



## SELECTED IGBO ROMANCE SLANGS: DECODING LINGUISTIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

Chibueze Onyinye Favour  
University of Lagos, Nigeria.

Phone: +2347034198852

Email: [onyinyefchibueze@gmail.com](mailto:onyinyefchibueze@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This study examines the linguistics and socio-cultural implications of selected romance slang in the Igbo language. The aim is to investigate the construction of these slang, their linguistic characteristics, and their broader implications within the Igbo society. Theoretical framework of Language Play and Cultural Context is employed. This research also employs a qualitative approach to analyze slang expressions collected from diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. The study aims to categorize these slang based on underlying themes and patterns, thereby identifying distinct cultural and linguistic differences. Discoveries unveil a diverse array of romantic slang in the Igbo language, marked by innovative linguistic forms often involving phonological and morphological adaptations. These slang serve various communicative functions, such as conveying humour, strengthening in-group identity, and addressing sensitive topics. Insights from sociolinguistic interviews underscore that the use of these slang is influenced by factors such as age, gender, social context, and attitudes toward language evolution. The socio-cultural analysis of the study uncovers the complex relationship between language, identity, and societal norms. While certain slang reinforce traditional gender roles, others challenge prevailing power dynamics and norms pertaining to sexuality. This refined connection between language and culture emphasizes the need for a holistic comprehension of how slang shape the Igbo society. In summary, this research illuminates the linguistics and socio-cultural implications of romantic Igbo slang. It emphasizes the significance of acknowledging the complex ties between language and society and how slang mirror and impact cultural dynamics. The study advocates for further exploration into the evolving nature of these slang as language adapts to shifting societal norms. Additionally, fostering open discussions about the consequences of these linguistic expressions can lead to a more inclusive and knowledgeable Igbo-speaking community.

**Keywords:** Romantic slang, Igbo, culture, linguistics, socio-culture, sociolinguistics

### Introduction

Language is a powerful tool that not only facilitates communication but also reflects cultural distinctions, social dynamics, and interpersonal relationships within a community. Slang is a type of language spoken within a speech community which is not understood by all. The phenomenon of slang, which often emerges from subcultures and specific social contexts, carries a unique linguistic and cultural significance. This study examines the world of Igbo romantic slang, aiming to uncover the layers of linguistic evolution and socio-cultural implications inherent in this fascinating linguistic sub-domain.

The Igbo people, primarily located in southeastern Nigeria, possess a rich linguistic heritage and culture. The emergence and use of slang, particularly in the context of romance and relationships, provide valuable insights into how language adapts to express complex emotions and interpersonal dynamics. By analyzing Igbo romantic slang through a linguistic and socio-cultural framework, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the Igbo language evolves and innovates to accommodate contemporary expressions of emotions and relationships and how Igbo romantic slang is deeply embedded in the cultural norms and social interactions of the community. Investigating this slang can offer insights into changing attitudes toward romance, intimacy, and gender roles within Igbo society, as slang often serves as a marker of belonging to a particular group or community.

The primary goal of this research is to decode the linguistic features and socio-cultural implications of selected Igbo romance slang. To achieve this goal, the study will address the following research questions: how has Igbo romance slang evolved in terms of its lexicon, grammar, and morphological features?; what are the positive and negative linguistic features of Igbo romantic slang, and how do they contribute to the



perception and expression of emotions within relationships?; what euphemistic expressions are present in romantic Igbo slang, and how do they contribute to the subtlety and cultural sensitivity within Igbo-speaking communities?; how does the use of these slangs relate to and influence gender roles within the society?

Based on preliminary observations, it is hypothesized that Igbo romantic slang will exhibit unique linguistic traits, such as metaphorical expressions, lexical borrowing from other languages, and simplified syntax. Additionally, the study predicts that the usage of romantic slang will vary across different generations, reflecting both continuity and shifts in socio-cultural attitudes. Furthermore, the research anticipates that Igbo romance slang will mirror broader societal changes, serving as a linguistic window into evolving gender dynamics and intimate relationships within the Igbo community.

