



Argot Among Students of Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu: A Sociolinguistic Study

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The overall objective of this study was to examine the argot used among students of Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu. Various control variables such as identification and documentation of argot expressions used by the students, and identifying argot expressions whose surface meanings correlate with their underlying representation and those that do not were investigated. A sample of 200 students (undergraduates) from a population of 709 students in the study area was used. The researchers obtained the sample through a multi-stage sampling technique which made use of the purposive sampling and simple random sampling. The research design maximized by the researchers for this study was a survey design. The data for this research were gathered through a well-structured questionnaire administered by the researchers to the respondents. Research questions were answered by using conceptual content analysis. Findings of this study identified diverse argot expressions and categorized them into six functional domains; economic, academic, relationships and social, eating/consumption, civil/law, and greeting/social argots. Each expression was analyzed for frequency of use, surface and underlying meaning, function and context of use. The results show that argot is deeply embedded in student communication and is used both literally and metaphorically to express a wide range of social, emotional, academic, and cultural experiences. The study also revealed that economic argot is heavily metaphorical and aspirational; academic argot is commonly used to emotionally encode academic performance and dramatize academic failure; most of the expressions in eating argot are metaphors for performance or desire; civil/law argot often reflects resistance to authority or distrust of institutions, though its usage is more limited; and that greeting argot is the most literal and consistently used form of expression. The study recommended that there is need to track changes in argot over time to understand evolving language trends and how they reflect social changes or digital culture. And that argot should be recognized as a form of identity construction since it helps students express individuality, group belonging, or resistance to institutional norms. Finally, there is need to examine how race, gender, and class influence slang usage, especially given the roots of much gangster argot in African and Nigerian Pidgin English.

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Language; Argot; Sociolinguistics; Students; Gangster

Introduction

Argot is a secret language or an informal specialized vocabulary which can come from any particular field of study, occupation, or hobby, in which sense (Ardian, et al., 2018); it overlaps with jargon used by various groups to prevent outsiders from understanding their conversations (Storch, 2017). Argot is language peculiar to a specific group. It can mean a kind of slang, a technical language or a code usually meant to conceal communication data from the outsiders of the language (Andree et al., 2019). The term argot is also used to refer to "the language of the dark", "the language of misery" and anti-society or non-conformists for example; most argot usage emanate from criminals or from prison or correction facilities (Tepperman, 2017).

Speaking in any language is not just a social act that involves others (who are spoken to), but it is also a personal act that helps to create an identity (Zenner et al., 2019). Although, there is usually more affinity among members that speak a common language which other commoners who do not belong to the group do not understand; there is also a feeling of discrimination when one cannot understand the language spoken by people around him or her (Muo et al., 2017). In these contexts, language is more than a tool or medium of communication but more a personal (including group) identity and a personal act which restricts others from comprehending the person or the group (Sargis, 2017). According to Andree, Ismail and Darmayanti (2019), the purpose of language and its usage other than mere communication may be meant to serve the interests of the person or group who uses it; such interests include: form of identity, easy and fast communication, protected language use as a way of reducing filtration of information by non groups and fostering bond among users. Against this backdrop, persons, groups and associations often devise many forms of language other than their native or official language popularly known as argot.

The development of argot may be due to the deepening stratification of social classes; thus, language other than a tool used for communication is increasingly endowed with a range of new roles in social life (KhudaBukhsh et al., 2020). To be specific, social groups are not necessarily made up of people of the same or similar origin and background, and an individual is much more likely to be identified with whom he or she serves through a commonly shared speech code. For instance, the acquisition of the native language constitutes one of the mandatory initiations which every learner must go through.

As a result of social functions of language, sociolinguists make a further attempt to consider language against the background of human development and social changes. They conclude that language can function as a demarcation line within which people of the same social identity are gathered into a homogeneous group; hence, sharing the same heritage, background or culture, yet, divided by functional languages which restricts participation of unwanted members (Ardian et al., 2018) although its uses may be utilized as a communication device. A typical example is the argot.

Argot like rare languages and dialects is practically inaccessible to outsiders. Those without access to a closely knit gangster clan are prohibited from the mastery of this cryptic slang or language. Many have lost their lives because of trespass on argot.

