



**Midlands State University**  
Established 2000

*Our Hands, Our Minds, Our Destiny*

**Faculty of Arts**

**Department of English and Communication**

**Dissertation Topic:**

**A critical analysis of prisons as discourse communities: an examination of Whawha prison complex.**

**By**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father. Thank you for believing in me. To my sister I also dedicate this dissertation as a challenge of greatness, I believe you can achieve more and so this serves as a benchmark for you to beat. I hope you envy what I have achieved and your desire is to achieve more. To my brother Wisdom this is sign of inspiration I got from what you sir have attained.

I dedicate this research to The Lord God Almighty who made it possible for me to finish this dissertation. Thank you Lord.

Psalm 37:25

*I was young and now I am old; yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken*

## **ABSTRACT**

This research looks at the prison community as a discourse community. The study also provides a sociolinguistic analysis of the language used at Whawha Medium Offenders Prison. Through the analysis of language the study also explores certain aspects of prison life at Whawha prison complex. The study uses the 'sociolinguistics theory'. The research examines Whawha Prison Complex as a discourse community, investigates how the inmates at Whawha Prison Complex use language in a peculiar way, explores the origins of cant, slang and jargon used at Whawha Prison Complex and also teaches the way prisoners at Whawha Prison Complex communicate.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **General Background and Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter of the research seeks to highlight and detail the background of the study for research, its aims and objectives as well as the justification of the study. The chapter is an introduction to the study of prisons as discourse communities with main focus on Whawha Prison Complex. This study seeks to analyse the prison as a discourse community. This research will also be a sociolinguistic study of prison lingo in Zimbabwe at Whawha Medium Offenders. The prison community is a community that uses peculiar language and this kind of language is known as prison 'argot'. Prison 'argot' is a secret language used by inmates which also acts as a code of conduct among the inmates.

The study also analyses how the language used in prison develops and the effects it has on the prisoners and their relationship with the correctional officers. The research examines the lexis, their structure and coinage. Usually the prison has a world run by prisoners within the prisoners. One of the aims of this research is to understand the prisoners' world at Whawha prison complex.

Research on the prison community has been carried out vastly at a sociological level, Bronson (2006) argues that "there has been a movement towards conducting research on 'the prison community' or 'pains of imprisonment' in relation to female inmates". Not that it's the aim of the research but besides analysing the language used at Whawha Medium Offenders the research somehow helps shed light on the life at Whawha Prison Complex by understanding the language used by the inmates. The study does not present the cultural norms and values of the prison community but certain aspects might be noted during the discussion.



## 1.2 Background of Study

A number of scholars including Jordans (2003), Sayers (2003), Bazerman (2012), and Swales (1990) just to mention a few have done a lot of research on the subject of ‘discourse communities’ and the ‘discourse experiences’. In general the term ‘discourse community’ categorizes a grouping of people who have a certain language and use it in a particular way with certain characteristics, patterns and norms. This research will analyse the prison as a ‘discourse community’. This kind of research falls under Sociolinguistics and Lexicographic studies and it is termed Prison ‘Argot’. The term ‘Argot’ comes from Spanish and French for slang. Such studies have been vastly carried out in various Western countries at large and seldom in a few African countries. Randy Kearsse an ex-convict in America published a dictionary in 2007 which he termed *Street Slang*. American Prison lingo is immensely documented especially on the internet.

Prison Lingo studies have barely been carried out in countries like Zimbabwe and hence one of the major reasons for this research is to bring home this study and examine the language used in Zimbabwean prisons. The study explores the development of prison ‘cant’, slang and jargon. Prison lingo overlaps with teen talk and street talk hence most of the phrases might not be new to an individual who has not been in prison. However there are quite a number of words that are peculiar to prison lingo. This research generally seeks to explore the slang, ‘cant’ and jargon used at Whawha prison complex and thus carry on with the research of prison lingo at a Zimbabwe scale.

The prison is a cultural and linguistic vessel and the language used can be considered as a language variety. Prison has its own values and norms which are strengthened by language. Once one gets in prison he or she adapts to a new culture and language which is spoken by other fellow inmates. Less has been done on the research of prison language and communication in Zimbabwe and most African countries. Linguists in most African countries

have limited research on prison lingo. One of the few African countries that have documented prison lingo is South Africa. The prisoners nurture and recreate language and this usually happens in slang. Language is used to serve various purposes among its users. Depending on its users language is subject to change in form and meaning over time especially when it is being used as slang. The existence of prison slang as a language variety cannot be ignored as it is a fundamental aspect of language. Not only is it a fundamental aspect of language but it also enforces the identity of the ‘prisoner’.

