

STREET LINGO. A TOOL FOR EXCLUSION? : A CASE OF UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE STUDENTS.

Abstract

This paper identifies Shona words which have been extended in meaning and used as street lingo by University of Zimbabwe students and examines whether the students are successfully excluding their lecturers from their conversations. The study's main aim is to establish if the assertion by scholars such as Belkhir (2016) and Mamvura (2006) that street lingo is mainly used for exclusion is true. The study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature and, therefore, it uses participant observation (incorporating the selective listening form) and a quantitative data collection tool namely a questionnaire. The study reveals that students change meanings of Shona words in a way that prevents lecturers from getting the meanings of these words. Lecturers do not deduce the extended meanings; they instead either think of the words' original meanings or the words' extended meanings in other contexts and this is how they become excluded from the students' conversations. Evidence from this study gives a general impression that street lingo is mainly used for exclusion.

Key words: Semantics, Semantic extension, Shona,

Street lingo

1.0 Introduction

Street lingo is a language variety that may be spoken when a section of society wishes to reinforce its identity and exclude others (Poole 1999). Researchers such as Mawadza (2000), Mamvura (2006), Nyota and Mareva (2012) and Terna–Abah (2016) assert that slang/ street lingo is used to exclude other people from conversations. However, there is little information on the validity of this assertion. This paper seeks to verify the validity of this assertion using the context of the University of Zimbabwe. The paper specifically identifies Shona words which have been extended in meaning and used as street lingo by University of Zimbabwe students and examines whether the students are successfully excluding their lecturers from their conversations. The paper treats these words as street lingo/slang because their extended meanings are very ephemeral in nature and are also informal. University of Zimbabwe students take Shona words and attach new meanings to them and use them in their informal conversations as a way of excluding lecturers from their conversations. It is then a goal of this paper to investigate whether this assertion is valid or invalid.

1.1 Semantic extension in street lingo

Semantic extension is a concept within Semantics, defined by Mukaro (2012) as that process when a word acquires a new meaning in a different context while retaining its original meaning. According to this definition, a word can have many meanings depending on the contexts it is used. Hock (1991) and Chimhundu (2002) use the term 'widening' to refer to semantic extension. Street lingo is defined as a language variety that may be spoken when a section of society wishes to reinforce its identity and exclude others (Poole 1999). Street lingo is also very ephemeral and informal. The extended meanings of Shona words used by UZ students are also informal and short lived, therefore, they are considered by this paper as street lingo.

1.2 Methodology

This paper adopts a mixed method approach. It utilized qualitative and quantitative methods of collecting data. It used participant observation and made use of questionnaires. The researchers obtained forty street lingo terms by participating in students' conversations. To see whether lecturers are being successfully excluded from conversations by the use of street lingo words by students, questionnaires were distributed to five lecturers selected haphazardly from each of the five faculties that were selected randomly at the

University. The selected faculties are Faculty of Arts, Sciences, Education, Social Studies and Commerce. Haphazard sampling is a sampling method that does not follow any systematic way of selecting participants and this sampling method was used in distributing questionnaires to lecturers since the researcher gave the questionnaires to those lecturers that were found in their offices. The questionnaires contained a list of the Shona words whose meanings are extended then lecturers were requested to supply the meanings of each of the words. They were requested provide the meanings they know for each word at their own time then the researcher collected the questionnaires at suggested time.

1.3 Data presentation and analysis

Below is a presentation of semantically extended Shona words that were obtained and a discussion on how successful the students are in excluding lecturers from their (students) conversations, through using lecturers' responses. Descriptive statistics is used to analyse data. Tables and pie charts are also employed to present the responses obtained from lecturers. Table (i) below presents the semantically extended words used as street lingo collected from the University of Zimbabwe students.

