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Anti-language, Slang and Cyber Scam Subculture among Urban Youth in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Cyber scam, an on-trend subculture among Nigerian urban youth, has posed a major security and economic threat to the global community. As part of the strategies developed to 'institutionalise' their illicit business and evade the punitive hand(s) of the Nigerian and international law enforcement agencies, cyber scammers in Nigeria have devised various strategies, including the deployment of anti-language and slangy expressions in their transactional and social interaction. Extant studies on cybercrime in the Nigerian context have largely addressed the phenomenon from the sociological, economical and information technological perspectives with little attention paid to it from a linguistic perspective. Therefore, this study, gathering data with the deployment of ethnographic techniques, and drawing from Halliday's (1976) concept of anti-language, investigates the linguistic strategies employed by cyber scammers in Southwestern Nigeria in their social and transactional interaction. Findings reveal slangy coinages and overlexicalisation, and relexicalisation (semantic extension) are anti-language phenomena characterising cyber scammers' language in region. These are achieved through the deployment of linguistic sub-strategies such as reduplication, clipping, blending and acronym (initialism).

Keywords: Cyber scam, Nigerian urban youth, Linguistic strategies.

Introduction

Nigerian cyber scam, a major crime among Nigerian youths, is a phenomenon that has posed a major security and economic threat to the global community (Chawki, 2009). This submission is not unconnected with the fact that the emergence, development and utilisation of information technologies in the country, particularly among youths, have been accompanied by astronomical increase in illicit activities, one of which is Internet scam otherwise known as *yahoo yahoo* business, or 419 email scam (in the Nigerian context). This (cyber) crime ranks among the anti-social vices such as stealing, forgery, falsification, cheating and misrepresentation of facts (Tive, 2006, p. 3) which the criminal

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law of the country frowns at (Chawki, 2009). However, Internet scam is peculiarly different from other crimes in that it involves false pretence on the part of the perpetrators (yahoo yahoo boys). As part of the strategies developed to evade the punitive hand of the Nigerian and international law enforcement agencies, cyber scammers in Nigeria have devised various strategies, including the deployment of anti-language and slangy expressions in their transactional and social interaction, thereby creating a solidarity identity for themselves within the Nigerian society. Extant studies on cybercrime in the Nigerian context have examined the phenomenon from sociological, economical and information technological perspectives with little attention paid to the study of the phenomenon from linguistic perspectives. Therefore, this study, drawing insights from Halliday's (1976) theory of anti-language, investigates the linguistic strategies employed by cyber scammers in Southwestern Nigeria. The study, among others, hopes to answer the following questions:

1. What are the common slangy (anti-language) expressions characterising the lingo of cyber scammers in the Southwestern part of Nigeria and their contextual meanings?
2. What linguistic strategies are employed in the formation of these anti-language expressions?
3. What is the perception of an average Nigerian youth about cyber scam?

Literature Review

1. Cybercrime: Definition, nature and types in Nigeria

Different scholars have attempted defining cybercrime from different perspectives. For instance, Halder and Jaishankar (2011) define cybercrimes as: *"Offences that are committed against individuals or groups of individuals with a criminal motive to intentionally harm the reputation of the victim or cause physical or mental harm to the victim directly or indirectly, using modern telecommunication networks such as Internet (Chat rooms, emails, notice boards and groups) and mobile phones"*. Saul (2007) observes that such crimes most times constitute a major threat to the security and financial status of a nation. Hassan *et al.* (2012) conceive of cyber crimes as crimes that are committed using the computers and networks. In the opinion of Maitanmi *et al.* (2013), cyber crime is any form of crime committed by criminals with the aid of a computer as a tool and the Internet as a connection in order to actualise or realise a variety of objectives, including illegal downloading of music files and films, piracy, spam mailing, among others. According to this scholar, it is a phenomenon that ensues from the wrong use or abuse of Internet services. Commenting on the nature of cyber crimes, Mconnell International (2000) had earlier submitted the phenomena are quite different from most terrestrial crimes in that: they are very easy to learn, the resources they require are relatively few compared to the damage they cause; they can be perpetrated within a geographical space without being physically present there, and they are most times not clearly illegal.

According to Maitanmi *et al.* (2013, p. 45), cyber crime refers to all activities done with criminal intent in cyberspace. These can be categorised as crimes against individuals (or persons), crimes against business and non business organisations, and crimes against the

government. From all these, it suffices to describe cyber crimes as activities requiring the use of Information Technology (IT) tools such as the computer, handset, and the Internet aimed at defrauding individuals, organisations or the government. The emergence of the phenomenon in Nigeria can be traced to the early 90's as a sophisticated form of the Advanced Free Fraud known as 419 in the Nigerian context. The perpetrators have been labelled *yahoo yahoo* boys. These individuals are fellows who have adequate knowledge of the use of information technology tools to defraud unsuspecting victims of valuable items such as money, expensive wrist watches, and other personal belongings. It would not be out of place to posit that Nigeria takes the lead among the African countries where cyber crime holds sway. This submission is predicated on the report by Hassan *et al.* (2012) that 36% of African users of the Internet are Nigerians. In an attempt to combat cyber crime in Nigeria, the government of the country has, as enshrined in section 419 of its criminal code, criminalised the phenomenon. In spite of this, the phenomenon has thrived unabated in the country, hence the untoward image it has created for it among the league of nations in the world.

