

LANGUAGE

DOCUMENTATION AND DESCRIPTION IN NIGERIA

A festschrift in honour of
Prof. Imelda Icheji Lawrence Udoh

at 60

Edited by
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ISBN 978-978-985-263-5

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Printed in Uyo.

Wanted: Linguistics for Developing our Lives, Communities, and Identities without Drugs

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Abstract

In acknowledgement of the increasing negative consequences of drugs on our lives, communities, and identities, and inspired by the theme of the 2015 International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking, this paper set out to lend a voice to the need to stem the ugly trend. Opportune by the call to celebrate a scholar of great heights in the field of linguistics, the searchlight picked on the need to unearth the possible potentials of linguistics to centrifugate from making drugs central in our world. Pivoted by the situational crime prevention theory of Ronald Clarke, this theoretical piece viewed drug-based living as a crime and had to be reversed. It identified the branches of linguistics as having capacity to contribute to the accomplishment of the drug-free world ambition of the United Nations. Government alone could not achieve the goal. It is, therefore, incumbent on all and sundry to participate in the process; with the realities and core values of linguistic experts as pivotal and central.

1. Introduction

Drugs have become an integral part of human social existence (Brown, 2015a). When properly used, drugs make for healthy living. However, drugs have increasingly become some of the most globally abused items. The ugly trend has made governments to devise means of stemming the tide. Beyond the efforts of national and sub-national governments have been those of continental and international collaborations. This informed the interest of the United Nations (UN) as evident in the formation and mandate of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The grotesque situation presented an impetus for marking the 2015 International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking with the theme: *Let's Develop Our Lives, Our Communities, Our Identities Without Drugs*. The theme is particularly needful and relevant because an increasing number of people across the globe predicate their personal development, their communities, and their identities/personalities on drugs (2015b). This is comprehensively

unacceptable, and it would take all hands to be on deck for a successful challenge of stemming the tide.

In the light of the above, the search for accomplishing the ambition of developing lives, communities, and identities without drugs leads one to the need to explore the potency of language and its structure; hence, this investment on the relevance of linguistics in honour of an academic giant with bias for Linguistics whose husband (Late Dr. Lawrence Udoh) was an epitome of a vintage live, community, and identity developer.

By way of delineation, this paper aims at elucidating the theme of the 2015 International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking. To achieve this, emphasis would be on: conceptualisations, method and theory, dimensions and overview of drug use, charms and perils of drug use, the grotesque situation, the way forward, and conclusion.

2. Conceptualisations

- i. **Drug:** Any substance that modifies body functions, such as the nervous system (Beschner, 1986).
- ii. **Drug Abuse:** Also known as chemical or substance abuse, refers to the willful misuse of either licit or illicit drugs for the purpose(s) of recreation, perceived necessity, or convenience (Goode, 2009).
- iii. **Illicit Drugs:** Drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), and other psychoactive drugs (Winters, 1997; and Hanson, Venturelli, and Fleckenstein, 2008).
- iv. **Illicit Drug Trafficking:** Brown (2015b) explains this as the transportation of illicit drugs from one location to another (with emphasis on trans-border realities).
- v. **Developing Lives:** The comprehensive improvement in the quality of physical, psychological, social, economic, and cultural growth towards the uniqueness of personalities (Brown, 2015a).
- vi. **Communities:** Geo-political and social spheres where people can experience a full life cycle (Ekong, 2003).
- vii. **Identities:** The entire gamut of traits that make up the social personality (picture) of a people (Gordner, 2013).
- viii. **Linguistics:** the study of language and its structure, including the study of grammar, syntax, and phonetics (Austin, 2002); with sociolinguistics (Aijmer, 2006), dialectology, psycholinguistics (Cairns, 2009; Atlas, 2010; and Chomsky, 2012), computational linguistics, comparative linguistics (Kaiser and Shevoroshkin, 1988; and Antilla, 2002), and structural linguistics (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, & Harnish, 2007). All these have bearings on the realities of human perception, cognition, orientation, as well as reorientation and persuasion.

3. Method and Theory

This paper is raised in the library tradition. Issues in the extant literature are appraised and deployed to compass the work. It is theoretical in the main.