Table (i). The Shona semantically extended words as used at U.Z by students

STANDARD WORDS	SHONA	ORIGINAL/FORMAL MEANING	EXTENDED MEANING
1) <i>bhara</i>		'wheelbarrow'	'an old car'
2) <i>chibage</i>		'maize'	'an ugly girl/woman'
3) <i>chihuta</i>		'quail bird'	'a lowest pass grade'
4) <i>China</i>		'a fourth day of the week when, traditionally, most people rest because it is considered sacred'.	'a boy without a fashionable appearance and money'
5) <i>chitunha</i>		'corpse'	'a marked assignment'
6) <i>chikwekwe</i>		'tick'	'a material'

		stic girlfriend'
7) jeko	'sickle'	'Nike label'
8) kubatwa	'to be held'	'to be drunk'
9) kubvuta	'to grab'	'to beat'
10) kudambu rwa	'to tear'	'to lose virginity'
11) kudonhe dzwa	'to fall down due to someone's action'	'made to fail'
12) kudhibha	'to dip'	'to lack knowledg e/to forget'
13) kudhingu ra	'to exceed the expected weight'	'to have first class distinctio ns'
14) kufamba	'to walk'	'to be intelligen t'
15) kukanga	'frying food'	'sexual intercour se'

16)	<i>kujega</i>	'lifting heavy objects'	'able to do something'
17)	<i>kunyika</i>	'to dip'	'being drunk'
18)	<i>kupisa</i>	'to burn'	'to have sex'
19)	<i>kuraura</i>	'to fish'	'to copy'
20)	<i>kusaona</i>	'not able to see'	'not intelligent'
21)	<i>kuseva</i>	'to dip sadza in soup or stew'	'reading'
22) <i>za</i>	<i>kusimud</i>	'to lift'	'to plagiarise'
23)	<i>kutamba</i>	'to play'	'to trick'
24)	<i>kutemwa</i>	'to be cut'	'failing'
25) <i>a</i>	<i>kutsotsw</i>	'to be tricked'	'to have sex out of wedlock'

26)	<i>kuzorwa</i>	'to smeared' be	'to be HIV infected by someone'
27) <i>a</i>	<i>kuvharw</i>	'to be shut'	'to face challenges in an exam'
28)	<i>kuzorora</i>	'to rest'	'to chill/to calm down'
29) <i>e</i>	<i>mazerer</i>	'algae'	'confusion'
30)	<i>mbama</i>	'a slap'	'a beautiful girl'
31)	<i>muto</i>	'soup'	'fashionable appearance'
32) <i>e</i>	<i>muzvezv</i>	'a snake track'	'HIV, virus'
33)	<i>pombi</i>	'pump'	'a slim beautiful girl'

34)	<i>nyama</i>	'meat'	'a beautiful girl loved by most boys'
35)	<i>reza</i>	'razor blade'	'a bitch/womaniser'
36)	<i>simbi</i>	'steel'	'a giant'
37)	<i>shinda</i>	'thread'	'a beautiful well-structured girl'
38)	<i>shiri</i>	'bird'	'girlfriend'
39)	<i>zondo</i>	'cow's legs'	'men's private organ'
40)	<i>zvipande</i>	'tree barks'	'crimes'

1.3.1 Success by students in excluding lecturers

Below we establish, through the data obtained, if

students are successful in excluding lecturers from their conversations.

