

# Linguistical Codification of Sexual Acts in Urhobo

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**Abstract:** Introduction: This study investigates the use of sexual codes in the Urhobo language. The objectives are to list and explain these sexual codes, who are qualified to use them, the condition for their usage, when and where to use them, who are the developers, and its function in the Urhobo language. Theoretical reviews show that different languages use different codes for sexual related matters which are traceable to cultural background and heritage. Sexual related matters are sacred in the Urhobo culture and met for some specific persons such as adults and married persons. The study indicates that sexual codes are developed and used by the parties that are involved base on the traditionally accepted places and conditions. The study concludes that discussions on sexual related matters are prejudice and discriminating against the women folks in the Urhobo traditional atmosphere because they are not allowed to say certain things about sexual act.

## INTRODUCTION

Generally, humans are regarded as special species of animals perhaps because of the way they do thing and the special codification of their language. Research has shown that human beings are quite unique than the other mammals because they are higher breed animal with special regards. According to Sapir (1921), this higher breed nature of the man is basically traceable to the special codification of its languages. This codification is expressed linguistically to include sexual matters. The coding of sexual activities is center to the Urhobo people because of the issues that are involved especially in terms of moral behavior.

The aim of this paper therefore, is to investigate the linguistical codification of sexual acts in the Urhobo society with the view to examine how it is being said, used, the condition for the usage, those that are qualified to say or use it, where and when to use it, why coding and the ambiguity in the coding language.

The reason for the coding of things may vary from one person to the other or from a community to community. Sometimes, a group of people could choose or fix certain things as coded for a special purpose. This codification can be extended to different aspects or spheres of their lives. For instance, it could be in their business, drugs, job, electronics computer, way of life, sex etc. This coding could be done through signs, gestures, or body language, smell, feelings etc with an intention. These codes can also be used to distinguish a set of people through their behavior and performance. The information passed through coded processes is very significant to the set of the people in that group or society. Therefore, examining sexual related codes or language in this contemporary generation in the Urhobo land is of significant important.

The National population census conducted in 2006 puts the Urhobo population figure to be over five million people making them to be the fifth largest ethnic in Nigeria. . According Udo, (2023) and .Ejobee (2024) respectively, this placement of the Urhobo people constituting the fifth largest ethnic group in Nigeria is boasting their significant demographic presence predominantly in the southern region of Nigeria, particularly in Delta State. The people and the language are genetically referred to as the Urhobo people and language respectively with rich historical and cultural heritage. This deep historical and cultural connections of the Urhobo people are well known and shared within neighboring ethnic groups, in the region and globally. Linguistically, the Urhobo language belongs to the Niger-Congo language family, under the Edoid branch. This linguistic classification reflects not only the Urhobo's geographic distribution but also the means of their identity over time.

Ekeh (2016) says that the Urhobo's linguistic heritage is closely tied to their sophisticated forms of governance and social organization, which are well structured for communal living. This system, deeply embedded in their language and oral traditions, which highlights the importance of communication in the maintenance of social order and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

The linguistic features of the Urhobo language itself offer further insights into the complexity of their social and political structures. Onovbiona (2016) opines that the language encompasses a rich vocabulary for governance, law, and social relations, reflecting the community's emphasis on leadership, social behavior and cohesion which are base for the representation of ideas that have significant codes for different things they do. One of the things they code for several reasons is the issue of sexual language. Sex language is a programmed language that is used to describe the features of human feelings that are intended to encourage, lure or activate sexual urge for sexual intercourse. Because of the sacred nature and culturally related context meaning/interpretation of the term "sex", the data for this paper spread across different category of persons raging

from the young to the age people in both genders. This is aimed to get a robust and reliable data that are used on the subject across borders of these ages.

## THEORETICAL/LITERATURE REVIEW

Coding is the process of giving a subject a code that is used for identify and for classification as wish by the coder. According to Wikipedia.org, coding is analytical process in which data could be gathered for qualitative and quantitative forms are categorized to facilitate analysis scientifically. The major reason for coding is to transform the data into a suitable form for purpose proper analysis. Coding is considered a process of discovery and is done in cycles. This categorization of information as coded is an important step in data processing. This is because it consists of codes or tags. During coding, the coder can manually add codes into data which are required features for identification. The coding scheme ensures that the codes are added consistently across the data set and allows for verification of previously tagged data. Some studies will employ multiple codes working independently on the same data. This also minimizes the chance of errors from coding and is believed to increase the reliability of data.

