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THE IDEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF METAPHORS IN SEXUALIZED DISCURSIVE PRACTICES AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTH

Abstract:

Young people in South-eastern Nigeria, particularly those found in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, ideologically explore the use of metaphor as the dominant linguistic resource in their sexualised discursive practices. This article interrogates the motivations for the entrenched belief in the use of metaphor as a primary medium of the discourse of sex and sexuality. The study examines how this ideology is useful in the construction of multiethnic identities and transformation of traditional social relationships within and outside group membership. The study discovers that young people use metaphor as symbolic ritualised code to deliberately manipulate, improvise and distort the normal course of language use and to exclude the ‘others’. Drawing insights from the social construction theory, we argue that young people sustain this ideology to exhibit disdain for safe sexual practices, construct their sexual identity and define a sense of sexual agency. This study concludes that the cross-fertilization of gender ideologies, social pressure and transgression of hegemonic ideological practices help to emphasize youth as social and cultural actors.

Keywords:

linguistic ideology ♦ metaphor ♦ social constructionism ♦ youth language ♦
multilingualism ♦ indexicality ♦ sexual agency ♦ Ágábá Boys ♦ Ábónímá Boys

Introduction

This study is situated in Calabar Metropolis, Southern Cross River State, South-eastern Nigeria. The study area is a veritable site for youth multilingualism and subcultural capital. There are expanding opportunities for education and tourism which have attracted young people from far and near. Equally significant in the shifting sociolinguistic ecology of the city is the influence of the cyber space and new media which are constantly transforming young people's life style and social engagements. The mobile phone, for instance, provides multiple platforms for interaction not only in sending and receiving calls and texts but also as a medium of exchanging photos, music and credit (Izon 2008, Batan 2005). Popular global youth culture especially in music and sports are contested locally to define the new transcultural flow, especially in meeting the demands for creativity and originality. This has helped to redefine "panethnic identities or new ethnicities" (Bucholtz 2012). Young people's constant engagement with their environment has brought about social change and transformation which are a component of globalization (Dutta and Bhadra 2012). These dynamics have signalled changing patterns of youth discursive practices and attitudes which have greatly affected the sociolinguistic trajectory of the city. Young people in Nigeria also adopt and appropriate linguistic practices and styles from other youth subcultures and the local linguistic environment which have resulted in the creation of their unique social register and dialect which are gaining currency in the wider urban space. For instance, we have seen on national television how a Nigerian senator uses the forms *swag* and *collabo* which are specific youth slang while contributing to a debate on the floor of the senate. This evidence shows how youth language has been demystified and it reflects the fact that youth culture is gaining popularity among the rest of the society (Godin 2006). This article is primarily concerned with the use of metaphor as an ideological principle in the sexualised discourse of youth gangs known as *Ágábá Boys* and *Ábónímá Boys*. Pratten (2008) generally describes the language of these gangs as "mafia slang and symbolism" which already conforms to their anti-social behaviour. In this study, we see the metaphor as an essential aspect of the ideological becoming of these gang members. It is a way of gathering new experiences and exhibiting differing social dynamism. It is also one of the communities of practice that defines their social universe and sexual agency.

There are a number of studies on youth discursive practices that mediate their sexual experiences or creativity of language use. Armstrong et al (2014) examine the impact of slut discourse among female undergraduate students in the United States. They argue that young women use slut stigma to draw boundaries around status groups linked to social class while also regulating sexual behaviour and gender performance. The study claims that high-status women employ slut discourse to assert class advantage while low-status women use it to express resentment for their exclusivity and participation in casual sexual activities. In this way, they become more vulnerable to public shame. This study is a pointer to the fact that slut stigma enables rather than constrains sexual experimentation. Cense (2014) reveals how minority ethnic youth in the Netherlands evaluate and frame their experiences in different sexual discourses. According to this study, young people share their sexual histories and future aspirations about love and sexuality with each other. These discourses are reshaped and remodelled according to specific circumstances and needs. The study also examines how these youths develop strategies to negotiate contradictory discourse arising from the conflict between home discourses and the prevailing ones in the general Dutch society. The paper concludes with the claim that a better understanding of different forms of sexual agency among young people is needed to support the development of health programmes informed by “the grounded realities of young people’s sexual lives” (Bell 2012: 294). Findings from this study reveal that the desire for sexual agency should be seen in the light of other desires such as the need for independence and resisting stereotyped social and linguistic norms among others.

Ogechi (2005) and Beck (2015) investigate the language of sex and HIV/AIDS among youth and university students in Kenya and highlight the special lexicon and expressions young people utilise in their discursive representation of sex and the HIV/AIDS campaign. The argument of these articles is that caregivers, campaigners and health policies implementer should avail themselves with and employ youth creative language particularly Sheng for effective health service delivery. Gonzalez and Stenstrom (2011) equally investigate linguistic creativity among English and Spanish-speaking youth focusing on the use of slang. The study highlights the linguistic mechanisms embedded in slang as an expressive discursive tool in youth language. The study claims that the Spanish teenagers most often talk about drugs and the English teenagers talk about sex often. They further reveal that Spanish youth use vocatives and intensifying expressions more often than their English counterparts, who, however, are more frequent users of denigrating expressions.

