



THE ART OF NEOLOGISM AND BORROWING: SOME RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE SHONA SLANG LEXICON

Rugare Mareva

Teaching and Learning Centre
Great Zimbabwe University
PO Box 1235
Masvingo
Zimbabwe

Abstract

The inquiry investigated the contribution of neologism/coinage and borrowing to the development of the Shona slang lexicon. The paper explores how entirely new Shona slang words are being created and how some are being borrowed from English and other local languages such as Shona itself and Ndebele, then modified to become slangy. A sample of five hundred Great Zimbabwe University students participated in the research study. Data were collected through observation and the questionnaire. The study establishes that like any other linguistic variety, Shona slang is not static but dynamic as it constantly adds to its linguistic repertoire through neologism and borrowing. The paper also finds out that the coined and borrowed words seem to be either euphemistic, derogatory/contemptuous, praising/appreciative, express a state of affairs or how an action is performed, or have the goal of avoiding detection. The inquiry concludes that the recent additions to Shona slang reflect contemporary social, political and economic developments in the country and recommends further research into other processes that contributes to the Shona slang lexicon.

Key words: neologism; borrowing; colloquial; language contact; language change.

Introduction

Despite being regarded as non-standard and a socially less acceptable language variety (Mawadza, 2000), slang has become a prominent feature of the Zimbabwean linguistic landscape and because Shona is the indigenous language spoken by about seventy per cent of the population (Peresuh and Masuku, 2002), Shona slang naturally tends to be predominant.

Slang is defined as an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases employed by speakers in a bid to establish group identity and solidarity (Eble, 1996). Poole (1999) agrees by observing that slang, also known as street lingo, is a language variety that may be spoken when a section of society wishes to reinforce its identity and exclude others. A further explanation of slang is proffered by Spolsky (1998), who states that slang is a kind of jargon that rejects formal rules and regularly transgresses other social norms and so makes free use of taboo expressions. Spolsky also elaborates that slang is used by a particular social group for a specific purpose, such as creating familiarisation in conversation, and it comes in the form of new words with new meanings or old words with new meanings.

While Nyota and Mareva (2012) state that Shona slang is spoken mainly the urban young and middle-aged people from well-to-do families who are referred to as *manose* or *masalads*, this researcher contends that the use of Shona slang has become pervasive, transcending age, urban and social status barriers. This researcher's experience has shown that the use of Shona slang has become commonplace even among the rural folk, the poor and the relatively aged.

Language is dynamic; it constantly changes (Wagner, 2010). As Crystal (1992) puts it, "Languages are always in a state of flux. Change affects the way people speak as inevitably as it does any other area of human life.... Language would stand still only if society did." Still on the dynamism of language and necessity for language change, Keith and Shuttleworth (2000:219) aver that,

Change is an essential part of life; without change, life ceases. Language, too, must change, if it is to remain alive. A language that does not change is a dead language.... In general, language changes because society changes and though some people regard any change in language as regrettable, they are powerless, thank goodness, to prevent it.

Slang in general and Shona slang in particular are no exception. Some of the ways in which a language variety may change and add to its lexicon include derivation, compounding, reduplication/echoism, blending, initialisation and acronymy, borrowing, and neologism/coinage (Wagner, 2010).

In previous studies, Mawadza (2000) focused on Shona slang terms originating from borrowing (which is a result of language contact with English and other African languages), and on original words that become slangy through metaphoric extension. Nyota and Mareva (2012) also focused on how original Shona words become slangy through semantic changes in ranges of meaning, through radical shifts in meaning, and through changes in motive value.

In the current research the researcher partly focuses on borrowing in Shona slang since he feels that there have been further developments in this regard following Mawadza's (2000) inquiry. The researcher also focuses on the contribution of neologism/coinage to Shona slang as, in his view, this process has been given scant attention by researchers into Shona slang in recent years.

Borrowing, according to Yule (1996), is a process whereby a language takes over words from other languages. On the other hand, neologism or coinage is the invention of entirely new lexical items (Yule, 1996). Another definition of coinage is given by Hatch and Brown (1995) who state that coinage is a process whereby a new word is needed but there

are no appropriate borrowed or native words to express it. Mooney (2011) says coinage/neologism is not only possible but is also an essential process.

In allusion to the contribution of neologism and borrowing to the inevitable process of language change, Finegan (1999:47) states that "Sometimes entirely new words are created.... Alternatively, words that exist in another language are borrowed."