In coding, it is important for the coder to chronicle their own thought processes through reflective or methodological memories, as to highlight their own subjective interpretations of the data. This is very crucial. It is crucial because it involves the process of initiation and critical thinking and productivity in the research. This is a map out research activities which will enable communicators uncover meaning from data coded and maintaining communication breakdown.

The usage of the word 'coding' varies from discipline to discipline. As for discipline like linguistics, coding could be discussed as an applied concept. In other words, a word can be coded to have several interpretations depending on the context of usage. Iain Hay (2005) outlines a two-step process beginning with basic coding in order to distinguish overall themes, followed by a more in depth, interpretive code in which more specific trends and patterns can be interpreted. This is so because; it is the activity that involved programming of a subject. It is a process of assigning a code to something for classification or identification. Coding entails logical reasoning, analysis of things and the planning out of a sequence of instruction for the actualization of a purpose. It is a process of creating instructions that will be then interpreted and followed for the purpose of completion of an action. It is activity to mark something for specific purpose. The coding can be through letters, numbers, name, color, drawing, signs patterns etc.

### Types of Coding in Language Use

There are different types of coding in language use some of them are listed below:

- High-level coded language: Just as the name implies, this is when a language is coded on the sense of context use. This high-level use of language is embedded in pragmatics theories wherein there are surface and deeper implication in their usage and interpretations. High-level language can be both formal and informal. It is formal when the interlocutors choose to be formal i.e. they use the language officially to pass a message as the situation demands. More of this shall be discussed in our data presentation and analysis while the informal is when such high-level language where it is not needed but used sarcastically either to make the audience to be amused or to seek attention which has a derogatory semantic implications

This high-level language is also seen and regarded to have metaphorical meanings. This metaphorical nature has associative meanings or interpretations that have the tendency of ambiguity. This is because, the high level coded language can culturally contextualized.

- Assembly coded language: This is a coded language that is associated or related to a group people or association. In this regard, those in this group or association know themselves and they could always use this assembly coded language to communicate, pass a message and understand themselves. In other words, it is a situation where certain assembly chooses to communicate in a special way for a special purpose. This type of assembly could be public or private. Whichever the case, the language is regimented. This assembly could be a family, group church, society, palace etc.

- Machine coded language: This is classified with an imperative way of doing things that are associated with using a coded format to give a command that are known to the users. In this regard, the commands are programmed or fixed either in a machine or related gargets. The imperative expressions or commands could be highly technical in nature because they are highly coded and sometime handy.

- Hardware coded language: This is a language that is coded in hardware gargets that are met to perform special duties. Many of such hardware are programmed and sophisticated. They are to be operated on or commanded to perform these duties. Hardware gargets are abstraction in nature programmed to perform certain duties for special purpose. Not every individual can understand neither operates this coded language in theses hardware gargets. The language of these hardware are either leant, acquired, acquitted with or know by the developer(s) which are expository in nature.

- Common coded language: Generally, every community or tribe has what we could classify as common language. This language that is termed to be common in some instances may not be common as predisposed. This could be predicated to many factors in the community or tribe as pointed out in Ejobee (2018). According to Sapir (1921) language is a coded phenomenon that is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desire by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Going further from Sapir's point of view, because the language is purely human and is basically on certain symbols that are produced, it means that even the so-called common language is also coded.

Generally, these coded languages pointed out above are described in terms of syntax, semantics, formal and informal, system, variables, error handling etc programmed for the execution of a task and function.

Sex on the other hand is the act of having sex to satisfy someone's sexual urge or pleasure. According to Wikipedia, sex is referred to as a set of biological attributes in humans and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene, expressions, hormones, levels and function, reproductive/ sexual anatomy. Sex is a Latin prefix meaning 'six'. Latin refers to it as six because the numeral 6 is used as a code for sex.

Sex is a common healthy and normal exercise/activity for people who are interested in. Sex is a ways to achieve pleasure, deeper connection, satisfaction, gains and intimacy between two or more people for a reason. The reason could be for relationship, intimacy, pregnancy, satisfaction of pleasure etc depending on why people choose to have the sex. There are different types of sex but that is not the focus of the paper.

