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## Demystifying the lexicon of drug dealers: A linguistic analysis of illicit drug sales in Mbare and its security implications on the war on drugs

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### Abstract

This research focuses on the linguistic terms used by drug dealers to refer to the selling and consumption of illicit drugs as well as the significance of these terms in influencing the fight against illicit drugs. The illicit sale of drugs and the language used by drug dealers are complicated subjects that have significant implications on security in the context of the war against drugs. By adopting a qualitative approach involving interviews and non-participant observation with members of the illicit trade, the study established that the linguistic terms used by the drug dealers and their associates are constantly evolving and are privy to individuals involved in the illicit trade especially drug dealers and consumers. In other words, there is a secret language code that is known by individuals involved in this illicit activity. They generally refer to everything related to the illicit trade from sellers, buyers, the drug itself (Appearance, use, packaging, or effects on the consumers) and everything in between. Consequently, it is this myriad and obscure terminology associated with the illicit drug trade that not only contributes towards their proliferation but also undermines the state's efforts to curtail their use.

**Keywords:** Linguistic terms, illicit drugs, Mbare, drug dealers, Zimbabwe Republic Police.

### Introduction

The study investigates the linguistic terms used by drug dealers in the illicit drug <sup>[1]</sup> network especially identifying the repertoires associated with the jargon relating to their names, use, and interactions between drug dealers and consumers in Mbare, Zimbabwe's oldest high-density suburb. It argues that the use of these cryptic linguistic expressions acts as an enabler of the drug trade as it allows members of the illicit trade to transact openly unbeknownst to the general public whilst also safeguarding against apprehension by law enforcement. Therefore, understanding the specific linguistic terms and codes employed by drug dealers in Mbare can help law enforcement agencies to better understand the drug trade in the area and develop effective strategies to combat it. Additionally, exploring the significance of language use in illicit drug networks can shed light on the social and cultural factors influencing the illicit drug trade, providing insights into the complex dynamics of drug use and distribution

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<sup>1</sup> An illicit drug is one that is illegal to have (for example, cannabis, heroin, and cocaine), and the non-medical use of drugs that are legally available such as painkillers and sleeping pills (Ritchie, 2022). This present study considers illicit drugs to be dangerous drugs. In terms of Zimbabwean law, dangerous drugs are defined in section 155 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] (hereinafter 'the Criminal Code'). The section states that dangerous drug means—

- (a) any coca bush, coca leaf, raw opium, or cannabis plant;
- (b) prepared opium, prepared cannabis or cannabis resin;
- (c) a scheduled drug;

The section goes on to give the meaning of 'scheduled drug'. It provides:

“ ‘scheduled drug’ means a drug specified in Part I or Part II of the Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Act [Chapter 15:02], and the term “Part I scheduled drug” shall be construed accordingly”.

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globally in general and Mbare in particular.

The reason for selecting Mbare high-density suburb is because of findings by the National Association of Youth Organisations (NAYO) in 2022 which indicated that drug abuse was rampant in Mbare which also acted as the supply hub for surrounding regions in the country. The survey also revealed that crystal meth, marijuana, methanol, and broncleer were among the most abused drugs. The illicit drug trade in Mbare, Harare, is a major concern for law enforcement agencies and it is further complicated by the fact that drug rehabilitation centres are full, and unable to cope with rising demand to accommodate new patients (Kafe 2023) <sup>[14]</sup>. The centres are estimated to be holding or treating about 5,000 people at any given time, with tens of thousands more either not coming forward for, or getting any assistance. As a result of this problem, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) in February 2023 launched a crackdown against drug abuse, smuggling, and trafficking which health authorities say is rising and seriously wrecking the lives of the country's youth population (Sibanda 2023) <sup>[30]</sup>. On February 21, 2023 during National Youth Day (NYD) commemorations, the President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa declared drug and substance abuse a national disaster. Consequently his administration launched a National Anti-Drug and Substance Abuse Campaign, warning all involved in the illicit network (drug producers, peddlers and abusers) that the long arm of the law would soon catch up with them. Nevertheless, the illicit drug trade has indicated no signs of weakening in Zimbabwe despite state efforts to bring an end to the activity.

The research therefore asserts that one of the reasons why Zimbabwe's war on drugs is failing to yield fruits is also because drug dealers use specialized linguistic terms and codes in their communication to sell and consume illicit drugs which make it difficult for outsiders to comprehend the operations of the illicit trade. This use of specialized linguistic terms and codes in drug dealing is a form of "cryptolect," a secret language used by a specific group of people to communicate covertly. The use of such language in the illegal drug trade can make it difficult for law enforcement agencies to monitor and intercept drug transactions, leading to the proliferation of the illicit drug trade in Mbare. It is important to acknowledge that little is known about the specific linguistic terms used by drug dealers in Mbare and the implications of such language use in facilitating the illicit drug trade. Therefore, the crux of this study is to investigate the linguistic terms and codes utilized by drug dealers in Mbare, and to explore their security implications in perpetuating the illicit trade in the area.