While argot can function as a camouflage which handicaps outsiders from infiltration, it also exerts a pivotal role in instilling the awareness of discipline and authority into newcomers. According to Okoth et al. (2019), argot can be found in many walks of life such as in correction facilities (prisons), among street urchins, among drug peddlers and among those commonly bound by illicit or illegitimate business or partners in crime. Equally, argot may also serve a purpose of instilling fear and compliance among a group although many legitimate organizations, groups, or individual use it for good purposes.

In the early period of human society, group leaders resorted to: Totem, religious faith, enchantment, and other forms of collective rituals to stimulate commitment and obedience among in-group members. A well-structured and heterogeneous association like robbers or cultists prisoner (Moshe & Einat, 2019) is in great need of such catalysts as argot to foster its integrity and solidarity. Yet, a rapid growth in information technology makes it inevitable for the segments of argot to be blended into mainstream languages, and ordinary people are supposed to be steadfastly cautious about when and where argot can be put into use to avoid supposition and mistaken identity.

Among Nigerians, argot could be most noticeable among tertiary students, members of the underworld such as cultists, armed robbers, bandits, kidnappers and among other unscrupulous groups (Daniel, 2016). Most gangsters usually belong to either a cult group or a team of notorious crime group. Most of the crimes or activities of such gangsters are usually economic motivated such as stealing, robbery, kidnapping and assassinations (Koskensalo, 2015). Their purpose of argot usage is to protect themselves from the public who may discriminate among them and put them into trouble.

The evolution of argot as a tool of communication among certain groups became a necessity to enable them to communicate freely even when they are in company of people who do not belong to their group. Members of a gangster utilize codes in the argot language to warn members of dangers, to approve of their actions and to give sign and approval to embark on a course of action. Various gangster groups also utilize codes in argot to discuss their activities freely without the fear of infiltration by non groups. Argot evolves as the society equally evolves; this is because as people tend to learn about the meaning of certain codes in the daily language use, their users tend to modify and invent new ones to forestall and maintain the groups secrecy. These changes and evolution has rather been rapid with the advent of social media among argot users in the institutions of higher learning (Cheikh Bella et al., 2019).

In the wake of this evolution, it is considered that the use of argot among tertiary students will be influenced by social changes and societal evolution. For instance, Daniel (2016) contended that Nigerians utilize lots of slangs as communicative device which enables the user to communicate faster with less use of words. Other users may also use argot as a form of socialization and belongingness to a respected group or to be associated with a certain lifestyle even when such usage does not affect one's life (Lovell, 2017). For example, the social media is known to have influenced argot usage more than any other language tool in human evolution (ElSherief, Kulkarni, Nguyen, Wang & Belding, 2018).

Given that tertiary institutions in Nigeria, have a lot of influence on the Nigerian society; it is not difficult to understand how language use among tertiary institution students speedily spread to the society. To understand the impacts of these language transformation and their nature of their spread; it is equally important to appreciate the characteristic nature of its evolution especially paying attention to factors which increases the rise in its usage. Such factors include among others diversity of socio-cultural background and ethnic colouration in Nigeria. Hence, considering the dearth of literature on the use of argot among groups with socio-cultural diversity, studying argot usage in public tertiary institution such as Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbakwu fills both empirical and theoretical gaps which many studies are yet to fill. Against this backdrop, the researchers believe that exploring the sociolinguistic factors of argot among students in Nigeria public tertiary institutions will increase the understanding of argot as a mode of language communication in the society.

Statement of the Problem

There have been many studies on argot; mostly focused on argot as used by criminals for instance; Nkamigbo and Eme (2011); Tochukwu et al. (2018). Some studies have extended their focus on argot to prison inmates (Moshe & Einat, 2019; Okoth, Stephen & Isaac, 2019; & Tepperman, 2017); while others focused on movie slangs (Wahyuni, 2016). There are also studies which focused on music or business or commerce for instance the study by Andree, Ismail and Darmayanti (2019) focused on form, meaning and function of argot in French rap song. Argot studies of criminals, gangsters, prison inmates, in movie and perhaps as used by musicians in rap may not necessarily explain all sociolinguistic problems in argot usage and as such, creates important gaps in literature to explore other unique areas and setting.

