

## SOCIO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF SLANG EXPRESSIONS IN ABAGANA, ACHALLA AND UGA STREETS IN FEGGE, ONITSHA, ANAMBRA STATE

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### **Abstract**

Slang expressions have generally been regarded over the years as the language of the “never-do-well” in society, especially among youths and adolescents, due to environmental influences and the harmful substances some of them consume. Yet, slang has gained wide acceptance and demonstrates significant communicative value among speakers, both in conversation and social interaction. Slang expressions in Onitsha Metropolis are not left out of this discussion. In recent times, the use of slang in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria, has increased significantly, especially for communication and socio-economic interaction among traders, touts, and young scholars. This paper presents a descriptive analysis of slang expressions used in selected streets in Fegge, Onitsha, with the aim of determining and measuring their communicative impact. In line with this objective, slang expressions commonly used in Abagana Street, Achalla Street, and Uga Street were identified and analyzed. The slang expressions popular in these streets have contributed to improving the linguistic competence of their users. This study therefore examines the relevance of slang to effective communication. To achieve this, several slang forms from the selected areas were collected and analyzed. These locations were chosen because slang expressions are actively used by the people who reside and transact there. It was found that these expressions have been widely accepted for their functional roles in society. Furthermore, the study advocates that these slang expressions used in the selected areas should be recognized and accepted by both the literate and business classes for their potential contribution to socio-economic development in the environment.

**Keywords:** Socio-Semantic, Slang Expressions, Language, Communication, Onitsha

### **Introduction**

Language is the special way human beings communicate with one another. Language contains sounds, words, and rules (grammar) that allow us to express ideas, share feelings, ask questions, give commands, and create relationships. Without language, there would be no organized way to pass knowledge, culture, or history from one generation to another. Ofoegbu (2012) defines language as “the human system of communication. It is a means by which humans alone communicate. Nweke (2021) posits that as human beings, we communicate our ideas using language. Life has no meaning without language. Ofoegbu (2012), building on his earlier works, defines language as a system of communication for humans alone.

Ofoegbu (2012) explains that language is man and man is language. This definition centers on the function of language that communication is inseparable with human. Ofoegbu (2022) sees language as the human system of communication which expands continuously as new experiences are recorded by people who speak the language. In a later collaboration, Nweke (2024) says communication involves the practical skills of listening and expressing thoughts. Again, Nweke and Okeke (2023) submit that, in both writing and speech, language is structured to communicate meaning for specific purposes. Ofoegbu and Udoe (2011) posit that humans use language to convey emotions and feelings that are reflected in their everyday linguistic practices. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Usar (2018) repeat and expand this definition, emphasizing that language is not only a system of communication but also a fundamental tool for expressing human experiences. The emphasis across these views highlights the exclusivity of language to humans and its indispensability in social life. Indeed, language remains a vital component of human social existence.

Ofoegbu and Okoli (2022) describe “language as a means human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, desires etc. through complex vocal or written symbols”. This showcases the effective nature of language. It states its function not just for interaction but also for expressions. Ofoegbu (2021) posits that the human language is very unique because it has its own structure and its own system of organizing its component units into meaningful patterns. This simply means that there are rules governing the organization of sentences in a language. Ofoegbu and Okey-Kalu (2021) describe language as “a means which human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, desires, etc., through complex vocal or written symbols.” This highlights the symbolic nature of language, showing that it functions not just for interaction but also for the expression of inner states, emotions, and symbolic representations. Ofoegbu and Ishima (2024) reaffirm earlier

views, calling language “the human system of communication ... man and man is language ... man uses language for his everyday interaction.” However, they extend the definition by situating

Nweke (2024) opines that Language is an important tool in the society and thus, in its multifunctional ways, plays crucial roles in human life. It is fundamentally a communicative tool characterised by taking systematically into account the speaker’s and hearer’s side, and the communicative needs of the speaker and of the given language community. That is, it involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding. Also in Ofoegbu (2024) “language is man and man is language”. Life has no meaning without language. Nweke (2024) emphasizes that there is recognition of a relationship between language and society that has existed from the very beginning.

Again Ofoegbu (2025) posits that Language is a system and this means that it is an organised human behaviour built on inherent structures and that language is purely a human attribute which, serves primarily as a means of communication. Nweke and Okeke (2025) articulate that language, in its multifunctional nature, enables individuals to participate in communicative acts with others; to assume roles and express or understand feelings, attitudes, and judgments; and to relate what is said or written to the real world as well as to other linguistic events. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Okoli (2024) emphasize that humans use language to communicate their individual thoughts, inner feelings, and personal psychological experiences, and this is evident in the present study.