Youth language is a playful and expressive intermix of everyday communicative events. It provides the way to construct or reinvent multi-ethnic identities. It is inspired by the need to be different and at the same time to collectively belong. Halliday's (1976, 1978) notion of anti-language which implies "values set against the established society" (Gonzalez and Stenstrom 2011: 236) clearly depicts the subversive nature of youth language which is highly connected with social change. In this article, we explore the use of metaphor not just as an expressive device but as an ideologically productive practice in anchoring sexualised discourse by urban youth gangs in Calabar Metropolis, South-eastern Nigeria. The study is rooted in the social construction theory which sees reality as constructed through discursive interaction. From the constructionist's perspective, the world is what we make of it through language. Language is therefore the key to shaping and creating our social world (Andrew 2012: 27). The study makes an initial attempt to understand the relationship between youth discursive practices and social activities and examines how youth construct social reality and mediate their experiences through sexual discourse informed by the ideological use of metaphor.

Ideology in youth language

The question of ideology has informed the debate in the linguistic and anthropological literature as it influences social discursive and linguistic practices, language nationalism, standardization, social stratification, hegemony and power. There are varied ideologies of language. Earlier conception of linguistic ideology was primarily concerned with linguistic hegemony or what Weber and Horner (2012: 16) call "hierarchy of languages." This is the dominance or promotion of one language above others in a bi/multilingual setting. In this way, ideology becomes a political-economy weapon in the service of oppressive forces (Zeidi 2012). In the Nigerian educational context, for instance, there is the all English ideology which makes the teaching and learning of the English language at all levels of education compulsory. English is, therefore, conferred with greater power, prestige and influence at the detriment of the country's indigenous languages. This kind of power relation may also affect the choice of language in the midst of other varieties in terms of standard use and writing. There is, for instance, emerging controversy among speakers of Igbo in Nigeria about the adoption of the Owerri dialect as the standard variety of their language. Speakers usually bring in socio-political sentiments in searching for their linguistic rights.

In this article, given the competing understanding of the concept of ideology, we are concerned with ideology as a social practice “held by immediate participants in a local sociolinguistic system” (Irvine and Gal 2000: 35-36). This is because it is difficult to find a site of social practice where language and ideology do not intersect (Zeidi 2012: 71). Linguistic ideology, therefore, is a body of ideas, form of thoughts and set of beliefs and attitudes towards language use which have been entrenched and motivated by social interests. We adopt Kroskrity (2006) view of language ideology in respect to the various dimensions of meaning. According to him, language ideology represents perception of language and discourse that are constructed in the interest of a specific social group. This justifies Heath’s (1977: 53) description of ideology as “self evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experience of members as they contribute to the expression of the group.” Woolard (1998: 237) corroborate this position when she states that “ideological concepts and notions are viewed as derived from, rooted in, reflective of or responsive to the experience or interests of a particular social position...”

The relationship between language and ideology is symbiotically defined; language is used to propagate ideology and ideology highlights the socially-situated uses of language. Irvine and Gal (2000) describe this kind of process in which ideological representation intersects with social and linguistic images as iconization. It involves a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked. According to them, linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representation of them as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence. This is why Weber and Horner (2012) maintain that because of the potential normative power of ideologies, language ideologies tend to be imbued with vested interests and can play a role in group membership, boundary negotiation as well as social inclusion and exclusion. Eagleton (1991) categorises linguistic ideologies into explicit and implicit (language) ideologies. Explicit ideology is concerned with ideology as a public discourse, which is a product of conscious, deliberate and systematic organised thought (Gouldner 1976, Woolard 1998) while implicit ideology upholds that the most important linguistic meanings are derived from the beliefs and intentions of the speakers (Eagleton 1991).

Based on available literature, we describe ideology as a set of beliefs, perceptions or feelings speakers have about a language, what it represents and how it can shape their social world. To young people, language is a social resource: they manipulate and

improvise it to discursively (re)construct their social and cultural space. This active interaction is used in negotiating identity of various kinds and in building networks among group members. The cross-fertilization of these interactions in the forms of gender ideologies, social pressure and subsequent transgression of hegemonic ideological concepts reveals how linguistic ideologies are entrenched in youth discursive practices. In this study, we focus on the entrenched implicit ideology as an essential part of youth discursive practices, especially in the construction of sexual agency. Young people are the makers and shapers of their language through creative and innovative strategies which they employ in the negotiation of meaning.

Methods and participants

Data for this article were obtained through a two month ethnographic fieldwork in Calabar South and Calabar Municipality which constitute Calabar Metropolis. The work is primarily focused on the study of two youth gangs, *Ágábá Boys* and *Ábónímá Boys* in both areas. Five primary respondents were selected in each group who are aged between 15 and 35 years. They were all males given that female membership of the group is not allowed. This is mainly as a result of the street reputation and gang orientation of the groups. They all claimed to have heterosexual identities. They are in one sexual relationship or the other. None of them is married but two said they have live-in partners (cohabitation). Five of them have completed secondary education but do not have the capacity to further their education beyond that level. Two respondents dropped out of secondary school as a result of financial constraints and three respondents only schooled up to the primary level. They are artisans doing one form of menial job or the other to earn a living. This evidence reveals the extent of educational and economic marginalization of the subjects.

