

**LANGUAGE CONTACT AND WORD FORMATION  
PROCESSES: THE CASE OF SLANG WORDS USED  
BY SOME NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES**

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**Abstract**

This paper sets out to provide a characterization of word formation processes used by some Nigerian undergraduates in generating slang words, both from the English Language and also from language contact between English and some Nigerian languages like Yoruba and Igbo. Plag's theory of analogy is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. The analysis of the slang words reveals some of the effects of language contact within a speech community. One of such effects of language contact is what the present writer calls lexical-mixing, which involves the combination of words and morphemes of two different languages to form new words. Such new lexical items help to throw some light on how the constitutive and regulative rules of word formation condition new lexis.

**1. Introduction**

Every language goes through changes, which are results of developments in the society that need to be integrated into the language. One way through which any language changes is by introducing slang words into the language. To this extent, the aim of this paper is to investigate and provide a characterization of the word-formation processes used by some Nigerian undergraduates in producing slang words, from a linguistic environment of language contact between Nigerian languages and the English Language.

This study focuses on the slang words used by the undergraduates of Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria. Lagos is a cosmopolitan city situated in the south-west of Nigeria, with Yoruba as its indigenous language. Invariably, Lagos State University (LASU) is a reflection of the cosmopolitan nature of the city of Lagos, because it comprises people from different ethnic origins, with different languages. However, Yoruba is the predominant indigenous language spoken in Lagos State University. This accounts for the dominant interaction between Yoruba and the English Language in the formation of slang words used in Lagos state university, as shown in the data for this study.

## 2. Theoretical Perspective

Word formation processes deal with the ways in which new words are constructed on the bases of existing words. Plag (2003: 37) notes that “sometimes new complex words are formed on the basis of a single (or very few) model words. For example, “cheeseburger” was coined on the basis of “hamburger”, and “air-sick” on the basis of “sea-sick”. The process by which these words came into being is called analogy, which can be modeled as a proportional relation between words. The essence of a proportional analogy is that the relation between two items is the same as the relation between two other corresponding items.” Plag (ibid: 38) further notes that “systematic structural restrictions emerge that are characteristic of derivational processes and which in a rule-based framework are an integral part of the rule.”

Yule (2010:53) points out that “we can very quickly understand a new word in our language (a neologism) and accept the use of different forms of that new word. This ability must derive in part from the fact that there is a lot of regularity in the word-formation processes in a language.” In strengthening his point, Yule (ibid: 53) notes that “when we look closely at the etymologies of less technical words, we soon discover that there are many different ways in which new words can enter the language....Rather than act as if the language is being debased, we might prefer to view the constant evolution of new words and new uses of old words as a reassuring sign of vitality and creativeness in the way a language is shaped by the needs of its users.” In this connection, Plag’s theory of analogy is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study.

### 3. On Slang Words:

Slang words are typically colloquial words used by speakers within particular groups to delineate their association. According to Leech and Svartvik (1981: 26), “Slang is language which is very familiar in style, and is usually restricted to the members of a particular social group, for example: “teenage slang”, “army slang”, “theatre slang”, etc. Slang is not usually understood by people outside a particular social group, and so has a value of showing the intimacy and solidarity of its members.”

Eble (1996:11) states that “slang is an ever changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or with a trend or fashion in society at large.” He (ibid: 12) stresses novelty and ephemeral nature as principal characteristics of slang.

Burdova (2009: 8) notes that “slang words and expressions are characterized by a high degree of informality, familiarity and 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.” She (ibid: 11) points out that “specific denominations, informality,

expressiveness and communicative function are common properties of the style of slang and correspond to a specific group of people highly conditioned by social situation.”

According to Prasad (2014: 169), “slang is used in different circumstances:

- By the people belonging to a certain social class or profession which discriminates them from other social classes or professional set up.
- By the people who are young in spirit or in years to create humour or joy.
- By some people to exercise wit and ingenuity to highlight their speech.
- Sometimes it is employed to make one’s language more arresting or sensational.
- In some cases, it is used to avoid clichés or to amuse some persons.
- Some people use it to show brevity, conciseness or to make eloquent speech.
- To lessen the bluntness of a refusal or rejection.
- To disperse or lessen the solemnity or pomposity of a conversation or piece of writing.
- On some occasions, it enables one to endure the inevitability of death or the crushing blow of madness.

