

Juvenile Language Expressions: Its Role in Language Communication

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Abstract: This work examines the speech styles of language expression exhibited by the juveniles in a speech community. It centers on young people between the ages of 10 – 17 years in eight secondary schools in the Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State and some year one undergraduate students of Rivers State University as case study. The data of the study is analyzed within the theoretical framework of Albert Cohen's subculture theory and sociolinguistics. It is observed in this study that juveniles use a style of language expression like slang, pidgin, secret language, vulgarism, etc., to enhance better communication and establish their presence in the society. The study further reveals that language expansion processes also derives from the unconscious use of some juvenile reactionary activities in language. The main thesis here is that language expansion within the selected speech communities achieved that feat due to the free use of all manner and style of language expression by the juveniles through the youths to the adult. It is therefore suggested that slang, pidgins, and other varieties of language expression among the youths as well as the adults should be encouraged. Consideration should be given to the bits and pieces of language in use in their secret places including vulgarism.

Keywords: Juvenile, Style, Language Expression, Subculture, Sociolinguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years young people who are not yet old enough to be regarded as adults have been associated with delinquent behaviour or crimes. There is a great gap to their language or their style of expressions and possible implication to enhanced effective interaction and hence ease of communication in a multilingual society like Rivers State. Their behaviour is severally described as silly, immature, abnormal and vandalistic, etc.

However, findings have revealed that juveniles speak bits and pieces of stitched and left over expressions that may seem abnormal to the adult world. They act as language vendors, auctioneers, use repetitions to indicate an increased degree of intensity (Ken Maduakor, 2018). This goes to support the general view that juvenile style of expression is perceived as unintelligible and lack wisdom. On the contrary, Crystal (1992) and Trask (1995) hold that children (juveniles) learn perfectly any languages they are exposed to, while most adults cannot do this. Again, that people use language that is unintelligible to make their membership of a group, to provide a past time, and to ensure secrecy when performing a particular activity.

Juvenile styles of language expression when viewed as linguistic game are seen as a creative form of a play, or even as a means of improving competence in speaking and language learning. Juvenile expressions are in fact normal, full-fledged languages that may hold the key to better understanding of the evolution and expansion of language if adequately analyzed within the confines of the society.

Juvenile expressions include pidgin, slang, secret language, trucker talk, whistle speech, taboos, auctioneer speech, vulgarism, etc., These language expressions embellish, colour, spice and even extend language use beyond the ordinary use of the juveniles. They cause variety in speech which is the spice of interest. Juvenile style of expression creates two or more linguistic communities which enhance communication. Accordingly, communication is the pivot on which all human interactions revolve. This ability separates humans from animals.

Trask (1995) also states that few varieties of language are spoken in total isolation. The speakers of most varieties are in contact with speakers of other languages, and one of the most obvious results of such contact is that words are borrowed from one variety to another. This also agrees with Crystal (1992) "that genres of secret languages can be found in many cultures and in a wide range of human contexts".

The adult world considers juvenile language as abnormal, vulgar, taboo, indecent and informal. However, Adegbite (2004) gives support to juvenile language when he declares that "English in Nigeria has been domesticated, made native, adapted and tamed to suit the Nigerian environment". Ken Maduako (2018) further adds that it has been pidginized, nativized, acculturated and twisted to express an unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction. These unaccustomed and debased forms of express are the attributes of juvenile language.

Crystal (2006) supported this thus: "when a word enters the language, it comes in at a certain stylistic level, with a meaning and a range of use that makes it fit within a particular variety". Juvenile style of expression is a fallout of the passion to expand the frontier of communication (though unnoticed). They enrich language vocabulary because they are mixed, simplified in both technical and linguistic sense. At some adult quarters, juvenile expressions are premature and debased. And this may account for the use of proverbs by the elders. Yule-Ifode (2001: 160) asserts that "the ability to sprinkle one's speech with appropriate proverbs is a mark of oratory and "is highly regarded in the society". And that "the use of proverbs is a mark of wisdom and understanding associated with the elders who are considered as sages". If we judge juvenile style of expression with the toga of English then they give us enjoyable linguistic pain, they bend and break the rules of the language, etc this is according to Crystal (1992). These features make language study an interesting one; to say the least. Juvenile style of expression also puns (play) on words to build rapport, relationships and fantastic word creation process. They create "spoonerisms which transpose words, for example "dear old queen becomes queer old dean. There are malapropisms which use similarities in pronunciation to mix up words" Crystal (2006: 174). Word creation either out of old ones or entirely new ones is the most productive way of extending the vocabulary of English. It could feature in the form of abbreviation, repetition, blending, shortening, conversion inflections, etc. This is the hallmark of juvenile language use.