2. Types of cybercrimes in Nigeria

As observed by Ribadu (2007), prominent among the various forms of cyber crimes in Nigeria include cloning of websites, false representations, Internet purchase and other e-commerce kinds of fraud. In the opinion of Olugbodi (2010), the commonest forms of cyber crimes in Nigeria are financial fraud, cloning of electronic mails, identity theft (which often manifests or comes in form of mails emanating from impostors claiming to be representing certain financial institutions and requesting customers to supply certain sensitive information about their accounts to avoid their accounts being blocked, thus making transactions impossible) credit card theft, cyber harassment, fraudulent electronic mails, cyber laundering, virus, worms and Trojans, and cloning of website. Maitanmi *et al.* (2013) submit the types of cyber crimes prevalent in Nigeria include: Yahoo attack, which involves the use of e-mail address-harvesting devices to obtain information about the prospective victim's e-mail address(es) from the Internet access points, with the intention of sending such scam messages; hacking which has to do with the perpetrator breaking the security codes of financial institutions or organisations for e-commerce, funds point cards and e-marketing products sites; software piracy (illegal reproduction and distribution of software applications, games and movies); virus dissemination, phishing (cloning of products and e-commerce sites/pages with the aim of defrauding unsuspecting victims); spoofing (the process of having a computer on a network to operate like another, usually one with exceptional access rights, so as to access information on the other systems on the network); cyber plagiarism (stealing other peoples' ideas via the Internet public domains); cyber stalking (in which the fraudster does a follow-up on the unsuspecting victim by sharing mails and entering the chat rooms frequently with them); cyber defamation (in which the scam perpetrator sends e-mails containing defamatory contents to people related to the victim or posts such on a website); salami attack (a technique through which small amounts of assets are removed from a larger pool. The stolen assets are removed one slice at a time (Hassan *et al.*, 2012, p. 627).

Beyond the submissions of these scholars, we have also observed that cyber crimes in the Nigerian space could also take the form of false online or blind dating. In this regard,

the cyber fraudster might put up a false identity, ask unsuspecting victims out online with a promise to eventually marry them. It usually turns out that the cyber fraudster capitalises on the 'relationship' to make heavy financial demands on the victim(s) (who are most times Whites interested in dating Blacks), with the intention of duping them.

Figure 1. A typical cross section of cyber fraudsters in operation



Source: Nkereuwem (2010).

Situating the present study: moving from the known to the unknown

While the present study is novel and takes a new dimension from the series of studies that have been carried out on cyber crime in Nigeria, it is important to mention that such studies serve as the springboard upon which the (present) study engages the phenomenon; hence it would not be out of place to briefly comment on the contributions of the studies to the understanding of the dynamics of cyber crime in Nigeria, as well as systematically situating the current study in scholarship. Several scholarly works have investigated cyber crimes in the Nigerian and global spaces from different perspectives.

Buchanan and Grant (2001) give a summary of Nigerian scam schemes and submit Internet growth in the world and particularly in the country has made it possible for cyber fraud to thrive. Chawki and Wahab (2006: 5) comment on the use of technology by cyber crime perpetrators to hide their identities and physical location, a development that makes it difficult for law enforcement agents to locate them. Tive (2006) examines the tricks employed by Nigerian fee frauds and the philosophy of tricksters. He observes tricksters employ deceptive lexical items in their business. Stajano and Wilson (2011) investigate a number of scam methods employed by Nigerian cyber scammers and spell out the role of security engineering operations in combating the phenomenon. Adeniran (2008) investigates the connection between the Internet and the emergence of *Yahoo boys* and yahoo sub-culture in Nigeria. The scholar claims the advent of the Internet has not only engendered the development of *yahooboyism* in Nigeria; it has also promoted finance-based criminal acts among Nigerian youths. Chawki (2009) observes anonymous servers, hijacked emails and fake websites are cyber tools often employed by Nigerian cyber

scammers to perpetrate their nefarious acts and suggests ways this untoward act can be addressed within the ambit of the criminal law of the country. He suggested that cyber crime could be combated through increase in the level of global awareness on it, increase in literacy rates, coordinated legislative efforts, and establishment of a high level of global network of cooperation between national, regional and international law enforcement agencies and police forces.

