

METHODS

Variation, birth, and death of some slang expressions in the Onitsha environment

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The current research work hinges on the variation, birth, and death of some slang expressions in the Onitsha environment. Slang expression is a language style that has various definitions, but one common thing about these definitions is that slang is an informal expression used during an informal communication. Due to its informal nature, variation, birth, and death do occur and that is the crux of this study. Over the years, some researchers have carried out research on slang expressions and some of them rooted their research on the Igbo slang. This spurred the quest to look at the variation, birth, and death of some slang expressions in the Onitsha environment. Data for this work were sourced from the students and the residents of Onitsha. The research portrayed that there are variations in some slang expressions that express female body structure endowment, beauty/handsomeness, sex drive, short of words deeds, and smoking—the birth of new slang expressions, which is the cause of slang variation and the death of slang expressions. The research has it that some of these slang expressions originate from some of the Igbo contemporary songs. Finally, Holmes' (1) idea that slang expressions are specifically for the young people is not applicable in the Onitsha environment because slang expressions are used by both young and old. In fact, it is gradually becoming a way of communication among people.

Keywords: slang, variation, birth, death, Onitsha

1. Introduction

Change inevitable, so is language. In the study of language, slang cannot be swept under the carpet because it is also a means of communication. As languages evolve within the community where they are used, so also is slang used within the same community. Slang is an expression commonly found in every speech community. The community in question can be a temporal community or a permanent community. Temporal community in this context can be a group of people who assemble momentarily like students in the school, traders in a market, and workers in various offices, among others, for a purpose that can last for particular hours in a day. In this case, there is a possibility of having contact with new people with new expressions, which either stay for some time and gradually ebb away or stay permanently

or become an everyday expression which sometimes is included in a language. Conversely, a permanent community in this context can be seen as people living in a particular environment like a street, village, town, local government, or state. Here, though there is more limited contact due to the recent way of living known as “minding my business and drinking water,” they still come in contact with one another once in a while and during communication they find themselves using those slang expressions generated from the temporal community. This is hugely dependent on the context of the discussion and the relationship between the speakers.

Ordinarily, young children speak differently from older children and also differently from young adults. Slang expression is also not left out. In recent days, slang is now used mostly by all, even among old people. It can

be seen used by students, lecturers/teachers, comedians, politicians, social media users and handlers, actors and actresses, musicians, and even in some adverts, to mention some. It has to a very large extent become a way of expression. In recent times, people pay attention to celebrities more by emulating their lifestyles like dressing, possessions (cars, house), makeup, and their styles of language. In the case of language styles, we often see code-switching, code-mixing, slang, and assume taboo words, to mention, and so on. However, this study focuses on slang. Because the adorers of these artists always like to emulate the artist(s) they have a crush on, they go to any length to copy whatever the artist(s) introduce in the process of releasing new songs that can come only in audio or in both audio and video. The style of language they use is not excluded in the things the people learn in the cause of learning the lyrics of their music, and this can be what we might see as indirect contact. The above-mentioned often employ some lexical items peculiar to themselves or give existing lexicons a new sense. The term "slang," which is rather ambiguous, refers to casual, unofficial, or quasi speaking. Initially, youth slangs distinguish them from older people because the change is so rapid, but this may not be visible lately because no one wants to be seen as old, and this applies in all ramifications, including the style of expression. Language will forever evolve, change, modify, and die, as so also slang expressions. In the process of evolution, some lexicons and expressions go into extinction, while some do come to stay or perhaps are modified. The slang spoken in Otu Onitsha, which is in the state of Anambra, was studied by Nkamigbo and Eme (2). Among the leading retail destinations in Anambra State, Onitsha draws residents from every part of Nigeria, notably users of several Igbo accents. In light of this, there will surely be the birth and death of slang expressions in the community of users. The major reason for this is contact. Language is like fashion; when new ones are introduced, some of the existing ones perhaps will go into extinction or be retained. On some occasions, the existing ones can be modified to suit the occasion of the context of use or what is trending. On some occasions, there may be variations of a particular slang expression pointing toward a specific context. Therefore, this study focused on the variation, death, birth, and modification of slang expressions so far in the Onitsha environment.