There were metalinguistic conversations and interviews that took the researchers to their playgrounds, meeting points and homes. We obtained six hours of recording of interviews and participant observations. We sought to know from our respondents why their sexual discourse is usually framed in metaphor as a matter of ideology. We asked questions about the origin of this ideology and how it became conventionalized. Based on explicit sexual codes produced by the respondents, we generated a corpus of data, which they used lexically and contextually. This metaphorical coding of sexual expressions is an essential part of their everyday language. We also recorded the use of these sexual metaphors in their naturally occurring contexts by observing the subjects' discursive

practices. A digital audio recorder was used in recording data and transcripts of interviews. We sorted out the literal senses of the forms and matched metaphorical attributions that licensed them to understand the correlation. Data were coded into relevant metaphorical frames, transcribed, translated and analysed.

Youth, metaphor and sexual agency

The use of metaphor is a fact of social life in youth linguistic practices and performances. From a literary perspective, a metaphor is a figure of speech that establishes a non-explicit comparison between things, people, activities and qualities (Underhill 2010). It makes possible the transformation of one object or concept to another. It compares two unlike entities and highlights their vivid images. Underhill (2010: 12) refers to metaphors as reliterating expressions which “proves that language is no prison house that confines us but rather a creative space in which we construct and reconstruct our concepts, thereby pushing back the limit of language, ideas, thoughts and feelings.” In this way, metaphors are expressive devices with sufficient creative enterprise that can reveal distinct patterns of thought and facilitate understanding. Metaphors can also be analysed as a purely cognitive process. At the conceptual level, metaphors are said to interface with the thought system. Lakoff and Turner (1989) argue that the ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature, and this structures how we perceive, how we think or what we do. They further maintain that the use of metaphor requires the recipient to comprehend a source domain schema provided by the metaphor and factor it into a target domain as specified by the context. The cognitive capabilities of metaphors are very powerful as they unleash the mind’s creative energy and help to understand the world better. The evaluation of metaphors from this conceptual account is mainly through the establishment of some series of ontological correspondences with a set of mappings that applies to a given source-target pairing. In this way, metaphors have strong cognitive force in structuring production, interpretation and comprehension of utterances (Emanatian 1996). Generally, metaphor in this way is used to process and understand an experience of one kind in terms of another. However, it is the conventional sense of metaphor that is of interest to our concern.

Young people in Calabar Metropolis explore the use of metaphor in talking about sex and in sharing their sexual experiences through processes of creativity and innovation which are employed lexically and contextually. Beyond their novel linguistic productions, a metaphor is also used as a form of poetic style to explain emotions, attitudes, and

relationships that cannot be captured in ordinary conventional language. The use of metaphor therefore is a dominant feature of youth linguistic creativity and cultural agency. Being an agent implies entering into a cycle of translating self-understanding (Lechanteur 2012). To put it more elaborately, Breakwell (1992: 35) describes agency as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and course of action needed to meet given situational demands.” Young people generally use language to define their sexual experiences and construct sexual agency. Apart from verbal communication, body-related practices such as movement, positioning, consumption, and dress code can be used to construct sexual experience. King (2011: 2) describes sexual agency as “...having the capacity to act in relation to sexuality.” Youth, the world over, are sexually active category who explore socially situated language to talk about sex. The rise of the new technology in communication has exposed young people to sexual contents in movies, music and pornography. These influences are said to have profound impact on their attitudes, behaviours and values towards sex, as well as their discourse about/around sex. In some cases, some categories of youth very often conceal their sexual activities (at least part of these) and do not talk about them. In this section, we examine how young people in Calabar metropolis use language (lexically, contextually and pragmatically) to create sexual agency in an attempt to gain greater insights into their ideologically sexualised linguistic practices based on the field data.

Interestingly, the use of language by the *Ágábá* Boys and *Ábónímá* Boys is a form of verbal playfulness (De Klerk and Bosch 1999). They see it as a game aimed at deriving fun or pleasure given the lucid character of this language (initiative, reactive and fluid). An important feature of the language of these groups is the manipulation of conventional meaning of base and neighbouring languages into new linguistic meaning which can only be negotiated by group members. This is why Blommaert and Rampton (2011) argue that features of youth language may enter into meaning-making regardless of the conventional attribution that may be bestowed on them. According to them, making meaning this way involves many other dimensions such as indexical, emblematic and aesthetic and not just linguistic. Young people in Calabar Metropolis, therefore, transact the business of their social world through the (re)production of symbolic codes with shared meaning and mutual understanding. They use youth-centred linguistic and interactional practices through adoption, appropriation and contestation to share local and translocal social experiences. In this way, they highlight the creativity of everyday interactions and enact micro-interactional competences (Bucholtz and Scapoulli 2009). Given the street-like reputation and gang orientation of these groups, they are usually associated with

permissive sexual culture. They construct sex as a natural erotic experiment, largely for its gratifying appeal and pleasure. They talk about dating, romantic love and erotic sexual practices. Based on our findings, they do not encourage dating because it does not allow them to ‘spray (their) tentacles’ (have multiple partners) but rather practice what they call *point and kill*, a form of transactional sex. They depend on sex trade (as patrons) and street economies for survival.

Young people tell stories and share experiences about their sexual encounters. Stories about their sexual exploits and escapades are shared by group members in their relaxed mood and within their community of practice. The study discovered that the strength of manhood, to these youth, lies on the rounds of sex one can sustain during intercourse. This is called *úbihi* ‘long lasting effect’. A respondent maintains that it is the only mark of active sexual life. One encounters *power failure* if he could not go beyond the first round of intercourse. *Total blackout* is a situation where a group member experiences erectile dysfunction. He, therefore, becomes a *mascot* (hopeless and helpless) before his *Ógbó* (sex partner). Members with this medical condition are encouraged to arm themselves with *ítiát* ‘stone’ (sex enhancing drugs) or *combined* (Indian hemp and local gin) for maximum performance. They condemn the act of masturbation which they call *útóm ikpòñ* ‘solo sex’ and perceive its practitioners as *outcasts* who are afraid to *chance* (intimidate) girls.