Costin et al. (2013) investigated the role played by phone numbers in online fraud schemes, demonstrating empirically its significance in 419 scams. Isacenkova et al. (2013, p. 1) submit Nigerian cyber scam is a famous kind of fraud in which perpetrators trick the victim into paying certain amount of money under the guise that the victim will have a future larger return. These scholars focused on scam campaigns as generated by cyber scammers to deceive and manipulate their unsuspecting victims. They concluded that Internet scammers craftily draft their scam mails to convince the victims of the veracity of the messages. Ogunsanya (2015) engages the phenomenon of cyber crime in Nigeria from an ethnographic perspective and submits, contrary to the notion that the advent of information technology, particularly the Internet in the global space has birthed cyber crime in Nigeria, cyber crime is a sub-set of all other forms of corrupt cultural practices such as money rituals and Advanced Free fraud native to the country. To him, the consumerist culture among Nigerian youths has only become more pronounced and evident through their engagement in cyber crime. Adesina (2017) examines the link between poverty and cybercrime in Nigeria from the view point of human security. She observes that, while cyber fraudsters can be labelled greedy and lazy; the bitter truth cum reality is that majority of cyber criminals engage in the act to empower themselves economically. In other words, cyber crime is a means of survival for these cyber criminals in the face of the harsh economic realities that define the Nigerian socio-economic space. Ajayi and Bamgbose (2018) and Lazarus (2018) engage the role of Nigerian hip hop artistes in the ‘institutionalisation’ of cyber crime in the Nigerian society. They argue essentially that the contents of many of the songs of Nigerian hip hop artistes brazenly promote cyber crime and some other social vices, particularly among Nigerian youths.

As pointed out earlier, a critical assessment of the studies reveals none of them has attempted the engagement of cyber scam in Nigeria, particularly from the linguistic point of view. This study, therefore, is a critical intervention in this regard.

Anti-language

The dynamism of language, as evident in its ability to adjust to socio-contextual realities (including the existence of anti-societies and their anti-languages), has been established and reinforced by scholars. This submission is captured in Halliday’s words as follows:

At certain times and places we come across special forms of language generated by some kind of anti-society; these we may call “anti-languages.” An anti-language serves to create and maintain social structure through conversation, just as an everyday language does; but the social structure is of a particular kind, in which certain elements are strongly foregrounded. This gives to the anti-language a special character in which metaphorical modes of expression are the norm; patterns of this kind appear at all levels, phonological, lexico grammatical, and semantic. The study of anti-

languages offers further insights into the relation between language and social structure, and into the way in which text functions in the realization of social contexts (Halliday, 1976: 1)

Halliday (1976) pioneers the concept of anti-language. According to him, this is a kind of language use that emerges from marginalised groups or an 'anti-society'. Kohn (2008), echoing the idea of Halliday on anti-language, submits anti-language is a process of resocialisation that not only expresses reality, but 'creates and maintains' this separate anti-societal reality, and the resocialisation process 'plausability structure will be mediated to the individual by means of significant others, with whom he must establish strongly affective identification' (Halliday 1978: 170). Following the explanation of the scholars cited above, one can posit that anti-languages are used to establish and maintain social structure through conversation just like everyday language can be used to achieve the same purpose. However, the social structure created by the use of anti-language foregrounds certain elements (social values) which are not expressed or found in the normal (ideal) everyday use of language. This reality must have informed Fowler's (1981, p. 147) comments (which are predicated on Whorfian argument) that anti-language creates an anti-world view. Anti-language, a special form of language use characterised by metaphorical modes of expression, appears at all levels of language use: phonological, lexical, grammatical and semantic. It can employ any level of language from phonetics to pragmatics to create and maintain an alternative reality (Fowler, 1981).

Since anti-language is said to have been created by anti-society, Halliday attempts a description of the relationship between the two. He opines that anti-society is "a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it. It is a mode of resistance, resistance which may take the form either of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction" (Halliday, 1976, p. 570). In Halliday's submission, just as a language is central to a society, an anti-language is central to an anti-society, a phenomenon that ostensibly foregrounds their social values. This is what Bernstein (1974) terms 'sociolinguistic coding orientation', 'the tendency to associate certain ways of meaning with social contexts'.

Characteristic features of anti-language

Halliday (1976) spells out the characteristic features of anti-language. According to him, prominent features of anti-language are relexicalisation and overlexicalisation. While the former deals with creating a new word for an old one; a form of lexical substitution, purposely done by the members of an anti-society to achieve certain purposes, the latter relates to the possibility of the creating new words to represent a single concept or idea by members of an anti-society. In this regard, Mallik (1972) submits the vocabulary of Calcutta underworld for instance has about 21 words for the word bomb and 41 words for the word police. Individual members of this underworld understand the said alternative words for bomb and police respectively and employ them for membership secrecy.

In this study, we conceive of relexicalisation from two perspectives: re-semanticisation (semantic extension or reconceptualisation) and coinage. In the case of resemanticisation, we speak of instances of existing words in specific languages (English, Yoruba, Naija) whose meanings have been purposely extended by members of the cyber

crime group, and with respect to coinage, we are concerned with anti-words and expressions coined by cyber scammers to negotiate their anti-society practice(s). The latter, following Halliday's notion of antilanguage, is an indication of the presence of overlexicalisation in the (anti)language of cyber scammers in southwestern Nigeria.

