

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR ANALYSIS OF IGBO YOUTH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

New language varieties are evolving across the globe. One example of such varieties is youth language. This paper explores the youth language used by young people of Igbo in South-eastern Nigeria. The Igbo youth language is characterized by extensive use of metaphors. Young people utilize metaphors to express the mechanics of sexual activities and their gratifying appeal. They utilize lexically and contextually driven sexually explicit codes to conceptualize and reconstruct sex and sexual relations within their social universe and group's dynamics. The study is rooted in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) which reveals that metaphor is a systematic cognitive device used in the understanding of certain abstract concepts through the application of concrete ones. The study establishes the existence of conceptual metaphors in the language of Igbo youth. The young people use sexual metaphors to structure their experience of women, men and sex in terms of status/objectification, dominance/power, possession/control and hostility/aggression.

Introduction

The study of metaphor has been one of the main research areas in Cognitive Linguistics. Within this framework metaphor is one basic imaginative cognitive mechanism. It is not a figure of speech, as it is considered by many traditional objectivist

approaches (see for instance, Halliday 1985); not even the result of a wide array of contextual implications, as proposed by Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995; Papafragou 1996; Goatly 1997). Ibarretxe-Antunano (2001) notes that in Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor occupies a central role in thought and language. It is a means by which it is possible “to ground our conceptual systems experientially and to reason in a constrained but creative fashion” (Johnson 1992:351). Metaphor is defined as a “mapping” or “projection” between conceptual domains i.e. across different experiential domains (Lakoff 1993).

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) introduce a powerful theory for the study of the role of metaphor in our ordinary conceptual system. This theory has been developed by Johnson (1987), Lakoff (1987), and Lakoff and Turner (1989), and followed, although not always in complete agreement, by many other authors such as Gibbs (1990,1992), Way (1991), Steen (1994), and Kövecses (2002), to mention only some. Lakoff and Johnson’s main concern is with why our everyday concepts are structured in one way rather than another. In particular, it is with conceptual metaphors, that is, conventional concepts elaborated metaphorically that may take public form in metaphoric expressions. But these metaphoric expressions, which represent these conventional metaphoric concepts, do not need to be interpreted metaphorically (Romero & Soria 2005).

The purpose of this paper is to explore sexual metaphors as an aspect of the language of the young Igbo people. The paper examines the use of sexual metaphors by Igbo youth in South-eastern Nigeria. It investigates how youth utilize metaphors to express the mechanics of sexual activities and their gratifying

appeal. Young people utilize lexically and contextually driven sexually explicit codes to conceptualize and reconstruct sex and sexual relations within their social universe and group's dynamics. The Igbo people occupy what is politically known as the south-eastern part of Nigeria. The Igbo language is spoken in the core Igbo states - Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo - as well as in some parts of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states all in the southern region of Nigeria. The study concentrated on the Igbo youth residing in Onitsha. Onitsha is located in Anambra state, and it is one of the major commercial cities which attract the presence of people from various cultures across Nigeria, including Igbo speakers of different dialects.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section two gives a brief discussion on method of data collection and analysis; section three presents the theoretical framework adopted by this study; section four is devoted to the review of previous related works on metaphors; section five is the presentation of data; section six discusses the implications of the use of sexual metaphors while section seven presents some concluding remarks.

Methodology

Primary data were obtained from only the male folk. The reason is that women shy away from using sexual metaphors. A questionnaire was adapted from Timothy Beneke's (1982) work "Men on Rape," and administered to twenty young Igbo men residing in Onitsha metropolis. The data were collated and analyzed using simple descriptive approach.

Theoretical framework

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, sometimes called Cognitive Metaphor Theory, was developed by researchers within the field of cognitive linguists. It became widely known with the publication of *Metaphors We Live By*, by Lakoff and Johnson, in 1980. Conceptual metaphor theory has since been developed and elaborated (Deignan 2005). Conceptual metaphors are used very often to understand theories and models. A conceptual metaphor uses one idea and links it to another to better understand something. For example, the conceptual metaphor of viewing communication as a 'conduit' is one large theory explained with a metaphor. So not only is our everyday communication shaped by the language of conceptual metaphors, but so is the very way we understand scholarly theories. These metaphors are prevalent in communication and we do not just use them in language; we actually perceive and act in accordance with the metaphors.

