

# **A Lexico-semantic Study of Examination Malpractice Expressions Used by Students in Some Nigerian Tertiary Institutions**

Abiodun Akintayo  
Lagos State University of Science and Technology, Ikorodu

Yomi Okunowo  
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode

## **Abstract**

Examination malpractice pervades the entire educational system in Nigeria and in order to cut off “outsiders” in their communication, Nigerian students have created some esoteric expressions that are restricted to fellow students. This paper is a lexico-semantic study of popular expressions used by Nigerian students to describe different forms of examination malpractice. This is crucial in order to determine whether the conceptual meanings remain the same or they have been given expanded applications. The paper examines the origin, conceptual meaning and semantic categorization of the terms. Data for the study were collected through participatory observation, oral interviews and administration of questionnaires to students in selected tertiary institutions in Lagos and Ogun States. The study employed lexico-semantic variation theory as the basis of analysis and the findings revealed ample features of coinages, neologisms, acronyms, semantic shift and extension. The paper concludes that the study has extended perspectives on lexico-semantic variation as it relates to students’ language usage to delineate forms of examination malpractice.

**Key words:** lexico-semantic variation, examination malpractice, coinage, neologism, acronym, semantic shift and extension

## **1. Introduction**

Examination malpractice in Nigeria has assumed an alarming proportion and become so widespread that it affects all levels of the country’s educational system; primary, secondary and tertiary. The managements of many institutions have put in place robust preventive and punitive measures to deter culprits; despite this, malpractices still occur. It has now attained a high-tech dimension with the use of modern technological devices and in addition, students have created a body of terminology that is esoteric, group directed and restricted to their colleagues. The paper is a lexico-semantic study of some terms popularly used by Nigerian students to describe various types of examination malpractice in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study is crucial in order to establish whether the conceptual meanings of the terms remain the same or are coloured with new connotations.

There are several lexico-semantic studies but the present research is distinct because it focuses on students’ language usage relating to examination malpractice. The way words are creatively deployed by students in this domain, it is fast becoming a language community and the dynamism of human language is also demonstrated with the use of lexical items that are given expanded application based on the communicative needs of the users. A crucial starting-

point is to consider some definitions of examination malpractice. Oluyeba and Daramola (1992) describe examination malpractice as ‘any irregular behaviour exhibited by candidates or anybody charged with the conduct of examination in or outside the examination hall before, during or after such an examination.’ Awanbor (2004, p. 23) defines examination malpractice as “an illegal act committed by a single student or in collaboration with others like fellow students, parents, teachers, supervisors, invigilators, computer operators or secretarial staff and anybody or group of people before, during, or after examination in order to obtain undeserved marks or grades.”

The Examination Malpractice Act (1999) explains examination malpractice as any act of omission or commission by a person who in anticipation of, before, during or after any examination fraudulently secure any unfair advantage for himself or any other person in such a manner that contravenes the rules and regulations. Implicit in the definitions above is the fact that malpractice can be committed individually or jointly before, during and after any examination with the primary aim of obtaining undeserved grades or securing an unfair advantage for the cheating candidate. The rabid quest for certification by students instead of acquisition of knowledge and skills is probably one of the causative factors of examination malpractice.

Nigeria’s former Minister of Education, Ruqqayatu Ahmed Rufa’i, in a keynote address delivered at the National Examination Summit held in Abuja on the 24th May, 2010 presented an increase in cases of examination malpractice in WAEC/SSCE examinations between 2005 and 2009. In addition, she reported that NECO recorded over 263,000 examination malpractice cases and over one million cases in its 2009 Nov/Dec. examination and 2009 June/July examination, respectively. Tables 1 and 2 below contains further details of examination malpractices perpetrated by Nigerian students and schools, respectively:

**Table 1: Examination Malpractice by WAEC/SSCE Candidates (2005-2009) (Ruqqayatu, 2010)**

S/N	Year	No of Candidates Involved	%
1	2005	73,050	6.86
2	2006	82,941	7.19
3	2007	74,734	5.97
4	2008	100,428	7.88
5	2009	118,608	8.74