In light of the above brief literature, this study, thus, focuses on the art of neologism and borrowing in the development of Shona slang.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The Great Zimbabwe University community constituted the target population for the inquiry. From this community, a purposive sample of five hundred first year Bachelor of Social Science students was chosen because this researcher taught them the Communication Skills module in 2013, so he interacted with them formally and informally on a daily basis. The students' ages ranged from twenty to forty years, so the researcher considered them to be an information-rich cite (Nyawaranda, 2003) for this study on recent developments in Shona slang. The students came from all over Zimbabwe, making the university a melting pot of cultures, so all the dialects of Shona could have been represented.

Data Collection

Data for the inquiry were collected through observation, a technique which "seeks to ascertain what people think and do by watching them in action as they express themselves in various situations and activities...recognised as the most direct means of studying people when one is interested in their overt behaviour" (Sidhu, 1984:158).

The Great Zimbabwe University Bachelor of Social Science students were observed over a period of two semesters in both formal and informal situations as they conversed in lectures, the library, social clubs, sporting activities, on the bus and in the dining hall. The researcher carefully listened to the students' conversations and recorded instances where Shona slang words were used. The researcher then tried to deduce the meanings of the Shona slang words from context.

To improve on validity, a questionnaire was also distributed to the five hundred students, in which the students were asked to supply the meanings of the Shona slang words which the researcher had compiled.

These are the data collection tools that Nyota and Mareva (2012) employed in an earlier related study.

Findings

The table below shows some of the recently coined words in Shona slang:

Table 1: Recently coined words in Shona slang.

Word	Meaning
Bhanya	Fine; ok; well
Bvupfuwe	Plentiful; in abundance
Chabvondoka	Things have gone haywire; the cat
Chidhuura	Fake; not original
Chimoko	Mature, beautiful girl
Dinga	Foolish, backward person
Duzumani	Foolish, gullible person
Garinya	Girl of loose morals
Getekete	Big, dilapidated vehicle
Gevha	Conman; trickster
Giringo	Carefree, comic figure
Gombototo	Marijuana; dangerous drug
Gwazhi	School
Gweja	Male illegal gold panner
Hwaga	Prostitute
Ikete	I'ts ok/fine
Jambanja	Violence
Jembi	Heavy meal
Kubheka	To see; to realise
Kubvondora	To cause violence; to unmask
Kubvonga	To prepare a meal
Kudhunduzo	To have sex
Kudhunya	To be mad
Kuherereka	To happen
Kujika	To refuse; to deny
Kujingirisa	To try make ends meet
Kukenerana	To be friends
Kuketa	To be good at school; to realise
Kukwapaidza	To beat up; to defeat
Kumanga	To propose love
Kushamula	To leave; to go
Kutsvobida	To be exciting
Kuvha	Drink
Machonyonyo	Very remote area

Magombiro

Robbers

Mandimbandimba

Strongly built extortionists

Mashangurapata

Nonsense; gibberish

Mazitye

Second hand clothes

Mbaa

Powerful charms

Monya

Heavily built, man

Mukorokoza

Illegal gold panner

Mungonjo

Police officer

Ngezha

Rich man

Vhuzhi

Sleek motor vehicle

Wanga

Poor, clueless man

An examination of the coinages in Table 1 reveals that the reasons for the creation of the new Shona slang lexical items include to be euphemistic, to be derogatory or express contempt, to praise or show endearment or admiration or appreciation, to express an action or a state of affairs, and to avoid detection or to disguise reality.

Terms that appear to have been coined to be euphemistic include *chidhuura* (fake item), *hwaga* (prostitute), *kudhunya* (to be mad), *gevha* (conman), and *kumanga* (to propose love). Calling a fake item *chidhuura* sounds nicer and less offensive. In the same vein, calling a prostitute a *hwaga* instead of the original Shona word *hure* sounds less derogatory and might therefore be more acceptable. Also, referring to someone's mad condition as *kudhunya* appears to be playing down on the unpleasant condition instead of using the more blunt and unsympathetic term *kupenga*. Similarly, calling a conman a *gevha* sounds less offensive than the original, uncharitable Shona word *tsotsi* which conjures up images of a heartless trickster who is sometimes violent. Lastly, *kumanga* (to propose love) seems to have been coined so as to avoid the Shona word *kunyenga* which in some parts of Zimbabwe refers to the sexual act and is therefore a taboo word.

Derogatory Shona slang words include *dinga* (a foolish, backward person), *dumuzani* (a foolish and gullible person), *garinya* (girl of loose morals), *machonyonyo* (very remote area), *mazitye* (second hand clothes), and *wanga* (a poor, clueless man).