Sexual contact is the act touching of the anus, breast or any part of the genitals of another person with the intent to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of the person with the purpose to meet certain satisfaction. This is also regarded as sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is a sexual activity typically involving the insertion and thrusting of the male penis inside the female vagina for sexual pleasure, reproduction, or birth. This is between a male and female.

## METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method of data collection was adopted for the study. This is because, the qualitative research method according to Tenny (2022) is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real research of which this study targeted. The data for the study was gathered through personal unstructured interviews of open-ended interactions elicited from Ten (10) persons who were selected from each age group which range from age twenty (20) to forty (40), forty one (41) to fifty (50) and fifty (51) to seventy five (75) which made the total participants to be 60. The choice of these different age groups is unique because it spreads across young age, middle age and aged ones who are active and well experience in terms of sexual matters. This was done by the researcher through personal interview method where questions and interactions were employed. The data was subjected to pragmatic analysis and interpretations. Pragmatics is the knowledge of the 'speakers' and 'addressees' background, attitudes and beliefs, their understanding of the context in which a sentence is uttered" (O'Grady, Archibald and Katamba 2011).

The descriptive approach was adopted to analyze the data gathered. The descriptive approach according to Crystal, (2015) is aimed to give a comprehensive, systematic, objective and precise account of patterns of the use language. The descriptive approach is more apt for the study for several reasons.

The descriptive approach is more effective because the subject of discussion is relatively a new area in linguistics study that calls for proper description

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Sexual Codes/Language

There are several codes for sexual discourse in different languages, for instance, Latin uses the numeral 6 (six) as a code for sex. English has several codes for sex e.g. 8 for oral sex, S3X for sex, CU46 for see you for sex, LH6 for let's have sex, RUH for are you horny? Etc. The Urhobo people also use several codes for sexual discourse. Some of the sexual codes, terms or languages in Urhobo are as follows: 'vwerhẹ/sherẹ,' 'mrọoma,' 'womuegbe' 'unu/oboyi shewhiyo?' 'e ke phi ukpanukpa,' 'e ke phi ogidi,' 'e ke phi ofovwi,' 'e ke muabọ,' 'ivwiri che bru' 'edughre,' 'ofovwi rẹ ikpato'. Ordinarily, these bold words above which are now having extra linguistic meanings related to sex have their bare meanings in the lexical entries of the Urhobo language. But because of their surface meanings and the description of their actions and what they portray are seen to be synonymous with what the culture considered to be in line with sexual act, the Urhobo people now code the words for that purpose. The table 1 below represents the bare meanings of the words and their likely translation in English language:

Table 1 Showing the Bare Lexical Entry and Their English Gloss

The Urhobo Bare Lexical Entry	English Gloss
Vwerhẹ/sherẹ	sleep or relax
Mrọoma	meet or see each other
Womuegbe	be ready
Ukpanukpa	Dragging
Ogidi	Trouble
Ofovwi	War
Muabọ	Wrestle
Ivwiri	Smoke
Edughre,	pleasurable day
Ofovwi rẹ ikpato	up and down movement
Unu/oboyi	hole/area

These bare meanings of these words do not actually have any sexual denotations so; anybody can freely use them in their everyday conversation as the case maybe. But because of the behavioral actions or performances associated with these concepts or terms in their usage, connotatively or metaphorically, these concepts are now used as code languages for sexual discourse especially when one is in the public domain. In this sense, many of such words/concepts used for such codes are very ambiguous in the public spheres within the Urhobo community.

Table 2 Showing the Connotative Usage of these words/concepts as Codes in Sexual Related Matters in the Urhobo language and Their English Equivalents

The Urhobo Bare Lexical Entry	English Gloss
Ihwivẹ cha vverhẹ/sherẹ nonẹ na	both of us shall have sex today
Acha mreoma aso na	we shall have sex tonight
Womuegbe vwọ ƙewwẹ rhe?	are you ready for my sex?
e ke phi ukpanukpa, (to drag)	act of dragging
e ke phi ogidi, (trouble)	to trouble
e ke phi ofovwi, (war)	to war
e ke muabọ, (wrestle)	to wrestle
ivwiri che bru (smoke)	there will be smoke
edughre, (turn taking day)	pleasure day
ofovwi rẹ ikpato (up and down movement)	up and down war
unu/oboyi (hole/area) shephiyọ?	is the hole/area set?

The usage and the contextualization of the words as sexual codes are very significant to the parties that are involved. Hence as any of the parties is using or referring to these codes, emotions and affections are taking place because it is what they (both parties) have coded for such discussions. The discussion can be very pragmatic in nature.