**Table 2: Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Secondary Schools (Weekend Times, 2007)**

S/N	Geo-political Zone	No of Schools Involved	%
1	North Central	54	16.6
2	North East	08	2.5
3	North West	12	3.6
4	South East	48	14.8
5	South South	116	36.0
6	South West	86	26.5
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The picture is also reflected in Nigerian tertiary institutions; between 1990 and 1997 about 4,426 undergraduate students were reprimanded in some Nigerian tertiary institutions for examination malpractices, while a greater number of perpetrators are believed to have escaped apprehension (Jayeola Omoyeni, 1999). The table below illustrates this fact:

**Table 3:** Students Reprimanded for Examination Malpractices in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions between 1990 and 1997 (Jayeola-Omoyeni, 1999)

S/N	Tertiary Institutions	No Reprimanded
1	Federal University of Technology, Akure	446
2	Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos	724
3	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	867
4	Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti	248
5	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	546
6	University of Ilorin, Ilorin	536
7	Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo	348
8	Osun State College of Technology, Esa-Oke	602
9	Osun State College of Education, Ilesa	109
	Total	4426

The National Universities Commission (NUC) is not oblivious of the incidence of examination malpractice in Nigerian universities. Consequently, it declared a War Against Sorting (WAS) in universities. The body identified sorting, which could be in form of money, gift items or sex as one of the central causes of examination malpractices in universities and directed all universities to mount aggressive awareness campaign against it and all other academic vices (Akinrefon et al, 2016). In spite of the efforts of university managements, malpractice could not be tamed and every examination season witnesses new methods of cheating. It is true that students' performance in examination may not be the true reflection of their ability, however, examination is still one of the dependable measuring instruments used to determine learners' performance in any given academic endeavour.

## 2. Literature Review

Omeri (2012) claims that Nigeria occupies the number one position in the world's Examination Malpractice Index. He further asserts that report on examination malpractice in the country contains very disturbing information as it puts the average annual examination malpractice index at 12 percent. In many institutions especially the privately owned, it has become an organized crime involving teachers, parents, students, none academic staff, security officers among others. Numerous studies have been conducted on examination malpractice in Nigeria from different perspectives. Taiwo, Folorunso and Gbadamosi (2020), undertook a statistical analysis of examination malpractice concepts at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. The concepts investigated were methods, causes, effects and possible solution to examination malpractice. The methodology used comprised descriptive statistics and contingency table test. Onuka and Durowaju (2013) researched the causative factors of examination malpractice and identified leakage of question papers in the process of setting,

printing, packaging; smuggling of answer booklets in or out of examination centres, among others, as forms of examination malpractice.

Ayanniyi and Anya (2017) enumerated forms of examination malpractice to include, but not limited to the following: tattoo, token, contract, expo, computo, impersonation, question paper leakage, aiding of students by lecturers, collusion among students and use of unauthorised materials in the examination hall. Akinbi, and Akinbi (2022) researched the incidence of examination malpractice in Nigerian tertiary institutions and itemized the various techniques of cheating which include impersonation, pairing, giraffing, prepared jottings and external assistance, among others. The study also emphasized the implications and ruinous effects of examination malpractice on the education system and society at large. Oko and Adie (2016) investigated causes, effects and possible ways of curbing the menace of examination malpractice using Cross River University of Technology as a case study. They identified the societal moral decadence and quest for certification instead of acquisition of knowledge as a principal cause of the menace. Ossai, Etche and Edougha (2020) focused on development, validation and standardization of a diagnostic instrument called Tertiary Examination Behaviour Inventory (TEBI) for determining the tendency of students in tertiary institutions to participate in academic cheating. It was anchored on the Modified Theory of Planned Behaviour and Item Response Theory and concluded that the theory is reliable for the identification of students with disposition towards academic dishonesty.

Most of the researches on examination malpractice have concentrated on its forms, causative factors, effects and possible solutions. However, research is quite lean on lexicosemantic study of the forms of examination malpractice. This gap provided the basis for this study which is an investigation of the origin, meaning and semantic classifications of the terms popularly used by students to delineate its various forms.

### **3. Methodology**

The data for this study were collected through participatory observation by being involved in the daily activities of the students during examination periods. A close study of their choice of words was carried out by the researchers through intimate interpersonal interactions. In addition, a recording of conversations of students was done in selected tertiary institutions such as; Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, Lagos and Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin, Lagos. The three institutions were purposively selected to reflect the three layers of tertiary education—university, polytechnic and college of education. The transcription and interpretation of the recorded data were done and thirty terms were selected for analysis.