### **Methodology**

This research employs qualitative research techniques to examine gathered data, utilizing primary sources for the research data. The study includes interviews with 55 Igbo speakers below the age of 45. Additionally, the researcher's intuition and observations are integrated into the analysis process. By employing this multidimensional approach, the study offers a comprehensive insight into the complex relationship between linguistics and socio-cultural aspects within Igbo romantic slangs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded in the Language Play and Cultural Context Framework by Wittgenstein (1953). Wittgenstein argues that understanding language in context is more crucial than its abstract meaning. Language Play and Cultural Context Framework merges the creative elements of Igbo romantic slang with the broader Igbo cultural background. It underscores how linguistic inventiveness, encompassing wordplay, metaphors, and linguistic innovations, enriches romantic communication while preserving cultural authenticity. By fusing language play and cultural analysis, this approach thoroughly explores Igbo romance slangs. It reveals how linguistic creativity within the slang enhances romantic interactions, fostering emotional connections and intimacy.

Additionally, it probes how the slang adapts to contemporary influences and societal shifts while upholding traditional values. This model illuminates the dynamic interplay between tradition and modern expression in the domain of romantic discourse.

### **Literature Review**

Chinagorom and Onuora (2018:67) affirm that the Igbo culture, originating in eastern Nigeria, is a dynamic blend of tradition and modernity. The Igbo language has evolved and diversified, giving rise to variations like slang. This slang incorporates elements from other languages, reflecting cultural exchange and the adaptability of Igbo culture. Through Romance Igbo slang, the language continues evolving, showcasing the combination of tradition and contemporary influences. The Igbo language serves as a vehicle for transmitting oral history, values, and cultural expressions. Music, dance, and art form integral parts of Igbo identity, reflecting societal norms, beliefs, and rituals. Religious practices, both indigenous and syncretic, underscore spiritual interconnectedness and guide ethical conduct. Igbo culture's resilience, adaptability, and distinctiveness continue to shape the lives and identities of its people while evolving in response to contemporary challenges and global influences. In studying Igbo culture, researchers uncover a rich tradition, innovation, and interconnectedness that reflects the essence of a diverse and flourishing community.

*Urban Dictionary* defines language romance, often referred to as “romantic words and phrases,” as the use of affectionate, endearing, or sentimental expressions in communication. It involves employing words, phrases, and tones that convey warmth, intimacy, and emotional connection between individuals. This form of linguistic expression aims to create positive emotional experiences and deepen interpersonal relationships through language. Romance slang typically refers to informal language characterized by playful, flirtatious, or endearing expressions used in romantic or intimate contexts. It involves using words, phrases, and gestures that convey affection, attraction, or emotions associated with romantic relationships. Romance slang often includes terms of endearment, compliments, and humour meant to create a light-hearted and amorous atmosphere. It's commonly used among couples or individuals expressing romantic interest, adding a sense of intimacy and playfulness to their interactions.



Romance slang can sometimes take on a derogatory form. In some cases, individuals may use informal language with negative or offensive connotations in romantic or intimate contexts. This can include insults, derogatory terms, or offensive language used to communicate negative emotions, disrespect, or hostility within a romantic relationship. The term “romance slang” generally refers to affectionate and playful language, but like any form of communication, it can be used positively and negatively.

Furthermore, it is crucial to clarify certain fundamental terms within the scope of this research: slang, linguistics, sociolinguistics, and socio-culture, code switching and mixing. According to Partridge (1950), slang can be defined as informal language that arises in reaction to shifts in social, cultural, or technological contexts. It may encompass novel vocabulary, modified meanings, or playful variations of conventional language. Slang acts as a mode of linguistic innovation, frequently conveying elements of humour, irony, or connections to subcultures.

From the webpage of Linguistic Society of America, linguistics is the scientific study of language and its structure. It involves analyzing language form, language meaning, and language in context.