Some of the terms that seem to have been coined to praise things for their positive attributes include *chimoko* (mature, beautiful girl), *jembu* (heavy meal), *kuketa* (to be good at school), *monya* (heavily built man), *ngezha* (rich man), and *vhuzhi* (sleek motor vehicle).

Terms that were coined to express an action or a state of affairs include *bvupfuwe* (plentiful), *kubheka* (to see), *kujika* (to refuse, to deny), *kukwapaidza* (to defeat, to thoroughly beat up) and *kutsvobida* (to be exciting).

Finally, words that appear to have been created to avoid detection include *gombototo* (marijuana). Because this is an illegal and dangerous drug, calling it *gombototo* might result in disguising the act of partaking it by hoodwinking the police into believing that it might be something innocuous.

The table below shows some of the recently borrowed words into the Shona slang lexicon:

Table 2: Recently borrowed terms into the Shona slang lexicon.

Word	Meaning	Borrowed From
Bhabhidho	bhabarasi (hangover)	Ndebele; babalasi
Bhizi	kupinda munhamo (to be in trouble)	English; busy
Bhoziwere	mupfumi (rich person)	English; Bothwell
Bvoda	sadza (thick maize meal)	Shona; bvowa
Chakala	zvinhu zvamira kuipa (things have gone haywire)	English; colour
Chidhenja	musikana akanaka (excessively beautiful girl)	English; danger
Clobha	mbatya (clothes)	English; clothes
Dheni	imba/pamba (house/home)	English; den
Dhiri	hurongwa hwakaipa (shady deal)	English; deal
Dzimeti	mukadzi/mudzimai (wife)	Shona; mudzimai
Gasi	doro/hwahwa (beer)	English; gas
Gogasi	muchembere/mbuya (old woman)	Ndebele; ugogo
Gulezi	mukadzi womukoma (sister-in-law)	Shona; maiguru
Gungeti	jira/ gumbezi (blanket)	English; blanket
Hon'asi	zhara/nzara (hunger)	English; hunger
Jagwa	motokari (motor car)	English; jaguar
Jahwi	zvishinji (plentiful)	Shona; machakwi
Kahwani	zviri nyore/zvinoita (it's easy/it's possible)	English; one
Kubhaiza	kuresva (to make an error)	English; bias
Kubhaudha	kuita zvebonde (to have sex)	English; bolt
Kubhiga	kuremekedza (to hold someone in high esteem)	English; big
Kuchila	kuzorora/kunyarara (to relax/to be mum)	English; chill
Kufaya	kunakidza (to be exciting)	English; fire

Kufizuka	kuneta/kutsamwa (to be tired/bored)	English; fizzle
Kufulanga	kukundikana bunzo (to fail a test)	English; flunk
Kugepa	kuenda (to go)	English; gap
Kuginyabvura	kupamba (to take by force)	Shona; ganyabvu
Kugosipapa	kuchechi/kuSvondo (to church)	English; gospel
Kujamuka	kuramba (to refuse/deny)	English; jump
Kukena	kupinda (to enter)	Ndebele; ngena
Kukerasi	kuchechi/kuSvondo (to church)	Shona; kereke
Kukiya-kiya	kuzama mazano anoraramisa (to try desperate solutions)	English; key
Kukirara	kudhakwa (to be drunk)	English; kill
Kukosa	kudya (to eat)	English; course
Kule	sekuru (grandfather/uncle)	Shona; sekuru
Kulen'aleni'a	kuita nungo (to feel lazy)	English; slacken
Kuleza	kuzorora (to relax)	English; lazy
Kuluma	kudya (to eat)	Shona; kuruma
Kumaka	kuve nedaka (to begrudge)	English; mark
Kushuzura	kuenda (to go)	English; shoes
Kusikera	kudya (to eat)	English; scale
Kusipaka	kunakidza (to be fascinating)	English; spark
Kusitana	kugara (to sit/stay)	English; sit
Kusofuta	kupfimba/kunyengetedza (to propose love/to persuade)	English; soften
Kuvhaya	kuenda (to go)	English; via
Kuzviruza	kurashikirwa nomukana/nezvinonaka (to miss out on a golden opportunity)	English; lose
Mahwani	zvakaoma (tough scenario)	English; one
Mogo	fodya (tobacco)	English; smoke
Muchembizo	muchembere (old woman)	Shona; muchembere
Mudhikasi	mutikitivha (detective)	English; detective
Mudhinhiwe	munhu asina hanya (carefree person)	Ndebele; ukudinwa
Mufesi	shamwari (friend)	English; face
Musomeki	muuto (soldier)	English; soldier
Muvheti	murungu (white person)	English; white
Puregasi	nhumbu/ mimba (pregnancy)	English; pregnancy
Sasi	nyaya (story)	Shona; kusasa
Sisitireni	hanzvadzisikana (sister)	English; sister
Sheledhe	mari (money)	Tshivenda; tshelethe
Teki-teki	kusasiyana nomunhu (to follow closely)	English; take on
Tonasi	guta/dhorobha (town)	English; town

