

POPULAR CULTURE: TRENDING SLANGS AMONG STUDENT YOUTHS IN LAGOS STATE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Nigerian youths have constantly evolved new ideas, ideologies and conventions specifically with the emergence of globalisation and digitalisation. Exposure to media objects and technology are undeniably potent influences and sources of popular culture among youths. The emergence of popular culture derived from music, film, internet, social media, entertainment, language, cuisine, politics and fashion have evolved slangs which are broadly accepted as norm within the youth's age range. These slangs have peculiar traits and features which make them trend for a season before they outlive their importance as a coded means of communication among them. These aspects of popular culture among Nigerian youths are the focus of this survey. The method involved the use of on line questionnaire as the major instrument of this research to reach wider respondents in tertiary institutions in Lagos state. The sample was taken from a population between the ages of 16-30 to be further broken into age ranges. It examined the concept of popular slangs, emergence of slangs from single words, syllables, phrases already in use or newly created words and acceptability among youths. It equally searched for sources, acceptability and contextual meanings of slangs among student youths. In addition, it classified, categorized and deciphered slangs with emphasis on some features which make them outstanding. The study made recommendations and suggestions for inclusion of some of these slangs in lexicons and dictionary as accepted modes of communication nationally and internationally.

Key Words: Popular Culture, Slangs, Media, Youths, Social Media

Introduction

The word 'popular culture' cannot be defined outside the context of culture because both are intrinsically interwoven. So in order to have an understanding of popular culture, the take-off point

must be from culture. Culture has generally been defined as a set of practices that represents the total way of life of a people inherent in their cuisine, dresses, language, beliefs, values, norms, music, dance, ideologies and so on. However, diverse opinions exist in terms of attempting a holistic definition of culture. Variegated postulations have been geared towards culture “based on languages; economy, religion, policies, social institutions, class values, status, attitudes, manners, customs, material items and education which subsequently influences managerial values,” (Kanungo, 2006). To Lebron (2013; p.127), culture is summed up as “the unique characteristic of a social group, the values and norms shared by its members set it apart from other social groups and is influenced by conscious, beliefs”. There is no right or wrong culture. No culture is superior to another, they are only different and these differences are culturally rooted and entrenched biologically, genetically, psychologically and sociologically. Despite areas of culture differences in language diversity, ethics and recruiting, Lebron (2013; p.129) identifies globalisation as bringing “a borderless world dominated by stateless corporations where many different cultures, values and practices are accepted.

Apparently, technology is main propellant for globalisation. As the world shrinks and become smaller in size due to technological advances, the need for effective communication is also on the increase. To overcome political, religious and geographical hurdles of cross cultural integration in a modern world, language plays a vital role. Language is an element of culture that is socially transmitted. Language is ‘the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression’ (Mahadu & Jafari, 2012, p.230).

Communication here refers to the medium adopted and employed in ways that reflect their value and what they do. In a nutshell language shapes culture because language and culture are two sides of the same coin. Language allows for communication, expression of ideas, feelings, thoughts, behaviours etc. Language find expressions in various media like art, poems, artefacts, music, dance and so on.

It is from all these expressive modes of language that slang is derived. Slang relies heavily on borrowing from other languages. Like all languages, slang is “patterned and rule governed, the unauthorized nature of these changes to grammatical constructions successfully ruffles the feathers of grammarians, language prescriptivists and other self-nominated guardians of linguistics standards” (Roth Gordon, 2020; P.5). Slang formation sometimes relies on words already in existence but used in a new context or entirely new words formed from lexicons and altered to

have meanings that would be coded and limited to a group of people. An outstanding attribute of slangs is their propensity to circulate rapidly. Speakers quickly “create inter textual chains and social connections through the linguistics processes of decontextualisation and recontextualisation” (Roth Gordon, Haris & Zamera 2022; P.6). These words and phrases spread quickly than regular words and are termed to go ‘viral’ (a term used in social media), meaning having a wide spread. There is a bonding effect in slangs where users share face to face interactions within a small circle. It has further extended to online communities, sharing identities by using specific words and phrased to strategically align with people they have never met. Slangs have also become popular in promotion of goods of services through social media campaigns seeking to acquire large audience.