A great deal of their discussion centres on what they do to female adolescents. They are regarded as objects of sexual pleasure that should always be *used* (exploited sexually) but not heard. This is the widely held view about women in the conventional society these young people find themselves. This is why Fingerson (2006) argues that women’s bodies are often culturally portrayed as passive and are devalued. Adolescent girls and women who resist sexual advances may be harassed, raped and diminished as the study discovers. In their discourse of sexual orientation, they depict gay and bisexual identities as morally outrageous and despicable. They exhibit deep-rooted phobia for the practitioners of these sexual orientations. Such people are usually given derogatory labels and addressed in abusive terms. This evidence reveals that young people use their discourse on sex to produce knowledge about sex (and sexuality) which is a fluid concept across time and space. This discourse defines new subjectivities and a sense of cultural agency. It is also important to note that this discourse is not informed by any changing cultural shift or ideologies of sex by the traditional society in which these youth operate and which still enforces discourse on sex in strict regulated space. Attwood (2006)

contends that there is a breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay.

Linguistic processes and sexual metaphor

Youth in Calabar Metropolis employ sexual metaphor in their informal discourse to enrich their language resources and foster a sense of belonging and solidarity. In this section, we highlight the linguistic processes that are used in forming these metaphors. One of the important morphological features in the creation of sexual metaphor is borrowing. Majority of the forms and expressions are borrowed from the sociolect of Nigerian hip-hop music; *káréwà*, *bang bang* and *chwá chwá* (sexual intercourse), others are derived from other youth sociolect especially Tiv, Warri and Igbo slang; *lóngó* (a place where sexual intercourse takes place), *ákáráchá* (a renowned prostitute), *élóbí* (a short, ugly woman/girl), and *ógbó* (girlfriend). Indigenous languages like Efik and Oro also provide the resources for borrowing. Forms like *nkányá* ‘thatch reed,’ *uté* ‘lit. beach’ (vagina) are borrowed from Efik and Oro respectively. In this case, new meanings have been conceived for old forms to foreground a sexual organ. Another process of creating sexual metaphor is through compounding in which case a lexeme is derived from two or more simpler lexemes (Mathew 1991). In other words, the two roots are incapable of independent existence and may convey meanings that are transparent (endocentric) or vague (exocentric). Forms like *honey dad* (sugar daddy), *honey mum* (sugar mummy), *ítíé ísòñ* ‘lit. a static sitting position’ (menstruation), red flag (menstruation), *úfòk-ényòñ* ‘lit. a high-profiled building’ (woman’s buttocks) are examples of compounding. In terms of meaning relations, the meaning of the whole may or may not be predicted on the meaning of the parts. They are, therefore, seen as metaphoric or synecdochic.

There are various instances of semantic widening. The form *ùtèrè* ‘vulture’ in Calabar youth slang formerly refers to an abused child, mostly homeless and victimized by poverty, disease and misery and who roams the streets fending for himself (the *Skolombo* phenomenon). In contemporary application, the term now refers to anyone who cannot afford to pay for sexual services. The reconstruction of penis as a premature, unripe and ripe plantain (based on its efficacy) is also an instance of semantic widening. In this way, narrowed meanings have become more generalised. The study also discovered a few instances of semantic narrowing in the sexual repertoire of youth in Calabar Metropolis. The form *ìsàlè* is the Yoruba equivalent for the preposition *under/below* but in its more recent use, it implies ‘under the thighs of a woman/girl’ which denotes sexual

intercourse. The word *ijó* means ‘dance’ in Yoruba but in the context of Calabar youth’ slang, it connotes only sexually provocative dance. *Gbédú* is another Yoruba word which means social party but has been reconceptualised as a gratifying sexual appeal.

Based on our findings, we identified the use of acronyms or abbreviations in the lexicon of youth’s strong language in Calabar metropolis. *TDB* (till day break) implies having fun with a sexual partner from dusk till dawn. *2-4-7* (24 hours a day and 7 days in the week) is used to indicate unlimited freedom or access in a sexual relationship. *IYC* (International Year of the Child) is used to refer to a childish or inexperienced sexual partner. *CF* (abridged form of Come Follow Me Stay) is used to refer to cohabitation while *IOU* (I owe you) is used in negotiating sexual services when a group member does not have physical cash to pay. Mensah (2011) refers to this kind of semantic process as disposition, which involves the expression of lexical meaning in terms of simpler concepts. There is also the truncation of lexical items which still retain their full lexical content and meaning. For instance, an ugly girl is said to be *ugh*, while a handsome guy is *andy*. A boo (from bobby) is a boyfriend, a *nig* (from nigga) is a rival boyfriend or admirer. *Kasa* (from *kasala* (NP word for problem)) is the commotion that ensues when two rival lovers encounter or confront each other.

