

Igbo Slang Expressions in Literature: Exploring a New Igbo Literature

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Abstract:

Over the years, slang expressions generally have been looked at as language of the never-do-good in the society, especially among the youths inspired by constant abuse of hard drugs and other dangerous substance. Yet, these expressions have gained wide acceptance among speakers of the language both home and abroad and even among the adults these days. Igbo slang is not left out of this revolution. In recent times, Igbo Literature has experienced a dwindling growth in readership especially among Igbo youth and young scholars. This has resulted heavily in the decline in production of Igbo Literature thereby fueling the lack of content and thenes in Igbo Literature. This paper therefore, looked at the possibility of engaging Igbo slang in Igbo Literature to know if this may help attract readership for Igbo Literature. To do this some Igbo slangs mainly used at Sokoto Road Main Market Onitsha Anambra State Nigeria, were collected and analysed. This area was chosen because the city is redpponsible for 90% of the Igbo slang spoken in Onitsha. Other data were collected from Igbo Hip-hop because artistes use these slangs in their craft. It was discovered that indeed if these expressions are brought into the Igbo Literature; they would make reading more fun for students as they can easily relate with the text's language. Furthermore, they would be useful to the younger generation of scholars most especially Igbo scholars because it will open a new and better genre of creative writing and encourage others to write.

Keywords: Sokoto Road; Main Market Onitsha; Igbo Slang; Igbo Hip Hop

Introduction:

Several scholars have tried to give a total and full meaning of Literature yet the subject has not been fully exhausted . They all sum up at the fact that Literature entertains, educates and inspires. Interestingly, one must feel any of these when one encounters any genre of literature. Literature is wholly a creative enterprise. A process that takes one beyond subconsciousness, both writers and readers. At the end, the reader ends up seeing the world through the eyes of the writer. If otherwise,

the reader ends up criticising the work of the writer thereby creating another creative piece for another reader to read and criticise. Like that, literature inspires thereby creating a chain of creativity.

As literature is important, so also is the language of the literature. The language a literature is rendered in is very important because it is what makes it possible to get the desired feedback from the target audience. There is also a better version of any language a writer decides to use in his or her

work assuming the writer has a particular target audience in mind. If it is English language, is it the hardcore English language like the Shakespearean English Language? If it is Igbo Language, is it the archaic version or the standard version? And so on. A writer becomes interesting when he or she incorporates a frequently used version of language in his or her works; that way it makes the work less boring to read and easy to remember. Igbo slangs are the funny and twisted versions of Igbo Language. They are mostly spoken by the youths when they do not want the adults or people who are not their friends or in their 'click' to understand their discussions. However, these days, most adults have learnt the slang expressions the little they can even though some are previously non-speakers of slang. This is a clear indication that it can easily be learnt and spoken by all ages. Interestingly, Igbo slangs are coined by the youths and not the elders, thereby contributing to the growth of Igbo language.

Igbo circular music of the 21st century especially Igbo hip-hop are laced with these slangs. These songs are streamed on digital music platforms all over the world like *Shazam*, *Youtube*, *Boomplay*, *Spotify* etc. this way, these songs go global same with Igbo slang used in composing them. This in turn sells Igbo language at large to the world via online streaming. The musicians in turn make more money as their songs are frequently downloaded. Most of these slangs used by these musicians have been adopted by Igbo language speakers which have over time become a lasting part of Igbo language. This simply suggests that Igbo slangs help in the overall growth of Igbo language. So, if circular music can, why not Igbo Literature? This paper shall look at some Igbo slangs used mainly by traders at Sokoto Road branch of Onitsha Main Market and some other Onitsha environs, their usages and how they can be used in Igbo literature to serve the same purpose of making Igbo literature more interesting as they do to Igbo circular songs.

Literature Review:

Slangs were previously viewed as language of the never-do-goods in the society; people who are not privileged enough to have a formal education.