Meaning of Popular Culture

Popular culture or “Pop culture” is a general term used to encapsulate traditions and material culture of a people. These will include music, arts, fashion, songs, dance, media that serve as sources of existence consumed by the majority of a people in a particular society. The term was coined in 19th century following the movement of rural dwellers to urban areas in search of livelihood, being “a culture that is left over of the high culture” (Storey, 2012, p.6). This marked the beginning of industrial revolution which created the middle class. Immigrants from suburbs created their own culture in contrast to “official culture” to share with co-workers. Gradually popular culture began to merge with media culture, consumer culture, mass culture etc created for mass consumption specifically in marketing promotion and sales of goods after the end of World War II. In present day popular culture is a niche created by users to embrace a variety of what people like or what is popular to them. Today, it embraces a variety of social media forms which has given it a twist in meaning and context.

There is a wide range of definitions and meanings of popular culture. “Popular culture is the culture which is left over after we have decided what is high culture.. Popular culture is the culture which originates from the people. It is the culture of the people for the people” (Storey, 2001, p.7). He further posits popular culture in six (6) conceptual meanings summed up as follows.

- i) A widely favoured or well liked culture by many people without reservations
- ii) Class distinction from what is identified as ‘high culture’ and ‘pop culture’ which is considered inferior

- iii) Commercialization of objects produced for mass consumption devoid of discrimination but used as a tool for suppression of oppression of the masses.
- iv) Negotiated to partially impose by dominant classes and partly resisted by subordinate classes who decide what to accept or reject.
- v) Folk culture that is general or created from a people rather than imposed on them.
- vi) Fusion of authenticity and commercialization in post-modern world where users may alter, embrace or reject manufactured content and create their own.

All of Storey's conceptual definitions of pop culture keeps evolving and adapting to new context and complexities. A major outstanding feature however that remains consistent in the meanings proffered by Storey and the evolvement of popular culture is that, popular culture is simply what people like, what they want and what they adopt as norm within their own space. By implication popular culture thrives on mass appeal and acceptance, now highly influenced by mass media. The ever influencing presence of mass media brought a new twist to popular culture. "Cultural products that constitute popular culture can be found in numerous genres and artefacts like popular music, films, TV programmes, video games, clothes, modes of transport, prints, cyber culture, internet memes, advertising, brand names and symbols, leisure, foods, entertainment, sports, slangs, verbal repartee and fads" (Ibe, 2019, p. 185) Popular culture has transited beyond being a set of practices, beliefs and object broadly shared in a social system to a reference print in building and strengthening ties, interactions and communication among people who share the same interests. To buttress, "Popular culture is determined by the interactions between people in their everyday activities: styles of dress, the use of slang, greeting rituals and the foods that people eat" (Delaney, 2015 in Ibe, 2019, p. 182).

Meaning of Slangs

The term "slang" reflects the dynamics of the language and is therefore obscure and ambiguous just as much as its origin. Important to note is the fact that slangs emerge from language. "Particular languages are associated historically with particular cultures; the language provide the key to the associated cultures... the language themselves cannot be fully understood otherwise than in the context of the cultures in which they are inextricably embedded" (Mahadi and Jafari, 2012, p. 234). Burdova (2009, p.8) expound that:

Slang words and expressions are characterized by a high degree of informality, familiarity, vocabulary richness. They are realized by a specific group of people whose members are connected with some particular link, such as territory (Californian), age (teenagers), subculture (students), and mainly occur in the spoken form of the language.” (Burdova, 2009, p.8).

With time new words and new meaning emerge for self-expression in creative ways. Slangs are informal words used for communication and understood among a group of people who can decode the contextual meaning of the word or phrase in use. Slangs could be abusive, friendly, funny or even secretive especially among its users. Over time slangs have evolved rapidly from many sources. Among these sources, the internet has been accorded the highest influential media for slangs. Exposure to the internet is a major wave of technology for inspiring new slangs, and making them popular and widely known within a matter of days. Slang is referred to as the ‘vocabulary of low or disreputable people’ (blog.gymglish.com) particularly of low education, economic and social status. Francis Grose, a lexicographer was the first to recognize slang in 1785. It was a type of language used by scoundrels to confuse a person or group of people.