2. Review of related studies

The primary tools of language are words, which are carefully chosen to convey the desired meaning. Language does not only enable us to communicate with each other, it further enables us to talk about something in various styles in which slang is included. Fromkin et al. [(3), p. 319] described slang as being metaphorical, playful, elliptical, vivid, and

shorter lived than ordinary language. Slang is defined by Johnson and Shirley (4) as informal, non-standard terms or phrases that typically have their origins in subcultures within a community. Slang, according to Crystal [(5), p. 53], is a colloquial departure from formal language; it is frequently inventive, colorful, and cunning in its creation, earning it the moniker "plain man's poetry." However, slang has lost some of its negative connotations, since it occasionally gives old terms new meanings, expanding the vocabulary of any given language (cf. (6)). Slang phrases are also defined by Harris (7) as words created by a social group or given new definitions in order to become fresh or conventional and to keep outsiders from participating in group conversations. In a similar spirit, Winkler [(8), p. 142] concurred that slang frequently develops in a specific group before potentially spreading to various segments of the wider community. Some slang phrases even cease to be regarded as slang after they are integrated into the ordinary vocabulary. Moreover, language offers us a means of engagement as well as a means of representation (9). The representation can be in a coded form, which can take the nature of slang. As a result, within the social context, language serves as a tool for both communication and the development and maintenance of social bonds among its users. The efficacy of the communication is greatly influenced by how effectively the sender uses them and how well the recipient understands them in accordance with the message the sender wants for the recipient (10). In light of this, sociolinguistics is defined as the study of those aspects of language that need to be analyzed in relation to society, taking context and other variables into account (11). Moreover, sociolinguistics is the study of the interaction between language and society, according to Wardhaugh (12). In other words, it looks at how people communicate in various social contexts and how they express different facets of their social identities. Holmes [(13), p. 1] asserted that the social environment of a conversation affects how individuals speak. In other words, we cannot disassociate language from society. This society consists of three elements, namely, human beings, community, and language, as posited by (14). The study of sociolinguistics also portrays how language variations occur between people due to social variables like ethnicity, religion, age, level of education, gender, and status and how the functionalization of these factors classifies individuals. Because of this, individuals speak differently in various social settings, and slang use is not uncommon. Slang expressions, according to Adeyanju (15), are unofficial but commonly recognized words or phrases that are used to enhance communication in a new context. Slang is defined as informal, imprecise words or phrases (lexical inventions) that typically have their origins in subcultures within a community, according to Johnson and Shirley (4). According to Harris (7), slang phrases are words that a social group invents or gives new definitions to make them innovative or customary (so that those outside

the social group are not allowed to participate in the group's debates).

Furthermore, the concept of slang is viewed in various ways by different people as follows: Slang is defined by Lorima [(16), p. 933] as a language that is presently used and recognized and consists of new definitions given to words that already exist or entirely new terms that are commonly regarded as deviating from regular English usage. For them, slang will either become obsolete over time or get adopted into everyday speech. Moreover, it is seen as a dialect that is specific to a given group, socioeconomic class, and occupation. According to Hashemi (17), slang is the language used by groups of people, such as youths or criminals, who want to convey their commitment to a certain social identity, though not often approved of by other social groups. In addition, the general public on some occasions does frown at its usage. Slang can be considered a courtesy gesture, according to Allan and Burridge (18), even if it is dependent on context, time, and location. Slang is always perceived as a phrase used in casual or everyday discourse to develop or reinforce social identity or group cohesion, or to conform to a societal trend (19). Slang is another area of language that indicates a person's age, according to Holmes [(1), p. 176]. She also thinks that young people should speak with contemporary lingo because it sounds strange coming from an older person's mouth. Moreover, it denotes affiliation with a certain group, typically one of youth. For instance, in Nigeria, as it relates to the Igbo language, the young use the word "oko" to refer to their parents while the old use "nna" or "nne." However, lately, slang expression has spread and cut across all ages in our various societies. For instance, you can hear some Igbo parents addressing their sons who have made it in life as *odogwu*, which means a rich man.