Furthermore, questionnaires were administered to students in the afore-mentioned institutions seeking responses on the terms used to describe different forms of examination malpractice, their meanings, possible origins and how they are used in contexts. They were administered to a hundred and twenty (120) students from each of the three institutions sampled; university (40), polytechnic (40), and college of education (40). Out of the corpus, only a total of one hundred and eight (108) were retrieved and analysed; the remaining twelve (12) were not accessible as at the time of analysis. The collected terms which are popularly used in the three institutions were identified and used for analysis in this study.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

Conventionally, semantics concerns itself with the ‘meaning of meaning’ and particularly the nature of meaning, how words have meaning and the relationship between words. Mainstream lexical semantics concentrates to a significant extent on lexical relations between words themselves (Apresjan 2000), and on decomposing lexical meanings into primitive components (Cruse 1986). It deals with the study of words, meanings and the relatedness of lexical items in a context or ‘co-text’. Words either denote physical and abstract things or connote images in the real and imagined worlds (Yule 1997; Akmajian et al 2006; Dirk 2010).

Adegbija (1989) identifies five major classes of lexico-semantic variation as transfer, analogy, acronyms, semantic shift or extension and coinages or neologisms. For Bamiro (1994), ten categories of lexico-semantic variation are identifiable: (a) loanshift (b) semantic under-differentiation (c) lexico-semantic reduplication and redundancy (d) ellipsis (e) conversion (f) clipping (g) acronym/ alphabetism (h) translation equivalent (i) analogical creation (j) coinages. Meanings of lexical items are also described in terms of sense relations such as synonymy which expresses similarity and antonymy which expresses oppositeness.

McGregor (2009, p. 129) posits that the notion of meaning in linguistics concerns that which is expressed by sentence, utterance and their components. He further explains that the context which is crucial to meaning and both the speaker/ hearer contribute in giving the appropriate meaning to a word or an expression in a language. Udofot (1999, p. 6) suggests that it is necessary for semantics to draw a distinction between the usual meaning of a word or an utterance and the meaning it has in a specific circumstance. A semantic analysis or study must take into consideration shared knowledge and belief, the society where the utterance is made and the subject that is being discussed. The semantic value of the lexical choices in the data presented is contextually restricted to the group and comprehensible by the users. The lexical items used by students to describe types of examination malpractice is group directed, contextually delimited to the members and would still need to be interpreted to other speakers of English before they are intelligible. This is a result of the semantic extension and linguistic patterns that characterize the variety. Adegbija’s (1989) model was used for analysis in this paper and in the data presented, there are ample features of lexico-semantic variations such as coinages or neologisms, transfer, acronyms, semantic shift and extension.

#### **5. Data Presentation and Analysis**

The data presented in this section are the terms popularly used by students in tertiary institutions in Lagos State. They were collected from students of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, Lagos and Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanjkin, Lagos which are three state-owned institutions and represent three layers of tertiary education; university, polytechnic and college of education. The lexical items, their meanings, origins and semantic categorizations are stated.

S/N	Term	Origin	Conceptual Meaning	Semantic Categorization
1	Dubbing	(music) Make a copy of a recording; as in ;'dub music from CD to tape' (to have a faithful reproduction	To copy another candidate's answer word for word. The helper/accomplice voluntarily gives assistance in the commission of examination malpractice.	Semantic shift
2	Giraffing	(zoology) Giraffe, a tall animal with a very long neck.	A method of cheating that requires the cheat to stretch his neck in order to spy on another candidate's work.	Semantic shift
3	Tattoo	(Cosmetics/ beauty regimen) A permanent mark or design made on someone's skin with a needle.	Answers that are carefully written in different parts of the candidate's body especially the laps or palms.	Semantic extension
4	Mercenary	(military) A soldier paid to fight for another country.	A (fairly brilliant) student who is paid or sometimes gets coerced to write an examination for another candidate.	Semantic shift
5	Mopol	(military) Contraction of 'Mobile Police'	A very strict and uncompromising invigilator who apprehends culprits easily.	Acronym
6	Exhibit	(law) Object shown in court to prove that the accused is guilty	Any written answer brought into the examination hall by a candidate.	Semantic shift
7	Jazz	(music) A genre of music	Any fetish item or object such as; magic biro, magic handkerchief or charm brought to the examination hall.	Semantic shift
8	Missile Catch	(military) a flying weapon directed at a target	It represents answer written on a piece of paper, squeezed and thrown to a student	Neologism