There are two main roles for the conceptual domains posited in conceptual metaphors: Source domain: the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions (e.g., love is a *journey*). Target domain: the conceptual domain that we try to understand (e.g., *love* is a journey). It has earlier been pointed out that metaphor is a mapping. A mapping is the systematic set of correspondences that exist between constituent elements of the source and the target domains. Many elements of target concepts come from source domains and are not preexisting. To know a conceptual metaphor is to know the set of mappings that applies to a given source-target pairing. The same idea of mapping between source and target is used to describe analogical reasoning and inferences (Kövecses 2005).

A primary tenet of this theory is that metaphors are matter of thought and not merely of language: hence, the term *conceptual metaphor*. The metaphor may seem to consist of words or other linguistic expressions that come from the terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain, but conceptual metaphors underlie a system of related metaphorical expressions that appear on the linguistic surface. Similarly, the mappings of a conceptual metaphor are themselves motivated by image schemas which are pre-linguistic schemas concerning space, time, moving, controlling, and other core elements of embodied human experience.

In their 1980 work, Lakoff and Johnson closely examined a collection of basic conceptual metaphors, including:

Love is a journey

Life is a journey

Social organizations are plants

Love is war

The latter half of each of these phrases invokes certain assumptions about concrete experience and requires the reader or listener to apply them to the preceding abstract concepts of love or organizing in order to understand the sentence in which the conceptual metaphor is used.

Deignan (2005) attempts to describe the central points of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and outline implications for researchers in the social sciences. The fundamental tenet of Conceptual Metaphor Theory is that metaphor operates at the level of thinking. Metaphors link two conceptual domains, the 'source' domain and the 'target' domain. The source domain consists of a set of literal entities, attributes, processes and relationships, linked semantically and apparently stored together in the mind. Conceptual metaphor theorists claim that all metaphors both

hide and highlight aspects of the target domain. For instance, the conceptual metaphor understanding is seizing, discussed by Lakoff and Turner (1989) suggests that an idea is a concrete object which can be metaphorically grasped and then held. In many cases, linguistic metaphors represent subconscious choices on the part of the speaker or writer, whose choice of language is partly constrained by the conceptual structures shared by members of his or her community. Metaphors can also help people to talk about difficult, emotionally intense or uncommon experiences, and thus, according to conceptual metaphor theory, to think about them

Hellermann & Markovits (2001) noted that among American adolescents, baseball metaphors for sex are often used as euphemisms for the degree of physical intimacy achieved in sexual encounters or relationships. In the metaphor, first prevalent in the aftermath of World War II, sexual activities are described as if they are actions in a game of baseball (Romaine 1999; Jezer 1982). Among the most commonly used metaphors are the *bases* describing levels of physical intimacy (generally from a male, heterosexual perspective). Definitions vary, but the following are typical usages of the terms: (Levkoff 2012)

First base – mouth-to-mouth kissing, especially French kissing;

Second base – skin-to-skin touching/kissing of the breasts; in some contexts it may instead refer to touching any erogenous zones through the clothes (i.e. not actually touching the skin), or manual stimulation of the genitals;

Third base – touching below the waist (without sexual intercourse); in some contexts, it may instead refer to oral stimulation of the genitals;

Home run (home base) – "full" sexual intercourse.

