

Communicative and Stylistic Utilization of New Yorùbá Idioms among Students of Higher Institutions

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Abstract

New idioms and idiomatic expressions are unique, and contemporaneous stock expressions constitute communicative clogs in Yorùbá literary and routine communication due to their semantic complexity and deviant nature. Existing studies on them abound in the works of Olátéjù (2005) and (2016), Àkànmú (2014) and (2015) but little or nothing has been done on the use of this phenomenon by students of higher institutions. This paper investigates issues expressed with these idioms and strategies adopted for using them. Mukarovsky's theory of Standard Language is adopted for this paper based on its potentiality and ability to explain nonstandard nature of these idioms as well as explaining 'differentia specifica' between the language of everyday conversation and literary language. Lagos State University Ojó and Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education Ijànikin were purposively selected for having many users of new idioms among the students where eight new idioms were retrieved from the two institutions. They are: 'gúnsẹ̀ lóbe' (stab the work/job), àgbékò (brassier), láìwòwé (without looking at the book), kò sí lóri fún un (he does not have it in his head), ó gbóná ó yeruku (it is hot and dusty), gbéégún (robed in masquerade dress), kílú tempà (cool temperament), ebo (sacrifice). Data were subjected to stylistic analysis. In all of these, an academic issue was expressed and was contextualized in absenteeism, carry-over/references, brilliance, dullard, examination malpractice, temperament, and merriment. Only the metaphorisation linguistic strategy was employed, and was differentially derived from nominalizations, composition, loan words, and phonaesthetic coinages. These idioms reflect the dynamism and modernity-constrained stylistic choices in Yorùbá discourses.

Keywords: new idioms, higher institutions, stylistics, Yorùbá discourses, linguistic strategy

Introduction

This paper is another dogged attempt to project and re-emphasize in a clear term, the pervasiveness, implication and currency of the new Yorùbá idioms among the students of higher institutions in Nigeria and as an aspect of language that is fast becoming a universal phenomenon. The paper is equally motivated based on the fact that the new idioms and idiomatic expressions are an instrument in the

hands of its users who have serious desires to move with time and be part of the latest development in every area of human experiences. However, in the course of participating in the latest or new development in science and technology, as well as telecommunication faced with certain linguistic constraints imposed on them by their language, especially difficulty in getting the appropriate lexical items and terms to express fresh ideas. However, to get out of this linguistic imbroglio, the option left for them according to Babalola (1972), Awóbùlúyì (1992), Àkànmú 2014 and Olátéjú (2005) lies in the use of the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions derived by coining new words and by ascribing new meanings to the existing words or idioms. This paper is preoccupied, essentially, with the effort of analyzing and interpreting new idioms and idiomatic expressions used among the students of higher institutions in Lagos State, in order to determine their stylistic and communicative relevance.

Method of Data Collection

Data for this paper was collected from the Lagos State University, Ojò and Adéníran Ògúnsányà College of Education, Otò/Ìjanikin as institutions whose students exemplified sufficient use of new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions. Some of the new idioms selected for critical analysis include ‘*gúnṣe lóbe*’ (stab the work), ‘*àgbékó*’ (brassier), ‘*láiwòwé*’ (without looking or reading from the book), ‘*kò sí lóri fún un*’ (he does not have it in his head), ‘*ó gbóná ó yeruku*’ (it is hot and dusty), ‘*gbéégún*’ (robed in masquerade dress), ‘*kúlú tempà*’ (cool temperament), ‘*ẹbo*’ (sacrifice). The only academic issue was expressed by all the aforementioned and was contextualized in ‘absenteeism’, ‘carry over’, ‘brilliance’, ‘dullard’, ‘examination malpractice’, ‘temperament’ and ‘merriment’. The new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions were analysed specifically at the stylistic level.

New Yorùbá Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions

New Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions are another unique and veritable aspect of language use formulated in reaction to the demands of the moment emanating as an outcome of the linguistic challenges faced by the users which, consequently, necessitates creation of new idioms and idiomatic expressions. These contemporaneous stock expressions are so unique and vital because of their complex and deviant nature which invariably necessitates overlapping tendencies of their semantic derivations and unique differences from the automatized or traditional idioms. These phenomena are the replication of metaphor, euphemism, and the established traditional Yoruba idioms in terms of structure and meaning. New Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions are differentially used in spoken and written form at the lexical and phrasal levels. The lexical ones are referred to as ‘*one-word idioms*’ while the phrasal or sentential ones which are more than one-word expression are called ‘*idiomatic expressions*.’ New idioms and idiomatic expressions which are full of interest and vitality are created through coining and by investing old words and expressions with new meanings. They are new, fresh, strange and ingenious. They are familiar and, their origin is not cloudy to the users who are dexterous and dazzled at their appearance in any form and context.