### **1.3 Brief Background of Whawha Prison Complex**

The research carried out was aimed at Whawha Medium Offenders at Whawha Prison Complex. Whawha prison complex contains two different prisons in the same complex which are Medium Offenders, which is meant for the older inmates that is those above eighteen and Young Offenders which is for the young inmates that is those from the age of 15 – 20 depending with the crime committed. Whawha young offenders was converted from an adult to a young offenders’ prison on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2005 and it has a holding capacity of 450 inmates. Whawha Medium Offenders maximum prison and it was opened on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1982. The prison has an official holding capacity of 1345.

These two prisons are separated and inmates from medium offenders barely mix with inmates from young offenders. Whawha prison complex is located in the Midlands region, 23 km outside Gweru along Mvuma road. Both young offenders and medium offenders are grade 3 prisons which house all classes of inmates. Inmates are formally classified into stages with time and these stages range from A to D class respectively.

The focus of this research is on Whawha Medium Offenders due to the fact that it serves as a prison to the mature inmates and for a much longer period and so the inmates at the Medium

Offenders get to experience more prison life than the inmates at the Young Offenders. More data could be deduced from the Medium Offenders subjects.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

A discourse community is a group of people who share one common language and use it in a peculiar way to achieve common goals. The same language used in several different communities can be made to mean something in another community; a group of people borrow language from another community and create new meaning. The language used in prison is a good example of how language from outside the prison can be made to mean something totally different when being used in prison.

Prison lingo is a vastly studied field in the Western countries hence one of the major key issues of this study is that it aims to bring more light to prison lingo research in Zimbabwean context. The subjects under investigation use a language common to other people in a different way. This research seeks to explore how the same language used in the outside community, by people who do not stay in prison, is used in prison.

The research explores the slang used in prison, its purpose and the effects it brings upon the individuals who use it. Partridge, (1935), Thorne, (1997) and Eble, (1996) argue that slang is not standard, temporary, instable and an identity marker. Halliday (1978) argues that slang is associated with 'anti-languages' which are codes of deviant subcultures such as criminals. Anti-languages are characterized by features such as secrecy, re-lexicalisation, over-lexicalisation, socialization and the language of an anti-society. Anti-languages arise as counter-reality.

The research will explore how the language used by prisoners fits in the characteristics of slang mentioned above. Using this language the research seeks to analyse the prison as a discourse community.

Apart from the fact that research on Zimbabwean prison lingo has received inadequate academic attention from sociolinguists, no description has been provided of the slang used by prisoners in Zimbabwean prisons. A sociolinguistic description of the slang used by prisoners is necessary to provide a better understanding of the slang they use and understand their culture and community. The aim of this research is to provide a sociolinguistic analysis of the language used at Whawha Medium Offenders, Mulvey (2013) argues that one of the reasons research on prison lingo is carried out is to help the relatives of the prisoner understand their family member whilst his prison and soon after release as some of the traits of prison life might linger for a while. Mulvey (2013) also propounds that documenting prison lingo is important to the people who are about to enter prison.

Prison slang is controversial but it is also a social phenomenon. The language of prison is linked with devious acts and it is secretive in nature. It is meant to be understood by criminals only and thus to this extent it is a tool used for socialization. Inmates identify with this language and it is a requirement for the inmates to know this language in order to be associated with the prison world.

### **1.5 Objectives**

- To examine Whawha Prison Complex as a discourse community
- To examine how the inmates at Whawha Prison Complex use language in a peculiar way.
- To examine the origins of ‘cant’, slang and jargon used at Whawha Prison Complex
- To learn and understand the way prisoners at Whawha Prison Complex communicate.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

- Do prisoners have a peculiar discourse?
- Why do prisoners use this discourse?

- When do the inmates use discourse?
- Where and with whom do the inmates use discourse?
- Is the use of discourse a social practice?

### **1.7 Research Hypothesis**

Wa Thiongo (1986) argues that language is a carrier of culture. The use of language in a certain way results in the creation of a new sub-culture. Prison is a sub-culture and its culture is concretized by the fact that there is use of a peculiar language.

### **1.8 Delimitations of study**

The exploration is narrowed down to the analysis of Whawha Medium Offenders only. Whawha Medium Offenders caters for older prisoners who serve longer sentences and so have a great deal of culture of prison life. The study's emphasis is on language use by the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders. The study on language will also reflect some of the cultural values and norms of the prison world at Whawha Medium Offenders.

