

Lexico-Semantic Features of Cybercrime Slangs in Nigerian Hip-Hop Songs

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Abstract

This study examines aspects of lexico-semantic features of cybercrime slang in Nigerian Hip-hop music. It has been observed that contemporary Nigerian hip-hop songs are intertwined with perpetrators of cybercrime, otherwise known as Yahoo Boys. Apart from these songs being a medium of entertainment in their clubs and parties, these musicians also appropriate cybercrime language in their songs. Most prominent in these songs is cybercrime slang. Therefore, this study investigates the lexico-semantics of cybercrime slang in Nigerian hip-hop songs. Extracts were selected from eight cybercrime songs randomly selected for this study and lexico-semantic features of slang inherent in the songs were analyzed. The findings revealed that through the slang words, the musicians see nothing wrong in cybercrime as they glamorize both the perpetrator and the act itself.

Keywords: slang, cybercrime, lexico-semantics, hip-hop, songs

Introduction

Cybercrime, sometimes known as computer-oriented crime, is a type of crime in which a person, a group of individuals or an institution gets defrauded through a computer network. The security and financial well-being of a person, business, or nation may be threatened by cybercrime. Apart from financial cybercrimes, other types of cybercrimes exist. An example is cybercrime against women which Halder and Jaishankar (1994) define as "crimes targeted at women with a motive to intentionally harm the victim psychologically and physically, using modern telecommunication networks such as the internet and mobile phones". There is also cyber warfare, the term used to describe transnational cybercrimes that involve at least one nation-state and traverse international borders. International cybercrimes, such as financial theft, espionage, and other cross-border crimes, are committed by both state-sponsored and non-state actors.

The most frequent cybercrimes in Nigeria are computer-enabled financial

fraud crimes and cyber extortion. The perpetrators of this crime in Nigeria go by the name “Yahoo Boys” and the crime is referred to as “Yahoo-Yahoo”. Gordon (2006) defines computer fraud as any dishonest factual deception made to induce loss in another party. In this situation, fraud entails receiving an advantage by unlawful alteration. Employees frequently steal by modifying data before entry, entering false information, entering unauthorized instructions, or utilizing unauthorized processes. They may also steal output by manipulating, destroying, concealing, or stealing it, usually to hide unauthorized operations. Computer systems may also be used to aid other types of fraud, such as bank fraud, carding, identity theft, extortion, and theft of sensitive information. The loss of private information or financial information is a common consequence of several sorts of crime.

Cyber Crime and Contemporary Nigerian Hip-hop

Hip-hop music in Nigeria started between the late 1990s and the early 2000s. It became popular specifically in 1998 with the release of the song “Sakambo” by a group of talented artists called The Remedies (Babalola and Taiwo, 2019). Tayo (2017) mentions that “in the Nigerian music industry, yahoo boys reign supreme”. He notes that D’banj’s song “Mobolowowon”, which was released in 2004, was the first song with a cyber-fraud theme in hip-hop music. The song supposedly described how the singer escaped from the British police for being wanted for credit card scams in London. He goes further to say that Yahoo-Boys have floated music labels, and some are singers themselves. Insights from the above suggest that Yahoo-Boys and Nigerian pop music artists may not be two separate entities with clearly defined boundaries. Beyond the realm of social media, however, research has not fully established the connections between Yahoo-Boys and Nigerian Hip-hop music. In other words, apart from media speculations (Punch 2017), the ethics of Yahoo-Boys and their representation in music have only been discussed as gossip in most Nigerian chat room forums and some television channels. This study focuses on the relationship between Yahoo cybercrime and Nigerian Hip-hop music from the perspective of the lexico-semantics of Yahoo slang as used in Hip-hop songs.

Slangs

Slang is a specialized form of language variation that is unique to a particular social group. Users of slang often make use of what can be stylistically unintelligible to non-members of the group concerned (Maledo & Edhobo, 2023). Slang is an informal variety of language that has become a common means of communication among groups and sub-

groups in society (Ajayi, 2019). There are different scholarly views on the concept of slang. It is viewed by some scholars as a colloquial departure from standard usage. Just like pidgin, slang has no native speakers; it is viewed as a context language. Ellis (2002) defines slang as a variety of language used in certain contexts by which people express their sense of belonging to a particular group within the community which is not specific to any geographic location. Longe (2003) views slang as a form of idiolect used between close friends, especially of similar age, family membership, or social group. On the other hand, Ademola-Adeoye (2004) sees the concept of slang as a jargon of any class, always colloquial, short in life span language with words and usages not accepted for formal use. In the words of Oha (2010), slang is an informal, non-standard word and phrase, generally shorter lived than the expressions of non-standard, ordinary colloquial speech, and typically formed by creative, often witty, juxtapositions of words or images. From the following, it becomes obvious that slang is a deviation from formal or conventional usage. Daramola (2016) is of the view that slang is often associated with younger people, gangsters, streetism, and hooliganism. Perhaps, this view is what lures Yahoo Boys, who are mainly youth, to engage in the social group's use of slangy expressions.