Prasad (ibid: 169) also notes that slangs help in enriching the language. Winkler (2012: 260) however observes that “slang words are commonly acquired and lost as each generation makes its contribution to a language.”

#### **4. Word Formation Processes in Slang Words**

**4.1 Word Coinage:** Lexical or word coinage is a common word formation process used amongst Nigerian undergraduates to create slang words. Word coinage involves creation of new words. Yule (2010: 53) defines word coinage as “the invention of totally new terms.” The new words are usually created to meet the need of a situation in the course of interpersonal communication, such that they are used in informal discourse to enhance social intimacy. Coined words do not have dictionary meaning, rather, their meanings are determined by the inventors or they are mutually accepted by the users within the speech community in which the coinages are created. This is usually the case with slang words.

The slang words under consideration do not form part of the standard variety of the languages involved, particularly, because they are mainly a combination of words from two languages, usually English and the dominant indigenous language used in the speech community. The speech community being studied here is the Lagos State University, which is one of the universities in the cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria. The language of its immediate environment is Yoruba. The slang words used in this speech community are usually a combination of English and Yoruba, for example:

- 'Lepastic', 'Kobalize', 'Egbecious', 'Afeferity', 'Yekeable', etc;
- Or a combination of English and Pidgin, for example:  
'Oversabi', 'Belleful', 'Misyarn', etc;
- Or coined solely from English, for example:  
'Kegite', 'Effico', 'Condomize', 'Footwagen', 'Longleg', 'Scopeman', etc;
- Or sometimes coined solely from Yoruba, for example:  
'Aje-Pako', 'Fashi', etc.

The slang words reveal some of the effects of language contact within a speech community. One of such effects of language contact is what the present writer calls lexical-mixing, which involves the combination of words and morphemes of two different languages to form new words. This is shown in the case of slang words coined from the combination of English and Yoruba, for example, 'Orobostic', 'Fanimorous', 'Egbecious', etc. In these examples, it could be seen that the base words are from Yoruba while the suffixes are from English, for instance: 'Egbe' is a Yoruba base form, while '-cious' is an English suffix. The combination of 'Egbe' and '-cious' form 'Egbecious'. (See the Appendix for the meanings of the slang words).

Interestingly, the creation of the slang words involves other types of word formation processes such as affixation, compounding, blending, clipping or shortening, acronym, and reduplication.

**4.2 Affixation:** This is a major word formation device by which slang words are formed through the addition of morphemes (affixes), either before (prefix) or after the base words (suffix). See Lyons (1968), Robins (1971), Bolinger (1975), Tomori (1977), Bauer (1983), Matthews (1991), Katamba (1994), Plag (2003), Booij (2007), Yule (2010), Prasad (2014), etc. Affixes are morphemes which are also parts of words. Morphemes are the smallest, indivisible linguistic units of meaning or grammatical function. They restructure the word root, as well as extend the meaning of the core word. Prefixes and suffixes are the two common types of affixes and they are bound morphemes. Prefixes are added at the beginning of a root word or base word such that they bring a

change in the structure or meaning of the word. Some examples of prefixes from our collection of slang words are:

Prefix	Meaning	Examples	Meaning
Over -	'Too much'	Oversabi	Claiming to have knowledge of everything
Over-	'Beyond'	Oversylla	Going beyond the syllabus

Suffixes are added at the end of the word root or base morpheme to change both its form and meaning. Some examples of suffixes from our data are: '-less' in 'wuloless', '-ite' in 'LASUITE', 'JAMBITE', 'Kegite', 'Abegite', '-cious' in 'Opacious', etc. There are two kinds of suffixes, namely, derivational suffix and inflectional suffix.