Existing Works on New Yorùbá Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions

There are a significant number of works on the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions by few scholars. These works include Qlátéjú (2005), and (2016), Àkànmú (2014), and (2015) respectively. The two scholars are of the views that idioms are terms referring to as words or expressions whose meanings cannot be determined or predicted from the individual elements in them. These scholars examined idioms and idiomatic expressions from the linguistic and literary point of view using Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) and Mukarovsky's theory of Standard Language respectively. In their works, stylistic and some socio-linguistic variables were also adopted to bring out the aesthetic and communicative potential of the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions.

Theory of Standard Language

Jan Mukarousky formulated the theory of Standard Language in 1970, and it is considered suitable for this paper because of its ability to explain the '*differentia specifica*' between the language of everyday conversation and literary language. It is also a good model to explain and interpret the deviant and inventive nature of the new idioms and idiomatic expressions.

Standard Language vs. Literary Language

According to Mukarovsky (1970), Standard Language (SL) is the language of everyday usage, and its major preoccupation is to facilitate understanding between the speaker and the audience in such a way that effective communication is ensured. It is unexamined, uncritical and does not draw attention to itself or open up provocative questions to the nature of its coding. It is used in schools, markets, during political campaigns and preaching. In Standard Language, communication must conform to the entire linguistic norms. Concepts crucial to the Standard Language are 'backgrounding' and 'automatization' illustrated by the hypothetical example below:

Lâi fàkókò sòfò
Mo *jeun síkùn* mi

Without wasting time
I eat into my stomach

It is clear from the example above, that no single element needs further clarification in regards meaning because of the standard form of the expression. However, Literary Language (LL) is the language of literature or poetic language. It has special nature which makes it remarkably different from Standard Language (SL), it cannot be referred to as the brand of a standard because it has all the forms of given language such as syntax and others. It is a stylistic variation of Standard Language as observed by (Qlátéjú, 1998). In Literary Language, violation of the norms of the Standard Language

is its major preoccupation and, that is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language. Concepts embedded in the Literary Language are ‘foregrounding,’ ‘de-automatization’ also illustrated in the example below:

Láì fàkókò òfò
Mo jeun sókè/mo jeun sáṗò

Without wasting time
 I eat into the upper stomach/I
 eat into the pocket

In contrary to the example presented under Standard Language, here, ‘*jeun síkùn*’ has been foregrounded to have ‘*jeun sókè*’ (eat into the upper stomach) and ‘*jeun sáṗò*’ (eat into the pocket). In other words, ‘*jeun sókè*’ and ‘*jeun sáṗò*’ are the artistic forms of ‘*jeun síkùn*’ (eat into the stomach). There is no expression like ‘*jeun sókè*’ and ‘*jeun sáṗò*’, but there is ‘*jeun síkùn*’ in the language. ‘*jeun síkùn*’ is automatized and serves as the background from which ‘*jeun sáṗò*’ and ‘*jeun sókè*’ are derived to create a foregrounding effect. ‘*jeun sókè*’ and ‘*jeun sáṗò*’ are made new and thus become elements of surprise. New idioms of this nature are created for entertainment and communicative effects. While ‘*jeun síkùn*’ means ‘eat into the stomach’ ‘*jeun sáṗò*’ and ‘*jeun sókè*’ mean ‘collect bribe’ and ‘move on/go on’, respectively. Foregrounding is also applied in this paper by using new Yorùbá idioms whose formation and structure are deviant from the standard norms primarily for stylistic effects.

Linguistic Strategies for Formation of New Yorùbá Idioms

Word formation is a universal linguistic concept that is concerned with the study of the patterns on which a language forms a new lexical item (Bamgbose 1975). In this paper, the linguistic strategies involved in the formation of new Yoruba idioms include the following:

(i) Nominalization

Nominalization is a linguistic strategy known for generating new words in virtually all languages. It is a derivation of a noun phrase from an underlying clause or sentence; or the process of forming a noun from other word classes (Ruvet, 1973:172). Below is an example of new idioms created from the linguistic process of nominalization:

Idiom	Formation	Literal/meaning	Idiomatic meaning
Olóṣẹkóṣẹ	Oní+oṣẹ+kí+oṣẹ	Olóṣẹkóṣẹ	Olóríburúkú
	Pre+n+neg.mark+n Owner-of-bad-soap	Possessor of bad soap	(a misfortune person)