Just like the coinages in Table 1, the borrowed Shona slang words in Table 2 also seem to have been borrowed to express euphemism (*chakala*, *bhabhidho bhizi*, *dhiri*, *kubhaudha*, *kukirara*, *gogasi*, *hon'asi*, *mahwani*, and *muchembizo*), to praise or show endearment or admiration or appreciation (*Bhoziwere*, *clobha*, *chidhenja*, *gulezi*, *kule* and *tonasi*), to express an action or state of affairs (*kuleza*, *kukiya-kiya*, *kugepa*, *kufizuka*, *kusitana* etc), and to avoid detection or to disguise reality (*kushuzura*, *kuvhaya*, *puregasi* etc).

This researcher also agrees with Nyota and Mareva (2012) who observe that Shona slang seems to be preoccupied with women, as the following terms from both Table 1 and Table 2 overtly or covertly have something to do with women: *chimoko*, *garinya*, *hwaga*, *kumanga*, *chidhenja*, *dzimeti*, *gogasi*, *gulezi*, *kubhaudha*, *kudhunduzwa*, *kusofuta*, *muchembizo*, *puregasi* and *sisitireni*.

Some of the coined and borrowed words are also reflective of the prevailing political and economic climate in Zimbabwe where, for example, the farm take-overs of the past decade have given rise to the concept of *mamonya* (heavily built men) who engage in *jambanja* (violence), causing things to become *chabvondoka* (to go haywire). Also, the rather bleak economic situation has given rise to *magweja* and *makorokoza* (illegal gold panners) and *mandimbandimba* (strongly built extortionists). Similarly, the unstable economic climate has engendered the concepts of *kujingirisa* (trying to make ends meet) and *kukiya-kiya* (seeking desperate solutions to economic hardships), a term popularised by the Government of National Unity Finance Minister, Biti.

Conclusion

The research study has established that Shona slang is very much alive in Zimbabwe and that the word-forming processes of neologism/coinage and borrowing contribute significantly to the development of Shona slang and that the words so formed are a reflection of the ever-changing social, political and economic situation in which not only the youth but even other age groups seek unique and informal terms to express the feelings (such as admiration, appreciation, contempt), actions and events that affect and shape their everyday lives. The researcher recommends further research into other word-formation processes that could also be contributing to the development of the Shona slang lexicon.

References

- Eble, C. (1996). *Slang and Sociability*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Finegan, E. (1999). *Language: Its structure and use*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Hatch, E.M. and Brown, C. (1995). *Vocabulary, semantics, and language education*. Cambridge and New York: CUP.
- Keith, G. and Shuttleworth, J. (2000). *Living language*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Mawadza, A. (2000). Harare Shona slang: a linguistic study. *Zambezia* XXVII (I) pp.93-101.
- Mooney, A. et al (2011). *Language, society and power: An introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nywaranda, V. (2003). Doing qualitative research study. *Zimbabwe Bulletin of Teacher Education* 12 (1) pp.1-3.
- Nyota, S. and Mareva, R. (2012). What's new in Shona street lingo? Semantic change in lingo adoptives from mainstream Shona. *International Journal of English Linguistics* 2 (6) pp.112-119.
- Peresuh, M. and Masuku, J. (2002). The role of the bilingual in the bilingual-bicultural education in Zimbabwe. *Zambezia* XXIX (1) pp.27-37.
- Poole, C.S (1999). *An introduction to communication*. New York: Pelgrave.
- Sidhu, K.S. (1984). *Methodology of research in education*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
- Spolsky, B. (1998). *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: OUP.
- Wagner, M. (2010). Word formation processes: How new words develop in the English Language. Retrieved from: killmonotony.net/written/wfp.pdf.
- Yule, G. (1996). *The study of language*. Cambridge: CUP.