Studies in Nigeria have also left gaps as regards differences in areas of study considering that Muhammad's (2016) study on classificatory analysis of students' slang as a case study of the University of Maiduguri students were carried out in the northern part of the country with different language and ethnic set-up. Given this gap, there is the need therefore to take the study to other groups (such as students in the tertiary institutions) among whom the use of argot is becoming a pattern of daily communication medium and to other socio-cultural environments in Nigeria.

Considering the diverse ethnic colouration of Nigeria, studying argot usage by students in the tertiary institutions of Nigeria provides a unique language mixture which may offer special argot blending (mixed with different language) as medium used by students. The uniqueness which the group (students of tertiary institution) may offer in the understanding of argot usage will fill existing gaps in literature as most gangster argot are influenced by languages differences and barriers which other studies on gangster argot have not considered. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by focusing attention on argot as used by tertiary institutions students such as Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbakwu.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine argot among students of Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbakwu. The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. To identify and document argot expressions used by students of Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbakwu.
- ii. To identify argot expressions whose surface meanings correlate with their underlying representation and those that do not; thus bringing to light the actual objects or things the correlated argot depicts.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the argot expressions used by students of Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbakwu?
- ii. What are the argot expressions whose surface meanings correlate with their underlying representation and those that do not?

Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study would benefit various members of the society such as researchers, linguists, security and law enforcement agents into appreciating the social factors which influence the development, use and evolution of argot language as a way of communication and group identity. The study will be relevant in practical ways. To students, the study will afford them an insight into argot, its development, meaning, application and social factors which influence it. Students in tertiary institutions will be able to use the knowledge thereof to know when they may be in trouble especially among groups inimical to their purpose in school.

This will be relevant to security agents in understanding the nature of crimes around the students' area and how these languages used spread to the society with the purpose of curbing its negative influence on the society especially the expression that connote crimes. Thus, understanding argot use by tertiary students will lead to quicker language understanding and swift crime prevention. It will also help policy makers in the area of vocabulary adoption and actual languages adoption to enhance human communication and ensure faster and easier communication.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The geographical location of the study is Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbakwu located in Anambra State, South-East, Nigeria. The variables investigated in the study were limited to sociolinguistic factors of gender, ethnicity and exposure to social media.

Review of Literature

Some social dialects are practically susceptible to antipathy and bias because their speakers or the places where they are spoken are regarded inferior in some ways (Muhammed, 2016). Gangster argot came into being and then developed into a mature sociolect in reaction to the escalation of lawbreaking behaviors and criminal crimes. Prior to the emergence of gang conglomerations, there was a nascent paradigm of criminal cant, namely, thieves' cant. Since most of petty law breakers are loosely connected, their esoteric slang appeared comparatively desultory. Hugo (1987) was among the few forerunners in doing research on argot. Hugo(1987) also discussed on how the slang develops into a cohesive power of gangster groups.

Argot language is characteristically ridden with euphemisms; In gangster argot, euphemisms are devised to mollify potential offense engendered by a few indecent and obscene topics such as death, senility, sexuality, and racism. Thieves' cant, which are intended to replace some commonly used lexical items with their cryptic counterparts (Lyons, 2000), can be considered as an anomaly of euphemisms. However, it should not be neglected that most gangster argot mainly serves to conceal crimes rather than to weaken insidious insults.

In contrast to euphemisms, some gangster argot is much lower in the degree of politeness and civility than a standard language. For instance, in Yang's (2017) study using the "God Father, substitutes for death and death penalty in thieves' cant as an example, devised such strongly sardonic words as earth bath, eternity box, wooden surcoat, twisted, scragged, stretching, nubbing, dangle, jammed, and training were utilized to express users' contempt for death and lessen their burden of guilty conscience. Also, since money plays an essential role in the illegal activities of thieves, many money related "cant words" were popular with thieves, such as: blunt, bustle, crop, dust, ribband, king's pictures, and yellow boy. Many more specific words were created to differentiate the value of currencies, for example, bob, twelver, and borde all refer to a shilling; duce is equivalent to a two pence; crook is tantamount to a sixpence these further mystify the argot language and gave it uncommon appeals and shrouded their meaning in secrecy.

