

Coinage in Akan Among Senior High School Students: A Case Study of Selected Schools in Ghana

Samuel Akwasi Konney
Enchi College of Education, Enchi, Ghana

The paper is entitled “Coinage in Akan Among Senior High School Students”. It aims to investigate coinage used by senior high school students. This paper also investigates other word formation processes involved in coined words and the reasons why the students use them in their everyday conversation. The collected data from direct elicitation and interviews were categorized into the types of coined words and analyzed in terms of their formation processes by using a method of analysis based on theories as proposed by Yule (1985), Potter (1975), O’Grady and Guzman (1996), and Gerber (1968). The findings show that there are 10 groups of word formation processes in this study. This paper presents a qualitative analysis of the findings of a sociolinguistic survey geared towards coinage as used by students of both Osei Tutu Senior High School and Bisease Community/Senior High School speech communities. It is also imperative to state that these two schools are located in typical Akan speaking communities. Osei Tutu Senior High School, situated in Akropong, in the Ashanti region of Ghana, is a single sex school (boys’ school) and Bisease Community/Senior High School on the other hand is situated in Ajumako-Bisease in the central region. The latter is a mixed school.

Keywords: coined words, speech community, coinage, blending, borrowing

Introduction

Language is important in our everyday communication. People need a language to communicate with each other in their society. Coinage can also be considered as a variation of language. Holmes (1992, p. 183) claimed that this language variation is a pattern of youth speech. Coined words can be found in teenagers’ conversation from all around the world (as cited in <http://www.digilib.petra.ac.id>). The use of coined words among secondary school students is an informal variety that comes through some process. There are different types of word formation processes. Yule (1985) said that word formation processes are the processes of forming new words or terms from the use of the old words to the new uses through some processes. Some examples of these processes are coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, acronyms, derivation (prefixes, suffixes, and infixes), and multiple processes. In addition, onomatopoeia from O’Grady and Guzman (1996) and also reduplication from Gerber (1968) are included to the processes of word formations to complete these theories. In the context of this research, it investigates why students use coined words among friends in school. Furthermore, this study is expected to improve people’s knowledge and make a contribution to sociolinguistics related studies and also to anyone who is interested in investigating the phenomenon of coinage.

Speech Community

A speech community refers to a particular group of people who use a particular language or language variety and are guided by the same set of linguistic norms. According to Morgan (2004, p. 4), for one to claim membership of a speech community, one must be conscious "... of the way language choice, variation, and discourse represent generation, occupation, politics, social relationships, identity, and more". This position supports the view that it is "Only through the integration of local knowledge and communicative competence in discursive activities can members identify insiders from outsiders, those passing as members, and those living in contact zones and borderlands" (Duranti, 2004, p. 6). Thus, the concept of speech community takes language as an embodiment of meaningful participation in a society and a culture. For example, student users of the coined expressions at the Osei Tutu Senior High School constitute a speech community that is different from the student users of the coinages at the Bisease Senior High School. This is by virtue of the fact that there may be differences and similarities in how a particular expression is interpreted and how similar concepts are expressed; be it verbal or nonverbal. The heterogeneity among and within speech communities is explicable under the notion of "variation".

Variation in Speech Community

Variation stands for change and differentiation as shown across the various levels of language use, from phonetic/phonology through morphology and syntax to semantics and discourse and beyond. Works of Labov (1966) have shown that these variations are systematically structured to the extent that they can be characterized and explained in terms of the social differentiations in a given speech community, that which can be described as a "structured heterogeneity" (Mesthrie, Swan, Deumert, & Leap, 2009, p. 74). Thus, observing variation means indirectly studying the differences in age, sex, profession, socio-economic status, place of origin or abode, ethnicity, discourse context, etc., of a given speech community, an orientation that reinforces the preoccupation of sociolinguistics, i.e., seeing language as a window of social reality. There is thus evidence in these studies and others that point to a strong correlation between social factors and language use.

Previously, such linguistic variation was viewed as an instance of free variants (i.e., alternate forms of the same expression) or a dialect mixture (i.e., the existence of two or more dialects in a given speech community among which choice is dependent on occasion). But for Labov, these issues are crucial to understanding how languages change and especially since this change is quantifiable. The primary assumption is that the frequency in the use of various linguistic forms under "ordinary" conditions could tell or predict something about the speech community. This way of looking at the relationship between language and society is what has come to be known as variationist approach, quantitative paradigm, urban dialectology, Labovian school, etc.