(ii) Compounding

According to Ògúnḃòwálé (1967), Rowland (1969) and Owólabí (1976), compounding is a very productive word-formation strategy which entails the combination of two or more independent words to form another word with an entirely different meaning. In compounding, two separate words are joined together to produce a single word. New Yorùbá idioms formed through compounding are mostly in the form of verb and noun structure – (vb+N) or (N₁+N₂) structure. For instance:

Vb + N

Idiom	Formation V + N	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
Gbéégún	Gbé + eégún Carry + masquerade	Gbéégún Carry masquerade	Jí ìwé wò nínú ìdánwò
Idiom	Formation N ₁ + N ₂	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
Àtíkè Qla	Àtíkè + Qlà Powder + Wealth	Powder of wealth	(a powdery substance) for an illicit drug like cocaine

See Àkànmú (2014) and (2015) for further study and examples of linguistic strategies involved in the formation of new Yorùbá idioms.

Analysis of New Yorùbá Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions used among Students of the two selected Institutions

As discussed earlier, the new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions from the two selected institutions are critically analysed at the stylistic level in this section. For instance, in Lagos State University, a new Yoruba idiom ‘*gúnṣẹ̀ lóḃẹ̀*’ was used by a student who in an attempt to inform his friend about his intention not to come for one of the general courses:

‘Mo máa *gúnṣẹ̀ yẹn lóḃẹ̀* ni
I will stab that class with knife

In the above, the use of the new idiom ‘*gúnṣẹ̀ lóḃẹ̀*’ (stab the work) is contrived through personification; it is not possible to stab what one cannot see or hold. However, the expression can be interpreted connotatively to mean ‘absent from the class’. In another instance, to be specific, during the student union election that brought the incumbent president of Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education into power, the president was applauded for his excellent campaign speech which was full of scholarly quotations

from different authors. At the end of his speech, the feedback from the fellow students was the use of the new Yoruba idioms:

- Láìwòwèé
(Without looking or reading from the book)

The expression above which literally means (without looking or reading from the book) is used to eulogize high intellect displayed by the incumbent president of the student union in the delivery of his speech, especially for quoting some great portions from scholarly works without reading from the book. It is believed that only an exceptionally brilliant person can do it. The new idiom 'láìwòwé' can be interpreted to mean *a brilliant person* or *someone who is intellectually or cerebrally endowed*. So when an argument ensued between two students of Lagos State University, one of the students remarked thus:

- Báwo lo ɛ ń sòrò bí ẹnì tí kò sí lórí fún bá yí?
(Why are you talking as if it is not in the head for you?)

In the above, the new idiom 'kò sí lórí fún' (it is not in the head for/it is not in his head) is used derogatorily to insult and abuse the addressee as someone who does not have common sense, intellect or brains, since it is believed that all these reside in human's head and whenever someone acts or talks stupidly in a manner comparable to the above, it means the person is *not intelligent, brilliant* or *lacks etiquette*. The issue of brilliance is also expressed in another instance where some students of Adéníran Ògúnsànyà were commending teaching ability of one of their lecturers:

- ...lecturer yẹn gbóná ó yeruku
(...the lecturer is hot and dusty)

The above is a new idiom also linked to 'brilliance'. The idea behind it can be likened to the process of putting something on fire; food becomes good and perfect if is well cooked while iron comes out solid, strong and perfect for whatever shape the blacksmith prefers. Here, the new idiom 'ó gbóná ó yeruku' (he is hot and dusty) is used for the lecturer probably because of the rigorous study he must have subjected himself to every day and night (putting something on fire for long) which consequently yielded into the acquisition of great knowledge displayed during lecture. The new idiom of this nature can be interpreted to mean *'an erudite person', 'a brilliant person', 'intellectually sound person' and 'cerebrally endowed person'*.

There is also an instance of the use of the idiom 'kúlú tempà' which is popular not only among the two selected institutions but virtually all students of higher learning in the southwest, Nigeria. 'Kúlú tempà' an expression that is loaned from the English expression *'cool your temperament.'* It is used by students to douse tension, chaos, and noise in a rowdy and chaotic situation on the campus, especially when student

leaders are addressing their colleagues who are angry over a certain issue. In order to get students' attention, student leaders always employ the use of the new idiom '*kúlú tempà*' (cool temperament). The moment they hear the expression, they will all maintain perfect silence. The expression '*kúlú tempa*' can be interpreted to mean '*come down*' '*calm down*' '*cool down your temperament*' '*be calm and listen attentively*'.

