

New Yoruba idioms and idiomatic expressions: a new mode of expression in political arena

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New idioms and idiomatic expressions, which are modern stock expressions, constitute communicative clogs in Yorùbá routine discourses because of their semantic complexity and deviant nature. Existing studies have established their scope of usage in Yorùbá music but have hardly addressed their communicative adaptability in politics. This paper investigates issues expressed in these idioms, context and strategies for using them in political arena. This is with a view to establishing their communicative and stylistic relevance in Yorùbá discourses. The paper adopts Mukarovsky's theory of Standard Language because of its capacity to explain the "differential specifica" between the language of everyday interaction and literary language. The data analysed in the study are based on different routine communicative discourses of politicians and party members on radio, during political rallies or campaign; the data are subjected to pragmatic and stylistic analysis. Nominalisation, pidginisation and dialect expressions are the strategies employed for the formation of new idioms in this paper. These strategies are used to express different political happenings contextualized in underachievement, sloganeering for support, deceit, and acceptance/rejection for second term in office respectively. New idioms and idiomatic expressions, used to express socio-political issues in Yorùbá routine communication, occurred in mediated and non-mediated contexts and are conveyed through nominalization, pidginisation, and dialect expressions. The idioms reflect dynamism and modernity-constrained stylistic choices in Yorùbá.

Keywords: *new idioms, Yorùbá, strategies, politics, stylistics.*

1. Introduction

This paper was motivated by the saying 'the world is a global village' (globalisation) which imposes new global communicative challenges on the Yorùbá people especially the politicians and their followers. The evolution of new idioms and idiomatic expressions thus becomes a coping strategy to meet the new communicative challenges. Globalisation is a phenomenon that filters into all domain of human experience, especially politics. As a result of this, the Yorùbá, politicians like any other politicians in the Third World countries, are faced with the challenges of how to express their ideas and experiences emanating from globalization. These politicians have a duty to inform, enlighten and educate their people about the latest development brought about by the wind of change blowing across the globe. At a time that Nigeria is trying to develop and sustain a democratic system of government, the Yorùbá politicians cannot afford to be aloof to this global development. The politicians must be in the fore front of the urgent need to educate Nigerians about new developments in politics. In doing this, they are incapacitated with certain linguistic constraints imposed on them by their language such as the unavailability of words in their language and difficulties in getting appropriate lexical expressions for their ideas. To

overcome this, the choice left for politicians according to Babalola (1972), Awóbùlúyì (1992: 26) and Olátéjú (2005) is to coin new words or idioms and also to attach new meanings to the existing ones. In this paper, such new coinages, words and expressions are hereby referred to as 'new idioms and expressions'.

By and large, in this paper, attempt was made to address political issues expressed with new idioms and idiomatic expressions in Yorùbá and strategies for using them with a view to establishing their communicative and stylistic potential in Yorùbá discourses.

2. New Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions

New idioms and idiomatic expressions are quintessentially modern stock expressions, formed in response to the needs of the moment arising as a result of the linguistic constraints of the users which consequently necessitates creation of new words and expressions. They are so called not only because of their complexity which requires the overlapping tendencies of their semantic realizations, but also because of their distinctive difference from old, traditional idioms. As a matter of fact, they straddle metaphor and euphemism and also serve as replication of the established Yorùbá idioms both in form and meaning. They are in spoken and written forms and mainly operate at the lexical and phrasal levels. They are also multi-functional because of their semantic unity. They may equally function as nouns, verbs and adjectives. New idioms and idiomatic expressions are created either through coining, (creating and recreating of new words and expressions) or by investing old words and expressions with new meanings. New idioms are creative, new, strange and fresh by nature. They are not vague expressions and their origins are also known to the users who are always dazzled whenever they come across them in any context.

3. Existing Studies on New idioms

Few scholars have turned their attention on the study of new idioms and idiomatic expressions in Yoruba. These scholars include Àkànmú (2003) and Olátéjú (2005). Some scholars have described idioms as terms referring to words whose meanings cannot be predicted from the individual elements in them (Babalola 1972, Bámgbóṣé 1975, Owólabí 1976, Awóbùlúyì 1992 and Yusuf 2002). These studies have not directly dealt with some issues raised in this paper but they serve as the springboard for this paper.

While discussing idioms and coinages, Babalola (1972) states that neologism is used for expressing new items and ideas brought into Yorùbá culture by foreigners. His view bears direct relevance to this study in that, neologism is one of the linguistic strategies employed in the formation of new idioms.