Word Coinage

Languages have a way of increasing the number of words they have. This is something that happens all the time and we see that new words are added to the stock of vocabulary in every language as the years go by. There are different ways by which languages increase the words that they have. The processes that are used to create new words are called word formation processes. Affixation, reduplication, and compounding are some of the word formation processes. Coinage which is the focus of this paper is no exception. Word coinage (or invention) is the process whereby new words are created outright, either deliberately or accidentally, to fit some purpose. Usually, words are coined to express new ideas, processes, products, etc., in the language. For example, brand names such as Xerox, Kodak, Exxon, Keenex, Nylon, Dacron, etc.; pooch, snob, nerb, blurb, googol, etc. It is worth pointing out that invention of new words is sometimes based on existing words, such as Jell-o on gel,

Kleenex on clean. Many acronyms such as Cobol, laser, etc., are based on phrases for which they stand. However, words are often created out of thin air, i.e., without basing on any other pre-existing word.

Using the Case Study Approach

Case study is one of the most popular qualitative research approaches. As more scholars have interests in researching social phenomena, the application of case study is growing rapidly. For instance, most of interpersonal communication and marketing communication research tend to apply case studies. It is important to understand the background of this method before choosing which technique that will be appropriate to a research. For this section, I look at the definitions and characteristics of case study. There are several definitions of case study as a research approach.

First, case study is defined as a method to deeply observe the characteristics of individual unit, such as a person, a group, or a community, in order to analyze various phenomena in relation to that unit of study (Cohen & Manion, 1989 as cited in Bassey, 1999). Another description is written by MacDonald and Walker (1975) that case study is “the study of the instance in action”. In response to this argument, Kemmis (1980 as cited in Bassey, 1999) explains that, case studies consist in the imagination of the case and the invention of the study... which are...cognitive and cultural processes.

In addition, Stenhouse (as cited in Bassey, 1999) stated that the task of case study is to produce reports of experience and to offer evidence, not to deal with generalisation. In his review, Robert Yin identifies a case study as an “empirical enquiry to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (2003, p. 13). Yin also describes that case studies can be qualitative or quantitative. Supporting this idea, Stake (2005) added that qualitative case study often focuses on experiential knowledge of a certain case and closely related to the social, political influences. Moreover, the credibility of a case study might be obtained through continuously making descriptions and interpretations during the period of the study.

As a qualitative research approach, a case might be an individual or a group/collective; it might also be simple or complex. Some examples of individual case might be a child, an adult, a student, a teacher, a person’s experience or phase in life. On the other hand, a collective or complex case might be in the form of working environment, campaign program, organization culture, neighborhood, or region.

According to Stake (2005), there are three different types of case study. The first type, intrinsic case study, is undertaken because of intrinsic interests, for example, particular curriculum, classroom, or book. Furthermore, the researcher aims to get deep understanding of a certain case. The second category is instrumental case study which provides a base to understand other issues. Usually, this case is a secondary interest of the researcher and used to support other interest. The last category, multiple case study or collective case study, is like the extension of instrumental study. This study consists of several cases in order to explore a certain phenomenon. In addition, the researcher tries to investigate whether there are similarities or differences among the cases characteristics to get better understanding of particular interests.

Methodology

Following typical variationist technique (Mesthrie et al., 2009, p. 76), purposive sampling method was employed in the selection of subjects for the study. Purposive sampling is a sampling procedure used in selecting subjects with the purpose of the study in mind.

Obtaining the Data

Direct elicitations and verbal interviews were used to collect data. In all, 30 subjects were purposively sampled and interviewed. In addition, the data on coined words were collected from a list of words given by the students. The sample composed of 25 males and five females from both Osei Tutu and Bisease Senior High School communities. There were 25 students, and five non-students.

The non-students included five teachers who are old students of the schools under study. The following questionnaire was verbally administered in a conversation manner.

Questionnaire for (Verbal Conversation) Interview

1. What are some of the coined words used in your school?
2. How do you refer to varieties of food and other things in your school?
3. Why do you use coined words?
4. What do these coined words mean?