Linguistic terms do not only serve the social function of establishing and maintaining social contact between the communicating parties and referential functions of referring and describing, analysing, arguing about, and explaining things in the world but also serve to be secretive, deceptive and to hide an illegal activity. There is also a cognitive dimension to the use of linguistic expressions. They may also have expressive functions of conveying, for example, the sender's beliefs, views, feelings, attitudes, volitions, and needs and this may evoke the corresponding states and activities in the receiver, for example, make them perceive or understand something, have certain feelings and attitudes, or perform a certain action. This is indicative of the psychological basis of words in a language.

Social factors play a significant role in determining the linguistic terms used in social interactions. According to Evin-Tripp in Rokhman's (2013) study, four main factors influence the language choice of speakers in social interactions: the setting and situation, the participants involved, the conversation topics, and the interaction functions. Similarly, Grosjean in Rokhman's (2013) study notes that language choice in social interactions is influenced by four factors: the participants, the situations, the discourse content, and the interaction functions. These insights are valuable in understanding the nuances of the elusive drug network in Mbare as well as providing knowledge on the reasons for using such terms in communication and interactions, by drawing on the factors that affect language choice in society.

The use of linguistic terms in this case serves a practical purpose of influencing the recipient's behaviour and eliciting a specific response. Drug users and dealers often form covert communities and networks, and to maintain anonymity, they use specialised codes when discussing drug types, transactions, and recruitment. This phenomenon is not unique to Mbare, as the distribution of illicit drugs is a global issue (Hariyanto, 2018) <sup>[12]</sup>. The linguistic codes and terms employed by drug dealers in conversations surrounding the sale and consumption of illegal drugs are not commonly known by the general public and that's why they evade detection and possible state suppression.

There are numerous slang terms and street names for illicit drugs. Drug culture has developed its own language in which ordinary-sounding words can take on entirely different meanings. People who use or sell drugs develop their own in-group terms and language, much like any other group of people with a common experience. Some terms are designed to cover up the topic of conversation from possible eavesdroppers. The language by drug dealers when talking about drugs is not just applied to the names of drugs; it is also commonly used to describe drug use and the sale of drugs.

The research centres on community groups that utilize slang language, which primarily includes drug dealers. This language is utilized as a communication tool that employs a specific set of codes in drug-related transactions. Consequently, the widespread use of this slang is contributing to the alarming proliferation of drugs. The research aims to determine the language and codes that drug dealers and drug users use while performing transactions. The code and language used are not common to the general public. The study therefore argues that the use of the slang jargon has security implications which explains why the proliferation of drugs in Zimbabwe in general and Mbare in particular continues unabated despite state sanctioned operations (Mandura 2023) <sup>[16]</sup>.

This study is of import especially as it adopts a multidisciplinary approach in demystifying the role that language plays in perpetuating the proliferation of drug trafficking and consumption in the global south in general and in Zimbabwe in particular. It is also the first of its kind to adopt this approach, especially in tackling the nationwide challenge of drugs in Zimbabwe. The paper is categorized into three broad sections excluding the introduction. The first segment consists of the literature review which conceptualises the study and situates it in the broader literature on language, crime and illicit drugs. The methodology forms the second part whilst the discussion of

findings forms the third and final portion before a brief conclusion.

### **Global perspective on Language, Crime and Drugs: A brief Literature Review**

This study deploys Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential association to demonstrate the subtle influence of linguistic terms on the illicit drug culture in Mbare (Sutherland 1955) [32]. The theory basically asserts that criminal or delinquent behaviour involves the learning of (a) skills of committing crimes and (b) motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes favourable to the violation of law (Matza and Sykes 1957:664). The study therefore argues that linguistic terms used by the members of the illicit drug trade in Mbare actually form part of the skills needed in enabling the delinquent behaviour. Botoeva also argued that language is very instrumental in blurring the lines between legal and illegal activities (Botoeva 2019: 1) [3]. By analysing the process of hashish production in north-east Kyrgyzstan Botoeva argued that:

language has played an important role in not just neutralizing the illegal nature of hashish production but in transforming the meaning of hashish harvesting, which allowed people to reflexively question the illegality of this practice. I argue that the words used in describing the different elements of the hashish economy in Toolu not only disguised the illegal nature of hashish making, and therefore neutralizing the feelings of guilt but that the naming process allows for a re-interpretation of the illegality of hashish making and helps form new interpretations rooted in the local moral system.

Globally, there is a growing body of literature on language, crime syndicates and drugs. This literature is broadly distributed across the globe including the global south and north especially in the Americas, Western Europe and Africa. These studies are critical in understanding how drug dealers and criminal organizations from different regions use language to serve a similar purpose of evading both the general public and law enforcement. Notwithstanding, this study further argues that language does not only act as a weapon of choice to cloak the activities of drug dealers from the preying ears of outsiders but it is also one of the reasons why the widespread proliferation of drugs continues despite frantic efforts to curtail it.