We also found cases of code-mixing in the repertoire of sexual metaphor of youth in Calabar metropolis. In this case, code-mixing is not used as a conceptual gap-filling process but as a deliberate strategy for improvising and distortion of the normal course of language. This is aimed at promoting their multi-ethnic identities as well as sustaining the group’s social relationship. A form like *ólóshow* ‘a proud or showy young woman’ is derived from *óló* (Oro word for person) and English *show*. *Ákágum* ‘a stingy person’ is derived from Igbo word for hand, *áká* and English *gum*. This literarily implies a gummy hand. This label is usually given to a supposedly rich man who does not reward his sexual partners appropriately. Another instantiation of sexual metaphor formation is through cause and effect relationship. Expressions like *push and start* (weak penis), *peck and go* (unsteady sexual relationship), *wash and wear* (use of drugs or enhancers for sex), *hit and run* (a randy lover) are common in this regard as the study discovered.

The importance of sexual metaphor

Based on our findings, the use of sexual metaphor is an important component of cultural communication among youth in Calabar Metropolis. They employ the resources of the indigenous languages: Efik, Ibibio, Nigerian Pidgin as well as English among others.

Some of the forms and expressions are proverbs or clichés while the majority of others are lexical manipulations or new creations based on their sociolect. Conventional forms and expressions are semantically recreated and made to carry vulgarised meanings. These sexual metaphors are used to perform some major functions which we discuss below. Youth in Calabar Metropolis use sexual metaphor to show their disdain for safe sex practices such as in the use of contraceptives like condoms. The following metaphors (and their source languages) are used to express these sentiments:

- | | | | |
|------|--|---|--|
| 1(a) | Fisherman no dey wear raincoat
(NP) | – | ‘A fisherman does not wear
raincoat’. |
| (b) | Ówó ísídíáhá mbóró yé íkpók
(EF) | – | ‘No one eats banana with the peels’. |
| (c) | Chop body leave kanda (NP) | – | ‘Eat the body and leave the outer
layer (peels)’. |

The expressions in 1 are used to demonstrate contempt for the use of condoms. In (1a), the metaphorical interpretation is that if a fisherman can take a greater risk by swimming bare body in the river or ocean then the rain should not pose a threat to his movement. He can always defy it. In the same vein, the danger of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases or HIV/AIDS cannot stand in the way of youth’s maximum sexual pleasure. In (1b), the act of using a condom is metaphorically conceptualised as ‘eating banana with peels’. Respondents argue that although the peels contain nutrients and micro fibres that are sources of nourishment to the body, they however, inhibit the optimal taste of the banana in the same way condoms can obstruct maximum bodily contact and sexual pleasure. Similarly, in (1c), *kándá* is understood as the outer layers of nuts which are inedible. In this context, the condom is likened to *kándá* which should be dispensed of during sexual encounters. Eating the body implies the desire to have what is called ‘*skin to skin*’ (direct contact of the sexual organs) instead of experiencing any obstruction from the use of condom. The general perception against the use of condom among these youths is that it minimizes sexual pleasure and restricts satisfaction. Some male respondents complained that condoms unnecessarily lengthen ejaculation. Others argue that they interfere with regular frictions and cause ‘dryness.’

Youth in Calabar Metropolis also use sexual metaphor to justify the need for multiple concurrent sex partners. A few such metaphors are furnished in 2:

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|------|---|---|
| 2(a) | Érénòwò ísídiáhá éféré áfã ìkpòñ
(EF) | – ‘A man must not eat only vegetable
(gnetum Africana) soup’. |
| (b) | Ényéné ñkpó kíététié n̄tè ánánáná
(EF) | – ‘One who has only one thing stands
the risk of having nothing’ |
| (c) | Something must kill a man (NP) | – ‘Something certainly has to kill a
man’ |

The data in 2(a) and (b) unarguably demonstrate the flair for multi-sex partners amongst these youth. The conception that a man does not need to eat only one variety of soup or having one thing is as good as having nothing directly reflects this thinking. Mensah (2012) argues that this kind of mentality is rife because of the belief that sex and sexual partners are like consumable goods that can be changed at one’s will the way one changes dresses. The metaphor in 2(c) is usually used as a consolation to engage in dangerous sexual adventures, as discussed above. It is used to create a sense of false modesty that one is ready to bear the consequences of risky sexual behaviour. The use of sexual metaphor to heighten dislike for condoms and encourage multiple sexual partners is not a belief upheld by all youth. A handful of them do support these practices. A few group members actually argue against risky sexual behaviour and called for an open discussion about the sexual health of youth as well as the need for effective interventions.

Youth in Calabar Metropolis also use sexual metaphors in culturally specific terms to construct their sexual feelings, attractions, practices and identification. All the respondents in the study admitted to being heterosexual in terms of sexual orientation and identity. Some metaphors are devised to condemn and abuse homosexual preference. Some of the metaphors include:

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|------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 3(a) | Íkpá yè òkpó (EF) | – ‘flesh and bone’ |
| (b) | Khaki no be leda (NP) | – ‘Khaki is not leather’ |
| (c) | If e no be Panadol... (NP). | – If it is not Panadol...’ |