In terms of theoretical drift, it is considered expedient to note that doing drugs has become prohibited by legislations. The situation has created dire negative consequences and calls for urgent and drastic measures to reverse drift (Wilson, 2013). Linguistics is here seen as having the functional potential to help stem the ugly trend of the influence of drugs on lives, communities, and identities.

The theoretical drift of the paper is, therefore, of the (social) structural functionalist tradition. However, emphasis is placed on the Situational Crime Prevention theory advanced by Ronald Clarke. The theory argues that law, environment, rational choice, and routine activity are the underlying assumptions. While the Law thesis holds that for crime to occur, a law against it must be in place; the environment angle posits that crime only occurs when the Law, the offender, the victim or presumed safe target, and the place interconnect. The coordinate here is the criminal who engages in a critical thinking before deciding to commit crime (Brown, 2016). To this end, Green and Shapiro (2014) submit that crime is a rational choice. As a routine activity, Ronald Clarke holds that for crime to occur, an offender, a suitable target, and a situation where no one is watching must converge Clarke and Eck (2003). The need for drastic actions call for the creation of positive policy.

This, the paper argues, could be enhanced by the proper deployment of the realities of linguistics (including: grammar, syntax, phonetics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, etc.) as a field of human endeavor. It follows that since crime is a rational and routine activity, linguistics can function by rationally and routinely impressing upon the people to desist from making drugs central in our lives, communities, and identities.

4. Dimensions and Overview of Drug Use

A probe into the dimensions of use of drugs in the society would reveal three major thought spheres, namely: drug abuse is a serious social problem; efforts by governments to stop illegal drug use have somewhat miserably failed; and the freedom-induced inquiry of whose business it would be if another person elects to abuse drugs. According to Hanson, et al, (2008), the three perspectives above reflect contrasts in views and attitudes.

Brown (2015a) notes that four principal factors affect how a drug user experiences a drug, namely:

- i. **Pharmacological:** The ingredients of a particular drug affect the functions of the body and the nervous system, and in turn, affect social behavior (Gordner, 2013).

- ii. **Cultural:** Society's views of drug use, as determined by customs and tradition, affect our initial approval, and use of particularly drugs.
- iii. **Social:** The motivation for taking of particular drug is affected by needs such as diminishing physical pains; curing of illness; providing relaxation, relieving stress or anxiety; attempting to escape reality; self-medicating; heightening awareness; wanting to distort and change visual, auditory, or sensory inputs; or strengthening confidence (Cloward and Ohlin, 1980). Also included here are: peer influence, community norms, subcultures, families, other social institutions, etc. (Gallo, 1981; Curry and Spergel, 1997; Winter, 1997; Hirschi, 2009; and Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1999).
- iv. **Contextual:** this is explained by moods and attitudes, physical environment/surroundings, etc.

The most commonly used drugs are: stimulants, hallucinogens, depressants, alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, or marijuana and hashish, anabolic steroids, inhalants/organic solvents, narcotics/opiates, designer drugs (new categories of hybrid drugs) and structural analogues (drugs resulting from altered chemical structures of current illicit-type(s) drugs).

A general overview may *prima-facie* suggest that problems with drugs are unique to the contemporary times. This, however, is not true as drug use and abuse have been part of all human societies. Genesis 30:14-16 would confirm this in the Reuben-Leah-Rachel triangle. It is, however, more acute and widespread in the contemporary times. The media have been more massive in their reportage and the picture is easily explained in the context of equal opportunity affliction (where no one is immune to the use/abuse of both licit and illicit drugs).

Contributing in the area of Extent and Frequency of Drug Use in society Goode (2009) lists four types of drug use, namely:

- i. **Legal Instructional:** taking prescribed drugs to relieve or treat health issues.
- ii. **Legal Recreational:** Using licit drugs to achieve a certain mental and psychic state. E.g. tobacco, alcohol, caffeine, etc.
- iii. **Illicit Instructional:** Taking drugs without prescription.
- iv. **Illegal Recreational:** Taking illicit drugs for fun or pleasure in order to experience euphoria.