In Mexico, there are a number of studies centred on detecting figurative connections in the formation of the drug trafficking vocabulary and also its relationship with violence (Reyes and Saldívar 2022; Pressacco 2022) [26, 24]. These studies emphasised the elusive nature of the drug trafficking language which is coded with various meanings that are largely unfamiliar to the general public, and sometimes even to law enforcement authorities. Reyes and Saldívar (2022) [26] observed that the drug dealer's languages consists of an intriguing compendium of terms and references that are intentionally constructed to obscure drug-related information by using figurative language devices like metaphor or metonymy.

The "narco language" is one of the predominant languages among Mexico's drug trafficking syndicates and Pressacco (2022) [24] identified two categories to classify this language: literal and figurative. By compiling an engaging list of terms, phrases, and constructions to illustrate the argot used by drug dealers, Pressacco (ibid) was able to situate the role that language plays in understanding the relationship

between violence and drug trafficking in Mexico. On a similar note, studies on the repertoires of the criminal jargon used in Columbia's prison system observed that linguistic devices like metaphors and metonymies were part of the criminal slang which was intricately linked to the drug network (Acosta and Mora 2008). This phenomenon is similar to the drug trafficking lexicon in Mexico, where the technical language associated with crime is saturated with metaphorical expressions. Similarly, in her investigation of the lexicon of Spain's criminal network, was able to observe the jargon used and also identified linguistic mechanisms such as synonymy and polysemy. In contrast, Torregrosa and Sánchez-Reyes (2015) [33] analysed the use of conceptual metaphors related to drugs in English law enforcement especially focusing on their application in the education and training of lawyers.

Again, scholars have also sought to analyse the Saussurean linguistic sign in slang language used in drug transactions between drug dealers and drug users. By using the case study of Padang City's South Padang sub-district, Astuti and Denafri (2020) [2] sought to determine the signifier and signified found in drug slang language and they established that slang is formed in word categories, abbreviations, and phrases which also take into consideration factors of language and context. In particular, time and place of the background, the number of participants in the interaction, talking topic, and interaction function. These factors then determine the use of slang terms between drug users and dealers. Also, studies on drug trafficking in North America further noted that the lexicon associated with this phenomenon undergoes constant change, particularly in the semantic fields related to drug names (Saldívar 2022) [29]. This phenomenon is evident through the introduction of new terms and the assignment of new meanings to existing ones, in both English and Spanish.

In Africa, a number of studies have also been undertaken to identify the repertoires of street jargon (Githiora 2002; Mutonya 2007 [20]; Eckert 2003) [11]. Among the documented urban codes is the Tsotsitaal language in Soweto (South Africa). The Tsotsitaal language developed among the youths in segregated suburbs of South Africa in the 1950s. Brook (2006) [4] observed that Tsotsitaal was an intermarriage of Afrikaans and isiZulu and it became a recognised language in most of South Africa's urban centres. Studies such as these provide valuable insights, especially for this study which also examines a type of street language spoken by drug dealers in Mbare. On a similar note, Mutonya (2007) [20] explored the creative use of street language in Nairobi's Kinoki community by low-income uneducated street youths marginalised by mainstream society and deprived of opportunities to integrate with society. He observed that these children manipulated Sheng, a widely spoken variety across social groups to redefine their stigmatised lifestyle and to ameliorate the hazards of street life. This reinvention was able to change the status of language and according to Githiora (2002) [10], it (Sheng) is now used in advertising.

Also, by examining the urban languages in Africa (slang) Eckert (2003) [11] argued that within Africa's urban spaces, "indigenous" languages have entered into new linguistic configurations in light of speakers' adaptive responses in terms of linguistic practices to their changing environment and new communicative needs. Eckert (2003) [11] observes an intensification of the youth all over the world to instigate

language change or language development by creating new terms. Thus, he argues that the creation of new terms has become a tendency of the youths rather than out of need. The issue of creativity of urban dwellers is also significant to this study even though it focuses on the language of drug dealers in Mbare. This present study embraces Eckert's (2003) <sup>[11]</sup> observation of the youth's influence on the dynamism of Africa's urban languages but further establish other reasons for the emerging urban languages among drug dealers.

In Zimbabwe, there is a dearth of research on language, crime and drugs. Nonetheless, there are studies that have investigated the creative potential of linguistic innovation in Zimbabwe (Viet-Wild 2009) <sup>[36]</sup>. It was generally observed that the linguistic innovation through the switching or mixing of languages is a widespread phenomenon that forms part of contemporary urban culture in Africa while in Zimbabwe it is spearheaded by music genres (Viet-Wild 2009) <sup>[36]</sup>. Hence this study will derive some important insights into the innovative style of drug dealers especially when selling and consuming illegal drugs in Mbare. Overall, unlike the literature review above, this research is different from previous studies in the sense that it not only seeks to contextualise the linguistic terms that are used by drug dealers when referring to the consumption and selling of illicit drugs in Zimbabwe but it also seeks to demonstrate how language use undermines efforts to curtail drug tracking.