However, recently, slang expressions especially the Igbo slangs are generally becoming a welcome funny version of the Igbo language. These days, they are spoken by even the educated ones. Slang expressions are mainly used in the social setting, for interactions among certain age groups in a society or speech community. No wonder Nkamigbo and Eme (2011:84) see it as a common linguistic feature found in every speech community. To them slang exists in every speech community. Moving further Harris (1994) adds that slang expressions are terms that are made up or 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 discussion. Harris' definition gives a better explanation of the main purpose of slang expressions. According to him, slangs are formed with the main aim of being known only to a select group in the speech community while excluding other groups of the same speech community. This is why most adults in Onitsha are always lost whenever they are in the midst of their children because they do not understand the subject being discussed. Even though these expressions are also in Igbo language, yet the adults do not understand them. This was what Harris meant as 'terms that are given definition ...' This means that it is not as if it is an entirely new language rather it is still the already known language with just new twists in their meaning to confuse another social group.

To Crystal (1997:53) slang is 'a colloquial departure from standard usage, it is often imaginative, vivid and ingenious in its construction so much so that it has been called the plain man's poetry'. Crystal conforms to the belief that slang language or expression is not an entirely strange/new language rather a slight departure or deviation from what is already known and used. To Winkler (207:147) slang often originates in a particular group and then may spread out to parts of the general population... or even become part and parcel of the common Lexicon and may no longer be considered slang...' This is to say that slang expressions contribute to word formations and language growth. This is so because slang cuts

across mainly the younger speech communities who have access to technology more and faster than the older speech communities. This way, they create video contents, graphics and design even entertainment packages with these slang expressions and put them out on the internet. From there, they go viral and reach a wider audience and before long, these slang expressions gain more speakers. It also gives one a sense of belonging. This is so because young people tend to suffer from low self-esteem especially when they do not fit into 'their' society.

So, in order to fit in, they try as much as they can to learn these expressions; that way they feel accepted in their society. Their society here refers to a speech community that belongs to a group of people or just people in the same age bracket. This is why Aboh (2015: 96) sees it as 'a functional language that is created to satisfy the communicative needs of a speech community'. Furthermore, Adams (2009:59) outlines that slang is primarily rooted in social context and the need for human beings to belong to one particular group or another. Adams and Aboh yet agree that slang gives the/its speakers a sense of belonging. It makes the speaker feel accepted which in turn boosts the self-esteem of the speaker, which to a greater extent gets the speaker engaged psychologically. Asiru and Ogutu (2018:228) while agreeing to the above submission add, thus (slang) of course would lead to creation of identity for the group and members. Young people have been identified as the main users of slang as a creative way of communication. Slang expression makes its speakers feel accepted in a particular speech community. This is why Asiru and Ogutu point out that it is a creative way of communication. It is creative in the sense that it does not make use of another language entirely rather it forms new words or expressions from the already known language, creatively. This way, the non-speakers know that the language they hear is Igbo language, yet they do not understand it because it has been twisted creatively to mean a different thing entirely. This makes the speaker have a closer relationship and a smoother

interaction as against non-speaker. Asiru and Ogutu agree to this while they submit thus slang often held in contempt by those who do not share its usage or belong to the social cadre of users, creates a form of social bond and solidarity. The submission of Asiru and Ogutu are based on their morpho-pragmatic analysis of slang in Yoruba home videos. They analyzed slang expressions in selected Yoruba movies using the word formation process and communication accommodation theory (CAT). In doing this, they looked at the process of word formation through compounding, borrowing, semantic extension and coinages. Nkamigbo and Eme (2011) on the other hand looked at Otu –Onitsha Igbo slang. In doing this they listed and grouped Igbo slangs and their usages in Otu – Onitsha, a city in the eastern part of Nigeria. They go further to group the usages according to contexts etc. using the tape-recording and one-on-one method of data collection. These scholars all see slang expression as a linguistic phenomenon that enriches a language and give its speaker sense of belonging. The works reviewed also helped in supplying the knowledge of the existing scholarly submissions and interests towards slang. It also created a vacuum which this works hopes to fill. The space here is that while these studies treated slang expression as a linguistic features of a language only, except for Asiru and Ogutu who treated it as it regards home movies, none of them treated it as a concept that can be used in Igbo literature.