Slang is the use of extremely casual phrases and expressions that are not thought to be common in the dialect or tongue of the person speaking. Namvar (20) conducted a study on the usage of slang among undergraduate students at a Malaysian public institution to determine whether Malaysian youth utilize English slang in their native tongue. In relation to this, the work concentrated on the following goals: to show if Malaysian young are familiar with slang and to investigate which type of slang they use more frequently than other types of slang. A pilot test with 20 slang items was given to 60 students at UPM who are majoring in English language. The Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to code and analyze the study's data. Data investigation revealed that the younger generation regularly uses online slang, abbreviated language, and movie slang. They appear to be familiar with these slang terms. The causes may be due to the widespread usage of the Internet nowadays, as well as the media, which, in this situation, plays the most significant role. Evelyn (21) conducted study on the slang usage and social effects of slang among Indian students.

Without considering additional sources like books, articles, and, most crucially, the Internet, which also exposes pupils to slang, she employed the descriptive approach, interviews, and questionnaires to gather the data. Her attention was drawn to the particular slang terms spoken by Indian students on the university campus. In addition, she now provided meanings in English for all of the Indian slang. Furthermore, she did not take into account many slang subgenres like Internet, cinema, and street. She decided to utilize terminology that was exclusive to India University students instead.

Boylu and Kardaş (22) conducted a slang study with a focus on instructors' and students' perceptions of slang instruction and acquisition in Turkish as a foreign language. Two distinct questionnaires designed by the researchers to gauge the attitudes of instructors and students were used to gather the study's results. The research revealed that most Turkish slang terms are something that both instructors and students are interested in learning and teaching. In conclusion, as it relates to the students, their motivations for acquiring slang phrases included improving communication with Turks, hearing too many of them on the street, living in Turkey, being interested, and just picking up new words. In addition to the aforementioned, instructors said that issues with pupils' social environments might arise from their lack of knowledge of the definitions of particular phrases. Because of this, the teachers suggested either publishing a separate book on slang usage or include additional slang phrases other than swear words in the courses.

Lastly, Nkamigbo and Eme (2) conducted additional slang study in an effort to better understand the Igbo slang terms employed by the Otu-Onitsha-speaking community. The study illustrated certain Igbo slang terms, as well as the diverse users and usage settings. The work also urged that because the Otu-Onitsha speech community is made up of Igbo speakers from the various dialect regions of Igbo land, it is necessary to intentionally encourage these slang expressions to spread throughout the different Igbo communities because it is customary for the speakers in Otu-Onitsha to occasionally visit their family homes or villages. The Igbo language in their individual communities would benefit from this. Slang is a linguistic style, and everything that is a style has a tendency to change. Change happens gradually, and before it does, there must be a variation, and variety brings about life and death. This introduces the following portion of this work.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design. Descriptive research includes describing variables without

changing them; it asks inquiries about the nature, incidence, or distribution of variables. The research design simply describes what already exists, and the collection of qualitative data are expressed as relative values. The outcome is often impartial, local, and temporal (23). A qualitative descriptive design is utilized when the research is interested in a straightforward description that concentrates on the specifics of what, where, when, and why of an experience.

4. Variation, birth, and death of some slangs expressions in the Onitsha environment

Slang is extremely commonly used in regular or familiar dialogue. If language or dialect tends to be distinct to a certain region, which might be the teenagers, gangs, or students, slang is a vital component of the young generation's experience and behaviors that they like so much, but in recent times, it is no longer so. The social meaning of slang is as changeable as the individuals who use it, since most typically a particular circumstance might entail two or more slang terminology to describe it. In summary, slang has become a current linguistic style of communication. Slang is linguistic and culturally specific; nonetheless, it may be transferred from one culture and language to another. If it is not commonly recognized or utilized, it could persist for a long in a sociolinguistic milieu before disappearing. It may also become a permanent feature of a society's linguistic repertoire or even develop into standard usage depending on the degree of its acceptability and use by educated speakers and role models. Recent electronic communications via social media contribute a lot to this process. Also sometimes, slang expressions can have variables of the same meaning. The reason for these variables is often the birth of a new slang; and because it is a style of language used in an informal conversation, it is shorter lived. Therefore, in this section, we look at slang variations, recent and obsolete Igbo slang.