### Materials and Methods

The study is qualitative and descriptive in nature Mogalakwe (2006) <sup>[18]</sup>. In order to unravel the influence of language on the illicit drug trade including its security implications in Mbare the research was guided by three questions. That is: What is the purpose of the linguistic terms used by drug dealers to refer to the selling and consumption of illicit drugs? What are the linguistic names used by the drug dealers and their terms of reference in the selling and consumption of drugs? What are the security implications of the indecipherable linguistic terms on state efforts to end the illicit drug trade in Mbare? In order to attend to these three pertinent questions the study utilised non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews with members involved in the illicit drug trade (Drug dealers, consumers and suppliers) in Mbare.

Non-participant observation was used by the researcher(s) to observe the participants in Mbare where illicit drug dealers frequent. Researcher were non-participant observers in the areas (Bases) where drug transactions were taking place. They gained access to drug dealers and recorded their language use, as well as observed their interactions with customers and other dealers. It was very difficult to gain access to the sites (Bases) where illicit drug transactions were taking place, however, the researcher managed to gain access through former students of the Department of Languages Literature, and Culture at the University of Zimbabwe who were involved in drugs. These students had knowledge of the sites where illicit drug transactions were taking place in the Mbare suburb of Harare and they also introduced the researcher to the drug dealers. From observations, researcher took detailed notes on the language used by drug dealers, including slang terms, codes, and other linguistic features that are specific to drug transactions.

Semi-structured interviews especially with some of the drug dealers and customers who were involved in the selling and consumption of illicit drugs in Mbare were also used to further understand the repertoires of the language of the illicit drug trade. The researcher designed open-ended questions about slang terms and phrases, as well as more specific questions about how the language is used in drug transactions. The questions were designed in such a way that they encouraged the participants to talk about their experiences and use of language in drug transactions.

The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. This allowed the researcher to analyse the language used by drug dealers in detail, including slang terms, codes, and other linguistic features that are specific to drug transactions. The researcher maintained ethical standards by avoiding engaging in any illegal activity or putting themselves or others in harm's way. The researcher also ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants since the activities that they were involved in were deemed illegal according to Zimbabwe's laws.

Data in this study were analysed using content analysis which enabled the researcher to determine the existence of specific words, topics, and concepts in qualitative data. It also provided insights into models of human thought and language use. The researcher(s) identified patterns and themes in the language used by drug dealers and explored the social and cultural contexts in which the language was used.

Let us revisit our methodology. Perhaps focus group with people undergoing Rehab will be better

### Discussion of findings

This section focuses on the presentation of data drawn from the field of study. The data were presented in terms of themes consistent with the objectives and questions identified in the study. Regarding the inquiry on the purpose of the linguistic terms used by drug dealers to refer to the selling and consumption of illicit drugs, the researcher(s) discovered that the main purpose of the cryptic jargon is to evade detection by law enforcement. That is, the consumption and selling of illicit drugs by drug dealers result in engaged running battles with the law enforcement agents which does not auger well with drug dealers hence they find different linguistic terms to use when talking about drugs. Terms that are used to refer to illicit drugs could be based on the drug's appearance, how it is used, how it is packaged, or how it makes people feel. The nomenclature that is used to refer to the illicit drugs consists of constantly evolving terms that refer to everything from sellers, buyers, the drug itself, and everything in between. These terms in the illicit transactions are easier to discuss in public, and a lot less obvious than using certain terms outright. It's also a reliable way to identify authentic customers versus someone who might be an undercover policeman.

The second research enquiry sought to identify and explain the meaning of assorted linguistic names used by the drug dealers and their terms of reference in the selling and consumption of drugs. The study discovered that there are various names given to drugs based on their appearance, effects, method of consumption. Furthermore the paper also observed that these linguistic terms are not only limited to the naming of drugs but they are also used to refer to drug dealers.

### Names of drugs based on the appearance of drugs

This sub-section presents data on the names of illicit drugs that are based on the appearance of the drugs in question.

#### Illicit drugs obtained from plants

1. Mashizha- marijuana
2. Green grass-marijuana
3. Muzumbani- marijuana
4. Matanda- marijuana
5. Flower power- marijuana
6. Trees- marijuana
7. Herbs- marijuana
8. Grass- marijuana
9. Broccoli- marijuana

The above names are given to particular drugs according to how the drug appears. For example, marijuana is called, *mashizha* (leaves), green plant, green herb or *matanda* (Logs) because it is a plant and/or the appearance of the plant. It is perhaps worth noting that marijuana is a herb. Marijuana is a plant that has five leaves. The term marijuana refers to either dried leaves, stems, or seeds that are obtained from a cannabis Indica plant.