It should be stressed here also, that students generally have different expressions for examination malpractice. For instance, in Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education, whenever a student is caught with some written information related to the examination of the day in a short piece of paper, this action is captured with a new Yorùbá idiom:

'Ó gbéégún'
(He carried masquerade)

This new idiom is culturally inclined because it is assumed that the person who puts on the masquerade's cloth is veiled and cannot be seen or known by anyone except those in the Egúngún's cult. This scenario is likened to a student who is caught with some exhibits in the examination hall thinking that he is equally veiled and that nobody sees him, forgetting that nothing is hiding under the heaven and that the invigilators he thinks are not there when he is preparing the exhibits aware of such based on their experiences and can easily fish out the perpetrator(s) in a manner comparable to the non-initiates of the Egúngún's cult who may also identify a person wearing the masquerade's cloth especially when they are familiar with the person's movement, gesture, and body language. By and large, the new idiom '*gbéégún*' which is formed through compounding of verb '*gbé*' (carry or lift) and Noun '*eégún*' (masquerade) can be interpreted to mean '*cheating in the examination*' or '*examination malpractice*' respectively.

As said earlier, sometimes new idioms can be existing words in the language with new meanings. A typical example of this is the use of '*Àgbékó*' (Brassiere) by the students of Lagos State University for something different from its original meaning in the context like:

Àgbékó méjì ní wọn gbé fún mi ní last semester
(I was given two brassieres in the last semester)

Looking at the above, it looks so ambiguous, especially when the speaker is a male student because only the female can use a brassiere. However, '*Àgbékó*' which is formed through nominalization *À-gbé-kó* (that-which-is carried-and-hung) can be interpreted to mean '*carry over*' or '*reference*'. '*Reference*' is called '*carry over*' by the students. The word '*carry*' from '*carry over*' can be translated in Yorùbá as '*gbé*' while '*over*' is translated as '*hang*'. In view of the aforementioned, the above context can be interpreted as '*I have two carry over in the last semester*'.

There is also an instance of the use of the new idiom that is common among students of higher learning in Lagos State and by extension, south west Nigeria, where a culturally based expression is given new meaning. The use of 'ẹbọ' (sacrifice) is credited to a student of Adéníran Ògúnsànyà College of Education, Ìjànikin when informing one of his friend about a party organized by one of them thus:

'Ebo wà ní hostel àwọn
Bíólá lójó Saturday

Ebo (sacrifice) is a Yorùbá word for propitiation, sacrifice or atonement. In its original sense, 'ẹbọ' is used when someone is instructed by Ifá oracle to appease to god(s) with certain sacrificial items in order to overcome his or her misfortune. The metaphoric manner by which 'ẹbọ' is used in the above connotes 'party', 'ceremony' and 'merriment' where assorted foods and drinks are served. The similarity of purpose here is that some of the items used for atonement in the cultural sense are sometimes assorted and sumptuous, especially to some careless, funny and hungry members of the society who may not have eaten eggs, fish, chickens, palm oil and maize pudding items put on the 'ẹbọ' for years.

Inference

In this paper, it is discovered that new idioms and idiomatic expressions were used in the routine discourse of students of higher learning for both stylistic and communicative effects. New idioms in this paper were found to be used to express purely academic issues and were differentially contextualized in brilliance, dullard, examination malpractice, and absenteeism, dousing tension, carry over/reference and students' party respectively. The paper also revealed the various linguistic strategies involved in the creation of new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions used by the students of higher institutions in Lagos State. These include neologism through prefixation and nominalization, borrowing and compounding, some of which were conveyed through metaphorisation. The use of new idioms and idiomatic expressions analysed in this paper has further proved that the Yorùbá language has the mechanism to cope with any communicative exigencies.

Conclusion

This paper has established concrete examples of the communicative and stylistic potentials of new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions used among students of higher learning in Lagos State and by extension, south west Nigeria. It has equally shown that the Yorùbá language has the necessary mechanism, like every other language of the world, to cope with the linguistic constraints necessitated by a global communicative economy. The coping strategies were discovered to be located in the word-formation capacity of the Yorùbá language in which the new idioms and idiomatic expressions constitute a vital and critical part of the strategies. Finally, students, scholars in Yorùbá

studies and by extension, African indigenous languages are encouraged to tap into the far-reaching implications and effects of this quintessential phenomenon called ‘new Yorùbá idioms and idiomatic expressions’ and make good use of it, especially in their respective disciplines and in a global communicative economy.

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