Slangy expression(s) and functions

Slang is an informal variety of language that has become a common means of communication among groups and sub-groups in the society. There are different scholarly views on the concept of slang. It is viewed by some scholars as a colloquial departure from standard usage. Just like pidgin, slang has no native speakers; it is viewed as a context language. Dumas and Lighter (1978, pp. 14-16) cited in Eble (1996, p. 12) state four criteria that define a linguistic item as slang.

These are captured in the excerpt below:

Its presence will markedly lower, at least for the moment, the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing; its use implies the user's special familiarity either with the referent or with the less statusful or less responsible class of people who have such special familiarity and use the term; it is a tabooed term in ordinary discourse with persons of higher social status or greater responsibility; it is used in place of the well-known conventional synonym.

In the opinion of Crystal (1995), slang is an 'informal' non-standard vocabulary usually intelligible only to people from a particular region or social group. Ellis (2002) defines slang as a variety of language used in certain contexts by means of which people express their sense of belonging to a particular group within the community which is not specific to any geographic location. Longe (2003) views slang as a form of idiolect used between close friends, especially of similar age, family membership or social group. On the other hand, Ademola-Adeoye (2004) sees the concept of slang as a jargon of any class, always colloquial, short in life span language with words and usages not accepted for formal use. Martiello (2005, p. 15) defines slang by differentiating between what he calls the general type from the specific type. According to him, while the general type of slang comprises terms and items that are used deliberately by speakers to deviate from the standard usage, and therefore are not group restricted; the specific type of slang comprises terms that are used by people of common age and experience such as college students. They therefore serve as in-group markers. In the words of Oha (2010), slang is an informal, non-standard word and phrase, generally shorter lived than the expressions of non-standard, ordinary colloquial speech, and typically formed by creative, often witty, juxtapositions of words or images'.

From the following, it becomes obvious that slangy expressions are informal expressions that are not expected to feature in formal contexts. It is an informal expression or word that is peculiar to particular sub-group of people within the larger group or society. It is used as a marker of identity, creativity and secrecy among users. Slang often projects the attitudes, ideologies and values of group members.

Methodology

The study employed participant and non-participant ethnographic methods of data collection. These methods are believed in the sociolinguistic circle as the most appropriate for ethnographic studies, as they ensure unobtrusive collection of data that depict the true language behaviour of research participants and subjects. Data gathered through participant and non-participant observation comprised discursive interactions among suspected yahoo boys in club houses observed to feature the influx of cybercrime perpetrators and randomly selected campuses in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. My ethnographic knowledge of the communal and hippie lifestyle of cyber scammers was really helpful in this regard. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight (8) practising and two (2) repentant cyber crime perpetrators (whose anonymity was promised during data elicitation) who were largely undergraduate students of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in the region through snowball sampling to validate the data acquired through participant and non participant observation. The data were subjected to linguistic analysis, with particular focus on the linguistic strategies, including anti-language and slangy expressions employed by yahoo boys in their illicit business within the purview of Halliday's (1976) concept of anti-language

Data presentation and Discussion

a. Anti-language and slang among cyber scammers in Southwestern Nigeria

Following Halliday's (1976) concept of anti-language, this section of the paper examines the various anti-language and slangy expressions deployed by cyber scammers in Southwestern Nigeria in their *yahoo yahoo* business. In achieving the aim of the section, we have identified the linguistic strategies deployed by cyber scam perpetrators and categorised them accordingly. These strategies include 'acronymisation', coinage, semantic extension. Some of these involve sub-linguistic (morphological) processes such as reduplication, blending, and clipping. This categorisation forms the basis of our presentation of the anti-language and slangy expressions observed in the language of cyber scammers.

b. Acronyms and Initialism in Cyber scammers' language

One of the strategic linguistic phenomena deployed by cyber scammers in Southwestern Nigeria is (acronyms or) initialism. Acronyms and initialisms, abbreviation processes in language, are like two sides of a coin with slight differences, hence the somewhat similar features that characterise their definitions from scholars. In an attempt to distinguish between the two, Fischer (1998) opines, while an acronym is formed by combining the first letters or several words and pronouncing the result as a word, an initialism is formed by combining the first letters of several words, but it is pronounced as separate letters. This submission is also maintained by notable scholars like Lester (1991, p. 406); Crystal (2003, p. 1); Fromkin et al. (2003, p. 95), Allan (1986, p. 241); Kleinedler (1993, p. iii) and Lamidi (2012, p. 64). The deployment of this linguistic process by cyber scammers in Southwestern Nigeria is evident in the table 1:

Table 1. Initialisms in cyber scammers' language

S/N	Anti-language/Slangy expression	Source Language	Conventional meaning	Yahoo business Usage
1	TF	English	-	Transfer
2	MO	English	Money order	Money order
3	LR	English	Liberty reserved	Liberty reserved (This is a mode of payment).
4	MTCN	English	Money Transfer Control Number	This is an acronym for Money Transfer Control Number
5	CC	English	-	Credit card
6	O G	English	-	Original Gangster
7	FMT	English	-	Format