Ofoegbu (2022) defines Semantics as the study and analysis of meaning and the meaning of a word is the idea a word conveys in the heart or mind of the speaker or hearer. Again Ofoegbu and Okoli (2018) assert that semantics deals with how meaning is encoded in language, especially in words and how semantic relations or creativity are realized in communication. Ofoegbu (2011) says that some words have peculiarity of usage and have meaning other than its logical or grammatical one. Ofoegbu and Usar (2017), demonstrate how words derive their meanings and how they are structured around socio-semantic choices that are carefully selected to achieve meaning in language use.

Slang is informal language that can be regional or develop from the individual, groups, communities and subculture. It can take the form of a single word, phrase clauses and sentences. According to Crystal (2008) A slang is an informal, and non-standard words, phrases (lexical innovations) which tend to originate in subculture within society. Crystal viewed a colloquial departure from standard usage. It is often imaginative, vivid and indefinites in its construction.

Recently Slang has become more accepted in the society than before. It could add meaning to existing words, thereby adding quality to the lexicon of any given language. One of the features of slang is that it is intelligible to people found in a particular group. The literate class and most communicative compent “Freshman” find it difficult to understand the language use in Onitsha city due to the fact that slang gives interpretation from the messages been constructed. Mosadioluwa (2023) opines that it won’t go by without slang users creating and incorporating words or phrases to ascertain their language use. Yet only small number of those uncommon words have found their way into popular culture in the nation.

Slang has a unique, genetically very heterogeneous layer of vocabulary and phraseology as well as stylistically colored emotional, evaluative and expressive quality which deviates literacy conventions and is employed in everyday speech (Sali yeva 2018). This is to say that slang expression has ecstatic values and communicative qualities to the users.

Lawal (2022) states that some of these buzzwords originated in the political sphere but others have their origin in comedy, music, cinema, the poverty line and romantic dramas among others sources. While the pidgin arena is the source of the majority of these colloquialisms.

This paper considers communicative and language pattern in popular slangs in Onitsha metropolis. It identifies the slang expressions used in the streets of Onitsha and determine their communication purpose and relevance.

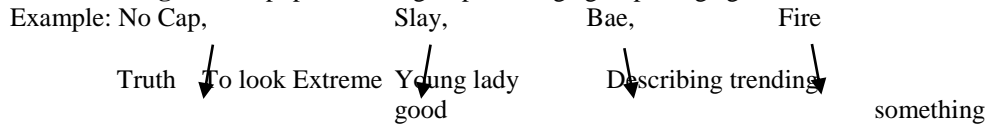
### **Literature Review**

Ofoegbu (2022) ideas are mainly on morpho-semantic analysis, his view goes with mainstream linguistics. "Semantics is the study of meaning in language, particularly how words, morpheme and expressions convey meaning in his morpho-semantic works, he explains how meaning comes through processes of word- formation, compounding. Slang is a fascinating aspect of language that often got over looked informal setting understanding slang is crucial for truly mastering a language and communicating effectively in real world situations (Adeyins 2017).

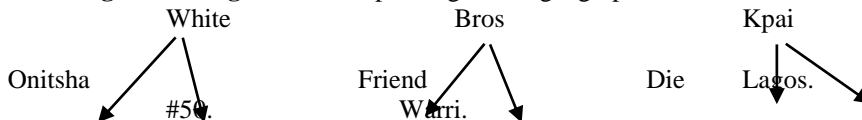
Slang refers to informal words, phrases, and expressions that are commonly used in everyday conversation but may not be considered appropriate in formal contexts. It involves rapidly changing within various social groups reflecting cultural nuances, trends and attitudes. Slang often emerges from specific communities, such as teenagers, subcultures, or regional groups, and can include words borrowed from other languages or created through word play (Eme C. A. (2016)).

**Types of Slang**

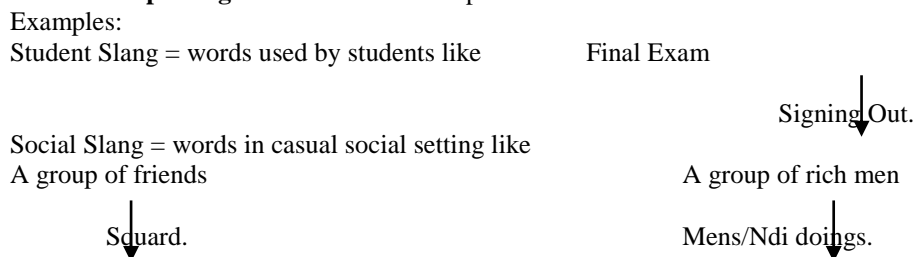
1. **General Slang:** This is popular among a specific age group or age grade, like Gen Z.