Lexis and Semantics

Lexis, according to Jackson and Amvela (2007:65) is the "stock of words in a given language that is vocabulary or lexicon. It is referred to as a word exclusive to a particular language. Abioye and Ayoola (2014:45) define lexis as comprising certain phrases and idiomatic expressions that are larger linguistic stretches to traditional lexical items. Babatunde (2000:87) views lexicon as "the set of lexemes in a language as stored in the brain of proficient users including all relevant linguistic information (for each lexeme) required for the production and interpretation of lexeme". This implies that the words in a language are stored in the brains of those who speak or use the language. Thus, words are effective tools used in communication. No language exists without words. Therefore, we communicate with words and the existence of words in a language is what makes up a language.

Semantics, on the other hand, is a field of linguistics that studies the meaning of words and sentences in a language. Semantics is coined from the Greek verb 'semantikos' which means significant or to signify. It is a branch of linguistics that is very important in analyzing the meaning of words and expressions. David and Elder (2004:105) submit that "semantics is that part of linguistic description which deals with meaning. It is often divided into lexical semantics dealing with the meaning of

words and grammatical semantics, how morpheme meanings are combined by grammar to form the meaning of utterances”.

Empirical Review

A good number of studies have been carried out on cybercrime in connection to Nigerian hip-hop music. Suleman (2018) examines the ways Nigerian cyber fraudsters are represented in hip-hop music. The study clarifies the motivations behind the conduct of the Nigerian cybercriminals and draws attention to the idea that some musicians and Yahoo-Boys might be "birds of a feather" as it demonstrates the relationships between various singers and Yahoo-Boys. Oludayo (2019) examines how lyrical construction can enhance our understanding of the cultural context of cyber-criminality. The study shows the concern over the relationship between Nigeria's music industry and cybercrime. His intentional selection of three Nigerian hop-hop songs shows how their lyrical construction glamorizes cybercrime. The data selected for the study justifies cybercrime by constructing it as “a way out of suffering”, “a game” and “a work” with huge benefits rather than a crime. The study concludes that cybercrime glamorization in popular music is dysfunctional to the eradication of cyber-criminality and urges the anti-crime agencies to partner with the Nigerian music industry to deglamorize cybercrimes.

Oniwon and Salami (2020) focus on materialism and vulgar themes in Nigerian hip-hop music. They described the musical genre as a religion and Nigerian youths as its adherents. They aver that by the means of excessive display of ostentatious lifestyle, this genre of music has inserted into the psyche of the youths a false perception of life causing them to engage in frivolities and disallowing them from pursuing productive causes in life. Furthermore, Ishaya (2023) studies the use of slang and catchy phrases in the songs of Nigerian artist, Wizkid, from a pragmatic perspective. The paper analyses selected songs by Wizkid and provides tables that break down the background information, illocutionary acts, and contexts/competence of specific utterances in the songs. Parts of its findings are that vulgarity, obscenity, and offensive language characterize Wizkid's slang and catchy phrases.

Drawing from Labov’s sociolinguistic theory, Nweke (2022) investigates the influence of hip-hop music on the language of Nigerian youths. The study examines 12 hip-hop tracks by four Nigerian artists. The result affirms that the lyrics of the tracks show expressions that are found in the language of many Nigerian youths. It concludes that this is an emergence of a language variety identified as hip-hop lect. From a critical discourse perspective, Ebebe, Ebim, and Uwen (2021) explore the representation of

cybercrime and internet fraud in the songs of Nigerian musicians, specifically focusing on the genres of Hip Hop and Afrobeat. The study argues that these musicians either openly support cybercrime or incorporate it into their lyrics, and this has led to a negative perception of Nigerian society and its celebrities. The use of the CDA approach enables them to observe the support for internet fraud in the lyrics, and the negative impact it has on Nigerian society.

Additionally, Okpongette and Ordu (2023) is a pragmatic analysis of slang and catchphrases in Nigerian Hip-hop music. The paper explores the use of slang and catchy phrases in Nigerian hip-hop songs and analyses their meanings and significance within the songs. The conclusion of the study highlights the importance of understanding the signals contained in slang and how pragmatics plays a significant role in the usage of slang language in hip-hop songs. Overall, the paper provides insights into the linguistic and cultural aspects of Nigerian hip-hop music.