The expressions in 3 generally discriminate against homosexual romantic relations which are primarily influenced by mainstream orthodox societal expectations of an ideal sexual relationship. 3(a) expresses a sense of identity based on heterosexual attraction. *Íkpá* ‘flesh’ semiotically represents a woman, while *òkpó* ‘bone’ stands for a man within the conceptual metaphorical frame. This is the cultural norm and traditional stereotype for sexual preference and it greatly defines the prevailing orientation. This is why Salu (2011) maintains that individual sexuality is a combination of the genetic mechanisms and information learned through personal experiences. The expressions in 3(b) and (c)

have the same metaphorical coding. They promote some biases against people who have same-sex attraction. *Khaki* cannot be leather or any tablet cannot be *panadol* implies lesbians or gays cannot in any way derive the same quantum of gratifying appeal from intercourse as heterosexuals. Respondents believe that heterosexual identity is a more fulfilling and natural relationship because of the prospects of marriage and child bearing which are sources of economic strength and influence to the family. Homosexual experiments on the other hand are described as outlandish and disgusting. As a result of these negative perceptions of homosexuality, derogatory labels have been invented in referring to people who have this sexual orientation by youth in Calabar metropolis. A lesbian is called *mfrák* ‘a threatening female friend’ probably as a result of her assumed “violent or aggressive” disposition as noted by a respondent. A gay is called *úkébé* ‘enema’ in which case, the process of injection of liquid through the anus to motivate evacuation is likened to the image of a gay romantic relationship.

This prejudice against same-sex relationships has been a key theme in Nigeria’s political discourse of late, especially with the signing into law of the anti-same-sex marriage bill in Nigeria. People who are found guilty of this offence are liable to 14 years imprisonment (with hard labour) with no option of fine. This law reinforces the societal rejection and disdain towards same-sex unions. As a result, people with this sexual orientation have been eclipsed in the public space. They are not only discriminated against, but are marginalised and demonised (Hackl et al 2012). This can impact negatively on their identity and wellbeing. In all of this, we subscribe to the view of the American Psychological Association that sexual orientation is not merely a personal characteristics within an individual. One’s sexual orientation defines the group of people in which he is likely to find satisfying and fulfilling romantic relationships that are essential components of personal identity. On this score, we conclude that through their language use, young people strongly reinforce and reflect deep-seated homophobia, and sexual metaphors are linked to this attitude, mirroring the perception of mainstream Nigerian society.

Youth in Calabar Metropolis also use sexual metaphors to reiterate gender stereotypes and inequality through the portrayal and representation of women as consumable objects for male-centred pleasure. Sexual relationships are largely seen by these youth as economic exchange where the role of the woman is largely passive and dependent. Metaphors in this category include:

- | | | | |
|------|--|---|---|
| 4(a) | Money for hand...back for ground. (NP) | – | 'Money in the hand...back on the ground'. |
| (b) | Pay as you go (NP) | – | 'Pay as you have consumed'. |
| (c) | Kwátńkpé (IB) | – | 'scratch and pay me' |
| (d) | Nothing goes for nothing (NE) | | |

The study found out that in these metaphors, the woman's body is recreated as a commodity which is objectified, commercialised and probably consumed. Sexual relationships involve the buying and selling of the woman's body and the rendering of sexual services. The expression in 4(a) metaphorically translates as 'payment before service' which paints a picture where goods are bought or services rendered. This is usually a way of securing the agreement structure of the sex bargain where there can be no scope for abuse, cheating or manipulation. Respondents agree that there is a scale of fees to be charged, depending on the kind of sexual services one desires which must be followed. According to respondents, women are subordinated to male domination in two ways in which the cumulative effect is to objectify womanhood. First, is outright prostitution in which the sexual use of the woman's body is a commodity. The second is gift-giving, which involves reciprocal relationship founded on mutual sharing of pleasure. In both instances, women are still at the receiving end of directly or otherwise commodifying their 'wares.' Van der Veen (2001: 33) argues that:

The buying and selling of sexuality for the client's use transforms the body into a vessel or object; the body becomes alienated as it is used as a thing for someone else. This process of objectification is also seen to spill over to the objectification of all women.

The metaphor in 4(b) *pay as you go* is usually contrasted with *short time* or *quicke* or *wait and take* in relation to the length of time a client desires in obtaining sexual services. While the former allows for a longer time frame that is relaxed and negotiable, the latter is not so elastic since it can only accommodate *one mouth* (a round of sex) which expires as the client reaches orgasm. In negotiating sexual services, there is also what is called *kpóhó ònò ikó* (IB) 'hit and return my container' which involves services that are rendered in the day against the normal routine which is usually at night. There is a brand of service known as TDB an acronym for 'till daybreak,' which entails spending the entire night with a client. There is a type of service called *tuwo* (a pun for two), which in the literal sense is a popular maize flour which is the primary source of carbohydrate in

Northern Nigeria. The youth use this form to refer to a situation where two male clients engage a single *service provider* (prostitute) or (runs babe) ‘campus prostitute’ or vice-versa. This kind of service usually attracts higher charges than *single bouts* (intercourse between single partners). The name *túwó* is used as a result of its phonetic resemblance with the word ‘two.’ So, if a service provider says she wants to eat *túwó* for dinner, it means she has a twosome deal to ‘prosecute.’ If a client is not interested in a game (sexual intercourse), he may desire to be *rocked* (massaged) or be given a *blow job* (to have oral sex performed upon him). The expression in 4(c) *kwátnkpé* - ‘scratch and pay me’ also demonstrates the sex for sale ideology where a woman offers her body as an object to be scratched in exchange for money. The woman’s body in this respect is likened to a mobile telephone’s recharge card whose value is dependent on what one has paid (scratched). The metaphor *nothing goes for nothing* in 4(d) is usually used by a *service provider* to discreetly inform a *bone person* (a close friend or client) that in spite of their closeness, if he desires sex, she has to be adequately remunerated for her services. In other words, he should not expect sex without any material reward.