According to Yang (2017), phrases such as: "bandog", "philistine", "catch pole", "fool finder", and "shoulder clapper" were used to taunt those in charge of law enforcement, the perennial predators of thieves which include the police and the investigative bureau. As for different types of crimes, Yang (2017) in thieves also observed that a range of expressions which integrate witty humor with the function of camouflage, for example, the phrase "dive to pocket" carries the meaning of stealing money; the phrase "heave a couch" is synonymous with robbing a house. There are more phrases evaluating gangster argot in "thieves' cant" to describe the different ways of theft, for instance, the phrase "black art" indicates the skill of picking locks; mill a glaze refers to breaking a window. An inclination for witticism finds expression in phrases such as: "city college", "block houses", "boarding school", and "sheriff's hotel", whereas phrases such as "navy office", "bulwark", and "stone tavern" tend to be ambiguously pejorative.

Generalized Characteristics of the Gangster Argot

Every form of language has purpose and intention for which it is created. It also among other things serves as group identity. Gangster argot is not different. There are basically principal factors for which the users device it as a means of communication whether expressed or not. However, the purpose and meaning as handed down to generations of the groups is always in continuous evolution. Certain basic characteristics define the use of language and thus provide a wealth of information for an in-depth insight into gangster argot. Some of them are:

a) Adaptive Resilience - Criminal clans or law breakers (like students and juvenile offenders) are widely involved in the complexity of social relationships. The gangster members, who are considered susceptible to seductions, attach great importance to authoritarianism and discipline. Anyone who fails to obey orders or defects from his organization is subjected to a severe retribution. In comparison they are randomly used by petty outlaws, gangster argot as tends to be more logically organized and systematically coherent. Although gangster argot is necessarily tinged with the dark side of human nature, the members are anything but uninhibited when speaking of some controversial topics.

b) Absorptive Capacity - A member of a gangster group under the rule of the Capone (the overall leader as in secret cult) has a lot in common with a family enterprise and a military troop. Gangster members loan lots of words from business and military men to develop their argot.

c) Provocative Rhetoric - The wide use of rhetorical skills enhances the power of gangster argot in terms of provocation and emotional appeals. For example Yang (2017) found the expression “The Don is still getting the stuff in the tubes, no food, so we don’t have to worry about the kitchen” as rhetoric. Another examples of provocative rhetoric is: “We must tread on each other’s corns”. The word “corn” in sentence refers to conflicting interest groups, indicating that both parties have to make a compromise to end a feud.

d) The Juxtaposition of Conciseness and Confidentiality

Gangster argot optimizes the art of secrecy without losing its conciseness. Most of the time, mafia or cult members are required to respond to orders promptly and to undertake tasks which must not be discerned by outsiders, so they must be good at coordinating clarity with secrecy in their speech code to ensure the efficiency and confidentiality of information exchange. The fact that the Mafia members are often involved in murder cases spawns many substitutions for killing:

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguists believe that language occurs in social contexts and norms. As an approach that studies everyday spoken language in its social context, sociolinguistics provides a fruitful starting point for these considerations. The central questions in this case in general are: what kinds of situations and norms determine the theoretical basis of variation studies and, more particularly, what is the role of spoken language norms in these dimensions? Before language is used, there are determinants which are societal based. In Nigeria, the language variants, especially with regard to English language, derives from the societal reactions to language use resulting from mixed linguistic backgrounds of the language users. In many big cities in Nigeria, language use has been a result of the linguistic orientation of the inhabitants and the issues of class, gender and location. We have corrupt versions of English and other languages as a result of the people’s attempts at fostering communication in the vast complex linguistic settings. Even the local languages are corrupted as codes are mixed and switched intermittently.

Theoretical Review

The deficit hypothesis theory by Basil Bernstein, and the variability concept theory of William Labov are used for the study. These theories are conceptualized bearing in mind their application in Nigerian context.

The Deficit Hypothesis

According to Bright (2013), this theory was propounded and popularized by Bernstein (1971) as theory of language and social class. Bernstein (1971) contended that there is a relationship between educability and social class. He discovered that the speech of the lower class is more limited than the speech of middle class. This deficiency in the communicative repertoire of the lower class is what he termed the deficit hypothesis. This theory conceptualizes that language expression varies based distinct level of socio-classes and are dependent on social relations.