Possible Inclusion of Igbo Slangs in Igbo Literature:

Having established the meaning, importance and functions of slang expression, this study shall briefly examine a literary work with similar expression in its narrative. The work to be used is *Adaeze*. The author used expressions that are familiar to students and academic environment because that text is mainly about life in the secondary and higher institution and this makes it very easy to be understood by students who basically are the target audience. This is a clear indication that infusing Igbo slang expressions in Igbo Literature is possible having in mind that Igbo

youths are mainly the audience. However, before *Adaeze* will be looked at properly, it is important to know a little something about the research area; Sokoto Road Onitsha.

Sokoto road is originally a street in Onitsha Anambra State which gradually became a business area. It is particularly known for a go-to-spot for anything female wears. There, one would find importers, wholesalers and retailers of female wears. Recently sellers in the area have included other types of wears in their business. This is because they are known for their versatility and not as a way of deviating from their main business. Sokoto Road accommodates indigenes of all tribes in Nigeria and buyers from all corners of Africa. This is because over the years, it has proved to be a place where one can get whatever one wants to get as it concerns female clothing and at a cheaper rate. This makes it a beehive of business activity and because of this, it gives room for language contact.

Language contact normally involves two different languages coming in contact with each. However, at Sokoto Road, sellers mix-up the different dialects of Igbo language to form new words which they use in their day-to-day business dealings. This

also helps them interact very well among themselves in the sense that most buyers who do not understand their slang expressions sometimes get duped or cheated. So buyers are forced to learn these expressions in order to interact properly with them and avoid being duped. This way, Igbo language is exported to other African countries. More so, most importers at Sokoto Road import mainly from China. Therefore the concerned Chinese learn these slang expressions, at least the relevant ones, in order to transact well with his Sokoto Road customers. At this point, the Chinese is at the mercy of the Sokoto Road business man, because in as much as they need goods to sell and make money, the Chinese needs his money more. Sokoto Road also accommodates graduates, literate and illiterate youths, young and old, men and women. It gives room for everybody to thrive. This way, the younger ones carry on the family's business legacy. This is also an indication that slang expressions used at Sokoto road Onitsha cuts across young, old, men, women, graduates, literates and the illiterates. This makes them a single speech community, gives them a sense of belonging and makes them bond well.

Most Slang Expressions Used at Sokoto Road and Their Usage

Slang Expressions	Ordinary Meaning	Slang Meaning	Slang Usage
Kpaa Ife	To Shift Something	To slightly reduce price	Kpaara m akwa a ife (reduce the price this cloth/jean for me)
Kpaa imi/ Suo imi	To move the nose	To betray someone/ A saboteur	O kpaa m ezigbo imi (He betrayed me badly)
Mbada	Something that is wide	Excessively rich, beautiful, etc.	Customer m ahụ ji mbada ego (That my customer is excessively rich)
Waa/Awaawa, Tido/Tawa gbawaa door, pịa tyre	Break/ hit on something/ break with the teeth/break the door/ hit tyre	To leave	Waa here now (Leave here now)
Nwa ọma ọsịiso	A good child fast fast	A beautiful Girl	{ bx nwa ọma ọsịiso (You are beautiful)
Nwoke ọma ọsịiso	A good man fast fast	A handsome man	{ bx nwoke ọma ọsịiso (You are handsome)