Bámgbóṣé (1975) identifies vocabulary coining strategies to include nominalization, explication, semantic extension, and loan words, among others. Through this, the Yorùbá lexicon is being expanded. Àkànmú's (2003) is not specifically on new idioms but it has some semblance of new idioms in the discussion and examples cited. He employed a sociolinguistic analytical method for the interpretation of the work which he referred to as coded language used by certain

groups of the Yorùbá society. He cites numerous examples of such expressions that are used in different contexts and discusses their functions in daily activities of the users, even though many of the examples cited as slang are not slang but new idioms used by a considerable number of people.

Ọlátéjú's (2005) work is a remarkable contribution on new idioms, their formation and interpretation. He examines new idioms and idiomatic expressions from both the linguistic and literary points of view. He adopted Chomskyan Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) while stylistic and some sociolinguistic variables were used to bring out aesthetic and communicative potential of the new idioms and idiomatic expressions.

4. Methodological Approach

Data were collected from different routine communicative discourses of some prominent Yorùbá politicians and parties' members on radio, during political rallies, campaigns, sloganeering in Lagos, Ìbàdàn and Òşogbo. These three cities were chosen because of their urbanized nature and the constant usage of new idioms and idiomatic expressions by the politicians. Data were subjected to pragmatic and stylistic analysis.

5. Standard Language vs Literary Language

The theory of Standard Language was formulated in 1970 by Jan Mukarovsky to solve the problem of relationship between Standard Language (SL) and Literary Language (LL). The suitability of this model lies in the fact that it can be used to explain the differential specificity between the language of ordinary usage and literary expressions as well as using it to explain and interpret the deviant and inventive nature of new idioms and idiomatic expressions.

According to Mukarovsky (1970), Standard Language (SL) is the language of everyday conversation. Its purpose is the understanding between the speaker and the audience with the aim of enhancing effective communication (Crystal 1997: 68). Language of ordinary discourse is casual and devoid of ornamentation. It is unexamined and uncritical. It does not draw attention to itself or open up provocative questions to the nature of its coding. It is often used in schools, on radio, during political campaigns and preaching. Its priority is effective communication which calls for employment of words and phrases that can be fully comprehended. Therefore, to enhance undistorted communication in Standard Language (SL), language must conform to the entire linguistic norms. Concepts crucial to the Standard Language are 'backgrounding' and automatization illustrated in example (1):

- (1) *Làkàsórò* Literal meaning: corrupt coinage from La casera drink
Idiomatic: no story/end of discussion

The above expression is a phonological creation from the name of a particular non-alcoholic drink in circulation all over the country. The expression *lákàsérà* (la casera) is the standard form

that has been foregrounded or de-automatized as 'lākàsórò'. In other words, *lākàsórò* is the artistic form of 'la casera'. There is no expression like 'lākàsórò' in the standard language. 'Lākàsérà' is automatized and serves as the background from which 'lākàsórò' is created and used as an idiom. 'Lākàsórò' which can be interpreted as 'no story/end of discussion' is made new, thereby becoming element of surprise because it has violated the Yorùbá lexical formation rules.

Although, foregrounding is logically prohibited in Standard Language, this is not to say that it is not visible in Standard Language as Mukarovsky indicates its possibility in journalistic language where it can be used as subordinate to communication in order to draw the readers' attention more closely to the issue at hand or the item of information articulated. This must have justified the use of new idioms and idiomatic expressions in political routine communicative situation discussed in this paper.

6. Linguistic Strategies for the Formation of New Idioms

According to Bámgbósé (1975), word formation is a universal linguistic concept that is concerned with the study of the patterns on which a language forms new lexical item. As far as formation of new idioms and idiomatic expressions are concerned in this paper, the linguistic strategies involved in their formation include the following:

6.1 Nominalisation

Nominalisation is universally known as one of the veritable tools for generating new words in virtually every language. Ruvet (1973 : 172) views it as the derivation of a noun phrase from an underlying clause or sentence; or the process of forming a noun from other word classes. It should be noted that the analysis done in the table below and the rest of this paper are based, not on general or traditional idioms, but on what we have called *new idioms* in this work. The linguistic strategies for the formation of such idioms form the thesis of this work. Below are some examples of new idioms and idiomatic expressions created from the linguistic process of nominalization.