Socio-culture is defined by Hall (1997) as the symbiotic relationship between social dynamics and cultural dimensions, emphasizing how cultural systems adapt to and impact social change. It underscores the role of culture in shaping collective identity and fostering a sense of belonging. These scholars’ definitions resonate because romance slang is a type of Igbo slang language influenced by societal factors, commonly used and understood by few in a speech community. Through this slang type, cultural briefs and practices are decoded.

Trudgill (2000), on the other hand, gave his own view of sociolinguistics as the study of language in relation to society. It focuses on the use of language in social interactions, considering how factors such as identity, social class, ethnicity, and gender influence and are influenced by language use.

Myers-Scotton (1993) defines code-switching as the alternation between two or more languages or language varieties in a single conversation. This often happens within bilingual or multilingual communities and can occur at the level of sentences, phrases, or even morphemes.

According to Muysken (2000), code-mixing is a type of language mixing where elements from two or more languages co-occur in the same sentence or discourse. He distinguishes between intra-sentential code-mixing (mixing within a sentence) and inter-sentential code-mixing (mixing between sentences) and explores the structural constraints and sociolinguistic factors that influence this phenomenon.

Several Igbo scholars, including Nkamigbo and Eme (2011), Ikegwuonu (2013), and Chibueze (2023), have conducted researches on Igbo slang, each offering unique insights into its various aspects. Nkamigbo and Eme (2011:84) focus their study on the slang of Otu-Onitsha, spoken within the bustling Onitsha Main Market of Anambra State, Nigeria. Interestingly, their research unveiled that this distinct slang, originally confined to the marketplace, has transcended its boundaries and permeated the boarder of Onitsha community, known as “Enu-Onitsha.” Their study meticulously categorized eight distinct slang categories that permeate the economic and social fabric of Otu-Onitsha life.

Building upon this foundation, Ikegwuonu (2013:3) explores the multidimensional role of slang within the Igbo lexicon. She highlights that slang extends beyond mere linguistic adornment, encompassing sarcastic, abusive, and even praise-based variations. Her work underscores the dynamic and versatile nature of slang as an expressive tool.

Chibueze (2023), in her contribution, honed in on the generational dynamics of slang usage. Specifically, she notes that while slang finds its primary domain among the younger population, proverbs tend to be favoured by the older generations. Her analysis investigates into the complex formations and types of slang expressions, shedding light on their complex styles of development.

While the studies conducted by these scholars have encompassed a range of topics, as mentioned earlier, the specific focus of this research is directed towards the utilization of slang as a channel for romantic expression.

The primary objective is to explain how slang, within the Igbo context, functions to nurture and facilitate social interactions of a romantic nature. This analysis delves into a careful analysis of the linguistic complexities inherent in such slang usage while probing the broader socio-cultural significance underlying these expressions.

### Data Representation and Interpretation

#### *How has Igbo romance slang evolved in terms of its lexicon, grammar, and morphological features?*

As languages adapt to new contexts and influences, they often undergo shifts that reflect the evolving expressions of speakers' emotions, relationships, and interpersonal connections. By examining the changes in vocabulary, sentence structure, and word forms within Igbo romance slang, this analysis aims to unravel the complex linguistic evolution and shed light on the cultural significance of these linguistic adaptations. This exploration will not only enhance our understanding of the Igbo language dynamics but also contribute to the broader field of linguistic studies and socio-cultural research. The slangs below exhibit certain lexical and stylistic components:

- (i) Asa nke a bụ ọganik medi– Fake beauty;
- (ii) Nwa bụgodu shawama – This girl is a beauty;
- (iii) Nwoke bụ wotamelon – Handsome and wealthy man;
- (iv) Nwoke bụgodu Kuwaiti korensi – A wealthy man;
- (v) I tiri eti ka Malawi korensi– You are broke;
- (vi) Nwaanyị nke m, aga m edeposit n'ime gị witatu widrowal n'abalị a – My woman, I will have sex with you tonight non-stop;
- (vii) Asa bebi, yọ biuti digodu wuu– Beautiful woman, your beauty is exceptional;
- (viii) Bebi m ọ bụ gị bụ mai ọn and ọf fọ laifū – My dearest, you are my all in all; and
- (ix) Aga m apianye my kukumba n'ime tōnelu gị n'abalị a –I shall have sex with you tonight.