Juvenile language also expresses some form of feminism. The feminist movement is innate even in them, the consciousness about the issue of linguistic sexism cannot be overruled. Crystal (1992:47) notes thus: "Dear God, are boys better than girls I know you are one but try to be fair". This goes to assert that coinages and informal use of words in many speech communities develop from the stiches and bits of words favoured by the juveniles.

One of the major features of language is productivity or creativity. Okeke (2009) holds that the number of utterances, words, and meanings in human languages is infinite. This therefore supports the nuances in speeches of the juveniles as they unconsciously create varieties in speech and word use. Juvenile style of expression gives life to language. This is because the slang of one generation can become the Standard English of another generation. In geolinguistics, we study "all the variations linked to the social and geographical roots of language users". Ducrot (1983:57). He further holds that "sometimes it is not possible to distinguish whether the modifications are linked ... to the desire not to be understood or the desire of the group to mark its own originality. The use of jargon in vocabulary and pronunciation of words by the juveniles presents itself as a sign of a social situation. It designates the speech of a social class – the juveniles.

Statement of the Problem

The misinterpretation of the style of expression of the juveniles and negligence of its roles in language expansion motivated this study. The expressions in slang, vulgarism, hidden or secret language, pidgin, trucker talk speech, auctioneer expressions, among others have all given rise to vocabulary and language expansion. They cause variety in language use. Variety is not only the spice of interest but also colours, motivates, embellishes, and beautifies language. The problem of this study is that juvenile style of expressions has helped language expansion in a multilingual society like Rivers State.

Objectives

This study is design to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To determine the creative ability of the juveniles in their use and adoption of certain expressions in language use.
- 2) To identify the attitudes of the youths and adults towards juvenile style of language expressions.
- 3) To examine the importance or role of the juveniles style of expression in the expansion, accommodation and variation in language use.
- 4) To examine the influence of these neologies in language expansion.
- 5) To suggest recommendations on how to accommodate these new expressions since language change is constant.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated based on the statement of the problem of this work:

- (i) Do juveniles produce novel expressions in their speech?
- (ii) What are some of the varieties or style of expression do they use?
- (iii) Are these expressions accepted in the speech communities today?
- (iv) Have these expressions helped language use to expand?

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the subculture theory developed by Albert Cohen in 1955 and sociolinguistics.

The Subculture Theory: Albert Cohen believes that juveniles who do not meet the social standards seek validation from a subculture. The subculture group is made up of other juveniles who also do not meet the social standard. These groups then act in manners that are not socially acceptable and hence rebel against the socially acceptable standards. This revolution or rebellious actions are demonstrated in their language use. The use of slang, hidden language, pidgin, jargon, vulgarism, taboo languages, etc. is one of the methods of showing deviant behaviour. Freeman (1994) believes that these reactionary language use have enhanced language expansion.

Propositions of Sociolinguistic: The main concern of sociolinguists according to Holmes (1992: 16) is “to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community and the choices peoples make when they use language”.

Ken (2018: 3) pointed out some of the concerns of the sociolinguists thus:

- Who speaks what language to whom and for what purpose?
- A sociolinguistic investigation must ask good questions and find out the type of data relate to the question.
- There should be interpretation of the result of the investigations.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This part of the study is primarily interested in the review of relevant theories and concepts of other writers on the type of language or expressions juveniles use in their daily interactions with both the youths and adult world. Such concepts as slang, pidgin, jargon, secret language, trucker talk, vulgarism, auctioneer speech, etc. and their contribution to language expansion shall be reviewed.

Yul-Ifode (2001: 156) in referring to juveniles’ uses age as a parameter. “Age as a social category is reflected in speech behaviour. That is why it is one of the factors responsible for speech variation”. The above means that when a person speaks, his speech gives information about his age. Yul-Ifode (2001) also attributes proverbs to the language of the elders. This also implies that vulgar language is used by the juveniles since it is rude, careless, offensive, and impolite.

Crystal (1992: 7) regards pidgin, one of the styles of the language expression of the juveniles, as a natural language. He sees it as “a major motivation for the development of auxiliary languages”. This idea points to the fact that juvenile pidgin can motivate further research in language studies.

In the view of Trask (1995:85) he states that “language is a very powerful means of declaring and maintaining ones identity” and “one of the most important aspects of that identity is membership of a group”. The juveniles’ hidden or secret language makes them distinct and a means of identity and not necessarily a deviation from the norms of the society. It becomes one of the ways of extending their group interest to the speech community and hence expands language use for better communication. This supports the view that language does not exist in isolation.