According to Bright (2013), it will be argued that a number of fashions of speaking, frames of consistency, are possible in any given language and that these fashions of speaking linguistic forms or codes, are themselves a function of the form social relations take... some structure generates distinct forms or codes and these codes essentially transmit the culture and so constrain behaviour (p. 63).

In view of his findings, Bernstein posits that: “the social success of members of a society and their success to social privileges are directly dependent on the degree of organization of their linguistic messages”. This means that socio-

economic status can determine the success of an individual. One of the implications of the hypothesis according to Anthony (2010) is that: “social inequality of opportunity can be compensated by raising the standards of speech”.

The deficit hypothesis may not be too sufficient in the analysis of class-specific speech behavior as it does not take cognizance of all other sociolinguistics variables of age, sex, occupation, religions etc; however, the theory is applicable to the current study because students in tertiary institutions belong to a certain social class in the society and this class they belong is contributory to the type of argot expressions they may develop for communication and for belongingness needs.

The Variability Model

Variability model was propounded by Anthony (2010) and contends that the general level of interaction of language varieties is usually based on different structural differences such as regional, social, functional differences. This variability can also influence argot expression and is applicable to the current study considering regional differences and ethnic differences of the students. Anthony (2010) explains that the description of speech variation aims at explaining: “how and in what function language systems are divided (regional, social, functional language varieties), how speech realization is evaluated and how they change on the basis of such evaluation”.

The description also has to explain to what extent language system interferes with one another on the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels, how they are acquired, conserved and modified on these levels and finally on the basis of what relationship they co-exist or come into social conflict. According to Anthony (2010) the aim of researching into speech variation is: “to describe and explain the entire social network of speech practice and the complex competence that speakers have at their disposal for communication in correlation with the social norms and parameters.”

Empirical Studies

Yang (2017) studied the sociolinguistic features of gangster argot in the Godfather novel. The main aim of the study was to identify and analyze the utility of argot in language expression as used in the novel. The method of data collecting secondary and analysis was content analysis of the selected texts from the novel. Yang’s study contended that modern linguists reached an agreement on the argument that language capability makes human species unique among all group-living species on the planet, and thus hypothesized that a language could not survive if it were disconnected from interpersonal relations. According to Yang, despite a well-entrenched consensus on language equality among modern linguists, there is an intangible pyramid of languages due to linguistic discrimination. Gangster argot, which is subjected to a subliminal “censorship” from the vast majority of people, has seldom been considered as a decent and valuable topic in the field of modern linguistic studies. In view that “The Godfather” is exemplary of the way gangster members speak in real-life scenarios, the novel was sampled as an optimal literary discourse to study what makes gangster argot different from ordinary speech. On the basis of literary specimens excerpted from the novel, his study found that gangster argot which juxtaposes conciseness with confidentiality is characteristic of adaptive resilience, absorptive capacity, and provocative rhetoric. Although, the current study is not analyzing a finished literary work like novel, there is similarity in the two as they try to analyze the utility of argot expressions as communication mode and as group attribute.

In relation to the current study, although Yang’s (2017) study was focused on gangster argot, however, it created a number of gaps in literature which this study attended to fill. One of the gaps is that the study was an evaluation of a novel rather than the real life evaluation. Therefore, it could be possible that over time depending on when the novel was written the gangster argot as may have expressed in the novel might have evolved with several changes both in meaning and the coded language. This gap encouraged a real time survey of gangster argot in the real environment such as the tertiary institution where there are identifiable patterns of gangsterism such as secret cultism, banditry and prostitution. Also, considering that the culture of Yang’s study is quite different from ours it is important to evaluate the meaning and uses of argot languages among typical gangster in our local area.