Table 1 *Examples of idioms created by nominalization*

Idioms	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
oní + àṣà + kí + àṣà (owner-of-bad-culture)	aláṣàkaṣà (owner of bad culture)	Oníṣókúṣò (vulgar person /user of nonsensical language)
oní + ebòlò (owner-of-ebòlò)	Elébòlò (seller of ebòlò vegetable)	A prostitute
má + fo + gótà (do-not-jump-over-the gutter)	mini skirt	indecent dressing

6.2 Pidginisation

According to Muysken (1980), pidgin is a contact language which is an amalgam of linguistic elements of two or more languages and which arises in social and economic transactions between, at least two groups speaking different languages by a process of restriction and simplification of one of the languages of these groups, usually that is in a socially superior position. This process of restriction and simplification is termed Pidginisation. By definition, a pidgin is no one's native language. In the process of becoming notarized, the pidgin undergoes extension and elaboration and thus becomes creolized.

Pidginisation, as used in this paper, is a strategy for loaning words or expressions that are not only pidginised but also foregrounded with idiomatic undertones for communicative purposes, especially by the youths and non-fluent speakers of the language. Examples of such idioms and idiomatic expressions include:

Table 2 *Examples of idioms due to pidginization*

Idioms	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
Vb + Vb or V ₁ + V ₁ Kárí kòòmù - kárí + kòòmù = carry come	Carry and come	Loan form of the pidgin English word 'carry come' for: come in/pack.
Kárí go - kárí + go = carry go	Carry go	Loaned form of the pidgin English word 'carry go' for: move on/ride on/go away
Vb + Noun		
Kárí mọ̀ní - kárí + mọ̀ní = carry money	Put money on the head	Loaned form of the English word 'carry money' for: carry passengers.

6.3 Dialect Expression

Dialect, according to Sàlámi (2006), is a distinct form or variety of a language that is associated with a recognizable regional, social or ethnic groups different from other forms of the language by specific linguistic features such as pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary, especially a variety of speech differing from the standard language or speech pattern of the culture in which it exists. As far as the new idiom is concerned, dialect expression is seen as a dialect variant of word present in the standard language and sometimes used consciously for entertainment. Examples of where dialects are used as idioms and idiomatic expressions include:

Table 3 Examples of dialectical idioms

Idioms	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning
E ẹ̀ tí ì rí <u>ǹkẹ̀n kẹ̀n</u> (You have not seen anything).	You have only seen little.	Greater show awaits you/that is just a tip of the iceberg.

The underlined word in the above excerpt is borrowed from the Òkè-Ògùn dialect of Yorùbá. In standard Yorùbá, the word should have appeared thus:

- (2) *E ẹ̀ tí ì rí ǹkan kan*
‘You have not seen anything’

The above expression rendered in Ìbàràpá dialect is often found in the adverts, addresses and speeches of politicians or even, in music of some artistes and it often has a stylistic significance of comic effect or entertainment.

7. Analysis of New Yorùbá Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions used in Socio-political Context

This section is devoted to analysing and interpreting idioms and idiomatic expressions found in the data collected for this paper. In doing the analysis, we first present the idiom, then its literal meaning and finally its idiomatic meaning. This analysis is to provide insight into communicative and stylistic relevance of the new idioms. Because of the possibility of new idioms and idiomatic expressions possessing many interpretations and the fact that meaning cannot be determined by their individual lexical constituents, this phenomenon is better studied and analysed from pragmatic and stylistic perspectives with a view to determined their communicative potential in political discourses.

- (3) *Eté* Literal meaning: Yorubanised version of the name Eteeh
Idiomatic: thief/looter

The context in which the name emerged is a context of corruption involving a former Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives. The expression ‘*Eté*’ as a new idiom is commonly used today by people, especially in the present political dispensation in Nigeria. It is a corrupt coinage of the name *Eteeh*. *Eté* is metaphorically used to refer to ‘a thief or a looter of public treasury’ like the former speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives who was allegedly accused of corruption and forced to resign on October 31, 2008 over the crisis that emanated from the N628 million building renovation scandal in 2007 before she was discharged and acquitted in a court of law.

- (4) *Ojúyọ̀bọ̀* Literal meaning: bulging eyes

'kò ní wọlé lẹ̀ẹ̀kan si' (he will not win once again) but it would not have created the effect seen in the dialect version.