The Data

Results from the data collected through interviews and direct elicitations are presented below.

Coined Expressions and Their Semantics Used by Students in Osei Tutu Senior High School (Asante Twi Speaking Community)

Coined Expressions	Meaning
Abontoa	“ugly person”
Shanko	“bath house”
Mokoei	“angry person”
Shima	“phone/machine”
Wɔ-wɔ (reduplication)	“face”
Gaza	“new house”
Akwashe	“bully seniors”
Mmowie	“Gari soaked in water”
Ashai	“to run away from school”
Alaya	“girlfriend in a different school”
Jama	“songs of jubilation and celebration”
H.O.D.	“one with a big head”
Otɛɛle	“a fat person”
Chap-y (derivation)	“student chaplain”
Rice gas (borrowing/compounding)	“Rice and Tomato stew”
Golden Tulip (borrowing/compounding)	“Peprah Yeboah (PY) house”
Shoe (borrowing)	“security man”
Shares (borrowing)	“token/bribe”
Argentina (borrowing)	“school uniform”
Capital letters (borrowing)	“a type of liquid food”
Attacker (borrowing)	“one that copies”
Offside (borrowing)	“going to the dining hall ahead of time”

Elclassico (borrowing)	“Rice and Beans stew”
Bundle (borrowing)	“a student who doesn’t bath before coming to school”
11:11 (borrowing)	“lavatory”
OTEC (acronym)	“Osei Tutu Examination Council”
DHP (acronym)	“Dining Hall Prefect”
Nnipa nɛ hwee	“staff room”
Bonsam gyam (compounding)	“in between Georgia house & Folsom house”
Satan	“fire”
Nkwasia din (compounding)	“nickname”
“foolish” “name”	
Kankan bi ɛdɛ	“a type of porridge prepared with corn flour”
“stink” “thing” “sweet”	
Turumu tea (compounding)	“Sarfo house”
“anus” “narrow”	
Star buju (borrowing & Coinage/compounding)	“white Kenkey”
Rice Kont (borrowing & clipping/compounding)	“Rice & Kontomire stew”
ɔrekye weather (compounding/borrowing)	“someone sleeping in class”

Coined Expressions and Their Meaning Used by Students in Bisease Community/Senior High School (Fante Speaking Community)

Coined Expressions	Meaning
SDA (acronym)	“serious dining attendant”
WP (acronym)	“wicked prefect”
VC (acronym)	“village champion”
SK (acronym)	“senior kurasinyi” “senior villager”
BBF (acronym)	“bibia bɛyɛ fine” “everything will be fine”
MPK (acronym)	“mbaa pɛ killer” “womanizer”
NCNC (acronym)	“no contribution, no chop”
OPD (acronym)	“ope bi adzi” “he/she wants some to eat”
Alapo	“lavatory/toilet”
Nsubae (compounding)	“a beautiful girl”
Pink	“please I need kisses”
Palon	“dating”
Calcium (borrowing)	“pipe-borne water”
143 (borrowing)	“I love you”
Me-ntsi-mee (compounding)	“a glutton”
Bundle (borrowing)	“a student who hasn’t bathed for three days”
Bosuo	“morning rice”
Mamamia	“the act of performing wonders”
Poschool-er (affixation/borrowing)	“a stubborn student”
Subanbu-ism (affixation/compounding)	“misbehaviour”