It is noteworthy that most of these terms and expressions whose acronyms are presented above are expressions that ordinarily found in the banking and financial domains of the country. Hence, their use is mostly restricted to such contexts. In other words, one hardly finds their acronymised versions outside the banking and financial sectors. However, yahoo yahoo boys (cyber scammers) have stuck to their use outside the banking system. Thus, in their personal chats and interactions, it is commonplace to find them being used. As such, it is not uncommon to come across expressions such 'I don TF the dough to the guy' (I have transferred the money to the guy), among others.

c. Coinage

Coinage is one of the various processes of word formation in languages. In the words of Pousada (2011), coinages are words that are created, or invented by an individual or individuals. In most cases, when such individual(s) is/are influential, the words created (or coined) become part of the vocabulary of the community around them. It is the process of formation or vocabulary addition that does not involve affixation (Naserly, 2010). This linguistic tool of coinage is largely used by cyber scammers in Southwest Nigeria as evident in the table 2.

Table 2. Coinage in cyber scammers' language

S/ N	Anti-language/Slangy expression	Source Language	Conventional meaning	Yahoo business Usage
1	Bad market	English	-	This refers to an unsuccessful business attempt, especially when a prospect detects the pranks of the yahoo boys and withdraws from a proposed transaction with them.
2	Jonzing	Nigerian Pidgin (NP)	-	This is used when a prospect/target victim has discovered the pranks of the yahoo boys, but pretends to play along.
3	Ọká ti fo/ Iṣẹ́ ti já	Yoruba		This is a Yoruba expression which means “the secret has leaked”. This is usually used when a business plan is foiled, especially when it involves the intervention of the security agency.
4	Grinding	English	Grinding is an adjective in English usually used to qualify poverty.	Browsing/ chatting online with a prospective victim “maga”.
5	Eke	NP	-	It means police in yahoo boys' parlance
6	Maye	-	-	Female victim (mugùn)
7	Maga	-	-	Male victim (mugun)
8	Mùgùn	-	-	Victim, male or female
9	Ọpata	NP	-	Nonsense
10	Noke	-	-	Defraud
11	Yawa	NP	Trouble	Trouble
12	Gba control	Code- mixed Yoruba- English	-	Hit the jackpot
13	Wire	English	In English, to ‘wire’ is to transfer currency from one	What yahoo boys have done here is to <i>reduplicate</i> the term wire to coin their own expression wire which has an entirely different meaning

			account to another, especially when it involves international transactions.	from the word 'wire' in the general sense. In this context, wire is hacking into (international) bank websites in order to make use of the code for illegal withdrawal and transactions (through pickers). This practice is not limited to banks; it is also extended to multinationals and international organisations.
14	Wash	English	Generally, Nigerians wash dirty items such as clothes, used, plates, etc.	Fake currency. This process also involves reduplication
15	G-boy/G-nigga	English	-	Yahoo boy/cyber scammer
16	Gbénusi	Yoruba	This has no conventional meaning in the Yoruba language, except when used as part of a sentence; for instance, Gbe enu si microphone yen 'draw your mouth close to the microphone	The imperative mono-lexical sentence in cyber scam parlance means 'celebrate or throw a big party after a successful deal'.
17	Thugger	-	-	Yahoo boy
18	Gbé pósito	Yoruba	Carry casket	To celebrate (usually after a successful deal). This is usually done at parties in club houses, pubs and relaxation centres
19	Come and marry	English	-	'Come and marry' is a concept in yahoo business where the scammer pretends to be in love with the suspect (usually a foreigner) and promises marriage to him/her with the intention of defrauding him/her
20	Sáná wólé	Yoruba	-	Begin the party with fireworks. The expression is used by Yahoo boys at parties

21	Şáşé	Yoruba	-	Browse all through the night, searching for clients (prospective maga or mugu)
22	Come and carry	English	-	This phrase is employed in the context where an unsuspecting victim has been deceived into paying for goods or items that do not exist
23	Hacker ikà	Code-mixing of English-Yoruba	-	An expert hacker
24	Balling	English	-	Spending money lavishly
25	Baller	English	-	A yahoo boy who spends money lavishly
26	Owó afẹfẹ	Yoruba	-	Money made from cyber scam
27	sha prapra	-	-	Original, confirmed, authentic
28	Sakamanje	-	-	Lie/scam
29	Èkélébè	-	-	Police
30	Sayé	Yoruba	-	Enjoy/ lavish money
31	Wọ́ke	Yoruba	-	To gain illicit access to the codes on a prospective victim's credit card, with the intention of using same to perpetrate illegal money transfer, withdrawal or any other fraudulent act
32	Home boy	English	-	An amateur yahoo boy who is just learning the ropes
33	Body IP	English	-	Body Insurance Policy: Voodoo, charm
34	Westy	English	Western Union	This word is derived from the expression Western Union through a morphological process called blending . This is the means through which yahoo boys claim whatever money has been deposited into their account by victims (maga).
35	Akante	-	-	Account
36	Lappy	-	-	Laptop, coined from the word laptop via a clipping
37	Gbéra	Yoruba	Arise	Wise up (used to encourage fellow