Derivational suffix is a bound morpheme which usually changes the word class of the root word or base word to which it is attached. However, it should be noted that the lexical meanings of the base forms are unchanged. They are still preserved in the derived words. The following examples are cases of derivational suffixes from our collection:

MORPHEME	WORD CLASS	
DERIVATIONAL SUFFIX	BASE WORD	SLANG WORD
-ous	<u>Verb</u> Fanimora (Yoruba) (‘to attract’)	<u>Adjective</u> Fanimorous (Yoruba + English) (‘Attractive’)
-able	<u>Noun</u> Yeke (Yoruba) (‘Clear’) (‘Beauty’)	<u>Adjective</u> Yekeable (Yoruba + English) (‘Beautiful’)
-lize	<u>Verb</u> Koba (Yoruba) (implicate)	<u>Verb</u> Kobalize (Yoruba + English) (‘to implicate someone’), (‘to get someone into trouble’)
-rity	<u>Noun</u> Afeke (Yoruba) (‘Flamboyance’)	<u>Adjective</u> Afeferity (Yoruba + English) (‘being flamboyant’)
-ite	<u>Adjective</u> Stale (English) (long stay)	<u>Noun</u> Stalite (English + English) (‘a student above 100 Level’)
-tic	<u>Noun</u> Parapo (Yoruba) (‘Togetherness’)	<u>Adjective</u> Parapostic (Yoruba + English) (‘to come together for a purpose’)
-ee	<u>Verb</u> Arrange (English) (‘to organize’)	<u>Noun</u> Arrangee (English + English) (‘good at fixing things’)
-er	<u>Verb</u> Step (English) (‘Movement’)	<u>Noun</u> Stepper (English + English) (‘a good dancer’)

Majority of the slang words above are derived from adding English suffixes to Yoruba base words. Such combination result to what the present writer has already pointed out as lexical-mixing. The English suffixes are used to 'Englishnize' the Yoruba base forms such that the word formation process still abides by both the constitutive and regulative rules which condition word formation process in English, where the different suffixes determine the various word classes. For instance, suffixes like '-tion', '-ment', '-er', will invariably derive nouns from verbs, for example:

<b>Derivational Suffix</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Noun</b>
-tion	Inform	Information
-ment	Assign	Assignment
-er	Teach	Teacher

This shows that word coinage is not done haphazardly; rather, constitutive rules condition their creation. This conditioning applies in various manifestations to all the different types of word formation processes as would be discovered in the course of this paper.

An inflectional suffix, on the other hand, is a bound morpheme which is affixed to a base word to indicate such grammatical aspects as tense, number, gender and case. However, inflectional suffixes do not change the word class. The inflectional suffix evident in our data is '-s' which marks plurality (number) as found in the following examples:

LASUITE + -S = LASUITES (plural)  
 ('Lagos State University Students')

JAMBITE + -S = JAMBITES (plural) ('newly admitted students in Nigerian universities, through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board')

In the examples above, '-s' is the appropriate phonological plurality suffix variant for the base words. This is still in keeping with both the constitutive and regulative rules which condition word formation processes. Below are some other inflectional suffixes in our collection:

MORPHEME	WORD CLASS	
INFLECTIONAL SUFFIX	BASE WORD	SLANG WORD
-ite	<u>Noun</u> Keg (English) (‘Liquid Container’)	<u>Noun</u> Kegite (English + English) (‘palmwine drinkard’) (‘Kegite’ is used to refer to members of the Palmwine Drinkers’ Club in Nigerian Universities.)
-ian	<u>Noun</u> Arcade (English)	<u>Noun</u> Arcadian (English + English) (‘a student always found in the Students’ Arcade rather than in the classroom’)

**4.3 Compounding:** This is the process of forming compound words whereby one base form is added to another. See Katamba (1994), Plag (2003), Booij (2007). Thus, a compound word consists of two or more base forms. Some examples from our data are:

Long + Leg = Long leg (English + English)  
 Book + Worm = Bookworm (English + English)  
 Omo + Town = Omo-town (Yoruba + English)  
 Aje + Butter = Aje-butter (Yoruba + English)

The combination may be between words of the same class, for example:

Book (noun) + Worm (noun) = Bookworm (English + English)  
 Omo (noun) + Town (noun) = Omo-town (Yoruba + English)  
 Scope (noun) + Man (noun) = Scopeman (English + English)

In these examples, each of the base words belongs to the noun class. On the other hand, the combination may be between words from different classes, for example, ‘Longleg’, ‘Aje-butter’, ‘Sufferhead’, and ‘Old School’, as shown below:

Long (adjective) + Leg (noun) = Longleg (English + English)  
 Aje (noun) + Butter (noun) = Aje-butter (Yoruba + English)  
 Suffer (verb) + Head (noun) = Sufferhead (English + English)  
 Old (adjective) + School (noun) = Old School (English + English)

Compounding is a process that cuts across word classes.