### **1.9 Limitations of study**

- Data was collected from ex prisoners and some of them had forgotten some of the lexis
- Distance between the researcher and the respondents was a major constrain
- Some of the participants did not respond

### **1.10 Significance of Study**

The essence of the research is on the analysis of Zimbabwean prison lingo. The study will present a sociolinguistic analysis of the language used at Whawha Prison Complex. Studies on prison lingo have mostly been vastly carried out in western countries and so the importance of this study is that it will present a Zimbabwean account on the same research. The research brings the study of prison language to Africa and most of all Zimbabwe.

This research will also analyse the prison as a discourse community. The study of discourse communities focuses on how language is used in communities, relating to synchronic variation, it is how different groups of people can use a common language but create different meanings. Bronson (2006) argues that the prison community can be viewed as ‘a self-contained world with its moralities, social relations, patterns of behaviour, rules and laws’’. On top of these prison has a common language. The sociolinguistic study of language in this research will be used to analyse the prison not just as a community but as a ‘discourse community’.

A lot of arguments on the concept of ‘discourse community’ have been done and a lot of questions have been brought up based on the arguments that were placed by the prominent scholars on what ‘discourse communities’ are, Swales (1998) suggested of place discourse communities after having suggested of a discourse community that was only characterised and united by written communication. This research explores if the prison community fits in the category of a ‘discourse community’ and or ‘place discourse community’.

### **1.11 Chapter Outline**

Chapter one provided a brief background to the study, as well as the aims and objectives. This chapter also explored the significance of the study. Chapter two dealt with the literature review of prison lingo and ‘discourse communities’. The chapter provided definitions and discussions of relevant terms to the study. The chapter also provided a theoretical framework used in data analysis. Chapter three presents the research methodology; it provides information on how information was collect. The chapter discusses the methods used to collect data and it also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the methods used. Chapter four will discuss and analyse the data that was collected. The data is analysed according to the participant observations and interviews that were conducted by the

researcher. The chapter will also present the lexis and phrases that were gathered from the interviews and participant observation. Chapter five provides the conclusion of the research. This chapter provides suggestions and recommendations for further research on the same subject.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter seeks to provide relevant literature discussions and views to this research. The chapter will provide definitions, illustrations and discussions essential to the research. In other words this chapter will be looking at similar studies that have been carried out on the same field and looking at perhaps where this research relates and departs from the several scholarly viewpoints that have already been asserted. According to Boswell and Cannon, (2009), literature review can be defined as a practice of reading, analysing and assessing intellectual materials. The chapter also provides a theoretical framework of the study.

#### **2.2 On the nature of Discourse Communities**

The notion of discourse communities emerged from the concept of speech communities. According to Hymes (1972) ‘speech community’ refers to a people who identify their language use as peculiar to others. Swales took up the tusk from Nystrand to further develop the ideology by providing the six components of a discourse community.

‘Discourse’ simply refers to language. Generally a discourse community is a group of people who share a certain common but peculiar language and membership in a discourse community requires a certain aspect of expertise in the common goal. To ease understanding of what a discourse community is one can refer to the six components provided by Swales (1990):

- i) A set of public goals
- ii) Mechanisms of intercommunication among members



- iii) The ability to provide information and feedback
- iv) The possession of genres of communication
- v) The acquisition of a specific lexis
- vi) A group of members with similar expertise about a subject

These six components show that a discourse community is a place where individuals share something in common and in this case its language. Swales (1990) propounds that a discourse community is group that has a set of common goals purposes who use communication to achieve these goals. He goes on to say that the environment is natural to the people and they would often not refer to themselves as a discourse community.

To Barton (1994) "A discourse community is a group of people who have texts and practices in common, whether it is a group of academics or the readers of teenage magazines. In fact, discourse community can refer to several overlapping groups of people: It can refer to the people a text is aimed at; it can be the people who read a text; or it can refer to the people who participate in a set of discourse practices both by reading and writing."

Herzberg (1986) propounds that "use of the term 'discourse community' testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups. The pedagogies associated with writing across the curriculum and academic English now use the notion of 'discourse community' to signify a cluster of ideas: that language use in a group is a form of social behaviour, that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge."

Johns (1997) and Porter (1986) argue that discourse communities might have common interests but not necessarily goals and they go on to give the example of a family and or

university. Porter (1992) contents that there is a 'public discourse community' and many others have suggested of an 'academic discourse communities'.