On the part of Adegbite (2004) he states that “English in Nigeria has been domesticated, made native, adopted and made to suit the Nigerian environment”. This assertion is a perfect truism about the use of pidgin, slang, jargon, vulgarism by the juveniles and youths in Nigerian society. This is why it is becoming easier to consider pidgin as a *lingua franca* for Nigeria. Again pidgin has become creolized in many parts of Rivers State.

Besides Crystal (2006: 8) holds that “some of the most interesting things that happen to words are to be found in the dialects and slang that make up non-standard English”. The slang as well as other language expressions of the juveniles has been described as non-standard and informal. However, their inclusion in our everyday interaction has become inevitable because the juveniles have been able to elbow it into regular use.

Slang Expression

The definition of slang shows negative thoughts, informal, causal, careless, derogatory, a highly colloquial and a creative deviation from the normal language.

Oluikpe and Anasiudu and Longe (2003) in Ken (2018) summarized the characteristics of slang thus:

- (i) Special vocabulary used by persons of low or disreputable character.
- (ii) The language of a low and vulgar type.
- (iii) A highly colloquial type of language considered to be below the level of standard, educated speech.
- (iv) Specialized vocabulary or men of the underground world.
- (v) Exists mainly in the spoken form
- (vi) Informal and non-standard

Crystal (1992) and Opara C. (2009) see slang as extreme form of colloquialism and could be viewed as offensive language in formal circles. It is peculiar to a certain class or group.

Pidgin

A debased, neglected, an informal and an ad hoc language in contact among people who do not have a common language. Yul (2001) defined it as a “simplified restructured, auxiliary languages which have evolved to facilitate communication in multilingual communities”.

Trask (1995), Jowitt (2005) share a similar opinion that the grammatical structure of pidgin is highly reduced when compared to other languages. And that as a contact language it bridged the gap between the ‘native’ and European traders.

Hidden and Secret Language

This, according to Crystal (1992), is the deliberate use of unintelligible language among a sect. He pointed out some reasons for so doing: to mark a person’s membership of a group, to provide a pastime, to ensure secrecy when performing a particular activity. It is of interest that these hidden or secret language filter to non-initiates and hence incorporation into the main stream of language use by all today.

Trucker Talk

This is similar to secret language in that it uses special numerical codes for communicating routine messages. It is unintelligible to outsiders. Trucker talk is the jargon that originated in 1958 among American truck drivers.

Auctioneer Speech

A form of speech in which the users speak fast to not only impress lay audience but also influence them. The auctioneer uses his charisma and personality to create excitement, drive bidding and effortlessly command the attention of the crowd.

They also employ humour. Good auctioneers possess excellent communication skills, showmanship and confidence. They also chant. The juveniles do this in their rap vibes, code mixing and switching music. They chant and attract the attention of the lay audience. They repeat phrases and avoid pauses which contribute to rapid speech.

The use or adoption of the above terms by the adult has helped to modify language. These 'shifts' have reduced the differences between participants, thus facilitating interaction, and obtaining the listener's social approval. It has also facilitated linguistic accommodation, speech convergence, divergence, and maintenance of identity. Through juvenile language, the participants can now rely on the context to clarify their meaning. There is also as great deal of usage variation on the part of individual speakers.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted the questionnaire method for the collection of data for the study. The questionnaire method is considered most appropriate because it is suitable for collection and interpretation of opinions and feelings of the respondents. It also deals primarily with the respondents in both oral and written interviews.

The data will be collected from students of SS 1 – 3 in some selected schools in Rivers State and first year undergraduates between the ages of 16 – 17 years.

A total number of fifty (50) students will be selected randomly from the schools selected. In order to achieve the primary aim of this research a list of expressions and words will be written out for the respondent to give their interpretations. Above all, they will be requested to mention more words that the juveniles and youths use in the speech community.

Presentation/Data Analysis

The data was presented in line with the classification of language expressions of the juveniles over the years with specific references to secret language, slang, pidgin, auctioneer speeches, spoonerism, malapropism, vulgar language, etc.

Ebere, A.C (1999) identified some of the following secret language of the juveniles:

Comrade – non-member of the Kegite club

Island – a place of initiation for new cultists.

Ahoi (Aleora) – newly initiated members.

Joo-joo – initiation drills

Blending – final initiation process of the “jew men”

Bush name – new names given to members after a successful initiation.

Executioner/Capone – the leader of a cult group.

Drumito – lead drummer in charge of the drums.

Songito – the lead vocalist.

