fool is the target domain that is the signifier. Hence, a conceptual parameter has been established through cross-domain mapping which is motivated by some semantic considerations.

The examples in 8(b) to (d) are instances of endocentric compounds which are headed and semantically transparent. It is also easy to predict the overall meaning of the resulting word from the meaning of the individual lexemes that constitute it. However, it is important to

note that since these forms are specially created with new meanings by the youth as a form of their social practice, they all involve metaphorical reading and understanding.

Code-mixing

Code-mixing or code-switching is an inevitable sociolinguistic behaviour of Nenwe youth. These bilingual performers use this device not in filling conceptual gaps or as random interference process as it were but as a deliberate strategy for the manipulation, improvisation and distortion of the normal course of language to promote identity and foster integration. Instances of forms and expressions that are code-mixed in Nenwe youth slang include the examples in 9:

- | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----------------------|---|------------------------|
| 9 | (a) | áká gum (gummy hands) | - | a greedy/stingy person |
| | (b) | nwa guy | - | a guy |
| | (c) | ásā baby | - | a fine girl |
| | (d) | ónyé show | - | an entertainer |
| | (e) | olee way? | - | Where is the road? |
| | (f) | àtú down | - | coming back home |

I agree with Vieu-Wild (2009, 697) that “linguistic manipulation through switching, mixing or creating of languages is a widespread phenomenon that forms an intrinsic part of contemporary youth culture in Africa”. The general pattern of code-mixing in the data in 9 is Igbo-English, where the code boundary is distinct and functionally operating in the context of use. The examples in 9 involve the cross domain mapping within the utterance from a concrete source to an abstract target domain where a new meaning is processed in the conceptual system. For instance, in 9(a), *aka gum (gummy hands)* is metaphorically conceptualized as a *stingy person* given the transfer of meaning to create a new expectation.

Borrowing

Closely related to the phenomenon of code-mixing is the concept of borrowing which is also as a result of language contact. The repertoire of Nenwe youth slang is found to display

some degree of borrowing from languages like English, Ibibio, Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin though Igbo is evidently the lexifier language. Instances of borrowing are furnished in Table 1. All the borrowed items in the repertoire of Nenwe youth slang are content words which carry what Barker (2002, 23) calls “the descriptive payload of the sentence or the meat of the message”. The study discovers that borrowing is the most productive word formation strategy among Nenwe youth. One reason for borrowing from a number of languages is to utilize the social characteristics associated with the forms and integrate same into their own lexicon. Therefore, borrowing among Nenwe youth is a linguistic necessity.

Table 1: Sources of borrowing of Nenwe youth slang

Lexical source	Borrowed item	Literary meaning	Metaphorical meaning
Ibibio	kop no mi	listen to me	love portion
	kwat nkpe	Scratch and pay	prostitute
	nwatawat	i have not driven	commercial cyclist
Hausa	aboki	friend	
	Boko Haram	insurgency sect.	a Hausa person
	Adamu	a name	a foolish person
Yoruba	okada	-	commercial cyclist
	tokunbo	a name	fairly used goods
	ashawo	label	prostitute
English	pale	pal	friend
	popsy	dad	dad
	maintain	uphold	be calm
Nigerian Pidgin	fuck	-	sexual intercourse
	mis yarn	misinform	lie
	yabbis	-	joke
	kasale	-	problem

Reduplication

Reduplication is “an affixation process in which some part of a base is repeated to the left or the right or occasionally in the middle” (Spencer 1991, 13). In the repertoire of Nenwe youth slang, only complete reduplication was found as we can see in the data below:

11. (a) wéwé - us
 (b) yoriyori - young girl
 (c) zubuzubu - eating well
 (d) kaikai - locally distilled gin
 (e) samsam - very correct
 (f) nkitinkiti - silent

Mensah (2011) refers to this kind of reduplication as frozen reduplication, which are basically non-derived. In other words, each of the constituents does not have a meaning in isolation, but a meaning is obtained when they are combined. It is noted that the phenomenon of reduplication is not a productive mechanism among Nenwe youth in enriching their slang vocabulary.