According to Fasola (2012, p.4) “slang is included in non-standard language as the sort of words and expressions which anyone might use in conversation or a letter, but which is not used in a speech or formal essay”. However, some slangs have crept in to language in form of abbreviations and acronyms and has become acceptable in oral or written language. Slangs have short lifespan, so it soon goes of extinction and becomes old fashioned. Slang allows for creative change of language that will eventually fade after brief popularity but creates a unique means of communication. Use of slang by young adults has increased tremendously in the internet age. This can be attributed to increasing exposure to pop music, writing, dance, entertainment news and fashion and social media. Youths use slangs for communication more to establish consent to trending cultures they are exposed to in the society. It has formed a kind of acceptability and identity within their kind to attain a height of conformity with trending slangs among their peers.

Objectives of the Study

This research sets out to interrogate the use of slangs as popular culture among youths in Lagos State tertiary institution. This will cover Colleges of Education, and Universities. It will examine

how conversant youths in these tertiary institutions are with some slangs used, their sources and how they make meanings out of them.

Research Questions

Three research questions were raised for this study. Specifically, the developed questions are:

RQ1: Do youths in tertiary institutions use slangs in their conversations?

RQ2: Are student youths aware of the sources of the used slangs?

RQ3: Do youths understand the contextual meaning of slangs that they use?

Scope of the Study

The research is delimited to the student youths in Lagos state tertiary institutions, that is, Lagos State University, (LASU) and Lagos State University of Education, (LASUED). It focuses on the uses of slangs among these groups of student youths. The reason for this is that the selected slangs of these periods appeared to be more embedded with cultural practices that help the students youths communicate effectively, which this study aimed at examining.

Theoretical Framework

This study espouses Cultural Theory as its theoretical framework. The theory is found as a branch within the disciplines of Anthropology and Semiotics, but it is often used in the media communication research. The study promotes the examination of ways in which people use symbols and signs to create meanings and make sense of the world around them. In this regard, people's perceptions are shaped by their cultural values and beliefs. Equally, the formations of group identities based on the cultural theories maintain that slang and other forms of vernacular language can be used to create and reinforce group identities. These within the context of this study have been identified as discussed concerning the use of slangs by an identified group of students in tertiary institutions as a group of people in consonance within their cultural context. Thus, this theory becomes relevant for this study.

Methodology

The study adopted mixed method, that is, quantitative and qualitative research approaches that use the following instruments: Questionnaire and Content analysis. The study aims at gathering information and generating data on Popular Culture: Trending Slangs among Student Youths in Lagos State Tertiary Institution.

Population of Study

The one-hundred and sixty-two (162) student youths selected at the time of this investigation form the population for this study. This cuts within the age ranges of the 16 -30 years student youths.

Instrument and Instrumentation

The instruments for data collection include Questionnaire and Content Analysis designed to elicit data from the research respondents. Respondents chose from a range of options and also provided short answers to research questions raised. An online questionnaire was developed as instrument for the research. The instrument was in two sections. The first section addresses personal information of respondents such as, age, type of gender and tertiary institution, while the second section consists of ten items meant to provide answers to research questions raised for the research. Questionnaires were designed on Google form and distributed electronically on students WhatsApp platforms through a link. Respondents were required to choose from options and also provide short answers in writing. Also, the content of the music extracted from the selected music were analysed based on the opinions of the respondents about them.

Result of Findings

A total of one hundred and sixty two respondents from Universities, that is, LASU and LASUED in Lagos State, took part in the research. A further break down from bio-data section reveals that 66 males, 94 females and 2 undecided took part in the research. This suggests that female engage in the use of slangs more than male student youths. Also, the age range of respondents reveals as follow:

16-20 = 62

21-25 = 80

26- 30 = 20

Youths that fall within the age range of 21-25 were more actively involved in the study than other age classification.

RQ1: Do youths in tertiary institutions use slangs in their conversations?

In answering this question, the under listed items provided answers to this query:

- i.) Are you conversant with popular slangs trending among youths?

In consonance with the question, 75.9% of the student youths respondents are conversant with trending slangs among youths; 9.9% are not; while 14.2% are not sure.

ii.) Do you use slangs during conversations with older generations?