The slangs in (i) – (ix) incorporate elements borrowed from the English language, resulting in a phenomenon of code mixing in (i) – (v) and code-switching in (vi) – (ix). Additionally, a noticeable semantic shift occurs within this set of slangy expressions. For instance, the term “ọganik medi,” typically associated with the natural state of a product, is repurposed to mean “fake or bleaching” in the specific context in which it is used. Furthermore, words like “shawama” and “wotamelon,” originally nouns in the source language, are used as adjectives in the target language, signifying a shift in grammatical tense. Slangs (i) – (iv) are primarily metaphoric expressions, while (v) – (ix) involve the borrowing of lexicons for euphemistic purposes.

Moreover, the introduction of the Igbo prefix “e-” to the verb “deposit” (ejaculate) illustrates the common practice of affixing elements to loaned Igbo words, even within slangy expressions. The phrase “witatu widrowal” conveys the notion of “non-stop,” specifically referring to a prolonged sexual encounter akin to a marathon. In this linguistic exchange, “kukumba” is used as a euphemism for “penis,” and “tōnelu” symbolizes a woman's vagina. Remarkably, the sentence structure of Igbo remains intact in these expressions. When two languages converge, language change often ensues, and Igbo is no exception to the influence of English on its slangy expressions.

#### *What are the positive and negative linguistic features of Igbo romantic slang, and how do they contribute to the perception and expression of emotions within relationships?*

In Igbo romantic slang, positive linguistic elements consist of endearing and affectionate terms that playfully create a sense of warmth and connection between individuals. On the flip side, negative aspects encompass derogatory language, disrespect, and manipulation, which can potentially damage relationships. The following expressions serve as illustrations of positive and negative Igbo romantic slang:

- (x) Asa, achoro m ka anyi ruba – Baby, I want us to date;
- (xi) Nwa ife gi na-ekoom/I kpofego m asa– Baby, everything about you drives me crazy;
- (xii) Nwa inwe ya– Baby, you are bodily endowed;
- (xiii) Ife m na-eri –My spec;
- (xiv) Nwaanyị nwere ngabasi– Pretty lady;
- (xv) I na-aba m anya – You are attractive;

- (xvi) I bu nwa gaa ụwa mgbede – To hang out with a lady;
- (xvii) Ụmụ asa high way – Prostitutes;
- (xviii) Asa, ị rụrụ m ojobo – Fine girl, you played me;
- (xix) Ọtanwa – Playboy;
- (xx) Eze nnụnụ – Womanizer.

Slangs (x) – (xvi) evoke positive emotions when directed towards women, primarily emphasizing a woman's physical appearance. Positive admiration can uplift a person's mood significantly. When a woman is complimented with positive and affectionate slang, it serves as a key to her heart and makes her more receptive to your requests. The impact of words is substantial, regardless of whether they come from a genuine source or not; what matters most is their positive delivery and tone. Women are naturally drawn to what they hear and greatly appreciate expressions of admiration. These specific slangs have the power to evoke positive emotions.

Conversely, slangs (xvii) – (xx) are characterized by a prevalence of negative emotions when used in conversation. These particular linguistic expressions, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have the potential to convey sentiments of displeasure, discomfort, or even hostility. When used in dialogue, such slangs can lead to misunderstandings, strained relationships, and a general deterioration of the conversational atmosphere. They may inadvertently offend or upset the listener, causing tension and friction between individuals engaged in the exchange.

It's important to recognize the impact of these negative slangs and to exercise caution when employing them in communication. Being mindful of the potential emotional responses they can trigger is essential for maintaining productive and harmonious interactions in various social contexts. Choosing to use more positive and constructive language can contribute to healthier and more amicable conversations.