			while the examination is going on.	
9	Runs	Run errands; run around to get something done	Preparations made by a potential cheat to ensure a hitch-free malpractice on examination day. This could involve bribing relevant officers who will invigilate and/or mark the examination scripts.	Semantic extension
10	Orijo	Corruption of the word, 'original'	A leaked examination question paper whose source is reliable.	Neologism
11	Load	From 'load' – a heavy or bulky thing that is being carried.	Any extraneous material such as textbook or notebook brought into the examination hall and carefully concealed by the candidate.	It has synonymous relationship with Indian hemp.
12	Micro Chip	Micro -(small), chip -(broken tiny piece of an object)	This type of malpractice involves copying answers in a small sheet of paper like the size of a complimentary card which could be tucked into shoes, calculators or mathematical sets.	Semantic extension
13	E-Method	'E' is a contraction of the word, 'electronic'	This is electronic method of cheating which takes the form of storing answers in mobile phones, calculators, wrist watches or any other device which is electronic based.	Semantic extension
14	Parasite	(Biology) A plant or an animal that lives on another and gets food from it.	A candidate who copies the work of another in the examination hall.	Semantic shift
15	Host	(Biology)An animal or a plant on which a	A candidate who allows another to copy his work. [an accomplice]	Semantic shift

		smaller one is living as a parasite		
16	Efiko	Corruption of the word, 'efficient'	An ambitious and efficient student who does not allow any cheat to copy his work.	Neologism
17	Expo	(expose) not hidden; to show something that should be covered.	It is used to describe a situation of exposing the examination question papers to the candidates before they sit for the examinations.	Neologism
18	Sorting	From the expression 'sort oneself out'; deal with a problem or difficult situation	The sale of marks by corrupt lecturers to students who did not do well in a particular examination or who wanted their scores raised.	Semantic shift
19	Dhl	(Daisey Hillblom Lynn) A German logistics company providing courier service.	One who is engaged to carry question papers or prepared answers from one venue to another.	Acronym // Semantic extension
20	Ecowas	Taken from Economic Community of West African States which emphasizes cooperation among member states.	This term is used when many candidates collude by discussing or passing materials among one another in the examination hall.	Acronym
21	Indian Hemp Local Term- 'Igbo'	(Botany) A type of plant whose use or sale is prohibited by the government	Any unlawful or prohibited material brought to the examination hall.	Semantic shift and it also has synonymous relationship with 'LOAD'
22	Masquerade Local Term- 'Eegun'	(African festival) Traditionally, the costume veils the masquerader and nobody knows his identity.	Any extraneous object carefully hidden inside the candidate's clothes, shoes etc and brought to the examination hall by the candidate.	Semantic shift
23	Magic	Anything in the realm of	Any ingenious method of examination malpractice that	Semantic extension



	Local Term- 'Idan'	spiritualism that defiles natural explanation.	completely overwhelms the invigilators /supervisors and goes undetected.	
24	Lateral Connection	(pipe/ water distribution ) The point at which the server line coming out from homes connects to the city's main server line.	This is a seating arrangement whereby the 'bright' student is seated in the middle flanked on both sides by the dull students who will copy his answers.	Semantic shift
25	Rank Xeroxing	(Rank Xerox) A company that provides clear photocopying service	This indicates a situation when a student collects and writes another student's answer word for word	Semantic shift
26	Swapping	From 'swap'-(a barter, an exchange) To give something and be given something else instead	This is an exchange of paper booklets so that the bright student can write answers out for his/her dull friend	Semantic extension
27	Table Top	(electronics) A gadget that is small enough to be placed on a table	The writing of anticipated answers on the top of a desk before the commencement of examination.	Semantic shift
28	Time Out	(Sport) a stop to the game for a few minutes in order to rest and discuss strategy.	The act of taking permission from the invigilator to go to the toilet but with the aim of reading up answers in textbooks or notebooks hidden in the toilet.	Semantic shift
29	Computo	A corruption of the word 'computer'	This involves the use of calculators, which has facilities for multiple entries. The Invigilator may not know that it has such facilities; she/he may think it is an ordinary calculator	Neologism
30	Special Centre	A term borrowed from West African	Examination venue/hall where malpractice is allowed or made easy because there	Semantic shift