1.3.1.1 Composition of participant lecturers

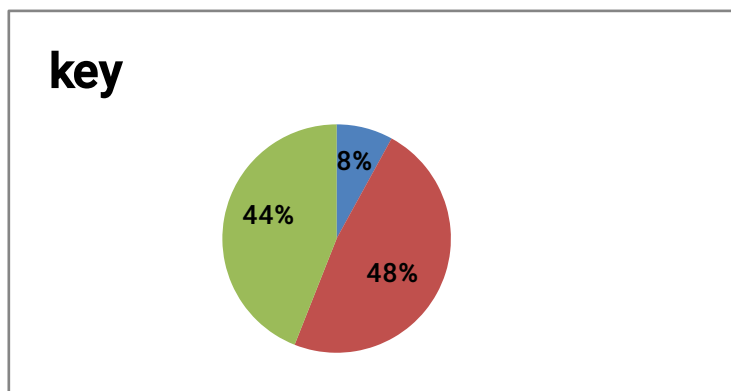
Twenty five questionnaires were distributed to twenty five lecturers selected from five faculties of the University of Zimbabwe through haphazard sampling. Only five lecturers per faculty were given the questionnaires. The questionnaires contained forty slang words. All questionnaires were returned, making a 100% response rate. The sample comprises of nine female and sixteen male respondents thus giving 36% females and 64% males. These lecturers were of ages between thirty and seventy years, the majority being in their 40s and 50s. Any statistical percentage in this section is therefore derived from measuring the response against the sample of twenty five lecturers.

1.3.1.2 The exclusion of lecturers from students' conversations

Here we present the data concerning the exclusion of lecturers from students' conversations. In order to establish whether students are successfully excluding lecturers from their (students) conversations, the lecturers were to provide what they think is the new meaning of each of the Shona words in the questionnaire and the results

presented here were obtained. Those who gave 5 to 8 correct responses out of 40 were 11 (44%); those who gave 1 to 5 correct responses were 12 (48%) and those who failed to identify all new meanings were 2 (8%). A pie chart below illustrates this finding.

Fig 1. Response rate



The questionnaire contained forty words as noted earlier on but no lecturer managed to provide more than eight correct responses. Basing on these results, it appears quite a number of lecturers are excluded from students' conversations. This observation corresponds to the assertion by scholars such as Terna-Abah (2016), Belkhir (2016) and Mamvura (2006) that slang is mainly used by people within a certain group so as to exclude

people outside that particular group from understanding certain conversations. In this case, lecturers are being excluded by their students from their (students) conversations because they belong to different groups and so students try to use language in such a way that lecturers fail to get what they (students) will be talking about.

Table (ii) below shows the percentage of lecturers who gave correct responses for each word.

Table (ii). Individual words and their percentage of correct response

Shona semantically extended words	Percentage of lecturers who correctly responded
1. china, pombi, kutsotswa, shiri, zondo,nyama, kuzorora, jeko, kudamburwa, kujega, bhara, kutamba, muto, chibage, kubvuta, kusimudza, kupisa, kukanga.	0%
2. chihuta, kunyika, shinda, muzvezve,	4%

<i>kubatwa, simbi, mazerere, chikwekwe</i>	
3. kudhingura, kufamba, kuseva, kuraura	8%
4. kutemwa:	12%
5. kudonhedzwa	16%
6. reza	20%
7. kuzorwa	24%
8. kusaona, zvipande	28%
9. mbama	36%
10. chitunha, kuvharwa	48%
11. kudhibha	60%

From the table, 18 words have 0%, 8 words have 4%, 4 words have 8%, 2 words have 48%, another 2 words have 28%. There are also 6 words in which each acquired 16%, 60%, 36%, 24%, 20% and 12 % correct responses respectively. These percentages show that some words' new meanings were known to the lecturers and others were not.

1.3.1.2.1 Words which received correct responses

From Table (ii) above, it is evident that there are some words whose meanings were correctly identified by many lecturers. These words are presented in the following table:

Table (iii). Words whose meanings were correctly identified

Shona words	Original meaning	Extended meaning
1. <i>chitunha</i>	'corpse'	'a marked assignment'
2. <i>kuvharwa</i>	'to be closed'	'to face challenges in an exam'
3. <i>kudhibha</i>	'to dip'	'to lack knowledge or to forget'

The above words' meanings were positively identified by many lecturers due to the fact that such words have been used for quite a long time and so, lecturers got to know their meanings through repeatedly hearing them being used by students. This is also because the same students and some lecturers live in the same community and therefore, some lecturers befriend students to the extent that students feel free to communicate using slang words with them.