5. Slang variation

Language variation is the choice of language a speaker or writer makes to express ideas, so also slang variation. Initially, Igbo communities usually used Igbo proverbs when they want to code expressions, but recently, they often use slang expressions either as a means of identification or to keep someone in the dark. In some cases, they use it just for the fun of it or to spice up their communication. Sometimes, it is used to avoid some taboo expressions. The following are some slang expressions that have variations.

5.1. Slang variations for a beauty/handsomeness

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|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. nwana – agbakalamisi | “the girl's beauty is driving me crazy” |
| 2. ìmakwananwankenameluo m ahụ | “her beauty throws one off balance” |
| 3. nwokeña – apụọkụ | “handsome guy” |
| 4. nwokeña – ebeebe | “handsome/cute guy” |
| 5. nwokeña maọsịsọnanwaọ maọsịsọ | “handsome guy and beautiful babe” |
| 6. asanwa | “beautiful girl or lady” |
| 7. nwakwụgoduọtọ | the girl's stature is nice |
| 8. nwatakịrịbugodimmiriọñuñu | “She is so beautiful.” |
| 9. nwatanwegodiriakara | “She has more than expected” |
| 10. nwatabụmmanụ | “he/she is beautiful” |

Recently, the quest for being beautiful and looking for beautiful ladies has gone haywire. Ladies are going under knives to look good for the men. Therefore, this has generated a lot of slang expressions by which people express the beauty of a lady/woman. Men are not excluded. There are characteristics of beauty/handsomeness. It can be the facial, fine legs, complexion and smoothness of the skin, and stature (flat tummy, well curved, and six pack for men), among others. Slang expressions in examples 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 describe the beauty of a lady/woman, while 5, 6, and 7 talk about men. In example (3), the concept *agbakalam isi* means “to run mad.” In example (4), *emeluo m ahụ* means “to hurt/cause pain.” In example (5), *na-apụọkụ* means that there is cause for fire burning something or done through the fire and that thing is still hot. In example (6), *na-ebeebe* literally means to perch. In example (7), the concept *ọsịsọ* means fast. In example (8), the concept *asa* is known to be a type of fish. In example (9), the concept *kwugoduọtọ* means standing straight. In example (10), the concept *mmiriọñuñu* means drinking water. In example (11), the concept *nwegodiriakara* means to have a mark. Finally, in example (12), the concept *mmanụ* is known as oil. From the above, we can see that the concepts have different meanings, however, they are gearing toward the same direction, which is the description of beauty.

5.2. Slang variation for sex drive

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|------------------------------|--|
| 11. The ì pịaọkụ | “to have sex” |
| 12. ìmakwaemee | “to know how to satisfy a man in bed” |
| 13. Ibeokwe | “to have sex” |
| 14. ofenwa m ga – atọnatauto | “she is good sexually” |
| 15. m bunyegiyā, | “if I make love to you, you will surely like us” |
| iga- alaikiya | |
| 16. ìtanwa | “to have sex” |

In this contemporary time, virginity has gone into extinction. Sexual morality is just for the people that do not belong or do not know what time is it. Most people find it difficult/frown at the mentioning of this Igbo expression *ilanwanyi/nwoke*; instead, they will prefer to use the above slang or any other coded words to express themselves. In example (13), *pīaoku* literally means to flog fire. In example (14), *im̄akwaemee* means to know how to do something, but the expression is unfinished. In example (15), *ibeokwe* means to cut the leave of a particular tree Igbo people normally feed the goats and sheep with. In example (16), *ofe* is soup and *ga-at̄onataut̄o* means will definitely be sweet. In example (17), *bunyege* means to give you and *ga-alaiki* means to like it. In example (18), *ita* means to chew. Of all the variations of expressing sexual performance, the only expression that is somehow related to its literal meaning is slang example number (14), however, it is contextual in the sense that the meaning cannot be understood without knowing the context of its occurrence. In all, the slang expressions gear toward sexual satisfaction.

5.3. Slang variations for short of words

17. in'oluofuma "dumb founded"
18. ibeluebelu "short of words"

In example (19), *n'oluofuma* means to sit well. In example (20), *belu ebelu* means to sit at the edge. However, in the above slang expressions, they mean to be short of words or dumbfounded. These slang expressions are used when something unusual happens. For instance, if one goes to an occasion graced by wealthy men from all walks of life, normally there are often fleet of cars with escorts and they usually spray money like a priest sprays holy water. You find the narrator using the following slang expression, *nwanne, o buruna i biara, i n' oruofumamaobu I belebelu*.