#### Classification and Usage of these Sexual Codes by the Age Groups

As earlier mentioned in our introduction in 1. above, we proposed to interact with different age groups which range from age 25 to 75. It was observed from the interviews and interactions that the usage of this sexual codes/language are classified and used by the different age groups. The classification and usage of these sexual codes by these groups are as follows:

**Group A:** The age group in Group A is people between the ages of 50 to 75. It was observed that the people within these ages are advanced and their strength in terms of doing hard work or activity is getting reduced and weak. Therefore they are so mindful of the choice of words/codes when it comes to the issue of sex. We found out they use what they termed “friendly codes” to pass their messages such as ‘vverhẹ/sherẹ,’ ‘mreoma,’ ‘womuegbe’ ‘unu/oboyi shephiyọ?’ ‘edughre,’ etc. According to them, they do not call for hard sex again rather; they do it for pleasure and satisfaction.

**Group B:** The age group in Group B is people between the ages of 25 to 50. The people in this group are relatively young and presumed to have the strength and vigor to do whatever they want to do. So, they use words or codes that signify their strength and might. They use words or codes such as: ‘e ke phi ukpanukpa,’ ‘e ke phi ogidi,’ ‘e ke phi ofovwi,’ ‘e ke muabọ,’ ‘ivwiri che bru’ ‘ofovwi rẹ ikpato’ etc. These codes they use suggest things like hard work, additional use of force, extraction of more energy, war related term etc. These codes they use represent the age group because this age represents the real workforce of any society. According to the information gathered from our informants, both parties that are involved in this sexual activity here use to enjoy such sex. Sometimes,

they could even take some substances to enhance their performance in order to satisfy their sexual urge.

#### Who Uses Sexual Codes?

Sexual matters in Urhobo are traditionally seen as a sacred thing that is not to be said, done or neither discussed by everybody. It is an act that is supposed to be performed by adults who are of age and duly married by any of acts of marriage in the land.

Sexual codes are met to be said or discussed by a man and woman of whom the public can attest to that they are married. In other words, people around them would know and be aware that the two persons involved are married because marriage is done to the knowledge of the general public. It is expected that it is only those who are married that can talk and make use of sexual codes as to perform their conjugal/marriage duties. The couples are qualified to build or create their sexual codes as away to codify the sacredness of the act. The Urhobo people believe in coding sexual mater because if sexual matters are to be said in the presence of the unmarried people, there is that tendency that these unmarried people may be influence or distracted by the pressure of sex. Also, sexual matters are highly seen to be emotional, full of strong feelings and very contagious therefore should not be said or used by everybody.

The discussion on sexual matters can be initiated by any person of both parties. But in most cases, because of the reserved nature of the Urhobo women, they do not want initiate process but both parties are free to discuss sex related matters perhaps using some codes that they have developed. Information gathered indicates that if the woman starts the discussion, such a woman is seen or looked at to be promiscuous, vulgar and look down on somehow in the society. So, in spite of the urge they (women) may have, such a woman keeps it to herself and remains silent about it until the other partner may sense or observe it. Some of the women interviewed see this as a discrimination and oppression on them.

#### The Necessity and Condition for Sexual Codes

In the normal Africa traditional setting, sexual words are supposed to be said or used in a secluded place and in a conducive environment. This is because sexual act is seen to be a sacred thing. Because of this, the Urhobo tradition sees it as what should be done in an indoor setting or hidden places. In other words, sexual activities are done behind closed doors. It is not a public activity. But because of civilization, modernity, interface, influence of immoral acts across the globe perhaps because of intake of substances by different kind of people for one reason or the other, this sacred act hard been polluted and mesmerized in the world today. Different people and culture started developing different strategies for the handling of this menace in order for the incoming generation not to see it as a way of life. Therefore, the condition has to be coded to maintain certain dignities that are associated with the tradition and sex in particular. So, sexual codes have to be created by the people who are involved who wish to say such words in any public atmosphere as to avoid being categorized as immoral persons by the

Urhobo traditional standard. In other words, sex codes are not said or used anywhere and if there must be need for such, it is to be said by the parties that are involved who must code it and also be ready for such discussion. This is so because the usage of sex codes could metamorphose into the act of sex itself. Therefore, the condition is that the parties involved must be ready for it.