From a stylistic perspective, Emiya and Diriyai (2022) discuss the language and style of Nigerian musicians and their effects on the lexicon of Nigerian English and indigenous languages. The paper analyses the use of code-switching, code-mixing, slang, pidgin, homonyms, and euphemisms in the lyrics of selected Nigerian songs and explains how these features are used in Nigerian music for self-expression, cultural expression, clarity of intention, and to appeal to a wider audience. It concludes that the language style of Nigerian musicians affects the lexicon of Nigerian English and indigenous languages. From a stylistic perspective too, Maledo (2022) is a study of syntactic distortions and cohesive devices in the language of scam mail, one of the precursors of e-mail fraud in Nigeria. The study contributes to the description and characterization of the language of scamemails. The focus was to reveal the inherent deceit hidden in the language used by scammers.

From the above, it is obvious that a greater percentage of the works deal with issues related to themes of cybercrime in music and how Nigerian hip-hop music puts cybercrime in good light. The use of slang also features in some of the studies. However, a research gap exists in the area of the lexico-semantics of cybercrime slang in Nigerian hip-hop songs. This research gap necessitates this study.

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative method which aims at explaining the lexico-semantic features of cybercrime slang in the selected songs. Data for the study were selected from eight Nigerian hip-hop songs written in

the English language, Nigerian pidgin, and Yoruba with emphasis on the English and pidgin components of the songs. Eight excerpts with features of slang and eight lexical items considered slang were extracted from these songs for analysis. The slang words were identified and analyzed from the excerpts while the lexical items and their semantic implications were analyzed in a tabular form, followed by a detailed analysis.

Data Analysis and Discussion

As established, Nigerian hip-hop music has been a means of commenting on the issue of cybercrime in Nigeria. So, it is necessary to identify some slang inherent in the songs, their semantic features, and their implications. In this section, the lyrics of the selected songs are presented and analyzed to identify some devices and lexical-semantic features used by Nigerian pop artists on the issue of cybercrime.

Aspect of Lexical Relations

The artists used some lexical relations such as synonyms and antonyms in their songs as presented below.

Datum i.

Too much money, the problem now is how to spend it.

Plenty dollars straight to aboki to change it.

I don suffer, every day and night our boys dey for system.

Now I don hammer.....,

anything you want just name it

cos my maga don pay....., mugu don pay.....

(Olu Maintain “maga don pay”)

In the above song by Olu Maintain, *Maga* and *mugu* are Yoruba slang that are used for people who are seen as ignorant and senseless. In the song, they are used synonymously to express meaning about victims of cybercrime.

Datum ii.

Some call it 419 or advance fraud

I say it’s getting doe from greedy victims abroad

Without pulling a trigger, contact or slashing with a sword.

(Modenine “419 state of mind”)

The italicized words are nearly similar in meaning used by the artist to show the relationship of words to express the context of meaning. 419 in the Nigerian context is derived from a section of the Nigerian penal code that stipulates some measures of penalty for anyone who gets involved in financial crime. Its nearest synonym as used in this song is advanced fee fraud in which victims are made to pay a certain amount upfront before the conclusion of the business transaction. This is what Modenine says here:

Datum iii.

They send the doe and another problem got em
sending more doe
Till they cash flow is on a low

In the above extract, Modernine goes further to justify 419 to him, it is a crime or not a serious crime as he sees it as getting or making money from a greedy victim this can be expressed in mathematical terms as in

419 = getting *doe* from greedy victims abroad (where *doe* stands for money)

Therefore it is justified.

Datum iv.

I don suffer no be small
419 no be thief, it's just a game everybody dey play
Oyibo man I go chop your dollar... (Nkem Owoh "I go chop your dollar")

In the above song by the Nigerian famous actor turned musician, Nkem Owo, he justifies 419 by saying that it is not a *thief* by contrasting 419 and *thief* through the use of adverbial negator, *no* (meaning not), in Nigerian pidgin. The underlined lexemes express a semantic contrast by the artist's use of 'not'. To a very large extent, this is a glamourization of 419 crimes and leaves nothing to be desired in the fight against cybercrimes in Nigeria.

In the chorus to this song, the singer also uses lexical items in antonymic relation to foreground the relationship between the victim and the swindler thus:

Datum v.

You be the mugu, I be the master

Oyinbo man I go chop your dollar,

I go take your money disappear

419 is just a game, *you are the loser I am the winner*

The italicized sentences in the above extract portray these contrast wherein the first, *mugu* and *master* are contrasted while loser and winner are contrasted. This contrast is enhanced through the use of syntactic parallelism to foreground the lexical antonymic relation between the wise (master) and the foolish (mugu).

Datum vi.

Maga don pay shout halleluyah.....

Mugu don pay shout halleluyah.....