				yahoo boys to intensify their efforts or up their scam skills or practices)
38	Jápa	Yoruba	-	run away
39	Ebelesu	Yoruba	-	Street boy
40	Lamgbe	Yoruba	-	Someone that is slow/foolish in nature, usually used to describe a victim that falls easily
41	Kizo	-	-	To stick to.., used to describe a situation where a yahoo boy is determined to stick to a particular victim until he finally succeeds in achieving his aim. This is in view of the fact that many 'victims' can be very difficult to dupe.
42	Lamba	-	-	Lies or false story narrated by a scammer to win the trust or confidence of the prospective victim
43	Omo beta	Yoruba/English code mixed	-	A nice yahoo fellow (perhaps due to his willingness to help others with proceeds from a 'deal')
44	Azza	-	-	Account number
45	Saint Sami-Ganja	English/unknown code mixing	-	A very successful yahoo boy
46	Gbẹ̀sẹ̀ kúrò lóri wire yẹn	Yoruba/English	Remove your leg from that wire	Avoid a/the risky move (usually as a warning statement to a fellow yahoo boy perceived to be threading a dangerous path) or seen to be after a 'client' suspected to be smarter or can easily initiate their arrest process if he/she is duped
47	Ijoba wire	Yoruba/English	-	A yahoo clique/group
48	Science man	English	-	A native/witch doctor

49	Ká pátá ²	Yoruba		A new practice among yahoo boys in which ladies' pants and men's boxers are being stolen for ritual purposes. This is also known as Free yahoo
50	System boy	English	–	Yahoo boy

d. Semantic extension

Semantic extension is another linguistic strategy deployed by cyber scammers in their anti-language. This phenomenon has been variously captured by scholars. For instance, Akindele and Adegbite (1992, p. 55) describe semantic extension as “the addition of meanings to an existing word in language. Kaan et al (2013) define it as the extension of the semantic boundaries of existing words to cover strange meanings. The table below presents various lexical items that have been subjected to semantic extension by yahoo boys.

Table 3. Semantic extension in cyber scammers' anti-language

S/N	Anti-language/Slangy expression	Source Language	Conventional meaning	Yahoo business Usage
1	Ọká	Yoruba	In Yoruba, ọká is a type of snake, that is slow to bite but very deadly when it does.	In Yahoo business, it means secret
2	Hammer	English	to hit or kick something with a lot of force	This means jackpot, a “business” boom. Yahoo boys use this expression when they have just recorded a success in their business.
3	Àpá	Yoruba	The mark of an old wound/scar	The digits on a credit card.
4	Bombing	English	To destroy something by exploding a bomb inside it	This is the process of sending different messages to different “maga/maye” by using bulk sms. Eg <i>Dear Customer, your ATM has been blocked. To reactivate it,</i>

² This is new phase in yahoo yahoo practice, following the stage of faeces eating, physical killing of human beings to boost ‘business’ by yahoo boys. From the information gathered, the pants and boxers stolen are used for voodoo or charms that boost yahoo business while the fellows whose pants/boxers are stolen die mysteriously.

				<i>please call 000000</i>
5	Ewé	Yoruba	This is a Yoruba word which means “leaf”.	However, in the context of the yahoo business, this is used to refer to cheque.
6	Format	English	The way in which information is arranged and stored on a computer	Series of e-mails specially prepared to be sent to prospective victims. It contains lies and falsehood, systematically package to deceive unsuspecting victims. This could even come in form of SMS (Short message service).
7	Já	Yoruba	In Yoruba, ‘Já’ means cut, used when an item like a rope cuts.	This in yahoo business means “Fail”, hence such expressions as “iṣẹ ti já”. This literally means “it has failed”. This is used when a business plan fails or a prospective victim discovers the pranks of yahoo boys.
8	Log-in	English	Log-in in English implies entering one’s details to have access to one’s account, usually a mail account.	In yahoo, this implies a stolen username and password details.
9	All night	English	All night in Nigerian English (NE) refers to Vigil	Night browsing
10	Loader	English	One who loads	One who deposits/pays fake currency or cheque into a victim’s account
12	Ọmọ ọpẹ	Yoruba	Ope’s child	A highly successful yahoo boy
13	Owó ọpẹ	Yoruba	Ope’s money or thanksgiving money	A sum of money (made through yahoo yahoo) that puts smile on the face of the
14	Àgbà awo	Yoruba	Chief priest/ a senior (occult) initiate	A senior fellow in cyber crime business
15	Run down	English	A detailed report A reduction in the size or quality of something	Reducing the worth of a yahoo boy