Basically, it is only adults, married people or educationists that are free or allowed to discuss or mention issues that are related to sexual act. This is so, because sexual discourse has stimulating consequences that could arouse the hormones responsible for sexual act in the process of discussion. Therefore, any sexual discourse is not met for myopic or young minded people rather it is for matured persons who are qualify for such discussion. This is one of the reasons in the Africa tradition; children are not allowed to see nor allowed to be discussing such issue. In other words, children are forbidden to talk or get involved in sexual act because it is believed that it can ruin their plans and destiny.

#### When and where is Sexual Codes Necessary?

On the aspect of when sexual codes are to be used, it can be before, during and after sexual act. It depends on the individuals that are involved. Usually, sexual discourses are met to give pleasure, arouse, enhance, awareness etc to the parties that are involved. It then depends on what those that are involved want to achieve.

The question of where on the other hand is that generally, just as it as mentioned earlier, the use of sexual language or codes are done in an enclosed places where the parties involved are expected to use the bedroom voices as possible as they can in their discussions or conversations. In other words, sexual matters are supposed to be mentioned in the bedroom with bedroom voices to make it sacred. The reason for the bedroom voices is to make people not to hear them, however, if the parties involved have their coded terms other than the generally ones, they could talk to themselves anywhere and anytime with the mindset that nobody would understand what they are talking about which makes it to be a secret and coded. Usually, in the tradition, there is no specific time for sex, it can be anytime of the day or night. What is important is that it must be in a conducive environment and a hidden place.

#### The Functions of Sexual Code/Language

In spite of the sacredness of the sexual performances in the Urhobo tradition, there are a lot of benefits that are associated with it that will make people to continue to talk about it and these benefits seem to be universally accepted. Some of the functions/benefits of the use of sexual codes/language are as follows:

i. Sexual codes have the tendency to stimulate and make both parties to be interested in having sex. When such codes are used, generally, it is an invitation to be interested in sex.

ii. Sexual code arouses hormones that are responsible for sex wherein the urge for sex will be seriously felt be the parties that are involved.

iii. Sexual discourse brings about erection. When sexual code/language is being used/discussed, it charges the atmosphere for erection which could lead to sexual intercourse by the parties involved.

iv. Sexual code makes the sex organs to be ready for sex quickly. When sexual codes are used, there is the tendency of getting someone wet, horny, secretion or brushing.

v. Sexual codes make sex enjoyable. Sexual codes make sex either before or after more pleasurable. Such sexual discourse could make both parties happy.

vi. Sexual codes bring about bond. Sexual codes seem to be a coded language that only the parties that are involved could know about and sometime it take a very long time to develop and use. So, it takes people who are bound to learn and master such language. Therefore, sexual codes bring about closeness of the people that are involved.

vii. Sexual codes make both parties to be active in sexual intercourse. When such code/language is used, that could continue to make both parties to be sexual active and could repeat sex severally without getting tired or burden.

viii. Sexual codes make both parties to be sexually healthy. Sex itself makes one to be very healthy both physically and mentally. It has serious medical fitness and it is highly recommended by medical practitioners. So, discussing it in any disguise is very healthy.

ix. The discourse on sexual codes could make both parties to be satisfied or achieved their dreams or aims at a particular time without necessarily having intercourse as the case maybe and both parties are happy. In other words, the discourse alone could bring about satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

Sexual act is a global phenomenon that has several implications. For instance, sex is pleasurable, met for reproduction, satisfaction of sexual urge, an exercise etc. whatever sexual act means to those that are involved, there are best global practices for it. As examined in this study, the Urhobo people as a nation has so much regards and respect for sex and the act. For example, they see sexual act to be a sacred thing and conducive. As such, it must be treated with such regards. Any deviation from the accepted formants or norms in the land is considered to be a taboo and violation and the penalty associated with such violations/practices must be invoked on those that are found wanting.

The Urhobo people see sexual act as what is met for adults and as such only those that are qualified (adults) are met to talk about it and also be mindful of where and when to talk about it. Because of this situation of where and when and its implications in the land that is what inspired the idea and reasons for codification of sexual language in their traditions. Because of their philosophical beliefs concerning the after might result of sexual act which they see that can mar or ruin the life of those that are not ready or matured for it in order not to be carried away with the pleasure of sex, the Urhobo's are very conservative in discussing sexual related matters in the public sphere or domain.

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