2. **Regional Slang:** It varies depending on the geographical location such as:



3. **Social/Group Slang:** This is used within specific communities or context.



**Effects of Slang in Language**

- A. **Cultural Fluency:** Slang provides insights into societal norms, values and trends. It allows learners to connect with native speakers on deeper level.
- B. **Authentic Communication:** Slang adds authenticity to language learning by exposing learners to the languages as it is spoken naturally. It helps to bridge the gap between informal instruction and real word communication.
- C. **Keep pace with language evolution:** Language is dynamic, and slang reflects ongoing linguistic trends. Learning slang helps speakers stay informed about evolving language usage, enabling them to adapt to changing communication styles.

Recognizing the value of slang while ensuring proficiency in standard language form for effective communication across diverse contexts integrating slang into language education can enhance learner’s cultural competence and communicative skills, but it should be accompanied by guidance on usage and context to maximize its benefits.

**Method of Data Collection**

To gain access on how these slang expressions were used in the streets of Fegge in Onitsha, Abagana street, Achalla street and Uga street were visited. Slang expressions were heard in these areas and properly recorded and it was also noted that these slang expressions play a vital role in their different levels of communication. Others pieces of information were collected through one-on-one interaction. The informants were not aware of the recordings and the interactions. This facility and enhance the validity of data collected.

**Theoretical Framework**

Referential theory has it that a word’s or expressions meaning is the real-world object or concept it refers to. When applied to slang, this theory suggests that the slang terms meaning is tied to the concrete or abstract thing it signifies, for examples, the word 'Ndi nku,' aka ewu' and 'ndi akaodo' originated from Igbo Language modified with slang usages which they refer to.

S/N	Word	Real-word Object
1	Ndi nku	People of firewood. (Nku burns in fire) Suggesting excess power of money
2	Aka ewu	Hand of goat (foolishness, inferior and minor) Suggesting inferior things.
3	Nid akaodo	People of pestle (a dangerous weapon) Suggesting those people are dangerous.

However, referential theory has limitations, as it struggles to account for slang that refers to abstract ideas, concept, or even nonexistent things like 'ote', 'Bechaline', 'tido', 'nwi now nwi', etc.

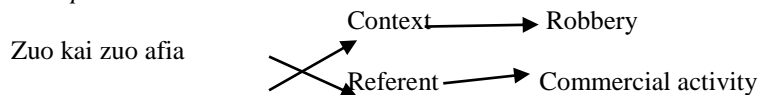
### Applying referential theory to slang:

- i. **Focus on Denotation:** For concrete slang, the referential theory can explain meaning by identifying the object or person the slang term denotes. Example: Kpo – Sound of gunshot.
- ii. **The Ogden and Richards Triangle:** This model illustrates the process, showing the relationship between a symbol (the word) the thought / Referenced the (the idea in mind) and the referent (the object in the world). Examples:

S/N	Word	Idea in Mind	The object to the world
1	Owu ite	Poverty	He or she needs financial help
2	Ike Pentecost	Extremely rich	Philanthropist
3	Pilot	A driver	A good road user

### Limitations of Referential Theory to Slang

- i. **Abstract Concepts:** Slang often refers to abstract ideas, emotions, or states of affairs that lack a concrete referent.  
*Example:* 'Ote', 'Inye iruefi', 'tido.'
- ii. **Fictional and Non-existent Referents:** Some words, especially in certain cultural contexts refers to thing that do not actually exist such as fictional characters.  
*Examples:* 'Alobam', 'Just Kpaa', 'Gmale'.
- iii. **Context Dependent Meaning:** The meaning of slang is often highly dependent on context, and a simple one to one relationship between a word and its referent doesn't capture this nuance.  
*Examples:*



From the illustration there is confusion between the context and the referent.