Semantic extension

Semantic extension arises when words with fixed coded meaning evolve to other meaning or contain other semantic substances. This is why Shindo (2009, 1) maintains that the interpretation of meaning is essentially a psychological and communicative activity. Among Nenwe youth, where there is observable semantic change, there is cognitive transfer that attempts to conceptualize entities and represent them linguistically. Instances of semantic extensions in Nenwe youth slang include:

- 12(a) crier - handset
 (b) maim - to beat
 (c) production - money
 (d) bottle - beer
 (e) waist - vagina

- (f) cowbell - large breasts
- (g) machine - (new) car
- (h) lick pepper - eat
- (i) tanker - heavy drinker

‘Crier’ in 12(a) is one who goes about to disseminate information, usually from the King’s palace to the entire community. Given the advancement in mobile telecommunication technology, the duties of the town crier has been largely redefined as people mostly get information affecting the welfare and well-being of the community through their mobile phones. The youth have therefore extended the meaning of the traditional town crier to cover that of the handset from a metaphorical point of view, Shindo (2009, 2) describes this semantic extension as the connection between and cognition. This establishes a prominent regularity in pattern of extension across sensory modalities (Ullmann 1951).

In 12(b), the meaning of the form *maim* has been delimited to the act of beating. Maiming is therefore conceptualized with a different experience which is that of beating. Nenwe youth refer to money as production. This follows from the idea that it is what is manufactured or produced that is sold to earn money. In this way, a more abstract domain is used to represent a concrete domain from a cognitive perspective. The meaning of *beer* is derived from that of a *bottle*, hence, *bottle* is extended to cover all kinds of liquor. In this way, a word has been used to describe something else it does not literary denote going by our conceptual metaphor theory. McGlone (2007, 109) refers to this kind of connection as “unconscious metaphoric correspondence that structure human concepts.”

The conceptualization of vagina as waist in Nenwe youth slang is another form of conceptual contrast whose essence is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Romero & Soria 2003). Similarly, the reconceptualization of human breasts as branded powdered milk follows from the regularity of contrast given that human breast also produces milk (for babies). There is therefore the mapping of meaning between the source domain (cowbell branded milk) and the target domain (human breasts) which are neighbouring domains of experience. The representation of a new car in 12(g) as machine is also a form of semantic extension. Before now, the term machine was basically used to refer to factory equipment and later to motor bikes given their effectiveness in minimizing manual/human labour and maximizing speed and efficiency. The experience

of machine has therefore been processed in terms of a new object, car which is expected to be maximally efficient. The act of ‘licking pepper’ is a form of semantic extension given that it is a part of the general process of eating but youth in Nenwe use this expression to conceptualize the general act of eating. In other words, the act of licking pepper (a part of food) has been extended in meaning to cover the act of eating generally. A tanker is said to be a heavy duty vehicle usually used in conveying liquid such as water, kerosene, and petrol. The form has been hiked metaphorically to a person who drinks excessively in 12. The quantum of the content a tanker carries is mapped to the quantity of alcohol consumed by a drinker, thus, creating a new meaning on the basis of parallel equivalence.

Nominalization

This is the process in which other word classes are converted to nouns. In other words, nouns are derived from categories such as verbs, adjectives etc. Based on my data, I found instances of nominalization in the repertoire of Nenwe youth slang as illustrated in example 13.

	Verb		Noun
13(a)	wak	– eat	wakis – food
(b)	Yab	– insult	yabis – insult
(c)	winch	– a witch	winching – (bad) luck

The source language here involves Nigerian Pidgin which naturally should not show traces of affixation. I therefore conclude that given the social expansion of Nigerian Pidgin, the language is gradually being creolized and showing features that are affected by remarkable contact with its lexifier language, which is English. It is however important to note that nominalization is not a productive word formation process among Nenwe youth in their use of slang.