Mpa/Papa/Nnaoooo	Father	A young boy/A friendly man	Mpa/Papa kedụ ka i mere (My guy/friend how are you?)
Alqba m	A mere coinage	My friend	Alqba m bja zuru nke m (my friend come and buy from me)
Onye nkụ/Ndị nkụ	Firewood People	Rich guys, boy/men	Nd[/Onye ahụ bu ndi nkụ (That/those boy/boys is/are rich)
Na-ebe ebe/Bechaline coined from the slang-verb (be) (to cry/ to cut)	Crying	Cute	Nwoke na-ebe ebe (the guy is cute)
Epise	Short form of a designer's name (Episano)	Class/Elegance	Ihe o yi n'ukwu bugodu epise (His trousers are expensive)
Masa	Short form of a short label especially for men (Masarati)	Class/Eleance expensive	Ukwu nwoke a bu ezigbo Masa (This mans is wearing expensive shoes)
Bute ike/ buru ike, Ike penticost	Carry strength	Became rich, or Become riche	Chima jere Lagos bute ike (Chime went to Lagos and became rich)
Taa	Today	To shut up/ insult, always used to intimidate	Taa si ebe a puo (Shut up and leave here)
Fee n'elu	Fly up	To import goods through cargo flight	Fee ngwa ahia ahụ n'elu (Import those goods by cargo)
Piawaa azu/ kpoo number	Break back/ call number	Hike price	Piawaa nwanji ahụ azu (Hike the price for that woman)
Nwanne	Brother/sister	Friend	Nwanne, si ebe a waa (my friend run away/leave here)
Ngabasi	To destroy with fingernails	Class/Pressure/ greatness	Nwaanyi a nwere ngabasi (This woman has class/is a great woman)
Eke/ogwurugwu	Python	A dull and out of fashion design goods for sale	Ihe niile nwoke China bunyere m bu eke (Everything the Chinese supplied me are all dull/ not good for sale/business)
Oja/mmanu/chapee	Flute/oil/shine brightly	Very nice design	E nwere m oja (I have very nice design)
Koosi	Kosisochukwu (name)	How are you? What happened / happening	Kee Kosi? Kee kosi adi?/How are you? What is happening/ happened?)

Meelụ m ife	Do something for me	Give me some money	Nwanne meelụ m ife (my brother/friend give me some money)
Umụazi	Kids	Thieves/pickpockets	Umụazi txtxxrx ego m (thieves picked my money)
Tichaa	Dust off	To steal/dupe	Umụazi a tichara m taa (thieves stole from me today)
Tinye arụ	Put body	Be part of /help/support	Ka anyi tinyere ya arụ (let us help him or her)
Ajụ juru m anya	I am dizzy	I am broke	Ezigbo ajụ juru m anya (I am very broke)
Ite ofe	To cook soup	A mixture of hard/alcoholic drink	Emeka choro ite ofe (Emeka wants to mix hard drinks/drugs)
Itipia/tiri eti	Beat mercilessly	To spend recklessly/to be totally with no money	O tipia final (he has spent all his money/ he is broke)
Piri ya/ buru ya	Mould/carry it	To face critically/fight	{ choro ka anyi piri ya/ buru ya?(Do you want us to fight?)
Gbanyelx gi film/plasma	Show you a movie	Trouble	M ga-agbanyelụ gi film (I will give you trouble)
Gwodogwodo/wotowoto	Coinage	Totally/aggressively	Anyi nyere ya wotowoto (we dealt with him/ her aggressively)
I makwa	You already know	A way of just hyping a friend or customer	Nwanne I makwaa (my brother/ friend I hail you)
Ebe e si ewe	Where you take from	Jean trousers that give less gain	So ebe e si ewe ka m na-azu (I only deal on jean that gives less gain)
A na-atụ gi egwu?	Is anyone afraid of you?	Used to just show the person being addressed is equal to the task	Obinna o na-atụ gi egwu? O ga-akwu gi ugwo (Obinna is equal to the task. He will pay you)

These are mainly the slang expressions likely to be heard among traders at Sokoto Road Onitsha. Although, there may be more since there are no laid rules guiding the formation of these expressions. Therefore, it is possible to have more of it overnight.

Sokoto Road Igbo Slangs in Igbo Hip hop:

In the recent times, Igbo hip hop artistes have dominated the entire Nigeria music stage. This is because the artistes spice their craft up with these slang expressions while at same time sharing the

message of peace, hope and unity. The audience who are mainly the youths embraced the genre more than that of the older artistes because they relate easily with the language of the younger hip-hop artistes. These artistes also back their songs up with captivating videos where they showcase all manners of affluence. The youths also learn the latest fashion trends from these videos. So, these artistes influence the youths to a very large extent. This is why these slang expressions are wide spreading.