- (7) *'Ó bọ̀jẹ̀ tì'* Literal meaning: it would never retrogress or go backward
Idiomatic: positive assertion/sloganeering for support,
 collective action for good governance/
 project

The expression '*ó bọ̀jẹ̀ tì*', literally interpreted as 'it would not retrogress or go backward' is a refrain to the political sloganeering of a political party in the south-western part of Nigeria. The governor of a particular State in Nigeria is fond of saying '*Èkó ò ní bọ̀jẹ̀ o*' (Lagos will not be backward the response or refrain of which is '*ó bọ̀jẹ̀ tì*')²(it would not retrogress or go backward). Again, the alternative would have been its standard version which people already familiar with 'ko le baje lailai' (it would never retrogress) but the governor uses the expression which calls attention to itself for aesthetic and communicative effect to solicit the support of the people, for the various developmental programmes of his government. In some other States, there are similar political expressions or slogans which have become idiomatic expressions that are meant to sensitise people to the activities of government. In one of these States, during the tenure of the former governor, the sloganeering idiom was '*Oyin ni o*':³

- (8) *'Oyin ni o'* Literal meaning: it is honey/shortened of name of Oyinlọ́lọ́
Idiomatic: successful tenure

The expression *Oyin ni o*, is used not only as an appellation, but also as a slogan during the political campaign of a politician whose name and tenure are expected to be as sweet as honey. This politician's tenure as governor was metaphorically predicated as *oyin* (honey) during an election in his State compared to the hardship experienced by the people of the State under the immediate past governor, whose tenure was characterized by mass retrenchment of teachers. As a metaphor, the expression *oyin ni o* (it is honey) means someone whose name and tenure are expected to be as sweet as honey. The expression is used to hail the former Governor of a particular State in Nigeria, who always got excited and entertained on hearing *oyin ni o*. This attribute is interpreted based on the socio-political context and in the socio-political views of some people in that particular State as sweet tenure, soothing tenure or a tenure that brings succour. In other words, the context of its usage always provides information which enables people to give the expression an interpretation of a peaceful and prosperous tenure. In another State today, the sloganeering expression is:

- (9) *Àjùmòṣe* Literal meaning: collective implementation
Idiomatic meaning: governance is a collective responsibility

The above is a slogan-turned idiomatic expression used virtually in every home and public place thus:

- (10) *'k'Ọ̀yọ̀ọ̀' lẹ̀ daá àjùmọ̀ṣe gbogbo wa ni o!*
(for Oyo to be peaceful and prosperous it is our collective responsibilities).

The word *Àjùmọ̀ṣe* in the sloganeering idiom is derived from the governor's name 'Ajímòbí' meaning 'together we woke up to know the manner of birth' The idiom, *Àjùmọ̀ṣe* (that-which-is-executed-collectively) shares the same derivational strategy with the first three syllable (A/jí/mò) in the name *Ajímòbí* (a person we woke up together to experience his birth) with another connotative meaning of 'collective effort' derived from the first syllable and vowel (A) in the two names, a first person plural pronoun which eventually expresses 'collective responsibility'. Today, whether on the television or radio, every advert placed by the Oyo State government is ended with *k'Ọ̀yọ̀ọ̀' lẹ̀ daá àjùmọ̀ṣe gbogbo wa ni o!* (for Oyo to be peaceful and prosperous, it is our collective responsibilities). The sloganeering has equally become a household expression with the meaning of *collective responsibility* even governance is said to be collective responsibility.

- (11) *Nàìjá* Literal meaning: Yorubanised and shortened of the name Nigeria
Idiomatic: affectionate way of addressing the country Nigeria
exclamatory words of disappointment when something strange happens in the polity.

The expression *Nàìjá* is also a new idiom that is frequently used by many Nigerians, especially for entertainment purposes. It has become a way of affectionately referring to the country, Nigeria and Nigerians, especially those abroad. Expression like '*ìgbà wo l'ó n lọ Nàìjá?*' (when are you going to Nàìjá?) '*ṣé o ti gbọ́ láti Nàìjá?*' (have you heard from Nàìjá?), '*Nàìjá lodù*' (Nàìjá is the real thing) are common expressions among Nigerians, especially during a football match between Nigeria and any other country. Whenever it is used in contexts such as the foregoing, it facilitates information or background that connotes 'an expression of unity' among Nigerians as far as the meaning is concerned. There are also Nigerian musicians, actors, actresses, comedians and youths who have chosen *Nàìjá* as their affectionate way to address their country and sometimes to express exclamatory words of disappointment. When something crazy happens in the polity, people always exclaim *Haà, Nàìjá! Nàìjá* is a created word pronounced in Yorùbá or Pidgin English. It is a name given to Nigeria by Nigerians. It has resonated very well with the educated, semi-educated and the illiterates.

- (12) *Kárí go/Kárí kọ̀mù* Literal meaning: go away/move away
Idiomatic: continue/you are not wanted

These are new idioms loaned from English. The original English words were correctly used in their Yorùbá form '*kárí go*' and '*kárí kọ̀mù*' under different political contexts to connote different meanings. For instance, during the 2003 gubernatorial election in Nigeria the association of market women in a particular State told the former governor of the State in one of his political rallies to *kárí go*. That is, his candidature is accepted by the people, therefore, he

Akińbò: Oṣùṣàlálé, did you remember to pay your own association money to the secretary before you left the meeting?