16	Legit	English	Legitimate	In the parlance of yahoo boys, <i>Legit</i> is a derivation from the word 'legitimate'. Yahoo boys use this term to describe their illegal activities as being legal or legitimate. They also use it to express the authenticity of the information they have about clients. This is derived through clipping
17	Blow	English	The word blow has many meanings in English none of which includes the one expressed by cyber scammers in Nigeria.	Become successful. Used to describe a situation where a yahoo boy has suddenly recorded a business success. It is common to hear expressions such as ' <i>mo ɛ́ blow</i> ' I want to make it big
18	Billing	English	Spelling out the amount to be paid for a service rendered or an item bought.	Demanding for money from a victim
19	Jazz	English	A genre of music	Charm
20	Dye	English	Change the colour of a clothing material	Disappoint/dupe/scam
21	Client	English	One to whom a service is rendered	A person planned to be duped or scammed
22	Address	English	Description of a place where one resides or works, etc	Bank account (details)
23	Hottie hottie	English	One who is very sexually attractive	In yahoo parlance, the word is reduplicated to derive hottie hottie. It refers to a yahoo boy that is currently doing well in the business. The synonym for this phrase in yahoo parlance is <i>omọ better</i> (a better child)
24	Pó sí	Yoruba	Casket	A container, usually a wooden box, in which drinks are brought to

				yahoo boys at club houses. This lexical item is otherwise called ‘ <i>àpótí ọrọ</i> ’ ‘the box of wealth’ as a form of overlexicalisation
25	Logistics	English	The careful organization of a complicated activity so that it happens in a successful and effective way	The gradual process by which funds are illegally moved from one account to another.

e. Name reconceptualisation

This phenomenon is also one of the strategies employed by cyber scammers in their anti-language practice. It simply refers to naming a concept with the proper or nickname of a popular figure in the society.

Table 4. Semantic extension

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Anti-language/Slangy expression</i>	<i>Source Language</i>	<i>Conventional meaning</i>	<i>Yahoo business Usage</i>
1	Alibaba	–	Alibaba is the nickname of a popular Nigerian stand-up comedy	Getting information about wealthy foreigners, particularly about their credit card details in order to use it order for goods from above
2	Papa Ajasco		Papa Ajasco is a popular name in the Nigerian entertainment industry. He is one of the major characters in a regular TV soap opera produced by Wale Adenuga (WAP)	Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARS) a unit of the Nigeria Police specially saddled with the task of handling cases involving hardened criminals

Apart from those expressions presented in the tables above, some other expressions found in the language of cyber scammers include:

Benz or nothing: A statement often made to keep their hope of being successful in their illicit business (Mercedes Benz is one of the fashionable cars in Nigeria and until they are able to acquire one or any other type of good car, they are determined to keep at their illicit profession) alive. Similar statements to this are *Ení lówó l'ó ñ ra Benz* (it is a rich fellow that acquires Benz), *enu ò ra Benz* (mere saying it does not acquire one a Benz).

If you no get money, no call sisi (If you are not financially buoyant, don't woo a lady): This statement is one of the statements often made to boost their morale in the business. It is predicated on the notion that women love material things, especially money; and for them to be able to have any type of woman they so desire, they need to 'work hard'. Another statement like this is: *if you no get money, hide your face* (if you are not financially buoyant, you should feel ashamed)

Owó ló ñ ɣe ìghoro (It requires money to command respect in gatherings, particularly social gatherings). As observed, one of the major causes of cyber crime in Nigeria, particularly among youths is the desire to be reckoned with, respected and honoured in the society. They will therefore go to any length to achieve this. To them, your intelligence, brilliance, and integrity, do not necessarily make you relevant socially but your ability to lavish money, hence the statement *Owó ló ñ ɣe ìghoro*. In some other instances, they would say: money stops nonsense (that is, it requires money to earn a respectable position in the society).

No more insufficient fund: this statement is heard when a yahoo boy has hit a jackpot perhaps after a long period of not recording success in the business. It is a statement of celebration that 'he has bounced back on track, 'the spending way'.

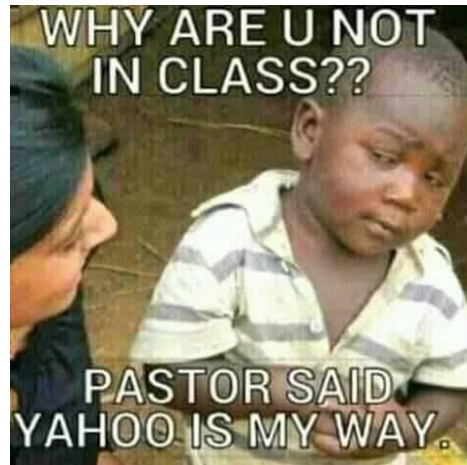
Cyber scam: an institutionalised sub-culture among Nigerian youths?