Additionally,

Strikeout – a failure to engage in any form of foreplay or sexual activity;

Additionally, there are two metaphors used to refer to men who have sex with men:

Pitching – the man performing anal sex

Catching – the man receiving anal sex

Other similar metaphors include:

Switch hitter – a bisexual individual, referencing a player who can bat from either side

Playing for the other team – usually indicating a person is gay or lesbian

Gwyn (1999) analysed the metaphors that seriously ill people used to talk about their experience, and drew conclusions about their thoughts and feelings on the basis of these. In other cases, notes Deignan (2005), speakers or writers may have deliberately chosen particular ways of expressing ideas metaphorically to convey an ideological or persuasive point. Genres that have been investigated include political texts and advertising. In particular, some analysts have used conceptual metaphor theory to try to identify the ideological stance underlying a text or corpus of texts. For instance, Sandikcioglu studied metaphors from the magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* from around the period of the 1991 Gulf War, and argued that these demonstrated a racist agenda, in which the world is polarized into ‘the Orient vs. the West, Us vs. Them’ (2000: 300). Santa Ana (1999) analysed metaphors in articles from the *Los Angeles Times* reporting on anti-immigrant legislation, and found that they constructed immigrants negatively, as animals, plants and commodities. The nation was metaphorically constructed as a house, and immigrants talked of as metaphorical threats such as floods or invasion.

Jurafsky (2014) observed that Adrienne Lehrer, a linguistics professor at the University of Arizona, studied how wine reviews changed over time from 1975 to 2000. She noticed that in the 1980s wine reviewers began to increase their use of the body as a metaphor, starting to use words like *fleshy*, *muscular*, *sinewy*, *big-boned*, or *broad-shouldered*. At the same time, influential wine writers like Robert Parker began to emphasize the sensual pleasure of wine, repeating words like “sexy” and “sensual,” describing wines as “supple and seductive,” “offering voluptuously textured, hedonistic drinking,” or even “liquid Viagra.” Literature professor Sean Shesgreen says that all this erotic talk about wine as “pretty and caressing,” “ravishing,” “pillowy,” and “overendowed” affirms that “in the kaleidoscope of Americans’ fixations, gastronomy has eclipsed sex.”

Jurafsky cited examples of sexual metaphors for food such as: the apple tarty ice cream pastry caramely thing was just **orgasmic** sumptuous flavors, jaw-droppingly good, **sexy** food succulent pork belly paired with **seductively** seared foie gras He also observed that people use a very different metaphor when they like the food at cheap restaurants. In reviewing inexpensive restaurants, they use the language of addiction or drugs instead of sex to talk about their fries. For example, or garlic noodles ... are now my drug of choice these cupcakes are like crack be warned the wings are addicting ... every time I need a fix. That fried chicken is so damn good! I swear the fries have crack or some sort of addicting drugs in them.

Analysis of Igbo Youth Language

Instances of the Igbo youth language are presented below.

1. *Status/Objectification*

a. SEX IS ACHIEVEMENT

I'd like to make it with her. Mu na ya ga-akwa ya.
He's successful with women. O na-enye umu nwaanyi ihe ha choro.
I climbed mountain Kilimanjaro. Ariri m ugwu Kilimanjaro.
I didn't get anywhere with her. O nweghi ebe o so m ga.

b. SEX IS PERFORMANCE

You were great last night. I nyere ihe a choro n'abali.
I got rave reviews in bed. O doonyere m ya.
He's good in bed. Nwata chi oku n'akwa.
She's a good screw. Nne i na-adu ya nke oma.

c. SEX AS HOME TOWNS

Vagina Adazi ani

Breasts Adazi enu

Buttocks Adazi nnukwu

d. WOMEN ARE OBJECTS

She's a cute thing. Nwa chatoro achato.
Take off your clothes and show me your stuff. I ga-aboro m ya.
How would you like a little bit of that? I ga-enyetu m ya obere?
She likes to flaunt it. O na-agbasapu ihe ya.
He played her like a violin. O kporo ya dika ubo.

e. WOMEN ARE ANIMALS

She works like a lion. Nwa a bu agu.
She's a vulture. O bu udele. A woman that sleeps with dirty men

Let's see if we can shoot some squirrel (or beaver.) Ka anyi gbaa
osa.

She's really a dog. Nwa a bu nkita.

What a mouse! O bu nkakwu. (Her vagina smells.)

Pig Ezi (A lady that has sex with men not minding their class.)

e. WOMEN ARE CHILDREN

Do you like the girls at the office? I choro umuaka ndi na-arụ oru?

Are children here? Umu anokwa ebe a?