5.4. Slang variations for money

19. udaegebndins̄o "money"
20. roba "money"
21. ike "money"

In examples (21), (22), and (23), we can see that all the slang expressions in use mean money. However, their literal meanings vary; *udaegebndins̄o* means gun powered often used during burials, also known as *mkponala*. *Roba* is an Igonized English word rubber, while *ike* means power.

5.5. Slang variation for smoking

22. chawaa isi "to smoke"
23. ise ife "to smoke"
24. iba ofia "to smoke"
25. ikwanye weavon "to smoke"

In examples 23, 24, 25, and 26, *chawaa isi* literally means to shine head, *ise ife* means to draw, *iba ofia* means to enter the bush, while *ikwanye weavon* means to fix weavon. However, in the above slang expressions, they all mean to smoke cigarettes, Indian hemp, weed, marijuana, and cocaine.

6. Birth of new slang expressions

When we talk about the birth of a new language, we talk about pidgin. This happens when a group of people from different language backgrounds are trying to find a common ground for communication. However, in the case of slang, its birth has to do with the drive of something that is in vogue, a code for a group, or just a means of spicing up communication, which is often seen in the lyrics of musicians; for instance, in the following examples.

6.1. Slang expressions of acts during sex

26. anyuanyu "to release sperm"
27. agba mmili "to be wet during sex"

The above slang originated from one of the Igbo Nigerian songs "Doings by Flavor." These slang expressions are new in the community and culled from the aforementioned song. The community now uses them during communication when they want to talk about the act of sex between the opposite sexes. In examples 23 and 24, *anyu* means to excrete waste matter from the body, while *agba mmili* means something to be watery or to spray water. He used these slang expressions to spice up his song as well as to avoid the use of the regular Igbo expression, which is *o dighi mma n'akwa*. Some other slang expressions are new in the community; for instance, in examples 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22. Initially, the slang expressions for a beautiful lady/woman are *tomato Jos*, *nwa chara acha*, and *asa nwa*, among others. So slang expressions for sex are *ikpon̄tu*, *i pīaoku*, *ibeokwe*, and so on. Slang expressions for money are not also left out, which include *okpogho*, *ego igwe*, *taquine*, and *chaa*, among others.

6.2. Slang expressions for a wealthy man

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|------------------------------------|--|
| 28. menskwusinnukwuike | “they are very rich” |
| 29. mensna – emena bundle | “the rich spray money in bundles” |
| 30. nnaa, mensdonyeiru
I ga-ama | “you can recognize rich men when they enter” |
| 31. odogwu | “a rich man” |

In slang expressions 25, 26, and 27, the concept *mens* means wealthy men/guys. This concept means men, however, it is addressed as mens. In addition, it is one of the new slang expressions in the community. Initially, slang expressions for rich men are *igbuozu*, *gbutoo*, and *I no maa*, among others. Finally, other slang expressions are related to wealth, but not captioned under any of the above, however, they are new in the community.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 32. doings get level” | “wealth has levels” |
| 33. imakwakaanyişi kwado | “dear, do know how prepared we are” |
| 34. ndendena – ede | “things are happening” |
| 35. ipiawaaazu | “intimidation via wealth” |
| 36. fabialukaizuogwu | “they came in in grand style” |
| 37. na – awaawa | “to go” |
| 38. ekeluolu eke | “no one is jack of all trade” |

7. Death of some slang expressions

Slang is known to be a choice of vocabulary by a speaker(s) during an informal or casual conversation. Therefore, it is prone to constant change, and this change leads to the death of some of them. The following are some of the slang expressions that are no longer in use in the community or are now used by people of insignificant numbers:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. kpokom | “money” |
| 2. igbu ozu | “to be rich/to make it big” |
| 3. owu ite | “poverty/lack of money” |
| 4. onyeokuku | “spendthrift” |
| 5. ezi | “men to a promiscuous lady” |
| 6. doo | “runaway” |
| 7. onye oro | “one who engages in extramarital affairs” |
| 8. umu nwa | “thieves” |
| 9. i naghị ajo njo | “A sexually liberal woman” |
| 10. o chara acha | “she is beautiful” |
| 11. ife aka | “To die” onyeefiogo |
| 12. i no n’ofe | “you belong to a revered group”
I no mma |
| 13. mpotoli | “enjoyment” |
| 14. okpunnabuenyi | “condom” |