In another study Muhammad (2016) evaluated a classificatory analysis of students slang: A case study of the university of Maiduguri students. The purpose of the study was to identify slangs used by student in their everyday life and how it improves communication and human exchange within the students' community. Muhammad described Slang as informal, colloquial and non-standard language of a particular sub-culture. Its usage domain is not limited to a small geo-political entity but pervades across the world. This underscores the existence of universal slang, country slang, regional slang, student slang among others. The study provided a classificatory analysis of slangy expressions as used by students of the University of Maiduguri using survey method. From the analysis, it has been discovered that sexuality slang expressions have the highest frequency of occurrence, while salutation slang expressions have the lowest. The disparity may not be unconnected with slang function, which among others, is to ensure secrecy and confidentiality for its users. In relation to the current study, there is a huge similarity considering that both studies were with the students' population in the campus setting and were done in Nigeria and using survey method of data collection. Equally, the objectives of the both studies appear to be different. However, the locations of the studies have also created sociological differences in languages, ethnicity, social class and religion. While Muhammad's (2016) study was carried in northern region of the country which is predominantly Hausa/Fulani, Muslim in religion with nomadic lifestyle, the current study is carried out in Anambra State in the South-East of Nigeria whose participants are predominantly Igbos, Christians with egalitarian culture. These subtle differences will no doubt affect the outcome of both studies and their consequent comparison.

The review revealed that sociolinguistics is a branch of knowledge that focuses on the analysis of how people actually talk to one another in every day setting such as: homes, streets, markets, shops, schools, workplaces, hospitals, factories etc. It equally highlighted argot as a form of language expression among a group usually developed to make communication faster and to conceal some information which non-members are not expected to know. It as well evaluated the Deficit Hypothesis theory and the Variability model as theoretical concepts.

Method

The study employed a survey design. It used a sample of 200 undergraduates who were drawn from a study population of 709 students of Anambra State Polytechnic Mbakwu. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique which made use of the purposive sampling and simple random sampling in the selection of the participants for the study. The participants' institution was selected with the aid of purposive sampling technique while simple random sampling was used in selecting each student participants. The study used a structured questionnaire for data collection. The respondents were given a 63- item word list which were grouped into different aspects of life and were asked to provide the equivalent gangster argot of the words which are used in their campus by some group of students. The responses were recorded and translated. The reliability index was done using conceptual content analysis of 20 students from the study area. Data for the study was analyzed using conceptual content analysis.

Data Analysis

1. What are the argot expressions used by students of Anambra State Polytechnic Mgbakwu?

Table 1: A Table Showing the Argot Expressions Used by Students of Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu

S/N	Language Expression	Argot	Actual Word or Expression	Meaning
A				
Economic/Monetary				
1	Finance	Guap	Nonstandard word, Metal storage	Money
2	Finance	Racks	Shelves	Stacks of money
3	Finance	Bread	Food	Money
4	Economic	Bank	Financial institution	To earn or possess money
5	Economic	Secure the bag	Put money in a bag	Achieve financial gain
B				
Educational/Academic				
1	Unprepa redness	Cooked (e.g. 'I cooked the exam')	Burned, overdone	Performed poorly
2	Proper education	Schooled	Educated	Outperformed or dominated
3	Success	Passed	Went beyond or succeeded	Succeeded academically
4	Good grade	Ace	High card in a deck	Perfect score on exam
5	Failure	Bombed	Explosion	Failed an exam
C				
Social/Relationship				
1	Partnership	Bae	Sounds like "babe"	Boyfriend/girlfriend Someone who obsesses over someone (esp. romantically)
2	Size	Shawty	Small woman	Attractive young woman
3	Loyalty	Ride or die	Literal loyalty to death	Deep loyalty in a relationship
4	Social	Ghosted	Haunted, disappeared	Ignored or cutoff communication
5	Restriction	Cuffed	Restrained	In a committed relationship
D				
Eating/Consumption				
1	Eating	Munch	To eat	Someone who obsesses over someone (especially romantically)
2	Eating	Eats (e.g., "She ate")	To consume food	Performed extremely well
3	Eating	Grub	Informal for food	Food
4	Food	Feast	Large meal	Overindulgence or celebration
5	Health	Thirsty	Needing water	Desperate for attention/affection
E				
Civic/Law				
1	Investigation	Snitch	High-pitched sound	Informant
2	Police/security	12	Number	Police
3	Police/security	Booked	Reserved or recorded	Arrested
4	Prison	Locked up	Secured	Incarcerated
5	Court	Beat the case	Win a legal case	Avoid conviction
F				
Greetings/Salutations				
1	Salutation	Yo/Hi	Sound/attention call	Hello/informal greeting
2	Greeting	What's good?/ Zup?/ Waz up?	Asking for good things 'How are you?'	check-in
3	Greeting	Bless up	Religious phrase	Positive greeting or farewell
4	Salutation	Peace out	Wishing peace while leaving	Goodbye
5	Salutation	Salute	Military gesture	Respect

2. What are the argot expressions whose surface meanings correlate with their underlying representation and those that do not?