#### Illicit drugs that are in liquid form

1. Cough syrup- broncleer
2. Uchi- broncleer
3. Tapi tapi- broncleer
4. Tea- broncleer
5. Maice- crystal meth

Broncleer is a cough syrup that is used medically for treating coughs. It contains codeine and alcohol. The syrup comes in different colours. It is derived from a plant in the poppy family. It is referred to as tea because it resembles the colour of tea. Tea is black in colour and it is in liquid form, hence the name tea. The study also established that the linguistic term *maice* (icicle) is used to describe crystal meth because of the crystalline form of methamphetamine.

#### Illicit drugs in the form of tablets\crystals

1. Mablue- cytsal meth
2. Maice- crystal meth
3. Dombo- crystal meth
4. Chalk- crystal meth
5. Cookies- crystal meth
6. Snacks- crystal meth
7. Buwe- crystal meth
8. Mangemba/ Maragada - psychiatric pills

Crystal meth is called *mablue* or *maice* because the drug usually looks like fragments of glass or bluish-white rocks. It is a strong and highly addictive drug. It is a clear crystal chunk or shiny blue-white rock. Crystal meth is equally called *buwe* by drug dealers because it can be in the form of tablets. *Buwe* is a Ndau word that refers to a stone.

It is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug. It is a tropane alkaloid and central nervous system stimulant. It is a white powder that appears in a white crystalline powder and sometimes can be like small, irregular-shaped, off-white rocks. It appears as powdered sugar, talcum powder, white flour, corn starch, or baby powder. The drug dealers also use the mangemba as the street name or code for pills for mentally challenged people.

### Names of illicit drugs based on colour

1. Brown sugar- Heroin
2. Brown- heroin
3. Mr. Brownstone-heroin
4. China white- heroin.
5. White horse- heroin
6. Mablue- crystal meth
7. MaDembare- Diazepam pills
8. MaButternuts- Valium

Heroin was given these names by the drug dealers because of how it appears, it is brown and white in colour. It must be pointed out that terms used by drug dealers to refer to drugs are constantly evolving. Some street terms fade into almost complete disuse relatively quickly, and new terms are invented all the time. This is especially true when a term referring to a drug is too recognizable, a new term will be invented to confuse police and the public. The drug dealers also use the linguistic term *maDembare* because they are blue in colour. It is worth noting that *Dembare* is a nickname for the Dynamos football club. Dynamos football club is the biggest Zimbabwean club based on title wins and fan base. The club's colours are blue and white <sup>[2]</sup> (Chiweshe, 2011) <sup>[6]</sup>. The drug dealers then termed Diazepam pills *madembare* because they are blue in colour just like the dynamos football team which wears blue and white colours. The drug dealers also use the linguistic term *mabutternuts* to refer to valium because they are yellow in colour.

### Names of illicit drugs according to how they are consumed

The study established that some linguistic terms for drugs are obtained from how the illicit drugs are consumed. Consider the following examples,

#### Gomhwa-Kushamira or kudira

The youths in Mbare refer to broncleer as *kushamira* or *kudira*. Kudira means to pour. *Kudira* is known as the art of consuming broncleer. When consuming broncleer, one has to tilt their head, facing upwards, then pour in the broncleer, making sure it does not come in contact with the teeth because it easily makes them rot, hence, the use of the word *kudira* which means to pour. The act, therefore, got its name of *kudira* as it is closely related to the original meaning of the word. This fits well with Ullmann's (1951) <sup>[34]</sup> theory of semantic change which suggests that semantic change can occur due to the transfer of names through similarity between the senses. The word *kudira* has, therefore, undergone a semantic change when used by drug dealers when referring to broncleer. *Kudira* would refer to a kind of consumption that is abnormal as there are requirements to tilt the head and avoid the substance coming into contact with the teeth.

1. Glue - kukweva
2. Glue- Kufemera
3. Crystal meth- Sniffer

<sup>2</sup> The traditional and favourite kit colour for Dynamos Football Club is blue and white. The club's home kit features a blue and white vertical striped shirt, blue shorts, and blue and white socks. However, the club has occasionally used different colours and designs for their kits over the years (Chiweshe, 2011) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Glue gases or solvents are breathed in or inhaled from something acting as a container or holder. The consumers sniff the glue using their noses. They can go for hours just sniffing glue from a container, hence the names *sniffer*, and *kufemera*.

1. Marijuana- Chamba
2. Marijuana -kubvira
3. Cocaine -kutompfa
4. Glue- kutompfa

The youths of Mbare also refer to illicit drugs in accordance to how they consume the drug. According to an informant, when taking in marijuana, *chamba* or *kubvira* they wrap the drug around a paper which is referred to as leaves or rizzles and they make joints, blunts, bonges and pipes. Sometimes they use vaping, edibles, and tinctures when consuming the drugs.