As a follow up to the question, 70.4% do not use slangs when conversing with older generations, 15.4% do, while 14, 2% do not.

iii.) Do you use slangs at home with your siblings and friends?

In response to the 71% do use slangs at home with siblings and friends while 29% do not

RQ2: Are youths aware of the sources of slangs?

i.) Where do you normally pick your slangs from?

A variety of responses show that sources of slangs are many but majorities are linked to social media. “Contemporary popular culture’s manifestations are not confined to a single medium; rather, they traverse and interconnect a wide range of media selections” (Ibe, 2019, p. 188). These sources include music, friends, streets, mass media (Television and radio), social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, YouTube Snapchat, etc.

RQ3: Do youths understand the contextual meaning of slangs?

i.) Do your fellow youths understand the context in which you use slangs?

85.2% understand the meanings of slangs used, 9.9% are uncertain while 4.9% do not.

ii.) Which of the mentioned slangs do you use regularly?

From the list of slangs given by respondents, some slangs do cut across and are commonly in use. Such as, *Omoo*, as in, *wahala wahala*, you go collect, *e choke*, *o por*, *kop or ke*, *ma fo*, *japa*, *sapa*, *chop breakfast*, *dey play*, *guy* and others. This shows that these are currently trending slangs among youths going by their popularity.

iii.) Do you feel comfortable using slangs during conversations?

74.1% are comfortable while 25.9% are not. This is an indication that majority of youths are at ease using slangs in conversations.

iv.) Do you wish older generation converse in slangs with you

44 (29%) respondents do not mind using slangs with their older generation, 71 (43.8%) do not wish to and 47 (27.2%) are indifferent. Answer provided reveal that majority of respondents do not wish to communicate in slangs with their parents. Reasons for this may not be farfetched given generational gap and hidden meanings in slangs among users which will expose some of their acts to their parents.

Discussion of Findings

Result of findings attest to the fact that students are actively involved in the use of slangs in LASU and LASUED, the Lagos State tertiary institutions. Also, they were able to identify main sources of slangs to be social media (facebook, youtube, Instagram, twitter, Tik tok, etc). The sources of their slangs include their friends, street, music, television, movies, comedy skits, novels and games. Outstanding among the sources of slang is music. Musicians especially of ‘Pop’ music have contributed immensely to the emergence of much slang. These care derived from the lyrics of their songs which popular among youths. This is apart from other popular cultures that come from them such as language and dance steps. A list of some popular musicians with a sample each of slangs that emanated from their music are listed from 2013-2023.

Table 1: Showing the Musicians, identified Slang, Album and year of productions.

No.	Musician	Slang	Album	Year
1.	Olamide	Duro Soke	Baddest guy ever liveth	2013
2.	Olamide	Goons Mi	Street OT	2014
3.	Ycee	Jagaban	Condo	2015
4.	Kizz Daniel	Wo ju o	New Era	2016
5.	2Face Idibia	No Shaking	Grass 2 Grace	2017
6.	Idowest & Davido	Ji ma sun	Ji ma sun (Single)	2018
7.	Naira Marley	Ma fo	Ma fo	2019
8.	Zlatan	Gbe body E	Zanku	2019
9.	Rexxie & Mohbad	Ko Po Ke	Ko po Ke	2020
10.	Davido	E Choke	E choke	2021
11.	Burna Boy	Chop Breakfast	Last last	2022
12.	Shallipopi	Evian Dey	Elom musk	2023

These words became generally accepted and remain in vogue as long as their music is trending. Some of these slangs go into oblivion as soon as these music fades or gains less popularity and new ones come up. This accounts for the short life span of some slangs while some may live longer. There is certainly no end in view to more emerging slangs as long as musicians keep producing slangs. This is a major source and exponent of popular culture imbibed mostly by youths in their daily interactions.

Some slangs were also coined from words or phrases used by individuals, important personalities while some cannot be traced to an author but they became popular. A few examples are,

Soro Soke: Became popular during the END SARS protest in Lagos when Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwoolu addressed the protesters, but was rudely interrupted with a shout of “*Soro Soke Were*”. It was later shortened to “*Soro Soke*” meaning “Speak Up” This later became an **#tag** throughout the protest and beyond.