Slogans

No pain No gain – slogan of the buccaneer cult group

Kill first Report later – slogan of the Vikings.

Eye for an eye – slogan of the Black Axe

Korovo – the god of the Black Axe.

7 – the code name for the Black Axe

Bagger – a member of the Vikings.

Sail – to gather

Slang: An extreme form of colloquialism. It is informal, causal and peculiar to a particular group of people. It is not deemed for dignified use:

Chick – young lady

Funky-baby – fashionable lady

Cop – police officer

Snappy dude – fashionable man

Tab – cigarette

Naff – silly

Toast – to chat a lady up

Paparazzi – sugar daddy

Runs girl – prostitute

Yankee – America

Ghetto – poor dirty place

Akada – an educated person

Father – pale

Trip – to admire

Mumu - fool

To hamma – to succeed

Kolo – madness

Yan – talk, tell

Fall hand – to disappoint

Pepper – money

Jaga jaga – dirty, untidy

Moi moi man – weak person

Show – come

To throw leg – to escort, to see off

Amebo – a gossip

Orobo – very fat

Pidgin – A simplified language adopted when different languages mix or are in contact. A restricted language which arises for the purpose of communication between two or more social groups. It became nativised or creolized and hence the juveniles freely use them to achieve unity among their sub-units.

You dey der – are you there

Masham--- stop

Denge – show off

Ola--- hair

Yawa--Trouble

Bunk--House

sea de rof--There is a lot of trouble

to jack--To read

p-man-- Father

I wan go high-- I want some alcohol

to enter inside bottle-- To be drunk

five, five hundred --Five hundred naira each

Show off – buzibody, shakara, dege-- Show off

Crush-- Admirer

aradite, sub-- Stingy person

wuru wuru, cona cona-- Deceitful

e don do-- Enough

jara--Addition or 'extra'

shap shap--Quickly

Vulgarism: The adult world regards vulgarism as remarks that are careless, rude, offensive and derogatory when used by the juveniles and or youths. This may be because it talks about sex and sexual parts of the body by these teens. They see its use as a deviation based on age.

Bang – to have sex

Straft – to have sex

Conge – sexual urge

Runs girl – prostitute

Bedie – bed mate

Bony boy hoo – boy friend

v boot--Woman bottom

Cowbell – large boobs

Sokoto – the female sex organ

Banana – a male's sex organ

9 month IT – pregnancy

Ikpoki – sex

Bakasi, ikebe – buttocks

To gian visa – to have an affair

Egypt – ex-lover

Opara, C. C. (2009) opines that this expression has no place in conventional modes of speech. They fit into informal conversational style. They are more appropriate in everyday speech than in formal writing.

She pointed out the following examples:

“We will be with you in a jiffy

Where the deuce are you?

I ain't no fool.

Shall we hang around next weekend?

Sure thing?

Aitchison (2003) in support of the style of expression by the juveniles holds that in analyzing language varieties among social groups within a speech community, the geographical location, age, occupation, socioeconomic status, ethnic group and sex are very important. He stressed that age is the pivot in this context. The above assertion therefore gives credence to the importance of considering the styles of expression of language by the juveniles in language growth and expansion.

4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work agrees with the proposition of Paul H. Grice, an American philosopher, who is regarded as the father of pragmatism that human beings communicate efficiently because they are by nature helpful to one another. In his cooperative principles he insisted that human beings should be “co-operative”. The findings in this research show that juvenile style of language use is in agreement with the cooperative principle which strives to make communication a means of integration of human beings in a speech community.

The findings also show that juveniles retail ‘language parts’ and make their use available for more participants. Again their adoption of such styles as malapropisms, spoonerism, auctioneer speech, trucker talk has added courtesy expressions to language use. The result is that language is expanding though this unconscious effort in communication. The findings also reveal that juvenile style of expression derives from the spoken variety of language use. The participants rely on the context to interpret their meaning. This spoken variety tolerates switches, alterations, and participant can spontaneously apply repetitions, pauses and other ethos in order to influence the audience and gain acceptance in a speech community.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having exposed the fact that juvenile speech style is promoting and enhancing language expansion, I make these below recommendations.

The adult world should accept juvenile language style as one of the ways language change must occur. Nothing is static therefore there should be room for infiltrations. It is difficult today to find an ‘elder’ between the ages of 40 – 60 years who does not code switch or mix in their daily speeches.

The academic environment should collate and put those expressions together as varieties of English to study and also formulate a dictionary to hold them all together for references.

Translation of these novel terms into nativised or indigenous languages shall go a long way to fostering the learning of the L1 formally.

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