The study also established that the term *kutompfa* is used to describe the act of inhaling drugs through the nose, such as cocaine or crushed pills and glue. The use of these terms establishes group identity and solidarity among drug dealers who are dealing with illicit drugs (Eble, 1996) [9]. Poole (1999) [23] agrees by observing that slang, also known as street lingo, is used by a certain portion of people who wish to reinforce their identity and exclude others.

The illicit drugs that are in the form of tablets are named as follows:

1. Mapiritsi- crystal meth
2. Kukabira- crystal meth
3. Muriwo-Marijuana
4. Gombototo- marijuana

These drugs are consumed by swallowing. Tablets in a normal way are taken by swallowing them. Some use water and some swallow as it is. The same applies to drug dealers when taking drugs. They swallow the drugs through the mouth. Some may use the drug as an additional component to their relish when eating.

The above data illustrates the names of illicit drugs according to how they are consumed. Cough syrup broncleer is referred to as *kushamira* because that is how the illicit drug is consumed. People who consume this illicit drug pour the cough syrup in the mouth because they drink it and may give black stains to the lips and teeth. Therefore, *kushamira* or *kudira* refers to broncleer, taking into consideration how the illicit drug is consumed.

Marijuana is referred to as *chamba*. This drug is taken by means of smoking. Therefore, the way of consuming is called *kubvira*. These words appear to have been created to avoid detection. By naming illicit drug terms such as *chamba*, *mapiritsi*, *muriwo* or *gombototo*, this might result in disguising the act of partaking it by hoodwinking the police into believing that it might be something innocuous.

In an interview one of the participants stated that these illicit drugs have scientific terms which are very difficult to pronounce hence, they have coined terms that they can easily articulate when referring to illicit drugs. In addition, another respondent revealed that:

In addition to coded language, drug dealers may also use body language and other nonverbal cues to communicate with their customers or other individuals within the drug culture. For example, a dealer may wear certain colours or clothing items to signal their involvement in drug-related activities, or they may use hand gestures or other signals to

indicate the type of drug they are selling or the quantity available.

The study further established that although many linguistic terms used by drug dealers to refer to illicit drugs are based on some play on the drug's name, these terms are not always obvious—in fact, the majority of drug names as used by drug dealers will likely have (seemingly) nothing to do with what the drug is actually called.

### Linguistic terms referring to how consumption of illicit drugs makes people feel

The study established that there are various linguistic terms that individuals may use to describe the feelings or experiences associated with the consumption of illicit drugs. Here are some examples:

1. Kunakwaa
2. Kuvharwa
3. ku sticker
4. Ku hyper
5. Kutsomwa
6. Kudhipisa
7. Chasing the dragon
8. Strung
9. Kubhena
10. Kulipitika
11. Ngoma

The above data illustrate how people feel after consuming illicit drugs. Crystal meth is referred to as *dombo* 'stone' because of its effects of sleeping the whole day and therefore rendering someone useless because he or she is not able to work just like a useless stone that does not feel anything. Hence, the same resemblance of a stone (*dombo*) is applied to someone after consuming crystal meth because he or she is always sleeping hence that person is useless (Cf Madzore, 2014) [15].

They also refer to a state of being chronically late as "*kusticker*". Added to that, drug dealers use the term *kambwa* to refer to whisky. In an interview, one respondent revealed that they call it *kambwa* (dog) because the consumer will have increased aggression, and violent behaviour, and become defensive when confronted. The consumer will have threats or harmful behaviour directed toward another individual or group. They refer to this state as "*kuhyper*". The linguistic term *kuhyper* is also used to describe the feeling of increased energy or alertness that can be experienced after consuming stimulant drugs such as cocaine.

Marijuana is referred to as *chamba* because the consumer will have impaired memory, impaired concentration, they will also have slurred speech as well as loss of coordination. This drug also disturbs the sleeping patterns. Therefore, the feeling is called "*kuvharwa*" which is a noun noun in class 15 of the Shona noun classification system.

It was also observed that the drug dealers also use the term *kubhena* to describe a feeling after the consumption of illicit drugs. The class 15 verb *kubhena*, which is a loanword from the English word 'burn', captures the fact that illicit drugs can make someone drunk quickly or very fast as compared to alcohol. The speed of at which one can be drunk by consuming illicit drugs, therefore, creates mental pictures of a process that takes place very fast because it is being facilitated by the power of illicit drugs.

The study established that the term *kunakwa* is a term used to describe the feeling of euphoria or intense pleasure that can be experienced after consuming drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, or heroin. The term *kuvharwa* is often used by drug dealers to describe the relaxed and sedated feeling that can be experienced after consuming marijuana. The linguistic terms *kudhipisa* or *kutsomwa* are often used by drug dealers to describe the drowsy and relaxed state that can be experienced after consuming illicit drugs.