Lori Iro: This was drawn from the words of an early morning preacher, meaning, “It’s all a lie” in one of the streets in Lagos which became popular in 2022. He painted a picture of many scenarios built on falsehood.

Let the poor breathe: This phrase was taken from one of the speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, made during one of campaigns. It was an appeal he made on behalf of the masses that they deserve a right to live well. The emphasis and stress laid on these words “th” by the current Nigeria President, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu was a point of attraction that made it popular.

Knack: This word is originally a pidgin word that means to hit but has now been widely accepted and used to mean to “get laid” and is commonly used among youths.

Idan: This is a Yoruba word that literarily means to do something magical, captivating or outstanding. Recently, this refers to a happening individual who is smart, street wise and can see opportunities and catch in on them to make extra cash or do something extra ordinary. This slang became popular in 2023 during the Hilda Baci cooking feat to make Guinness world record.

Aza: This is a slang that refers to account details. The origin of this word is not known but it is accepted among youths especially as it carries the promise of sending money to bank account.

Furthermore, respondents were able to list some of these slangs and their contextual meanings. These are samples of slangs gathered from the research presented in a tabular form.

Table 2: Showing the Selected Slangs, Sources, and Contextual meanings.

S/N	SLANGS	SOURCES	CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS
1.	O Por Gan (OPG)	Pop music	It's really good
2.	Ko Por Ke (KPK)	Pop music	Undisputedly good
3.	Scope	Street & lexicon	Lie or deceive
4.	O ti zeh	Pop music	It's okay, good or happening
5.	E choke	Social media	Surprise
6.	Tuale	Street	Respectful greeting
7.	Ma fo	Pop music	Don't doubt it
8.	Sapa	Social media	Poor or hungry
9.	Japa	Social media	Relocate
10.	You dey whine me?	Comedy skit on social media	Are you deceiving me
11.	Soro Soke	Streets during END SARS protest	Not interested, speak up
12.	O ma loud gan	Social media	It will be outstanding
13.	Gbe body e	Pop music	Move
14.	Serve/chop breakfast	Social media	Jilt a lover
15.	O ma Lit gan	Social media	Very good or outstanding
16.	Iyanu ma sele	Movie	Hopeful
17.	Wahala Wahala	Pop music	Trouble
18.	Wotowoto	Social media	Unpleasant
19.	Figo	Street (area boys)	#500
20.	Ko lo far	Street	It's not much
21.	Konji	Social media	Sexual desire
22.	How far	Street	Greeting
23.	We mueve	Social media	Get over something
24.	On point	Social media	Exactly
25.	Wetin dey sup	Social media	How are you

26.	Who dey breathe	Pop music	Oppression/ threat
27.	Nothing dey happen	Street	Assured
28.	Omo Iya mi	Street	My friend
29.	Show	Street	Let's meet
30.	My gee	Street	My friend
31.	Aw far	Street	What's happening
32.	Laba	Social media	Sleep
33.	Abeg shift	Social media	Leave me
34.	E shock you	Social media	Are you surprised
35.	O lule	Politics	Failure
36.	Vawulence	Social media	Trouble/ violence
37.	Aje	Social media	Swearing
38.	You wan collect?	Social media	A Threat
39.	Bugga	Music	Show off
40.	Gbeera	Music	Move or take action
41.	Wake up, wake up	Music	Be at alert
42.	Emi lokan	Politics	It's my turn
43.	E sope	Social media	Pretending not to hear
44.	Woo se	Social media	Consider it
45.	I will woose you	Pidgin (Street)	I will beat you
46.	Dey play	Street	Not serious
47.	Dry	Social media	Having no effect/ not interesting
48.	Sharp sharp	Social media	Fast
49.	Goobe	Pop music	Trouble
50.	As in	Street	To emphasize

The findings of the research reveals that youths derive their slangs from pop music, social media, mass media, phrases in Yoruba language, people's mistakes, pidgin and so on. It also establishes the fact that some slangs have the same meaning and can be used interchangeably

Classification of Slangs

Slangs that indicate chaos or trouble

i) Wotowoto (ii) Vawulence (iii) Wahala Wahala (iv) Gobe

Slangs for greeting

i) How far? (ii) What's up? (iii) Wetin dey sup? (iv) Tuale.