Hey, baby! Hei, nwa

f. SEX IS FOOD

She was sweeter than honey. Nwa a tokariri mmanu aṅu.

What a dish! Onye ka a gwooro anu a?

She is a cherry. Nwa bu udara.

g. WOMEN ARE THEIR GENITALS

She's a cunt. O bu oru.

h. MEN ARE THEIR GENITALS

He's been a real dick lately. Nwoke a bu onyonkwu.

What a cock. Lee odogwu ya.

i. A PENIS' LENGTH is MANLINESS

He's hung like a bear. Onyonkwu ya toro ka agwo.

He couldn't please anyone with that thing. O nweghi ihe o ji ihe a
emeli.

He's more man than she can handle. O kariri nwa ya.

She's not ready for my hot beef insertion. O gaghi ebudoli achamoku m.

j. A SEXUALLY ACTIVE WOMAN IS BAD:

What a slut. O na-ara ka nkita.

She's a little tramp. O bu kezaya.

She'll spread for the break. O na-emepe ukwu ya mgbe o bula.

k. A SEXUALLY ACTIVE MAN IS GOOD

Boy is he a stud. O gbasiri ike.

He's a player. O bu onye oru.

He's a master of the bedroom. O bu ide ji ulo.

2. *Dominance/Power*

a. SEX IS A HUNT, A CONQUEST

I'm going to go out and get a piece of ass tonight. M ga-agba nta n'abali a.

They're going cock hunting. Ha na-aga igba asa.

He's looking for a good fuck. N'abali a ife niile ga-eme.

He tamed her. O ga-adogbu ya.

b. SEX IS BEING SERVICED BY A WOMAN

She wouldn't put out for me. O choghi ikpaputara m ya.

She did it for him but she wouldn't do it for me. Nne meere m ihe i meere nwanne m nwoke.

Last night she gave me a blow job. Nwa a kuru m okpo n'abali.

She knows how to please me. Nwa a ma eme. Nwa a na-eme ofuma.

c. SEX IS INSTRUCTION

I know how to show a woman a good time. Ama m etu esi eme nwaanyi obi uto.

You could learn a lot from me, baby. Nne i ga-amuta otutu ihe n'aka m.

I could teach her a thing or two. M ga-akuziri ya ihe o maghi.

d. SEX IS TRIUMPH

I really put it to her! Egosiri m ya nkari.

I really stuck it to her! Akuru m ya.

e. SEX IS TRIUMPH THROUGH INFLICTING PLEASURE

Boy, did I make her moan! Nna, i nu mkpu ya.

I got her so hot she could hardly stand it! Apiara m ya oku ihe di egwu.

She was in such heat she was begging for it. Emegidere m ya o rio biko.

f. SEX IS MADNESS

I'm wild with desire. O na-adogbuzi ya adogbu.

Every time I look at a woman I go crazy. Ukwu nwere nti na-agba m ara.

g. SEXUAL FEELING IS ELECTRICITY/FLUIDS CONTROLLED BY A WOMAN

She turns me on. Nwa a kpaliri m, m na-enwu oku.

She really got my juices flowing. O mere mmiri mmuo m gbafuchaa.

One look at her and I'm all stirred up. Otu aka o kpara m n'ahu, ahu m chawa oku.

h. FLIRTING/FOREPLAY IS ASKING FOR INTERCOURSE

She really wants it. O choro ya acho.

She's hot for you. O bu n'ihì gi ka o ji amighari.

She's just asking for it. O nweghi ihe foronu.

i. SEX IS A POWER WOMEN HAVE OVER MEN

She's just a cock teaser. Nwaanyi bu onye okwo ugbo.

If she wouldn't give it to him, why did she lead him on. Nne bia mee ka m nyusisia.

Women can have it any time they want it. Nwaanyi ga-enwe ya mgbe o bula o choro ya.

3. *Possession/Control*

a. SEX IS A COMMODITY

I've never had to pay for pussy. M gaghi akwu ugbo kabu kabu.

Why should a man rape if he can get it for free? I na-agugba nwaanyi ebe i ga-enweta ya n'efu?

She wouldn't give me any. Ukwu gbara kasaa.