The drug dealers also use the term *kulipitika* to describe the state of the user who is in need of drugs accompanied by psychological and physical disorders. The use of the linguistic term *kulipitika* is caused by participant factors in the interaction, which is when the drug user has overdosed. This can cause mental and physical problems for drug users who abuse drugs beyond their capacity.

The word *ngoma* is a Shona word that is used by drug dealers to refer to broncleer. The word *ngoma* is also used by Zimdancehall musicians to refer to music. When this word is used by drug dealers it refers to a feeling of drowning in music after consuming broncleer. Broncleer 'bronco' is called *ngoma* because it is used as a relaxation drug which gives a feeling of being relaxed when listening to music.

In an interview, a respondent said: "They use this kind of language as a way to signal that they are part of a particular subculture of drug dealers or drug addicts and to differentiate themselves from people who are not involved in illicit drugs". In addition, another respondent indicated that:

Drug dealers by using linguistic terms to refer to illicit drugs, the buyer feels like they are in the know, make the illicit drug seem less dangerous, and create a drug culture and the linguistic terms cover up the stigma behind drug use. Take for example, if I refer to marijuana as 'spice' that will take away the sound of danger and guilt associated with drug use.

### Linguistic terms referring to drug dealers

Distribution of illicit drugs is illegal in Zimbabwe therefore drug dealers use some linguistic terms that conceal the identity of people who distribute drugs. The study established that drug dealers use certain linguistic terms to describe the person who provides them with the drugs, such as:

1. Cooker
2. Dummy man
3. Middleman
4. Pill lady
5. Papump
6. Pusher
7. Source
8. Ku supply
9. Jazzman
10. Parinotengeseka
11. Marunner
12. Stash
13. Base
14. VaChibhegi
15. Pane pump here?

One of the participants states drug dealers use the linguistic term *jazzman* because jazzman was a well-known wholesaler who used to advertise goods on Zimbabwe

broadcasting cooperation Tv. A *Jazzman* is therefore a drug dealer who stocks illicit drugs in large quantities and people will always have the illicit drugs in stock. The study also establishes that the drug dealers use the linguistic term *cooker* to refer to drug dealers who mix drugs or those who crush illicit drugs which are in the form of big tablets so they package them in sachets. The term *cooker* is sometimes used in the context of drug manufacturing, particularly for the production of methamphetamine. *Cooking* is a term used to describe the process of synthesizing methamphetamine using various chemicals and equipment (Puljević *et al.* 2021) <sup>[25]</sup>. Those who manufacture methamphetamine are often referred to as *cooks* or *meth cooks*. They may operate in clandestine labs, often in remote or secluded locations, to avoid detection by law enforcement (United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988) <sup>[35]</sup>.

From the above examples, the drug dealers also use the term *marunner* for individuals who distribute drugs. *Marunner* is a slang term for middlemen who import goods from foreign countries to Zimbabwe or offers cross-border errand services for a fee (Musarakufa, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>. Given the definition of a runner, this study argues that a "runner" in the context of drug distribution is typically a middle person who transports drugs between the drug dealer and the consumer from one location to another. Runners may be paid a fee for their services or may receive drugs in exchange for their efforts.

Drug dealers also use the term *stash* or *base* to refer to places where illicit drugs are distributed. The study established that drug dealers also use the linguistic term *papump* referring to a drug dealer who aggressively promotes and sells drugs, often to vulnerable or addicted individuals. The term also describes a drug dealer who distributes illicit drugs in high volumes just like a fuel station which stocks fuel in large quantities hence, the term *papump* (fuel pump). The phrase '*pane pump here?*' (Is there a pump here?) is used when one asks the drug dealer if he/she is selling or has stocks of drugs. This is known as asking the dealer for drug availability. The phrase '*pane pump here?*' is taken from a fuel pump which is found at a fuel station and the fuel pump is the one used to pump fuel into someone's vehicle.

The linguistic term *VaChibhegi*, 'Mr/Mrs Chibhegi (bag)', is used to refer to someone who is always moving around with illicit drugs (Cf Kadenge & Mavhunga, 2011) <sup>[13]</sup>. It is noteworthy that the Shona {va-} prefix that is associated with these words is an honorific plural, which is normally used with class la nouns and is also indicative of someone who is in possession of something, such as a bag or a pocket.

In an interview, one respondent said:

The use of these linguistic terms can also be influenced by the drug culture itself. We use coded language or slang to discuss drugs and drug transactions as a way to evade law enforcement and avoid detection.