1.3.1.2.2 Words which received wrong responses

There are many words whose correct meanings could not be identified by many lecturers. Some obtained wrong responses and other did not receive a meaning at all due to various reasons. Some lecturers were providing original meanings, others were providing old extended meanings and yet others were giving broader extended meanings. There was also a group of lecturers who were giving the extended meanings they know as used in other contexts other than U.Z with the assumption that the meanings are the same. Moreover, some words have unpredictable mappings, that is, they have distant links in original and extended meanings and so, some lecturers left such words unattempted. Below is a discussion on words whose meanings were wrongly identified.

1.3.1.2.2.1 Words which received zero response rate

There are many words which were not attempted by many lecturers. Some of these are as follows:

Table (iv). Unattempted words

Shona words	Original meanings	Extended meanings
1. <i>kusimudza</i>	'to lift'	'to plagiarize'
2. <i>kubvuta</i>	'to grab'	'to beat'

3. kupisa	'to burn'	'to have sexual intercourse'
4. zondo	'cow's heels'	'male sex organ'
5. china	'a fourth day of the week when, traditionally, most people rest because it is considered sacred'	'a boy without a fashionable appearance and money'
6. nyama	'meat'	'a beautiful girl loved by most boys'
7. kutsotswa	'to be tricked'	'to have sex out of wedlock'
8. jeko	'sickle'	'a Nike label'
9. kutamba	'to play'	'to trick'

The above words were left unattempted by most lecturers. This is because the words are new in the slang lexicon. They have been coined recently and

so, their meanings are not yet known by lecturers. Moreover, this could be attributed to the fact that the original and the extended meanings of some of these words are not closely linked. There is no direct or one to one correspondence between the original and the extended meanings of these words and so, lecturers cannot predict the meanings. This is especially the case in such words as *zondo* and *china*.

1.3.1.2.2 Words which were given their original meanings

There are words which received original meanings. This means that lecturers are familiar with the original meanings of the slang words but are not familiar with their extended meanings. It entails that lecturers hear those words being articulated by students but, they only think of their original meanings and this is how they become excluded. The table below shows such words.

Table (v). Words which were given original meanings

Shona word	Original meaning	Extended meaning
1. <i>bhara</i>	'wheelbarrow'	'an old car'
2. <i>chibage</i>	'maize'	'an ugly girl/'

		woman'
3. muto	'soup'	'a fashionable appearance'
4. kukanga	'frying food'	'to have sex'
5. chihuta	'quail bird'	'a lowest pass grade (3 rd grade)'

Lecturers who got the above responses wrong were providing the meanings in the middle column of the table.

1.3.1.2.2.3 Semantically extended words from other contexts

Some lecturers got the meanings wrongly because they provided the extended meanings they know as used in other contexts. Some of the words which received such meanings are as follows:

Table (vi). Words which were given extended meanings as used in other contexts

Shona word	Original meaning	Extended meaning	Meanings provided by the informant

			s
1. kujega	'to lift heavy things'	'able to do something'	1: 'to assist' 2: 'to help' 3: 'provide support'
2. kupisa	'to burn'	'to have sex'	1: 'something new' 2: 'still fresh information and goods' 3: 'topical issue'
3. pombi	'pump'	'a slim beautiful girl'	1: 'tight trousers' 2: 'tights' 3: 'very tight dress'

Some lecturers were providing the meanings they know as used in other contexts not at the University of Zimbabwe context, they are not aware of the

distinct meanings of these words as used by the University of Zimbabwe students. The responses to the words in the above table show the extended meanings provided but these meanings are not the same as those attached to these words in the University of Zimbabwe context.