He's not one to let an opportunity pass him by. Ukwu anaghi abia be ya laa n'efu.

You got her used. O ji ya me ihe.

She owed it to me. O ji m ugwo ya.

b. VIRGINITY IS A COMMODITY

She lost it to him. O tufuola ihe ya.

She's damaged goods. O mebichaalaa.

I'm saving it for my husband. Ana m edotere ya di m.

c. SEX IS POSSESSION

I'd like to have her for a night. Achoro m inwe ya n'abali a.
I bet I could get her if I tried. M ga-enweta nwa a ma m nwaa.
I want him to have me. Achoro m ibu nke ya.

4. Hostility/aggression

a. SEX IS A SPORT

I hope I score tonight. M ga-agbatu ya n'abali a.
I struck out with her. Mu na ya soro mpi.
I reached second base with her. Anyi gbara agba nke abuo.
He made a pass at her. O kpagaara ya okwe.
He's playing the field. O na-egwu egwu n'ama egwuregwu.

b. SEX IS AMBLING GAME

If you play your cards right, you'll score. I gbaa okwe gi nke oma i ga-meri.
Your best bet is not to come on too strong. Jiri nwayo gbaa egwu a.

c. SEX IS WAR

I tried to get her into bed but got shot down. Anwara m ike m ikpobata ya n'akwa mana a gbaturu m.
If I can wear down her resistance, I'll score. O buru na m merie ekweghi ekwe ya, m ga-agba nke oma.
He's always hitting on women. O na-eti umu nwaanyi ihe mgbe obula.
She ignored his sexual advances. O meghi ka o choputara nkata nke nwoke na-akpa.

d. SEX IS THEFT

She's good snatch. O bu ezigbo ihe mgbaji aka.

If she won't give it, I'm going to take it. O buru na o nyeghi m, aga m ewere ya n'ike.

He's robbing the cradle. O na-ahi aka n'okpuru akwa.

I'd like to cop some ass. Achoro m ibudo ukwu.

e. SEX IS HITTING A WOMAN'S GENITALS

I'd like to bang her box. Achoro m ikutu igbe ya.

f. MASTURBATION IS HITTING ONES OWN GENITALS

I beat my meat last night. Akuru m anu m n'abali.

I like to whack off. Achoro m ikutu ihe.

g. IMPREGNATION IS AN ACT OF VIOLENCE

He knocked her up. O gbatuola ya.

h. A PENIS IS A GUN; SPERM IS AMMUNITION

He shot his load into her. O gbabara mgbo ya n'ime ya.

i. SEX IS AGGRESSIVE DEGRADATION

I'd like to screw her. Achoro m iwughari ya.

I want to fuck her. Achoro m ipia ya oku.

The Implication of the Use of Sexual Metaphors

This paper discovers that young people use sexual metaphors to structure their experience of women, men and sex in terms of status/objectification, dominance/power, possession/control and hostility/aggression. Data 1 a-k show objectification. For instance, the metaphors portray sex as an achievement and performance while they portray women as objects, animals etc. Data 2 a-i show dominance/power. For example, sex is viewed as a hunt, a conquest, a triumph and women's power over men. Then again, sex is an act serviced by women. Data 3 a-c present sex as possession. Here, sex is seen basically as a commodity possessed by someone. In data 4

a-i, sex is perceived as aggression/hostility. This suggests that sex is a sport that involves some sort of aggression. One person tries to outsmart another and win. Sex is also seen as war, theft and aggressive degradation.

Conclusion

The analysis as presented above reveals that sexual metaphors are normally used by young men in Igbo land to communicate social behaviour and sexual attitude. Youth language appears to have been formed along the lines of sexual/social intimidation and subordination of women. one may therefore observe that in transmitting the Igbo culture and worldview, the society may have produced social stereotypes and stigmatized expressions which constrain the woman from attaining her optimum in self-development and self-actualization. The metaphors that are commonly used to talk about sex often create or legitimize attitudes which connect sex with violence, sex with degradation, and sex with dominance. Concerning degradation, women are greatly affected while men enjoy dominance.

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