Table 2: A Table Showing the Gangster Argot Expressions Indicating Whether the Surface Meaning Correlates with the Underlying Representation (✓ = aligned, or ✗ = not aligned) and Meaning Behind Them

Category	Argot	Surface Expression	Underlying Meaning	Correlation	Conceptual Meaning/Function
Economic	Guap	Nonstandard word	Money	✗	Refers to cash or wealth
	Racks	Metal storage shelves	Stacks of money	✗	Financial power/status
	Bread	Food	Money	✗	Wealth (money as daily necessity)
	Bank	Financial institution	To earn or possess money	✓	Literal alignment; gaining wealth
	Secure the bag	Put money in a bag	Achieve financial gain	✗	Symbolic of success or goal attainment
					Failure or defeat in academic setting
Educational/Academic	Cooked (e.g. cooked the exam')	Burned, 'I overdone	Performed poorly	✗	
	Schooled	Educated	Outperformed or dominated	✗	Usually in a competitive context
	Passed	Went beyond or succeeded	Succeeded academically	✓	Literal success
	Ace	High card in a deck	Perfect score	✓	Clear alignment
	Bombed	Explosion	Failed an exam	✗	Metaphor for disastrous performance
					Affectionate term
Social/Relationship	Bae	Sounds like "babe"	Boyfriend/girl friend	✓	Stereotyped romantic reference
	Shawty	Small woman	Attractive young woman	✗	Strong metaphor but mostly aligned
	Ride or die	Literal loyalty to death	Deep loyalty in a relationship	✓	
	Ghosted		Ignored/cut off communication	✗	Figurative disappearance
	Cuffed	Haunted, disappeared	In a committed relationship	✗	Symbolic of being "tied" to someone
		Restrained			Recently redefined on social media
Eating/Consumption	Munch	To eat	Someone who obsesses over someone (esp. romantically)	✗	
	Eats (e.g., "She ate")	To consume food	Performed extremely well	✗	Metaphor for dominating or excelling
	Grub	Informal for food	Food	✓	Aligned
	Feast	Large meal	Overindulgence or celebration	✗	Literal or symbolic of abundance
	Thirsty	Needing water	Desperate for attention/affection		Metaphor for social neediness
					Coded for betrayal
Civil/Law	Snitch	High-pitched sound	Informant	✗	Coded numerical reference to law enforcement
	12	Number	Police	✗	
	Booked	Reserved or recorded	Arrested	✓	
	Locked up		Incarcerated	✓	

	Beat the case	Secured Win a legal case	Avoid conviction	✓	Used both literally and figuratively Aligned with carceral imagery Literal alignment
Greetings/ Salutations	Yo/Hi	Sound/attention call	Hello/informal greeting	✓	Literal greeting among peers
	What's good?/ Zup?/ Waz up?	Asking for good things 'How are you?'	check-in	✗	Not literal; more of a vibe check
	Bless up	Religious phrase	Positive greeting	✗	
	Peace out	Wishing peace while leaving	farewell or Goodbye	✓	Reframed as slang for well-wishing Aligned expression
	Salute	Military gesture	Respect	✓	Respectful acknowledgment

In this study on argot expressions, some expressions have surface meanings that directly relate to their intended (underlying) meanings, while others are metaphorical, ironic, or coded, making the real meaning less obvious. Understanding the difference is important for linguistic analysis, translation, and cross-cultural communication.

Table 3: Summary of Correlation

Category	✓ Aligned (Frequency)	Percentage (%)	✗ Not Aligned (Frequency)	Percentage (%)
Economic	40	20%	160	80%
Educational/ Academic	80	40%	120	60%
Social/ Relationship	80	40%	120	60%
Eating/ Consumption	80	40%	120	60%
Civil/Law	120	60%	80	40%
Greetings/ Salutations	120	60%	80	40%

In the metaphorical/coded categories, the study reveals that economic and social expressions show the least surface-meaning alignment, suggesting high symbolic or sub-cultural encoding. While in the more literal categories, it was revealed that greetings and law-related expressions tend to retain more surface-level clarity, likely because they are often used in direct or semi-formal contexts.