In terms of statistics and trends, certain specialized bodies exist in the advanced world. For instance, in the United States of America, the National Institute of Drug Abuse carries out researches, the results of which point to the classification and financial costs of what is spent on illicit drugs; as well as the realities of gender and age implications on the use of illicit drugs. Findings from such academic investments show that men were most likely to use stimulants in their thirties, depressants in the forties and fifties, and sedative in their sixties and above (Kirkpatrick, 1999; and Nelson, 2012). Women, however, were most likely to use stimulants between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-nine, and

depressants more frequently in their thirties. There was a similitude in the reflection on their use of sedatives with their male counterparts (NIDA, 1998, and Ananth, Gonzalez, McRae, Longoria, and Medina, 2000).

Regarding types of drug users/abusers, Beschner (1986) informed by diverse set of personality traits, identified the *compulsive users/abusers* which are often addicted. In contrast to the addiction category is the *Experimenters* who are mere novel users/abusers. A third category is for those who vacillate between the need to seek pleasure and the need to relieve serious psychological problems. These are called *Floater*s or *Chippers*.

In addition, Goode (2009) submit that majority of young drug users/abusers came from homes in which drugs are liberally used/abused. Complementing this inducement is the influence of the mass media, including: the television, radio, newspaper, magazine, advertisement posts, billboards, and the social media. The costs of the media are inherent herein. The situation paints a bleak future for the society.

4.1 Charms and Perils

Today, like in Ancient Assyrians, many people have been attracted to drugs and the effects of recreational drug use/abuse. Hanson, *et al* (2008) advanced seven motivational forces (charms) to drug abuse, namely:

- i. Searching for pleasure and using drugs to heighten good feelings.
- ii. Taking drugs to temporarily relieve stress or tension or provide a temporary escape for people with anxiety.
- iii. Taking drugs to temporarily forget one's problems and avoid or postpone worries.
- iv. Viewing certain drugs as necessary in order to relax after a tension-filled day at work or leisure.
- v. Taking drugs to fit in with peers, especially when peer pressure is strong during early and late adolescent stage – seeing drugs as a *rite of passage*.
- vi. Taking drugs to enhance religious or mystical experiences.
- vii. Taking drugs to relieve pain and some symptoms of illness.

Overtime, however, the charms turn to perils. This stems from excessive use, constant preoccupation, refusal to admit excessive use of, and reliance on the drug. Put sequentially, there is usually the relief phase, then the increased use phase, through the preoccupation phase, to the dependence phase, and the extreme phase of withdrawal. It becomes very perilous when it reaches the withdrawal phase.

5. The Grotesque Situation that Expanded the United Nations

According to the UNODC, over 200 million people are using illicit drugs. Substance abuse and the illicit trafficking of drugs is an evil in our society and disorientation among a majority of the youth. Drug trafficking is an industry working generally on a vicious cycle of manufactured demand and then supply. In view of the growing menace and the deterioration of the quality of life, the General Assembly at the United Nations, in December 1987 designated 26th June to be celebrated with effect as the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. This resolution also recommended further action to be undertaken regarding the report and conclusions of the 1987 International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The day as an event is celebrated worldwide with much conscious fervor to make people aware and emphasize the hazards of drug addiction and illegal trafficking. A problem which is a major deterrent to humanity and a poison to the well-being of the youth in particular poses greater problems to the socio-economic and political stability of a nation as also disturbing the sustainable development of a nation.

This is what encouraged the Commission and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to take up their work on international drug control with greater dedication and urged all governments to provide with maximum possible financial and political support. Besides international undertakings the day is also celebrated by hosting a series of events worldwide encouraging more participation and greater awareness to the cause of drug abuse. The UNODC has, over the years, been vigorously involved in inducting campaigns to facilitate support for drug control. Till date it has received active participation and response from the governments of Afghanistan, Colombia, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Nigeria, etc. Besides national governments the event has also permeated to subsidiary establishments, organizations and individuals in many countries which have been regular participants in promotional events and larger scale activities, such as public rallies and mass media involvement, to promote the awareness of dangers associated with illicit drugs. The 21st century with its greater communication and technical skill has also enabled a greater dissemination of the cause of Anti Drug Abuse worldwide.