Medwam	“I will eat”
Full-buhuss (borrowing & coinage)	“ugly person”
Abontoa	“an ugly girl”
Tsigolo	“someone who has a big head”
Srede	“someone with a light skin”
ɛsukum	“a girl with big buttocks”
Pabam	“fast runner”
Poolay	“a common thing”
Sokomi	“a witch or wizard”
Double entry (borrowing)	“big mouth”
Gashi (blending)	“Gari and Shito”
Saviour (borrowing)	“dining hall”
Shank	“to attend to nature”’s call”
Shankro-meter (coinage & borrowing)	“toilet roll”
Shankier	“a student who likes defecating”
Striker (borrowing)	someone who eats a lot at the dining hall”
Bubunee/mower (coinage & borrowing)	“an intelligent student”
Atekyɛ	“rice and groundnut soup”
Home chop (borrowing/compounding)	“food brought from the house”
Homodwan (compounding)	“a form one student”
Campro (blending)	“campus romance”
Crife	“an over-righteous student”
Mambabe	“a pampered student”
Magagage	“fearless/careless”
Mazoa	“a rebel leader on campus”
Data (borrowing)	“a person someone is dating”
Pmol (clipping)	“paracetamol”
Enter P (blending/clipping)	“entertainment prefect”
Proto (clipping)	“protocol prefect”
Favy (clipping)	“favouritism”
Apɔw	“relevant information/exams malpractice”
N-dzi-gu (compounding)	“failure”
Foko	“you can’t do anything”
Azaa	“fraudster”
Yawa	“shame/uncivilised”
Boo	“food”
Yaro	“small/young boy”
Gɔbe	“Gari and Beans”
Kwɛɛ (onomatopoeia)	“a sound from hitting a student with a wooden duster”

Findings and Discussions

This study shows 95 coined expressions used by the students. The next session discusses the word formation processes involved in the formation of the coined words.

Coinage

As earlier mentioned, this study shows 95 terms considered as coinage used by the senior high school students. Coinage is the invention of totally new terms and they tend to become everyday words in the language (Yule, 1985). All the expressions categorized as coinage here are mostly used among others, as a teaser, to express a joke, ideas and to give complements to other students, such as the word *mambabe* which refers to a pampered person, *ashai* which is the term for someone who runs away from class or school, and *tsigolo* which refers to a bigheaded person.

Borrowing

The study reveals 16 borrowed words used by the students. Yule (1985) stated that borrowing is the taking over of words from other languages. From English, the students have borrowed some words such as the word *offside* which means going to the dining hall ahead of time, and the word *bundle*, which is usually used to refer to someone who has not bathed for three days. The words borrowed from Spanish and Argentines vocabularies are *Elclassico* to mean rice and beans and *Argentina* to mean school uniform in the case of the students of Osei Tutu Senior High School because their uniform looks like the jersey of the national team of the Argentines (Argentina).

Compounding

This study indicates six compound coined words used by the students, such as the word *ndzigu*, *nsubae*, *nkwasia din*, and *bosam gyam*. Compounding is the process of joining two separate words to produce a single form (Yule, 1985). The term *nsubae* is mostly used to praise a girl who is attractive and charming. This term is used by stringing the *nsu* and *bae*. The expression *bosam gyam* is usually used by students when they want to describe the space in between Georgia house and Folsom house which is considered as a place where stubborn students gather or meet. This term is used by combining the word *bonsam* and *gyam*.

Blending

This study shows three blended words used by the students. Yule (1985) stated that blending is a process of combining two separate forms to produce a single new term. The coined words categorized as blending here are used to describe something shortly, for example the word *gashi* is formed from the combination of *gari* and *shito*. Again, the word *campro* is formed from the process of blending from *campus* and *romance* which means campus romance.

Clipping

There are four clipped coined words revealed in the study, such as the word *favy* and *proto*. Clipping occurs when a word of more than one syllable is reduced to a shorter form (Yule, 1985). There are two types of shortening; they are apharesis and apocope. Apharesis is new words by deleting consonant or vowel at the first syllable. Moreover, apocope is new words by deleting consonant or vowel at the last syllable (Potter, 1975).

For example, the formal word *favouritism* is shortened and becomes *favy*. Furthermore, the formal word *protocol* is shortened and becomes *proto* by deleting the syllable (letters) *col* (apocope process).

Acronyms

This study shows 10 acronyms used by the students. Acronym is the word process which is formed from the initial letters of a set of other words (Yule, 1985). These acronyms often consist of capital letters where the pronunciation consists of the set of letters, for example the word OTEC, which is an acronym for Osei Tutu Examination Council. DHP is an acronym for Dining Hall Prefect. SDA is an acronym for Serious Dining Attendant. OPD is an acronym for Ope Bi Adi. MPK is an acronym for Mbaa Pe Killer, etc.