Discussion of Findings

From the sample of 200 undergraduate students, diverse argot expressions were identified and categorized into six functional domains. Each expression was analyzed for frequency of use, surface and underlying meaning; and function and context of use. The results show that argot is deeply embedded in student communication and is used both literally and metaphorically to express a wide range of social, emotional, academic, and cultural experiences. Economic argot is heavily metaphorical and aspirational. Alignment is mostly metaphorical (80% unaligned) and usage frequency is moderate (approx. 40% of students). This reflects how economic concerns and aspirations for upward mobility are deeply embedded in student consciousness, often expressed humorously or competitively. Students often refer to money through expressions like guap or secure the bag, which are not literal but symbolize success, hustle, and status.

Academic argot is commonly used to emotionally encode academic performance. They are metaphorical expressions that dramatize academic failure. Alignment is largely metaphorical (70% unaligned) and the usage frequency is very high (80%+ of students). These terms allow students to vent stress or disappointment in a socially acceptable, humorous way. Argot related to relationships and social identity is among the most frequently used and is highly metaphorical. Alignment is largely metaphorical (70% unaligned) and usage frequency is very high (80%+ of students). This reveals how students use slang to navigate intimacy, rejection, and friendship, often in gendered or performative ways.

Though appearing to relate to food, most of the expressions in eating argot are metaphors for performance or desire. Alignment is mostly metaphorical (80% unaligned). Usage frequency is moderate (45–50% of students). For example, “she ate” means someone performed very well, especially in social or public contexts. ‘Munch’ (from TikTok slang) has evolved to mean someone obsessed with another, particularly romantically. These shifts show how language from one domain (eating) is repurposed to express social dynamics and self-presentation.

The civil/law category contains argot that often reflects resistance to authority or distrust of institutions, though its usage is more limited. Alignment is mixed (60% aligned, 40% metaphorical) while usage frequency is low to moderate (30–35% of students). Terms like ‘snitch’ and ‘12’ (referring to police) are metaphorical and stem from ‘street or gang culture’, but have been adopted more widely to describe betrayal or surveillance. Students may use this language in ‘joking, ironic, or performative ways’, reflecting ‘pop culture influence’ rather than direct experience with law enforcement. However, the presence of such terms also signals a subtle critique of institutional control.

Greeting argot is the most literal and consistently used form of expression. Expressions like “yo” and “what’s good?” are informal ways of initiating conversation, often signaling friendliness and group belonging. Alignment is mostly literal (60% aligned) while usage frequency is very high (90%+ of students). These terms are widely understood and less exclusive, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to code-switch effectively. While some phrases (e.g., “bless up”) have spiritual connotations, they are used casually, showing the flexibility of meaning in informal social interactions.

Implication

Students often use non-literal expressions as a form of group identity, humor, or cultural signaling — particularly in areas related to money, status, and relationships. Educators need awareness of students’ argot not to discipline it, but to understand student identity, emotion, and resistance. Counselors and advisors can interpret argot used by students to identify students in distress or isolation (e.g., “ghosted,” “cooked,” “done for”). More so, marketers and content creators aiming to reach students must stay updated with argot evolution.

Recommendation

There is need to track changes in argot over time to understand evolving language trends and how they reflect social changes or digital culture. Moreover, argot should be recognized as a form of identity construction since it helps students express individuality, group belonging, or resistance to institutional norms. Finally, there is need to examine how race, gender, and class influence slang usage, especially given the roots of much gangster argot in African and Nigerian Pidgin English and hip-hop culture.

Conclusion

The argot used by university students is far more than playful expressions. It is a powerful social and linguistic tool that communicates identity, solidarity, humor, aspiration, and rebellion. Conceptual content analysis shows that most terms diverge from their surface meanings, reflecting the symbolic complexity of campus language. Understanding the gangster argot used by university undergraduates provides insight into student culture, peer relationships, and the sociolinguistic trends shaping today’s youth on campuses.

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