**4.4 Blending:** This is a word formation process which involves bringing parts of two words together to form a completely new word. See Katamba (1994), Plag (2003), Yule (2010). The new word usually expresses a new concept. Blending can be achieved by taking only the beginning of one word and joining it to either the end or the beginning of the other word. An example from our data is:

‘Panasonic’ and ‘Sharp’ = ‘Panasharp’ (‘to be acute’, ‘a sharp or a smart person’)

**4.5 Clipping or Shortening:** Clipping is the word formation process which deals with the removal of one or more syllables from a word, leaving the shortened part to represent the whole. The shortening does not change the class or meaning of the word. The shortening or clipping may occur at the word initial or final, though it is most common at the final position. See Katamba (1994), Plag (2003), Yule (2010). Some examples from our data are:

Expo(se) = Expo (‘leakage of exam questions’)  
 Effic(ient) = Effic (‘a studious person’)  
 Acad(emic) = Acada (‘academics’)

All the cases of clipping in our data are done at the word final position. It is interesting to note that apart from ‘Expo’, the clipped forms are made to adapt to the Yoruba CVCV syllabic structure.

**4.6 Acronym:** This is a name-giving concept formed from the initial letters or alphabets of more than one word to form a new word. Acronyms are pronounced according to their spellings. See Katamba (1994), Plag (2003), Yule (2010). Some examples from our collection are:

NASA	→	Non-Academic Students’ Association
NFA	→	No Future Ambition
OYO	→	On Your Own
ITK	→	I Too Know

**4.7 Reduplication:** This word formation process deals with the compounding of two or more identical or slightly different words. Usually, the sound in one of the compound words is duplicated. Some examples from our data are: 'waka-waka', 'yahoo-yahoo', etc.

## 5. Conclusion

Majority of the slang words used amongst undergraduates in Lagos State University are derived by adding English suffixes to base words of the indigenous languages, which result to what the present writer calls lexical-mixing. Essentially, the analysis of the data shows that in the formation processes of the slang words, the undergraduates still abide by both the constitutive and regulative rules which condition word formation processes in the English language. Evidence of these word formation processes in the language use of the students shows creativity and dynamism. If this continues for a long period of time, some of these slang words may eventually find their way into the Yoruba/English dictionary for documentation and standardisation.

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**Notes**

SLANG WORDS	MEANING
Abegite	A LASU student who habitually sits under the tree
Acada	Academics
Afeferity	Being flamboyant
Aje-butter	A well fed person
Arcadian	A student always found in the Students' Arcade rather than in the classroom
Arrangee	Good at fixing things
Attachee	A person who tries to belong, a parasite
Basket-mouth	A gossip
Belleful	To be satisfied
Bookworm	A studious person
Carparkite	A student usually found at the car park on campus
Carry go	To continue
Chop up	To eat well, To add weight
Condomize	To use condom to protect against HIV/AIDS
Effico	A studious person
Egbecious	A sluggish person
Expo	Leakage of exam questions
Fanimorous	An attractive person
Fashi	Forget something, Keep afar off
Footwagen/Leggediz-Benz	Trekking or moving on foot.
ITK	'I Too Know' (those who always claim to know everything, being too forward)
JAMBITES	Newly admitted students into Nigerian universities, through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board.
Kegite	A member of the Palmwine Drinkers' Club
Kobalize	To get someone into trouble, to implicate someone

LASUITES	Lagos State University Students
Leftee	To be left handed
Lepacious/Lepastic	A slim stature
Longleg	Highly connected
Misyarn	To be loose in speech while talking
NASA	Non-Academic Students' Association
NFA	No Future Ambition
Old School	Archaic, Old fashioned
Omo-town	One who hardly stays at home
Opascious	To be both slim and tall in stature
Orobostic	Tendency to be fat
Oversabi	Claiming to have knowledge of everything
OYO	On Your Own
Panasharp	To be acute, a sharp or smart person
Parapolistic	To come together for a purpose.
Scopeman	A liar
Show face	To appear
Stalite	A Student above 100 level
Stepper	A good dancer
Waka about	One who roams about
Waka-waka	Globe trotter
Wowoscious /Wowostic	Ugly appearance
Wuloful	Useful
Wuloless	Useless
Yahoo-Yahoo	A fraudster
Yekable	Good looking,