As I move to the end of this paper, the question that comes to mind is whether the fight against cyber crime in the Nigerian context can be successful, given the fact that many Nigerian youths do not consider the phenomenon as a negative aspect of life that needs to be avoided like a plague. For instance, in an online (Facebook) survey done to gather reactions from youths across the country on their views on cyber crime and schooling, many of them, in fact, majority openly declared their preference for yahoo yahoo. Some of the responses are presented here:

YAHOO OR SCHOOL?:

Resp 1: Abeg yahoo dey better pass school (Please, yahoo is better than schooling)

Resp 2:



Resp 3: Yahoo

Resp 4: thunder fire school (May thunder strike school)

Resp 5: Wayawaya kin sati lowo (Wire, all I want is money)

Resp 6: Yahoo better pass Nigerian school. After 4 year in school some will become apprentice for another few years. Some Keke drivers others okada

Resp 7: Who school help (How is school helpful?)

Resp 8: YAHOOO

Resp 9: Yahoo is the best job

Resp10: Lalasszz school na scam (In the end, school is a scam)

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/shockingnews360/permalink/2458926407652555/>

Some of the strong justifications given by Nigerian youths for preferring *yahoo yahoo* to schooling are lack of job opportunities even after graduating from the university. In fact, it is now commonplace to come across graduates on the streets of Nigeria being involved in menial jobs such as motorcycle riding (*okada* riding), taxi driving, and gate-keeping, among others for which they are said to be poorly paid. Meanwhile, some of their counterparts with lower qualifications but who have 'been so smart' enough to join the league of cyber scammers and other anti-social vices are seen living luxury life, driving exotic cars around and living in beautiful mansions. In this regard, the government is blamed for not providing jobs for the graduates. In some other instances, many of the youths engaged reported that *yahoo yahoo* is 'one of the ways of recovering the money and resources of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular which the Whites carted away during the colonisation of Africa'. To these youths, it is pay-back time, hence, they do not have any sense of regret practising *yahoo yahoo*. This explains the reason they go to any length, including resorting to spiritualism in order to record success in their illicit business (Tade, 2013). Another observation made in the course of this study reinforces the submission of Ogunsanya (2015). This has to do with the concept of *omolúàbí* which is an ideological phenomenon among the Yoruba all over the world (Ajayi, 2017). From all indications, the principles of *omolúàbí* have been relegated to the background as evident in the socio-cultural practices of the contemporary Yoruba society in relation to cyber scam. This was observed in an interaction I had with a parent on the need to dissuade her

son and nephew (a practicing yahoo yahoo boy) from practising cyber crime. She responded: 'the other time his (the nephew, a university undergraduate student) mother was sick, he singled-handedly handled the bill. If not for his intervention, the mother could have died'. From this response, it is obvious the woman is subtly in support of the nephew's involvement in cyber crime.

In another encounter, a young man lamented to me on how his 'girlfriend', without mincing words, told him she was leaving him for a 'yahoo boy', because he was considered broke and the yahoo boy rich and financially buoyant to meet her needs. The 'broke' boyfriend had been out of school for over four years without any job. Thus, the lady felt it was time to call it quit with him. What made the story more worrisome was the acknowledgement by the lady that the rich fellow was actually a yahoo yahoo boy. Ordinarily, one would expect such knowledge is enough reason the lady should not want to associate with him (the yahoo boy). But, with the conviction 'the society no longer cares about how you acquire(d) your wealth, but only want to celebrate your success, she did not see any evil in associating with him, let alone dating. This runs contrary to the principle of *omolúàbí*, for instance, captured by Awoniyi (1975 cited in Odebunmi, 2015) thus: '*omolúàbí* rests on the principles of good behaviour, social harmony, integrity, and socially appropriate manners'. This notion is further reinforced by Ogundeji (2009), Işola (2009) and Faleti (2009). According to these scholars, some of the moral values that define an *omolúàbí* are selflessness, hospitality, avoidance of wickedness, truth and rectitude, kindness and generosity, due respect and honour to parents, elders and those in authority, chastity in sexual matters, avoidance of stealing, avoidance of hypocrisy, dependability in keeping covenants and bonds, straightforwardness, protection of women as the weaker sex, to mention but a few.

As evident in the practice of the young lady and the woman talked about above, this culture of *omolúàbí* is seeing gradually disappearing, giving room for sub-cultural practices that aptly contravene its core ideology, such as get rich quick syndrome, get rich at all cost, inordinate love for materialism, among others (Ajayi & Bamgbose, 2018; Lazarus, 2018), hence increase in the practice of *yahoo yahoo* among the youths.

Conclusion

This work has attempted a discussion of anti-language and slangy expressions as used by yahoo yahoo boys in their illicit business. From our analysis, we observed most of the expressions: anti-language and slang are from the English language. Similarly, there are words and expressions from Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin in anti-language of yahoo boys. They employ linguistic devices such as semantic extension, acronyms, coinages and blending in their language use. These expressions serve as a mark of identity among these yahoo boys as well as a means of ensuring secrecy in their public interactions. During the period of gathering data for the study, it was discovered that these yahoo boys live a sort of communal life, attend night club parties, and characteristically manifest a hippie lifestyle. It will be interesting to see how subsequent studies on this subject matter examine the phenomenon across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria.

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