Another important function of sexual metaphors among youth in Calabar Metropolis is for the hegemonic construction of masculinity which is a direct consequence of the portrayal of women as sexual objects whose passive sexual role may sometimes translate to victimization. The cultural model of an ideal male-female sexual relationship in Calabar Metropolis is typically based on patriarchal relations, where the man is seen as the initiator and executor of the processes that may eventually lead to sexual contacts. The woman is subordinated and her role is auxiliary as the study discovers. Instances of metaphors used in this regard include:

- 5(a) *Érènwò ìtréké brúsáí* (EF) – ‘A man must always demonstrate his might’
- (b) *Èkòndò èrènwò* (EF) – ‘A man’s universe’

The expressions in 5 reflect power as the essence of masculinity. They indicate that there is no mutual recognition and reciprocity in heterosexual relationships among youth in Calabar metropolis. The man is seen to be strong, ambitious and domineering. This kind of orientation tells him that his need for love and respect can only be met by being masculine, powerful and violent (Kokopeli and Lakey, 1995). The woman is fragile, oppressed, and subject to abuse and exploitation. Women are devalued, dehumanised and harassed in stereotyped sexual partnerships based on our field data. One major proof of

this dominant power relation and hegemonic masculinity is violence, which usually results in rape and other forms of sexual aggression, as the study discovers.

Implications of the use of sexual metaphors

One of the primary goals of this study has been to investigate the extent to which the use of sexual metaphors can influence sexual behaviour of youth in Calabar metropolis. Given that sexual metaphors could be utilized as means to measure up macho stereotypes, the study discovers that this perception leads young men to feel that power and violence often lie under the surface in talk of heterosexual relations (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013). Mensah (2012) submits that sexual metaphors may be used to break the ice in attempting to negotiate a sexual relationship. They warm up the atmosphere and set the tone for one's overtures to be considered. Based on our findings, there are various ways in which the use of sexual metaphors impact sexual behaviour and general social lives of youth. Some members of the establishments see these metaphors as deviant linguistic behaviour that also seem to promote social vices like delinquency, restiveness, waywardness and even prostitution.

Based on our findings, the use of sexual metaphors can trigger a reasonable degree of sexual freedom. One of the ways of manifesting such freedom is by non-consensual touching behaviour which reflects the expression of dominance and control. This social touching attitude which is mainly male-female dyads involves hand touches and non-hand touches. Hand touches include the touching of a woman/girl's waist, breasts, arm taps and handshakes. Non-hand touches are kisses, embraces and hugs etc. These touches are used to express attitudes and emotion towards one another and indicate a wish for sexual intimacy. Three male respondents admitted that they use touching behaviour to somehow douse the heat (strong urge for sex). A respondent said that *touchery* (act of touching) most often invariably leads to *emergency action* (unplanned sex) "in keeping the body and soul together."

Kokopeli and Lakey (1995) maintain that one major proof of dominant power relations and hegemonic masculinity is violence which usually results in rape. A tendency for touch may result in rape since it is usually not consented as some respondents admitted. Sexual metaphors are forceful and socially distasteful and provide counterforce to the traditional linguistic ideology of the Efik society as the study finds out. Such metaphors are therefore said to weaken the bonds of conventional order and prepares the ground for social vices like violence, which is usually the primary thought in a rapist's mind

(Kokopeli and Lakey 1995). A respondent owns up that most rape suspects in the city are those who are conversant with the use of *free language* (sexual metaphors) and are usually members of gang groups or cults.

Calling people sexually derogatory names is also a consequence of the frequent use of sexual metaphor by youth in Calabar Metropolis. Respondents admit that women/girls who refuse 'to play ball' or consent to sexual advances are usually labelled with sexually derogatory names like *Virgin ánwáñá éðàk* 'a virgin with a deep hole,' *Ékpri mbómbóm* 'small buttocks,' *Ádiá akáñ* 'one who eats and denies' (lit. one who likes sex but pretends otherwise), Red bull 'ugly and unattractive woman/girl,' old calendar or old cargo 'sexually unattractive woman' etc. These names are a means of control as well as demeaning the sexuality of women. Respondents also agree that as a result of their perception towards the use of contraceptives like condoms as reflected in some sexual metaphor, they do not have regard for their partners' thoughts, feelings and opinion in respect to the appeal or request for safe sex. The consequence of this sort of attitude would be the danger of exposing such partners to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or the risk of unwanted pregnancy.

Respondents also admit that the use of sexual metaphor has led them to believe that sexual partners can be changed in a way young people wish. In this way, having multiple sexual partners becomes the norm. This attitude also encourages the treatment of women as sex symbols who can easily be 'used and dumped.' Demeaning remarks are made about the woman's body and she is only expected to play a passive role while the man sees himself as the key player in a relationship. It was also agreed that this kind of power relation can be a threat to any healthy sexual relationship. Unequal treatment or perception of women based on socially constructed gender roles may engender violent acts such as rape, sexual harassment, sexual slavery and women trafficking etc. This gender-based violence against women cannot be isolated from the use of drugs for sex and involvement in pornography. Sex enhancing drugs and alcohol are usually consumed by youth in preparation for sexual *bouts* (engagements) in order to improve sexual performance. In some instances, photos of naked sex partners are taken in the ecstasy of sexual pleasure and subsequently shared using mobile technology (sexting) among each other. On the part of the young girls, respondents agree that sexual metaphor may partly be responsible for the exposure of parts of the body through indecent dressing which is a means of sexual invitation. From these responses, we admit that sexual metaphors

directly or indirectly influence sexual behaviour of youth in Calabar Metropolis and beyond.