Some artistes who use these slang expressions are

- **Phyno:** He took a cue from ‘Nigga Raw’ another Igbo artiste who introduced Igbo rap. Phyno spiced it up and took over entirely. He coined words like ‘Aloba m’ (my friend) and ‘Colat’ (collateral). These words have refused to be entirely forgotten by the Igbo youths especially ‘aloba m’. Traders have since adopted the word in their business dealings. He also used slangs like ‘mbada, nwanne, xmx nwa, eke’.
- **Flavour:** He is another young Igbo artistes doing so well in the music industry. He has used words like Nwoke qma qs[[sq, nwanne, nd[nkw, ike penticost, nwanne, nd[ike, nwa na-ebe ebe, o bu ike ka izuqgx, belu ebelu, o nwelx ngabas[, and many more in his songs.
- **Anyidons:** He is another artiste waxing so strong in the industry. He has used slangs like Mpa, gbanyelu gi film, nwanne, in his songs and these slang expressions endear youths to his songs thereby making his followership and popularity grow.
- **Zoro:** He is another Igbo artiste who mixes these slang expressions in his craft. He even took it up a notch by also introducing the traditional Igbo masquerade and instruments in his songs.

The list of artistes in this category is endless and they are not stopping any time soon. Interestingly, it appears that this new dimension in the music industry is widely gaining recognition and subsequently helping Igbo language grow globally.

It is also worthy of note to know that in as much as these slang expressions are mainly formed in Onitsha, it does not mean that musicians cannot use them in their craft. So if musicians can, why not literary artistes?

Inno Uzoma Nwadike, a known literary artiste tries to imbibe the urban youths language in his works maybe because he mostly writes about students’ life in the university. He uses expressions commonly used in the university environment in his works. That way, the readers who are mostly university students feel drawn to the work. Even if the reader is not a University student, through the work, he or she gets to learn the language used in the University environment, should he or she become one in the future. A good example of this is his work *Okwe Agbala*. It is a drama text published in 1991 about University environment and he used mainly student characters. Nwadike centered the work around two university students; Chinyere and Ozuruigbo and then a lecturer character Dokita Emezina.

He used the work to expose the ills going on in the university environment. To do this successfully, he used popular expressions used in the University, like,

Fuchọ Prof – Future Prof (pg 4)

Festi klas/ sekond klas opa – first class/ second class upper (pg .6)

Lekchọ/Lecture pg.5

Digrii/ dgree pg.5

You have to fīlōsōfaiz- you have to philosophize (pg.6)

Akada biskiti – Cabin biscuit (pg 7)

Distinkshon –Distinction pg 8

Kredit – Credit pg 8

Merit – merit pg 8

Dọk – Doc pg 10

Fīlōsōfī na Klaziks – Philosophy and classics (pg 18)

Tuu wọn – 2¹ (pg 44)

Miil Tikeeti – Meal Ticket (pg 44)

Foṣtū Klas – First Class (pg 44)

Viisii – VC pg (48)

Diin – Dean (pg 50)

Akademik Registra – Academic Registra (pg 51).

These are expressions commonly used in the University. Any University student who picks up this book to read can easily relate to the idea and message the writer intends to pass because he or she already understands what these expressions mean. Therefore, introducing popular Igbo slang expressions to Igbo literature will also draw the work closer to the reader while educating, inspiring and entertaining the reader. It is also important to note that formation of these slang expressions often follow linguistic approaches of coinage and abbreviations therefore they have actual meanings.

Conclusions:

No language is complete on its own neither is there any language that is superior to another. However, languages grow. They do this by borrowing from other languages while dropping some words. This way, language meet up with current trends like the new Igbo word for telephone, 'ekwent[' which was coined due to the introduction of telephone/mobile telephone. Igbo slang expressions in the same vein makes Igbo language grow. It also makes it travel to a wider audience. This is typically because these expressions are mostly spoken by the younger generation who use social media tools to communicate often. Therefore, if Igbo slang expressions can be introduced to Igbo Literature, it will reawaken the reading culture among youths.

This will not only be done on published hard copy but also on woks published on the internet. That way, the youths can reach it easily wherever and whenever they want.

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