Derivation

This study indicates three derivation words used by the senior high school students, for example the word *poschool-er*, *subanbu-ism*, and *ochap-y*. Derivation is a process which forms a word by adding an affix and has the distinct meaning and category from the base (O'Grady & Guzman, 1996). There are three kinds of affixes found in the study, such as prefixes, suffixes, and an infix.

Multiple Processes

The study shows 12 multiple processes words used by the respondents. Multiple processes are forming some new words from old words through more than one-word formation process (Yule, 1985). For example, the word *shankrometer* (toilet roll) is coinage which is derived from *shank* and then added a borrowed word *meter* in the end of that word. The word *star buju* (white Kenkey) is formed by the process of adding a borrowed word (*star*) to the coined word *buju* in the beginning of the word to form a compound.

Onomatopoeia

There is only one onomatopoeic word revealed in the study. O'Grady and Guzman (1996) stated that onomatopoeia is a word that has a sound that represents an aspect of the thing. The onomatopoeic word is *kwɛɛ* for the emission of sound from the wooden duster when used to hit a student's head hard.

Reduplication

There is also one reduplication word found in this study. Reduplication is a duplication of sounds or words (Gerber, 1968). The evidence is seen by the appearance of the word *wɔ-wɔ* (face).

The Reasons Why the Students Use Coined Words/Expressions

The study shows four reasons why the students use the coined words in their everyday communication.

Expression of Emotional Feelings

A number of students tend to hurl insults at their friends and demonstrate their anger by expressing it with coined words. The expression of anger is justified by noticing the responses from the interview data. Some of such words are SK (Senior Kurasinyi) "Senior villager", *subanbuism*, *attacker*, and *nkɔmɔ bini* "senseless conversation".

Expression of Pleasure, Humour, and Laughter

This study reveals that some of the students often use the words, such as *wɔwɔ*, *kwɛɛ*, *pabam*, *shankier*, and *SDA*, for amusement and even for the pleasure of teasing other people.

Students Want to Make Other People Confused

Some of the respondents claimed that they use coined words because they want to cause confusion in the mind of other people who are partial members of their speech community. In consonance with the reasons why the students use coined words, coinage can indicate the group membership. It can assert or claim membership of

identity or solidarity group (Spolsky, 1998). Therefore, people who do not belong to the group may not know the semantics of those words.

Expression of Effortless Utterances

The study finds five respondents who argue that coined words can make their conversation effortless. With this, comprehension takes place without difficulty. Moreover, they tend to use them to make the communication more captivating with no circumlocutions.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The coined words are frequently used among students. They have their own words to use during interactions with their friends. The coined words mark students' identity in the communication event. The evidence is obvious from the result of the questionnaire. The students could provide the meaning of the coined words correctly. It shows that they comprehend the coined words very well. Thus, future researchers would be better to carry out researches in the second cycle schools to compare the coined words used by students and teachers in their communication.

References

- Bassey, M. (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Duranti, A. (2004). *A companion to linguistics anthropology*. California: Blackwell Publishing Limited.
- Gerber, P. L. (1968). *Lessons in language*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc.
- Holmes, J. (1992). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Hudson, R. A. (1980). *Sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Labov, W. (1966). *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Arlington: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- MacDonald, B., & Walker, R. (1975). Case-study and social philosophy of educational research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 5(1), 2-11.
- Mesthrie, R., Swan, J., Deumert, A., & Leap, W. L. (2009). *Introducing sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Morgan, M. (2004). Speech community. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *A companion to linguistic anthropology* (pp. 3-22). MA, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing.
- O'Grady, W., & Guzman. (1996). *Morphology: The analysis of word structure*. United Kingdom: Longman.
- O'Grady, W. & Guzman. (1996). *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction*. United Kingdom: Essex.
- Prasastie, I. (2007). *Language variation*. Retrieved January 14, 2012, from <http://prasastie.multiply.com/journal>
- Potter, S. (1975). *Our language*. Canada: Pinguin Book.
- Spolsky, B. (1998). *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stake, R. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi. Sage Publications.
- Yule, G. (1985). *The study of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks/London/NewDelhi: Sage Publications.
- Zapata, B. A. A. (2000). *Handbook of general and applied linguistics*. Trabajo de Ascenso sin publica. Mérida, Venezuela: Escuela de Idiomas Modernos, Universidad de Los Andes.