		Examination council (WAEC) which refers to venue for candidates who have discrepancies in their registration.	is poor or no supervision at all.	
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## 6. Discussion of Findings

The creativity in the terminologies used to describe various forms of examination malpractice is best seen in the extensive use of neologism. Generally, neologism can be categorized as coinage; for example in the data presented we have; ‘missile catch’, ‘computo’, ‘expo’, ‘orijo’, ‘efiko’, etc. All of these are coined from existing English words and they have new meanings. The creation and use of new words that are not in the English lexicon definitely affects intelligibility because decoding the sense of the terminology becomes difficult for anybody outside the group. This, therefore, makes the language to be peculiar and group-directed. Another noticeable property is reinterpretation or extension of an existing lexical item in English to cover new areas of experience. The word ‘mercenary’ which is used in military parlance to refer to a paid soldier who fights for another country has been given semantic extension to incorporate a student paid to write an examination for another. In the same way, ‘tattoo’ which ordinarily refers to a design drawn on someone’s skin has been extended to mean answers written on the thighs or palms of a candidate. The words ‘parasite and host’ which are biological terms are now used to refer to a candidate who copies from another (parasite) and the accomplice who allows his work to be copied (host).

The terms MOPOL (Mobile Policeman); ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and DHL (Daisey Hillblom Lynn) are examples of acronyms in the data. MOPOL as used by the students is not the gun-wielding policeman trained to apprehend law breakers; the meaning has been extended to refer to a strict and efficient invigilator who apprehends candidates who engage in examination malpractice. In the use of ECOWAS, there is a sense of cooperation or mutual understanding among friendly candidates to copy one another’s work. This parodies the objective of ECOWAS which promotes cooperation among member states of West African sub region. As presented in the data, there are three types of copying; ‘giraffing, ECOWAS and dubbing’. When a cheating candidate stretches his neck and copies answers from his neighbour who is oblivious of the act, that is (giraffing or giraffe method) but when there is a mutual agreement among two or more candidates to copy one another’s work, it is called ‘ECOWAS’. ‘Dubbing’ is copying word for word the answers of another candidate who agrees to the commission of the crime. The term ‘time out’ which has its origin in sports has also been given expanded application to mean; ‘the act of taking permission from the invigilator to go to the toilet but with the aim of reading up answers in textbooks or notebooks hidden in the toilet’.

Some of the words have synonymous relationship and can be used interchangeably for example; ‘expo’ (leaked examination question) means the same thing as ‘orijo’ (original

examination question; not fake) while 'load' (any written answer brought into the examination hall) means the same thing as 'exhibit'. There are some words in indigenous Nigerian languages which are given direct translation or transliteration such as; 'eegun' (masquerade) 'he carried masquerade' or 'idan' (magic) 'he performed magic,' 'Magic' is any ingenious method of examination malpractice that completely overwhelms the invigilators/supervisors and goes undetected. 'Igbo' (Indian hemp) is any unlawful or prohibited material brought to the examination hall.

## 7. Conclusion

In order to enjoy a degree of privacy in their communication, students have created new words and expressions which are only comprehensible to members of their inner circle. The creative expressions used by students to describe forms of examination malpractice are numerous and cannot be exhaustively discussed in this paper given the exigency of space. However, the terms mentioned would give an insight into students' language usage relating to examination malpractice. It should also be stated that some of the terms mentioned in this study may have slightly different meanings in another institution but the basic imports remain the same. The terminologies also serve a dual purpose; first, they meet the communicative needs of the students and second, they are group directed because they are sufficiently esoteric to repel outsiders but comprehensible to members of the group. The desire to communicate in an obscure manner often resulted in expanded application given to lexical items taken from the local languages, such as: 'igbo' (Indian hemp), 'eegun' (masquerade), 'idan' (magic).

There is a distinctive and peculiar flavor in the terminologies used by Nigerian students to describe types of examination malpractice and because they have a shared purpose and common objective, with the passage of time, they may soon become a homogenous group that is bound together by the same linguistic habit. This study has extended the perspective on lexico-semantic variation study as it relates to students' language usage to delineate forms of examination malpractice.

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