#### A. Slang expression popularly used in Abagana street Fegge Onitsha as follows:

Slang Expressions	Ordinary Meaning	Slang Meaning	Slang Usage
Nwanne gba flesh.	Run flesh.	To remove all your valuable and hand it over to a criminal or arm rubber.	Gba flesh ozugbo.
Ikwapu Ikwata.	Move in and evacuate or park out.	Stability or no shaking.	By ikwapu ikwata one move.
Zoo kai zuo afia.	Hide we want to sell goods.	Indicating danger or intending robbery.	Bia nwa zoo kai zuo afia here.
Gmale.	E-mail address.	Gender with male and female attributes or features. A lesbian	Abum ezigbote G-male di sharp.
Nwi nwo nwi.	A sound.	Security or government officials approaching.	Mpa wao maka nwi nwo nwi.
Kpo	A sound of gun shot.	A sign of danger or disagreement or something of no use.	Zoba onwegi maka kpo OR English gbagi kpo.
Nwegi na okompi ita aja.	Own you in okompi you will eat sand.	If I get you in a lonely place you are gone.	Makachi nwegi na okmpi ita aja.
Just kpaa.	Just weave.	Remain calm.	Nnao just kpaa.
Ana ewepu mmadu ana etinye mmadu	Discharge someone and replace with another person.	Life threatening word.	Maka na ane ewepu mmadu ana etinye mmadu na ugbo.
Piam.	Flog me.	Give me something	Piam okwe kam tido.

#### B. Slang Expression used in Achalla street Fegge, Onitsha

These slangs expression are used by men, women, teenagers and children. Some of the expression were recorded as follows:

Slang Expressions	Ordinary Meaning	Slang Meaning	Slang usage
Gbachaa aru	Run body.	Give a tip to somebody .	Gbachaa m aru nnaoo
O suo.	It stabs.	Business just clicked or money in abundance.	Osu go nu.

Inye iru efi.	To give cow's face.	To show contempt to a buyer especially those who prices his goods or product very low.	Pia ya eru efi
Ote.	_____	Original product	Afia bugo di ote.
Ike Pentecost.	Power of Pentecost	Extremely rich or wealthy.	Odugwu bu ike Pentecost
Arachaa aka.	Leak your hands.	Good living	Ejim owaa aracha aka
Aka ewu.	Hand of goat.	Fake product.	Igwe a bu aka ewu nwanne.
Ndi nku.	People of firewood	Rich people	Nnekwa ndi nku.
Bechaline/ na ebe ebe	Crying	Cute, good looking	Nwa bugodi bechaline.
Owu ite	Thread of pot	Poverty,	Owuite jim like mad.

### C. Slang expression in UGA street, Fegge, Onitsha (terminal points)

Below is slang expression mostly used in Uga street Fegge, Onitsha Onitsha:

Slang Expressions	Ordinary Meaning	Slang Meaning	Slang Usage
Gbatiya	Stretch it	Drive.	Gbatiya ozugbo
Owa	_____	Vehicle in good condition.	Bia kais kpa owa
Gwura gwura	No Meaning	A vehicle in poor condition	Bia bupu gwura gwura .
Mangala.	Dried fish.	Transportation of corpse from city to home town.	Bia gba mangala.
Pilot .	Someone that flies aeroplane.	A driver.	Pilot carry go.
Tido.	_____	To go.	Bia kai tido.
Owa ekopugo.	Owa has remove.	The vehicle has failed break.	Chaa na uzo na owa ekopugo.
Alobam.	_____	My friend	Alobam gbatiay.a
Ndi akaodo.	People of pestle.	Anti-tout squad.	Choo way gi maka ndi akaodo.

### Findings

It was shown that the slang expressions are used in selected streets of Fegge in Onitsha are of different context of usages. This is line with Crystal (2019) that slang is lexical innovative which originate in subculture within the society. I am convinced that slang expression used in Abagana street, Achalla street and Uga street in Fegge, Onitsha will go a long way in the enrichment of communicative competence.

This paper also reveals that some of these slang expressions in Abagana street, Achalla street, and Uga street in Fegge Onitsha have moved to other popular area in Onitsha metropolis where many of them are now used as ordinary words of the speech community.

Moreover, some of the words like "Gwura Gwura" (A vehicle with poor condition) in Isha dialect Esan South of Edo State is used as a slang expression with meaning modification in Uga street around terminal points in Fegge. In summary, observation, recording, interactions and conversations gave rise to this work. Their slang expression usage suggested these slang expressions has a socio-semantic effect among the users.

### Conclusion

Practically, slang expressions are socio-linguistic features found in every speech community. Just as change is inevitable in human life, so it is with language. Therefore, this paper examines slang expressions in selected streets of Fegge, Onitsha, where such expressions are popularly used. Holmes (2015) observes that slang is primarily a linguistic feature of young people and is generally unusual in the speech of older individuals. Furthermore, other slang expressions that exist in the Onitsha environment often arise from code-mixing and code-switching, which, in turn, enhance communicative effectiveness among speakers.

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