Slangs for something new or pleasant

i) O ti zeh (ii) O por gan (OPG) (iii) Lit (iv) Ko po ke (KPK)

Slangs for surprise

i) E choke (ii) E shock you

Slangs for lies or deceit

i) Se you dey whine me ni? (ii) You dey scope me?

Slangs for intimidation

i) Who dey breathe? (ii) I go woose you (iii) Soro soke (iv) You wan collect? Iv. Who dey flex?

Slangs for Confidence and assurance

i) Iyanu ma sele (ii) Nothing dey happen (iii) On G (On Point)

Slangs for friendship

i) Omo Iya mi (ii) My gee (iii) Guy (iv) Omoo

Features of slangs used by youths

Some outstanding features were identified in the slangs in use by youths and will be discussed.

Use of indigenous language in slangs

A major discovery from this research shows that some of these slangs are coined out of Yoruba language or a combination of Yoruba and English words or phrases. This may be attributed to ethnic affiliation, location and people in Lagos as a Yoruba speaking state. One of the factors that

may be responsible for the popular use of Yoruba in slangs may not be far from the fact that these institutions in Lagos state are domiciled in Yoruba land. Obviously the society where youths stay determines the language of slangs in use. This is coupled with the fact that musicians now mix indigenous languages in their music which is a major source of popular culture. Examples of slangs in Yoruba language include

i) O lule (ii) Gbeera (iii) Soro soke (iv) Omo Iya mi (v) Emi lokan (vi) Woo se e

New words

Some slangs are totally coined from lexicons thereby making them new words used within a context, such as

i) Sapa (poor, lack or want)

ii) Figo (#500)

iii) Tuale (respectful greeting)

iv) O ti zeh (state of being good)

Use of Pidgin

It was also discovered that youths are vast with pidgin in slangs. This is more noticeable in slangs used as questions. For example

i) E shock you? (ii) Nothing dey shele (iii) You wan collect? (iv) You dey whine me ni?

v) Wetin dey sup?

Language mix

Some slangs that have a mix of Yoruba and English words such as

i) Ko lo far (ii) Gbe body e (iii) Dry, (iv) Lamba, (v). Lit

Single word slangs

i). Dry (ii). Lit (iii). Lamba, (iv). Tuale (v). Show (vi). Aje (vii). Scope (vii). Sapa, (ix). Yahoo

x). Konji

Conclusion

Every society has its own culture shared among different sub-groups distinctively. This one strand is the basis of this research which is an indicator that today's youths are progenitors of popular culture. For youths, popular culture is socially acquired knowledge that gives them a sense of belonging and identification among their peers. Most importantly, the intricate meanings of slang is synonymous to them and are not hidden from them. Adults who are outside their age range may find it difficult to understand or make meanings out of these slangs but this does not reduce from the fact that slangs have come to stay as long as generations of youths exist. Most youths prefer to communicate in slangs within their circle as a common and shared tradition. This is mainly because it encompasses a wide range of communication for their specific group; allowing a certain level of understanding for socially transmitted knowledge, conveyed, distributed and commonly interpreted. Social media have also played significant roles in making slangs popular among youths especially when it comes from celebrities, important personalities or even social media influencers. Slangs as popular culture is precise and possess peculiarities that dictate its popularity among end users within the scope of readily available words and expressions for bonding.

Recommendations

This study revealed that a lot of slangs emerge constantly as popular culture among youths. This is an area begging for positive exploration from grammarians, lexicographers and language scholars as a symbol of communication without bias of prejudices. There is need to embrace slangs as the language of youths and language of the "present" and acknowledge that it has come to stay instead of building walls of prejudices and apathy towards it.

It is high time a lexicon for this creativity and ingenuity among youths is developed for records. By so doing, future generations could make reference to them, recycle some slangs while creating new ones that would become relevant in their time. Some may even be finally accepted in larger circles giving it wider coverage and accepted as a mode of communication.

It is also very crucial that older generations who fall outside the scope of this study acquaint themselves with slangs and make attempts to learn and understand the contextual meanings of slangs. This could be a means to bridge generational gap, improve effective communication and enhance relationship with youths especially in tertiary institutions.

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