Phrasal verbs

Based on the data, it is discovered that Nenwe youth slang comprises a lot of phrasal verbs, which include a verb and a particle which co-occur to form a single semantic unit. Examples include the following:

- 14(a) shut down – sleep
- (b) ball out – go out
- (c) show background – come to the house
- (d) no send – be unconcerned
- (e) free me – stop talking (what I do not like)
- (f) jazz down – lie/kneel down
- (g) pull over – stay aside
- (h) park well – be careful
- (i) fall hand – mess up
- (j) buy market – be in trouble
- (k) dey bam – calm down
- (l) fall mugu – act foolishly

The semantic units of these phrasal verbs cannot be understood based on the individual meanings of the parts in isolation but can only be taken as a whole. In this concern, the meaning is non-compositional thus, not predictable. Apart from the non-transparency of the meaning of these phrasal verbs, I discovered that Nenwe youth and most other young people construct entirely different meanings from the phrasal verbs and which are highly metaphorical in nature. For instance, the prepositional phrasal verbs, ball out, jazz down and pull over are a combination of a verb with prepositions which will not only result in creating new words but the new units acquire meanings which are different from the two separate words.

Irregular meaning correspondence

In the repertoire of Nenwe youth slang, it is also discovered that certain English words are metaphorically assigned completely different meaning from the generally known ones. In other words, there is no regularity in meaning correspondence. Such forms include:

	Form (English)	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
15(a)	menstruation	period	lack of money
(b)	fling	throw away	sell (illegally)
(c)	weed	unwanted grass	marijuana
(d)	firewood	source of energy	money
(e)	physical	structure of human body	money
(f)	cast	throw	being loquacious
(g)	link	connect	see

The conventional meaning associated with these forms in 15(a-g) becomes frozen and acquires new meaning in the context of Nenwe youth slang. This phenomenon is known in semantics as decomposition. Based on the conceptual metaphor theory, the actual quality described by the source domain (literal meaning) has been mapped onto the target domain (metaphorical meaning). The target domain is understood in terms of the source domain. There are instances where indigenous Igbo words are used in this sense:

16. Form (Igbo)	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
(a) akpuruka	strong person	scavenger
(b) chere kam bia	wait I am coming	cheap product
(c) chere were	wait and take	cheap product
(d) onwero	nothing is there	nothing is happening
(e) owuite	hunger	lack of money

(f) oringo	ice cream	enjoyment
(g) okpoali	dame gun	sophisticated gun
(h) mkpara	gun	sophisticated gun
(i) ajirija	stone	bullet

The examples in 16 further reveal how conceptual parameters have been established through cross-domain mapping. The choice terms from the source domain to the target domain is not random but motivated by semantic considerations, among others (Baider & Gesuato, 2003). For instance, referring to *a scavenger* metaphorically as *a strong person* shows the link in which meaning is transferred from an abstract domain (of strength) to the physical domain (of human object). This is a social practice which embodies metaphor in question in some way.

Certain slang used by Nenwe youth are sourced from other youth subcultures and the Nigerian popular music and home videos. These include:

17(a)	titrate	-	to urinate
(b)	odeshi	-	protective medicine
(c)	twang	-	police cell
(d)	ekelebe	-	police
(e)	gobe	-	buttocks (of a woman)
(f)	otonto	-	locally brewed gin
(g)	combine	-	local gin and Indian hemp
(h)	awuf	-	free food, money or drink
(i)	moral	-	power
(j)	gbedu	-	dance
(k)	mala	-	eat

(1) shakis - liquor

The kind of meaning relation in 17 does not reflect similarity-based extension of meaning but involves a reconceptualization of the whole area of experience in terms of another. This is because in conceptual metaphor theory, seemingly unrelated features of one concept can be associated with another concept.

Conclusion

The study investigated youth slang within a unique socio-cultural context, Nenwe Community from the perspective of Lakoff & Turner (1980) conceptual metaphor theory which allows the description of literal forms and expressions to be mapped to achieve metaphorical meanings. Youth in Nenwe Community develop their unique language with Igbo as lexifier language to sustain their group's existence and dynamics. They use this language to express solidarity, foster unity and fight established norms and convention. Social exclusion and societal inequalities given the unstable socio-economic indices have been largely responsible for the linguistic behaviour of Nenwe youth. We therefore advocate for a more tolerable view of youth slang and understanding of youth groups since it is still part of their effort to find a social space and the search for identity. Colloquial forms have been found to constitute entries in the vocabulary of the Nenwe Igbo speakers as in other languages. Some of these contributions are slang. On this note, it is recommended that further studies be conducted to know more about youth slang and their creative potentials. This will give greater insights to understanding the attitude and behaviour of young people in the society.

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