***What euphemistic expressions are present in romantic Igbo slang, and how do they contribute to the subtlety and cultural sensitivity within Igbo-speaking communities?***

In their study, Fakuade *et al.* (2014:120-125) shed light on the concept of sex as one of the most robust taboo subjects within Igbo-speaking communities. They grouped sex-related expressions under the umbrella of moral linguistic taboos and highlighted how these expressions align with the accepted moral standards of the Igbo society. Igbo society has devised alternative means to mitigate the discomfort associated with discussing such topics. Delving into these delicate slangs reveals a layer of subtlety and emotional depth that enhances romantic communication within Igbo communities. The exploration of the expressions below provides valuable insights into the complex art of expressing affection and desire while still honouring and being sensitive to cultural norms.

- (xxi) Ka m bee gi okwe – Let me fuck you;
- (xxii) Ka anyị pia ọkụ – Let us have sex;
- (xxiii) Ndị na-akpọ ntụ – Gays;
- (xxiv) Nwa, m ga-ata gi – Baby, I will make love to you;
- (xxv) Bịa ka m kpaa gi aka na trigger – Come let me arouse you;
- (xxvi) Ka anyị gbaa egwu jigida – Let us have sex.

In the provided slang, terms like “okwe,” “pia ọkụ,” “ata,” and “jigida” serve as substitutes for the topic of sex. The word “trigger,” borrowed from another language, is used to convey the idea of “arousal” or “increasing excitement.” Additionally, the term “ntụ,” originally referring to “charcoal dust,” is employed to describe same-sex acts. The literal meanings of “okwe,” “pia ọkụ,” “ata,” and “jigida” are “pebble,” “flogfire,” “chew,” and “waist bead”, respectively. As mentioned earlier, these subtle linguistic choices allow for a more culturally sensitive adaptation within the Igbo context.

***How does the use of these slangs relate to and influence gender roles within the society?***

Understanding the concept of gender in the African context is of paramount importance. Chauraya (2012:254) elucidates that, in African perspective, there exists no clear demarcation between sex and gender. Consequently, within the Igbo framework, gender is delineated as the societal expectations, behaviours, and responsibilities assigned as appropriate to individuals based on their gender at birth. In Igbo society, men,





representing the male demographic, often initiate conversations within relationships. Men feel comfortable employing romantic slang in these interactions, as evident in slang (x), where “Asa, achoro m ka anyi ruba – Baby, I want us to date” is used. “Asa” is a term used to compliment the beauty of females.

Chibueze (2023:28) explains that despite the euphemistic nature of romantic Igbo slang, the usage statistics reveal a notable disparity, with a male-to-female ratio of 3:1. In other words, a larger proportion of male youths engage in conversations using romantic slang compared to their female counterparts in Igbo society. Examining the aforementioned romantic slangs in (i), (vii), (x), (xviii), and (ii), (xi), (xii), (xvi), (xix), (xxiv) above, the use of terms such as “asa” and “nwa” in these expressions imparts a specific tone to the communication. It implies that a male is addressing a female, as “asa” and “nwa” are typically used by males in romantic relationships when referring to females. These expressions explicitly define what the Igbo people perceive as a proper relationship between individuals of the opposite sex. It is noteworthy that traditional Igbo gender roles persist even while slangs are utilized, despite the informal nature of this mode of communication.

### Conclusion

In this study, an examination of romantic slangs in the Igbo language was conducted, focusing on their linguistic and socio-cultural implications. The research categorized these slangs based on themes and patterns, revealing a diverse range of innovative linguistic forms involving phonological and morphological adaptations. These slangs were found to serve various communicative purposes, such as conveying humour, reinforcing in-group identity, and addressing sensitive topics. Sociolinguistic interviews highlighted that the use of these slangs is influenced by factors including age, gender, social context, and attitudes toward language evolution.

The socio-cultural analysis examined the relationship between language, identity, and societal norms. The study unveiled that while some slangs reinforced traditional gender roles, others challenged existing power dynamics and norms related to sexuality. This study emphasized the importance of understanding the profound connection between language and culture, highlighting the need for a full comprehension of how slangs both reflect and impact cultural dynamics.