Halleluyah Moet, champagne, henessy

Maga Don Pay by Kelly Hansome

This idea of seeing the white who pays the money is repeated by Kelly Hansom in his song “Maga don Pay” used as data iv above. Using syntactic parallelism, the semantic sameness of *maga* and *mugu* is made prominent by placing as the subject of the first two clauses as seen above. To also enhance the happiness of the beneficiary of money, the lexical item, *Halleluya*, is repeated at the complement position.

Datum vii.

Ghetto boys we hustle vision 2020

Our government dem promise

You know say boys go chop every day we scamming

All night no sleeping I go Alaba go buy lappy.

(Bella Shmurda “Vision 2020”)

In the above, the word *lappy* is derived from a *laptop* through the morphological process of clipping in which part(s) of a word is/are cut off to derive a new word. Laptop is an electronic device used as a tool by perpetrators of cybercrime. As used, *lappy* is a cybercrime slang referring to laptops.

Another prominent slang used in hip-hop songs is the expression of

monetary terms as seen in the extract below by Modenine in his song "419 State of Mind".

Datum viii.

The CBN Director has to be bribed a bit
 500 gram there about on the side of it
 You can get that go head you won't regret that
 Don't forget that your getting like 15 mill
 500 gram ain't nothing after this deal

As seen above, *gram* and *mill* are slang used as measurement units for money. In the International System of Units, a *gram* is a unit of mass while *milli* means one thousand. So one milligram is equal to a thousand, which is equivalent to a gram. In the context of Yahoo slang as appropriated in the hip-hop song, 500 grams as used refers to \$500,000:00 (five hundred thousand dollars) while 15 mill refers to \$15,000,000:00 (fifteen million dollars). So the victim is required to pay five hundred thousand dollars upfront before they can access the fifteen million dollars.

Semantic Shift and Extension

Semantic shift involves redefining the central character of a word. Semantic extension is defined as the extension of the semantic boundaries of existing words to cover strange meanings. The table below presents various lexical items that have been semantically shifted and extended in the selected songs.

S/N	Lexical item	Conventional usage	Context usage	Song
i	System	A set of hardware or software operating in a computer or technique/method	A laptop computer.	"Maga don pay"
ii	Paper	A writing or printing sheet	Money	"Stay Woke"
iii	Yahoo	An internet search engine or email service provider	Internet fraud	"Yahooze"
iv	Hammer	A carpentry tool	A record of success	"Maga don pay"
v	Doe	A female deer	Money	"419 state of mind"
vi	Client	One to whom a service is rendered	A victim	"Prayer for client"
vii	Grind/ grinding	To reduce to small pieces	To hustle	"Stay woke"
viii	Aboki	Friend	Bureau de change man	"Maga don pay"

As the table above indicates, the semantic scope of the eight (8) lexical items identified from the selected songs for this study has been extended. In (i), the meaning of *system* has changed from a means or a method of doing things or from that of an operating system in the language of the computer to mean *laptop* as slang in the context of cybercrime. *Pepper* in (ii) is a Nigerian pidgin slang for money that is appropriated into cybercrime hip-hop music. As it is often in Nigerian Pidgin, “Pepper don rest” means “I have made money”. The origin of *Yahoo* as a lexical can be traced to Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travel*. In computer language, *Yahoo* is an Internet search engine. In the Nigerian Internet fraud language, *Yahoo* has experienced a semantic shift from that of a search engine to that of perpetrators of cybercrime money fraud.

Hammer in (iv) has its traditional meaning of a carpentry tool. As used in cybercrime slang, it now refers to having achieved a measure of financial wealth as we have in such expressions as “The guy don hammer” meaning “The guy has become rich”. *Doe* has its semantic scope changed from a female deer to money while a client with the semantic implication of one to whom a service is rendered extends its semantic scope contrastingly to make such a victim. To grind or grinding in (vii) which means to reduce into smaller pieces or powdered form (depending on the substance) now has semantic scope changed to hustle, meaning to get extremely busy in struggling to make money while *Aboki*, a male friend in the Hausa language, now means an operator of bureau de change who sells and buys dollars from the *Yahoo* boys.

Conclusion

This study has investigated aspects of lexical semantic features of slang appropriated by Nigerian hip-hop musicians in their songs. The study has revealed how slang is used to convey meanings related to cybercrime, financial success, and manipulation. It has shown that synonyms, antonyms, and repetition are prominent in the selected songs. It has also revealed that some of the lexical items used as slang have to undergo semantic shifts in the context of the songs. This use of semantic extension helps the artists to convey their message through the making of new meanings in the use of existing lexical items as slang. The paper also discovered that through the use of these slang, the Nigerian hip-hop songs glamorize cybercrimes which has an adverse effect on the economy of Nigeria and the image of Nigeria internationally. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding these lexico-semantic features to fully grasp the meaning and social context of contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music.

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Writer's Brief Data



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