In the above slang expressions, we assume that they are dead because we hardly hear people use them. Some of them are still in existence, but their meanings have changed. In the following examples, for instance, example (40), *kpokom*, which means money has been replaced with the slang expressions *nkū* and *udaegbendinso*. Initially, a one-time poor man or an average man all of a sudden became very rich, people would say, *O gbugo ozu*, which means he/she is now rich or has made it big, but lately, the slang has been replaced with *mens*, *odogwu*, *ogandioga*, and *I buteike* seen in example (41). The slang expression *owu ite*, which means poverty or lack of money, is another slang expression that has long gone from the community; instead, what is in vogue now is *onyetirieti* or *tikpolutikpo* and *sapa* seen in example (42). *Onyeokuku* in example (43), which means someone who spends irresponsibly, has also been overtaken by *o na-amanku/o na-agboiheewuna-eli*. In example (44), the slang expression *ezi*, which is often used by men to promiscuous ladies, has also gone into extinction. However, the contemporary slang expressions used lately are *umuaka highway* and/or *nwaomaosishi* or *onyenkukpoli*. Sometimes, *nwaoma osisi* can also mean a beautiful girl/lady. In example (45), *doo*, which means to run away, has also been taken by *Iimbombo* or *nalie*. The slang expressions *onyeoro* in example (46), which means one who engages in extramarital affairs, and *i naghị ajo njo* (47), which means a sexually liberal woman, are of related meaning, only that the latter is usually for a lady/girl, but lately, the populace use *nwaomaosishi* which can as well represent a beautiful lady or the slang *onyenkukpori*. In example (48), the slang expression *umunwa* that once represented thieves now represent girls/ladies. Sometimes, girls can also be called *umunnunu*. In example (49), the slang expression *o charaacha*, which was used to describe someone that is beautiful, is no long in existence instead the use of the following slang expressions, *nwatabogodimmirionunu*, *nwatanwereakara*, *nwatakwuoto*, *nwatana-apuoku*, and *nwatakwin’oku*, among others. The slang expression *ife aka* in example (50), which means to die, has been also replaced with the slang expression *efiogo*. In example (51), the slang expression *i non’ofe*, which means you belong to a revered group, has been replaced with the slang expression *i nomma*. *mpotoli* in example (52), which means enjoyment, has been replaced with *nkukpoli*. The former slang expression *okpunabuenyi* in example (53), which means condom, has also been substituted with *ncheanwu*.

8. Summary and conclusion

As change is inevitable in the life of a man, so too it is with language. Therefore, this study examined the variation, birth, and death of some slang expressions used within the Onitsha environment. Slang is an informal way of communication, however, there are cases where some of them after a long

while in use are introduced into the standard aspect of the language. As a result of the informal use of slang expressions, the above-mentioned factors under study do occur. For instance, the advent of most of the slang expressions are generated from celebrities like actors/actresses in their movies, comedians and musicians in their songs. When these slang expressions are introduced newly, which is known to be their birth, the already existing ones will be used alongside the old ones. After sometimes depending on the number of people who are using it, as well as the level of people, the slang expression either dies or lives on. But before the death of the slang expression for those who will die, there will be variations of two or more slang expressions gearing toward the meaning. This is visible in the examples 1–26. Then examples 27–38 portray some of the new slang expressions circulating within the Onitsha environment. Some of these slang expressions are generated from some of the Igbo songs of the artist, Flavor like *Doings get level*, *I makwakaanyisikwado*, *ndendena-edede*, and *fabialukaizuogu*, among others. Furthermore, Holmes' (1) view on slang expressions, which states that current slang is the linguistic prerogative of young people and is generally odd in the mouth of an older person, does not hold water in the Onitsha environment because the use of slang expressions spread across all ages. Finally, there are other slang expressions that exist in the Onitsha environment that are in the form of code-switch, code-mixing, and other languages that are not Igbo.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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