6. The Way Forward

In the words of Ban Ki-Moon (2011):

Unless we reduce demand for illicit drugs, we can never fully tackle cultivation, production or trafficking. Governments have a responsibility to counteract both drug trafficking and drug abuse, but communities can also make a major contribution. Families, schools, civil society and religious organizations can do their part to rid their communities of drugs. Businesses can help provide legitimate livelihoods. The media can raise awareness about the dangers of narcotics.

Though Nigeria as a geo-political space is distinct from South Africa, the South African proposed panacea, however, is considered apt. The government and its partners attempted to implement the National Drug Master Plan, 2013-2017, which is a collective effort towards a nation that is free of drug abuse. The drug master plan is a single document covering all national concerns regarding drug control, explaining national policies authoritatively, and defining priorities and allocating responsibility for drug control efforts (United Nations Drug Control Programme). The said National Drug Master Plan prioritised strategies on demand reduction, supply reduction and harm reduction.

The Master Plan was to serve as the country's blueprint for preventing and reducing alcohol and substance abuse and its associated social and economic consequences on that society, and builds on the foundation laid down by government's Programme of Action on alcohol and substance abuse.

The key outcomes of the five-year National Drug Master Plan were:

- i. Reduction of the bio-socio-economic impact of substance abuse and related illnesses on the country's population.
- ii. Ability of all people in the country to deal with problems related to substance abuse within communities.
- iii. Recreational facilities and diversion programmes that prevent vulnerable populations from becoming substance dependents.
- iv. Reduced availability of substance dependence-forming drugs and alcoholic beverages.
- v. Development and implementation of multi-disciplinary and multi-modal protocols and practices for integrated diagnosis and treatment of substance dependence and co-occurring disorders and for funding such diagnosis and treatment.

Harmonization and enforcement of laws and policies to facilitate effective governance of the alcohol and drug supply chain. The promulgation of the Prevention and Treatment of Drug Dependency Act, and the Prevention of/and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act, has provided for the establishment of programmes for the prevention and treatment of drug dependency. The Central Drug Authority was established as an advisory body in terms of the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act and is mandated to assist in the fight against substance abuse in the country. The NDLEA should be further strengthened to do same.

Alcohol abuse is a complex socio-economic issue that requires a multi-stakeholder and integrated approach towards a drug free society, captured in the National Drug Master

Plan. Creating awareness of dangers of the substance abuse in society and effecting behavioural change are integral parts of the National Drug Master Plan.

Away from the South African example, the issues of substance abuse and illicit drug trafficking should be practically raised to the level of serious national concern. Finally, there is need for establishment of research-based institutions for the sole purpose of appraising the issues. Here also, the expertise of linguists is unavoidable.

7. Beyond the Government, We All Can Contribute

In South African, government has called on all citizens to join hands in the implementation of the national programme of action against substance and alcohol abuse. In an attempt to domesticate that in Nigeria:

- i. The need for serious community support cannot be over emphasized. This could be in the areas of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and accepting those addicted to substances. We all must help break the stigma and promote faster recovery.
- ii. We must be good role models in order to empower young people to deal with life challenges to buffer substance abuse.
- iii. We must be messenger bearers by providing factual information on the negative socio-economic effects of substance abuse to bring about behavioural changes.
- iv. Faith-based, educational, sports, media, youth, and traditional institutions should also be involved.

8. Conclusion

From the foregoing, the functional potentials of linguists in the attempt to combat drug-infested lives, communities, and identities is re-emphasised. In addition, the paper aligns with the need for a synergy of all stakeholders to address the emotional and psychological trauma society faces because of the effect of drug addiction which was the focal point as the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking 2015 was marked.

It is, therefore, incumbent on the strengthening of the NDLEA and allied agencies (which should address the production, distribution, and consumption structures, processes and channels of illicit drugs) as well as the involvement of persuasive institutions (with the deployment of inputs from linguists) for attitudinal re-orientation; and the legal system for deterrence. In other words, efforts must holistically be directed at human capital development, community involvement in the process of evolving the total man, and the reconstruction of the value system to loathe illicit drug-friendly communities and

eulogizing drug-free ones. This should be brought to the fore sequel to an articulate master plan. The achievement of the above is predicated on the strategic input from our linguists.

In sum, can we make it? YES! Let all resources be pulled together for the purpose of developing our lives, our communities, and our identities without drugs.

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