Oṣùṣàlálé: What exactly are you saying? Where do you expect me to get money? It is like the politicians have packed all the money in circulation. They are just enriching their pockets.

The underlined expression, which literally means 'eat into the pocket,' can be interpreted as "our politicians are just enriching themselves with public funds". This interpretation is arrived at because of the political information expressed in the context which gives clue to the comprehension of the excerpt. In a similar vein, the expression '*jẹun sókè*' for "move/go on" can be used in different contexts. Let's consider the example below:

(16) *Òkè ni A.C.N wà nínú ìwé idìbò yẹn,*
Òkè ni kí ẹ jẹun sí

The A.C.N is located at the uppermost position
in the ballot paper, eat into the upper stomach.

The excerpt is credited to the incumbent governor of Lagos State, Babátúndé Rájí Fáṣọlá (BRF) during one of the political rallies of his party (Action Congress of Nigeria) held on the 5th of March 2011 at the Tàfáwà Báléwà Square (TBS) Lagos State. The rally was covered by the Lagos Television (L.T.V) and T.V Continental (TVC). The underlined expression is idiomatic and requires socio-political information, as reflected in the context such as the above for a meaningful interpretation. It is not only abnormal to eat into the upper stomach (*jẹun sókè*) it also negates the norms and conventions of the Yoruba language. Eat into the stomach (*jẹun síkùn*) is the normal and acceptable way of saying it. However, as stated in the theory adopted for this paper and in spite of its literariness, the use of new idiom of this nature is allowed because it is well entrenched among the youths and sizable number of elders who enjoy reading contemporary textbooks or listening to music and programmes on radio, television, home videos and even on buses, as it (new idiom) has become a codified means of expressing fresh ideas and concepts which globalisation is known for even in everyday communication.

Also in this context, the expression is embedded with a fresh socio-political meaning of 'cast your vote for the A.C.N', whose logo and name appear in the upper part of the ballot paper. The Governor is trying to educate his supporters on where to cast their votes, that is, the position of the party logo on the ballot paper. This idiom elicits laughter. Consequently, the mammoth crowd who found joy, happiness and entertainment in the use of the expression '*òkè ni kí ẹ jẹun sí*' (eat into the upper stomach) instead of '*òkè ni kí ẹ tẹka sí*' (thumbprint on top) could not hide their feelings as Fáṣọlá himself was hailed and adored.

8. Findings

In this paper, we discovered that new Yoruba idioms and idiomatic expressions were found to be used to express certain socio-political issues in Nigeria, especially in some part of western Nigeria. These political issues were expressed in a special and unique ways in the following socio-political contexts: *'Eté'* (name of a politician) for corruption/stealing; *Ojúyọbọ* (physical description of a politician) for under achiever; *Yóó wolé èẹ̀ken si* (He would win once again) for deceit; *Ó bọ̀jẹ̀ tì* (It would never retrogress or go backward) for collective support; *Oyin ni o* (It is honey) for a successful tenure; *Ajímòbi/Àjùmòṣe* (a politician's name) for collective responsibility; *Nàìjá* (pidgin name for Nigeria) for affection/ disappointment and *Kárí go/Kárí kọ̀mù* (carry go/carry come) for continuity and discontinuity.

Nominalisation, pidginisation and dialect expressions were the strategies employed for the formation of new idioms in this paper. These strategies were used to express different political happenings contextualized in underachievement, sloganeering for support, deceit and acceptance/rejection for second term in office respectively.

New idioms and idiomatic expressions, used to express socio-political issues in Yorùbá routine communication, occurred in mediated and non-mediated contexts and were conveyed through nominalization, pidginisation, and dialect expressions. These idioms reflect dynamism and modernity-constrained stylistic choices in Yorùbá.

9. Conclusion

New idioms and idiomatic expressions are quintessentially unique expressions, mostly used in a special and peculiar way when viewed from communicative and stylistic perspective. We therefore, conclude from the foregoing, especially from the linguistic strategies involved in the formation of the new idioms and idiomatic expressions, that in spite of the globalisation, which imposes new global communicative challenges on the people, especially the politicians and their followers, the Yorùbá language has the mechanism to cope with such communicative exigencies. The evolution of the new idioms and idiomatic expressions thus becomes a coping strategy to meet the new challenges and helps users of the Yoruba language, especially politicians to be more abreast with certain linguistic development which informed the use of new idioms in their environs as this in turn would assist them on their use of language during political rally, campaign and electioneering slogans.

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