In conclusion, this research highlights the significance of recognizing the complex interplay between language and society and how romantic Igbo slang reflects and influences cultural dynamics. It encourages more investigation into how slangs are changing as language adjusts to changing societal values. Moreover, encouraging open conversations about the outcomes of these informal language expressions can help create a more inclusive and informed community of Igbo speakers.

### References

- Adeola, O. & Akinmade, A. (2020). *Sex Sells: Sexual Metaphors in Selected Nigerian Hip-Hop Music*. Retrieved from [Sex-Sells-Sexual-Metaphors-in-Selected-Nigerian-Hip-Hop-Music.pdf \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- Chauraya, E. (2012). The African View on Gender and Its Impact on Implemented Gender Policies. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, ISSN: 1520-550914(3). Retrieved from <https://jsd-africa.com/Jsd/Vol14No3Summer2012A/PDF/The%20African%20View%20on%20Gender%20and%20its%20Impact%20on%20Implemented%20Gender.Efiritha%20Chauraya.pdf>
- Chibueze, O.F. (2023). Ntosaasi Okwu Akuku dika O Si Metuta Asusu n'Obodo. An undergraduate thesis submitted to the Department of Linguistics, African, and Asian Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria.
- Chinagorom, L. C, & Onuora, N. T. (2018). The Origin and Evolution of Igbo Language and Culture over the Generations. *Journal of Humanities*, 1(1), 65-67. Retrieved from [\(PDF\) The Origin and Evolution of Igbo Language and Culture over the Generations. \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- Fakuade et al., (2014). Linguistic Taboos in The Igbo Society: A sociolinguistic Investigation. p.120-125. Retrieved from <https://uilspace.unilorin.edu.ng/bitstream/handle/20.500.12484/323/LINGUISTIC%20TABOOS%20IN%20THE%20IGBO%20SOCIETY.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>



- Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage Publications, Inc; Open University Press. Retrieved from [\(PDF\) Hall 1997 | Joline Jacobsson - Academia.edu](#)
- Ikegwuonu, C. N., (2013). Mmùba Okwu Ohurù: Uzo Mwulite Mkpurukwu na Nkwali Otuto Asusu Igbo [e-book]. *ANSU Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 51-62. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333479387\\_Mmuba\\_Okwu\\_Ohuru\\_Uzo\\_Mwulite\\_Mkpurukwu\\_na\\_Nkwali\\_Oturo\\_Asusu\\_Igbo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333479387_Mmuba_Okwu_Ohuru_Uzo_Mwulite_Mkpurukwu_na_Nkwali_Oturo_Asusu_Igbo)
- Linguistic Society of America. (n.d.). What is Linguistics? Retrieved from <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/what-linguistics>
- Muysken, P. (2000). *Bilingual Speech a Typology of Code-Mixing*. The Edinburgh Building, UK: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from [83569-1333-276660-1-10-20220517.pdf](#)
- Myers-Scotton C. (1993). *Social motivations for codeswitching. Evidence from Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Retrieved from [Microsoft Word - JESR V5N1 Jan 2015 \(semanticscholar.org\)](#)
- Nkamigbo, L.C, & Eme, C.A. (2011). Igbo slang in Otu-Onitsha: Towards enriching the Igbo language [e-book]. *An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 5(6), 83-94. doi:<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v5i6.8>
- Partridge, E. (1950). *Slang Today and Yesterday* [e-book]. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 1 Romance. Retrieved from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Romance>
- Salawu, A. (2011). Breaking the Culture of Mute Sensation: Female Expression of Power in Sexual Contest with Men in Yoruba Newspapers. *Journal of Social Sciences* 27 (1): 39–51. Retrieved from [\(PDF\) Breaking the Culture of Mute Sensation: Female Expression of Power in Sexual Contest with Men in Yoruba Newspapers \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. London: Penguin Books. Retrieved from [sociolinguistics-an-introduction-to-language-and-society\\_compress.pdf](#)
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Retrieved from [Philosophical Investigations | work by Wittgenstein | Britannica](#)