Discussion of findings

This article examines youth sexual discursive practices that are ideologically entrenched in the use of metaphor gaining insights from social construction theory of communication which sees language as a constructive action, which is relative and non-representational. According to Andrew (2012: 27), the social constructionist movement is sustained by the belief that human social life is produced through discursive interaction. Discourse is the principal instrument of the social construction of reality. It provides the framework that enables people to construct the phenomena of their personal experience. Young people construct and negotiate meaning in relation to the experience of their social lives. Intersubjective understanding and a variety of discursive practices are constructed, reproduced and conventionalized within the social space. This ideological foundation of youth language is a socially situated fluid practice which in itself is self-reflective. It is motivated by a number of reasons as the study discovers. Primarily, there is the need to renegotiate and sustain identity, which is the outcome of social relation, and which is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to them, which they draw upon in their communication with other people (Burr 2003: 106).

Importantly, there is compelling necessity to exclude the others, particularly teens and adults. However, from our findings, other youth who were called *inwañ* (lit. farm) ‘fools’ were also socially excluded and labelled. This category of youth do not belong to a particular community of practice with its specific mode of bonding together through shared goals, values, beliefs, practices and activities (Gee 2001). Based on the findings, young people also conceptualize habitual discursive practices by interacting together in a social system to illuminate their social experience and construct values and beliefs which are generated in their discourse. We have seen how through sexual metaphors, they have institutionalised their disdain for the use of condoms. They believe that this contraceptive method inhibits pleasurable sex and minimises sexual performance. According to the gang members, body-to-body contact (*ébónyó*) is the proof of genuine love. They have not only constructed their sexual identity as basically heterosexual but have shown deep-rooted aversion for people with homosexual orientation. Such people are labelled, teased and made to appear as outcasts. A respondent argues that “God created *bone* and *flesh*

(metaphor for Adam and Eve) and not only *dry bones* (a metaphor for two men) to further justify his contempt for same-sex relationship.

Youth in Calabar Metropolis also use sexual metaphor to negotiate sexual encounters. This covers the range of their sexual network and partners. The relationship with such partners is not one of reciprocity or mutual pleasure but that of their self-centred pleasure. Hegemonic masculinity and aggression usually define such sexual exploits. The partners are changed at will and harassed and sometimes physically assaulted to do the sexual bidding of the gang members as the study discovered. Their sexual act has no focus on reproduction but mainly on sexual pleasure and fulfilment. The use of sex-enhancing drugs is very prominent and the overall sexual act is characterised by violence. Victims are usually raped or gang-raped when they tend to exhibit resistance to the sexual advances of these gang members.

Based on our findings, it is revealed that youth in Calabar metropolis have negative attitude towards the English language in spite of the socio-economic pressure on Nigerians to learn the language. Speaking or interacting in English is, therefore, not part of their identity. They prefer Nigerian Pidgin and the indigenous Efik, Ibibio, Igbo, Oro and their sociolect thus mitigating multilingualism as a resource for translanguaging. On why local youth do not communicate freely in English as in other codes, a respondent remarks that *Grammar no be moi-moi* ‘Grammar is not bean cake’ (It’s difficult). Another argues that *We no get morale for grammar* ‘We do not have the capacity to speak English’. Hence, the general perception of group members about English is that it is elitist in nature and a rare privilege of the educated members of the society. Open discussion of sex, sexual activities and relations are regarded as taboo by the larger stereotyped and conservative society and the cultural system in which the Agaba and Abonima Boys are part of, hence their recourse to the use of metaphor as the ideological foundation in driving their sexualized discourse in order to exclude children, elders and the others from such discourses. All this is accomplished to forge their individual identity and group belonging and to integrate into the new cultural flow.

Conclusion

Language is only one of the indexical features that contributes to the semiotic bubble that young people create and draw upon. They have a community of practice such as music, dress sense or fashion, sports, initiation rituals, and a whole social universe that transports their ideas and make up their world (Mensah 2016). In this article, we have explored the

ways young male adolescents in Calabar Metropolis use metaphor ideologically in their discursive interactions involving sex and sexuality. The study is rooted in the social construction theory which defines language as a social and cultural practice that can be recreated and reconstructed to index reality. The construction of meaning is shaped by life experience, belief and background which can influence the perception of reality. The *Ágábá* Boys and *Ábónímá* Boys modelled their events and activities in language. They utilise metaphor as an ideological tool in their discourse of sex and romance as a process of socialization and enculturation. This ideology is passed on through time and is overtly used to define their sexual orientation, exhibit disdain for the use of contraceptives like the condom and also defines their other ideologies of sex. Based on ethnographic evidence, this ideology in its overall social context can also ignite sexual aggression, exploitation and utilitarianism. This is why Nortier and Svendsen (2015) maintain that the evolution of ideologically productive youth linguistic practices shows commonalities and differences in how young people experience, act and relate to the contemporary social, cultural and linguistic complexity of the 21st century. A comprehensive sexuality education is therefore a necessary panacea to curbing these youth sexual behaviour and excesses and to promoting their sexual responsibility and decent quality of life.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to two anonymous reviewers of this article who also contributed ideas and materials that significantly strengthened the arguments of this paper. We wish to appreciate the efforts of all the youth who participated in this study. We thank our field assistants, Etim Edet (Togo), Eme Essien and James Bassey (Ambulance). Any errors that remain are ours.

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