This can involve using terms that are not commonly used in everyday conversation, or using words in a way that has a different meaning than their literal definition. The coinage of terms to refer to suppliers of illicit drugs conforms with the observation by Mawadza (2000) <sup>[17]</sup> that slang is an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish group identity and solidarity. To avoid being detected and arrested by the police, some of whom operate

in plain clothes, the drug dealers are therefore forced to come up with their own street lingo to refer to suppliers of drugs in Mbare. As noted by Saldívar (2022) <sup>[29]</sup>, apart from the language of drug dealers being crypticity, this study discovers that one of the characteristics of the language used by drug dealers in Mbare is its speed of change. This fact makes it elusive to law enforcement and the general public.

### Apocope

The study also established that drug dealers also use apocope as a linguistic strategy when referring to illicit drugs. Apocope is a type of word formation process in which one or more syllables or letters at the end of a word are removed, resulting in a shortened form. This is exemplified below:

1. Rug- drug
2. Bro- broncleer
3. Cha- chamba
4. Juana- marijuana
5. Do- dombo (crystal meth)
6. Sombo- musombodhiya
7. Coke- cocaine
8. Meth- methamphetamine
9. Oxy- oxycodone
10. Crystal -crystal meth

From the above examples, the first example shows that in "rug" instead of "drug," the letter "d" has been removed from the original word, resulting in a shortened form or apocopated word. Meth - Apocopated form of methamphetamine, a powerful and addictive stimulant drug. Apocope is used by drug dealers to obscure the meaning of their conversations from outsiders, such as law enforcement agents. Oxy - Apocopated form of oxycodone, a prescription medication used to treat severe pain. Oxy is often abused for its powerful pain-relieving effects. Apocope is a common word formation process in many languages and can occur at different positions in a word, such as the beginning, middle or end. This type of apocope is often used in informal language, and can sometimes result in new words or word forms that become widely used and accepted within a language community and in this case illicit drug dealer's community.

I was thinking we can categorise according to the nature of words. If it is metaphorical, figurative etc. Also perhaps placing our words in tables may help greatly

### Security implications of language on the fight against drugs in Mbare

Findings concerning the third enquiry on the security implications of the linguistic terms on the fight against drugs in Zimbabwe revealed that the cryptic language used by drug dealers also contributes towards complicating the war on drugs in Zimbabwe which was launched in February 2023 (Sibanda 2023) <sup>[30]</sup>. Although there are other reasons such as widespread youth unemployment, Zimbabwe's deepening economic crisis, and corruption within Zimbabwe's police force, which also undermines the country's war on drugs, linguistic terms used by members of the illicit trade is also another factor (Chenzi 2023) <sup>[5]</sup>. In order to fully implement Zimbabwe's war on drugs 500 million Zimbabwean dollars was invested and since February 2023 to date (July 2023) at least 5 000 arrests were

made and drugs worth US\$ 2 million were confiscated (Nekhoma 2023) <sup>[22]</sup>.

Nevertheless, these achievements are not able to reduce the illicit drug trade let alone end it. The study identified that as of July 2023, the illicit drug trade in Zimbabwe in general and Mbare in particular continues to thrive. The spokesperson for Zimbabwe's Ministry of Health and Child Care, Donald Mujiri also stated that as of May 2023 60, percent of patients admitted in Zimbabwe's mental institutions suffer from drug and substance abuse-related problems (Mandura 2023) <sup>[16]</sup>. The study argues that linguistic terms are also to blame for failure to effectively address the illicit drug trade.

That is, by using a plethora of perpetually revised linguistic terms relating to drug dealers and the appearance, taste, type, effect of the drugs including their apocopated forms, drug dealers can easily communicate with their clients in a way that is less likely to draw attention or suspicion from authorities. For example, a drug dealer may use the apocopated form "coke" instead of "cocaine," when communicating with clients. Additionally, drug dealers may use apocope or other slang terms as a way to create a sense of exclusivity or secrecy among their clients. By using language that is not widely understood or recognized outside of the drug subculture, they can create a sense of insider knowledge and identity among their clients. This was corroborated by one respondent who said: "The community of drug dealers believes that the linguistic terms used in this community would create security and confidentiality."

### Conclusion

This study has shown that the language used by drug dealers when talking about the consumption of illicit drugs is specific to their subculture and obscures the meaning of their conversations from outsiders, such as law enforcement. The data presented above show that drug dealers use distinct language to talk about illicit drug-related activities. This language can be a way for individuals to communicate in a way that is specific to their subculture and obscure the meaning of their conversations from outsiders, such as law enforcement agents. To create a drug culture for specific drugs, drug dealers use linguistic terms regarding users of individual drugs, as well as what is called to be under the influence and how to use that specific drug. Consequently, these linguistic terms that punctuate the illicit drug subculture ultimately undermine the state's efforts to thwart the illicit trade since the use of these terms not only perplex the general public and law enforcement but they also perpetuate its proliferation. It is the argument of this paper that in the war against illegal drugs, the state and its organs need to value the idea that words matter. Words have to be centralized for the war against illegal drugs to be won.

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