Extended meanings provided for the word *kupisa* shows that lecturers are aware of its meaning as used on the WhatsApp platform but when it comes to the University of Zimbabwe context, the meaning is not the same as it means sexual intercourse not something new. The word *kujega* means to assist someone to many people outside the campus, also the word *pombi* means tight dresses and trousers to many people outside the campus and so, lecturers think that the meanings are the same as in the University of Zimbabwe context. This shows that slang differs with contexts (Dozie and Madu, 2012) and as such, some lecturers know the extended meanings in other contexts not as used by the University of Zimbabwe students and this is how they become excluded from students' conversations.

1.3.1.2.2.4 Words which received old extended meanings

Furthermore, some lecturers got wrong meanings because they provided the meanings they used

when they were in school long back. Such words are listed below:

Table (vii). Words which received old extended meanings

Shona word	Original meaning	Extended meaning	Meanings provided by lecturers
1. <i>simbi</i>	'steel'	'a giant'	1: 'girl' 2: 'very beautiful woman' 3: 'a beautiful lady'
2. <i>pombi</i>	'pump'	'a slim beautiful girl'	1: 'not useful' 2: 'a useless person' 3: 'poor man'
3. <i>chitunha</i>	'a corpse'	'a marked assignment'	1: 'full chicken prepared for someone'

			2: 'slaughter ed broiler' 3: 'chicken'
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The lecturers who responded were of the ages between thirty and seventy years, the majority being in their 40s and 50s. As such, some lecturers were providing the extended meanings they used when they were at school, not knowing that slang is ephemeral and so, the meanings they knew when they were at school are not the same with the current meanings. This is shown by meanings provided for words in the table above in which *pombi* used to mean a useless or poor man long ago. *Chitunha* also meant chicken prepared for someone and *simbi* used to mean a beautiful girl. Therefore, when these lecturers hear students saying these words, they think of their old extended meanings and this is how they become excluded. This shows that the extended meanings of slang words are ephemeral and can lead to the exclusion of people outside a certain group.

1.3.1.2.2.5 Words which received broader extended meanings

Some words were answered wrongly because the lecturers provided the broader extended meanings not knowing that the meanings have been narrowed down. Students have the ability to narrow down meanings of words such that when lecturers hear them they think of their umbrella extended meanings not knowing that their meanings have been narrowed down. The below table illustrates this observation:

Table (viii). Words which were answered by their umbrella meanings

Shona word	Original meaning	Extended meaning	Meaning given by lecturers
1. <i>kudamburwa</i>	'to tear'	'to lose virginity'	1: 'sex' 2: 'to be made love to' 3: 'a woman who had sex'

The word in the above table received responses such as 'sex, to be made love to, a woman who had sex'. To the University of Zimbabwe students, it only means to break a girl's virginity. When lecturers hear students saying *kudamburwa*, they think it refers to having sex yet they will be strictly referring only to the action of losing virginity by a female being. In this case, it seems the lecturers have an idea of what is meant by *kudamburwa* but their idea is too broad. This also shows how lecturers are being excluded from students' conversations.

1.4 Conclusion

Shona words which are extended in meaning and used by the University of Zimbabwe students as street lingo were identified. The study established that quite a number of lecturers are excluded from the students' conversations. Basing on the sample taken, the general impression is that students are successfully excluding lecturers from their conversations by using Shona words which have been extended in meaning. Most lecturers are familiar with the original meanings of the words and some are familiar with the extended meanings of the words as used in other contexts but are not familiar with the extended meanings as used by UZ students as shown by their failure to identify the

extended meanings of the Shona words as used by UZ students. This shows the creativity of UZ students in using language as they use a language that is native to most of the lecturers in the study but successfully hindering them (lecturers) from deducing the meanings. Overall, basing on the findings, the general impression is that students are successfully excluding lecturers from their conversations as evidenced by the lecturers' failure to exceed eight correct responses. The conclusion that can be made here is that, basing on the size of the sample taken, it appears street lingo is a veritable tool for exclusion as put across by many scholars including Belkhir, (2016) Terna-Abah (2016) and Mamvura (2006). This study then supports the assertion that street lingo is a language which is used mainly for exclusion of people outside a certain group.

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