Swales (1990) describes of a discourse community characterised by written communication only which saw a number of questions being raised i.e. how bigger or smaller a discourse community is supposed to be like, if a discourse community only requires a speech in order to be preserved, if purpose is the essence of a discourse community and what the genres of a discourse community are. Among other questions raised by different critiques was one which argued whether a family scattered all over the globe but communicating through email be described as having a discourse.

Swales (1998) came back to the question and made a distinction between 'place discourse communities' and 'discourse communities' which are united both by speech and written communication. A number of scholars including Johns (1997) and Porter (1986) dismissed the issue of a discourse community having common goals as argued by Swales hence Johns contented that 'discourse community' is being displaced by 'community of practice', which was rather a term from socio-cultural theory than linguistics.

To Borg (2003) 'we do not generally use language to communicate with the world at large, but with individuals or groups of individuals...these groups are gathered into communities'. The boundaries of discourse communities are often obscure and often go beyond and many discourse communities have smaller more specialized sub-communities.

Several new concepts in discourse communities are still being brought forward. Mey (1998) argues that "the notion of the discourse community has rapidly evolved from that of a static group of experts with clearly defined roles. The discourse community is now perceived as a diffuse group of individuals with different levels of expertise and changing social relations, whose communicative needs more or less coincide at different points in time."

Tuebert (2010) propounds that "our intentionality, our consciousness, comes into existence by being a part of society, a member of a discourse community. We develop thoughts, feelings, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes in collaboration with others. Our intentionality is part of the collective intentionality of the discourse community to which we belong. Our mind is part of a collective mind."

### **2.3 The prison community as a discourse community**

Most research on discourse communities has mostly been done in academic environments for example a mathematics or literature class. This research aims to analyse the prison community as a discourse community and study the language used at Whawha prison complex in particular. This study shall analyse the language used in prison to analyse the prison as a discourse community. Halliday (1977) argues that "the language through which a group thinks and communicates serves to organize the experiences of its members, to formulate their world and social reality". Einat and Wall (2006) further suggest that the language that a community speaks serves a socio-cultural index of that community.

In linguistics the study of prison language falls under sociolinguistics and it is termed Prison Argot. Studies on the language used in prison have been carried out in several western countries especially America which has a vastly documented research on the internet on prison lingo.

The prison in general is characterised by a group of people who have a set of rules and practices that are common. In prison there are two distinct groups, the correctional officers and the inmates. Inmates use a certain kind of language that is called Argot. Cardozo (1984) connotes that guards have their own jargon and on occasion their own cant which however is not documented. Prison inmates are a discourse community that is held together by various

rules, uniforms and ways of speaking and the officers can also be considered as a discourse community. Thus the prison consists of several discourse communities.

According to Maurer (1981) “the language of sub-groups, subcultures and speech communities may include idiosyncratic expressions that do not exist in formal language of the larger society or borrowed words that are assigned new meaning”. The same can be argued about the prison community. The language used in prison consists of idiosyncratic expressions and borrowed terms that have a different meaning. It is this combination of new terms and the borrowed terms that formulate what is known as ‘argot’.

Prison argot or lingo is not formal language but rather slang used by prisoners. The prisoners are thus a part of a discourse community and have a set of common goals and purposes to fulfil hence the need to use this slang to communicate. Mulvey (2013) defines prison lingo as ‘primarily a spoken language; it can be written down but is not intended to be used for writing and so it has its special features’. Mulvey connotes that ‘cant’ is perhaps one of the oldest forms of prison lingo. Slang is said to be where ‘cant’ emerged from, however ‘cant’ is mostly linked with criminals. According to Asher (1994) ‘cant’ is “the restricted speech of the low often criminal classes of society”. The Cambridge Advanced Dictionary defines ‘cant’ as special words by a particular group of people such as thieves, lawyers, priests often in order to keep things a secret. For a long time ‘cant’ has been mostly used by thieves and its more or less street talk hence it results in the birth of prison lingo.

According to Becker (1994) ‘argot’ originally referred simply to the language of a brotherhood. Prison argot involves slang, ‘cant’ and jargon which are not new trends.

Prison lingo can develop due to two distinct effects. Haim and Einat, (2000), contend that recent prison scholarship is the use of the ‘endogenous’ and ‘import’ models of prison argot-creation. In the ‘endogenous’ model, imprisonment produces a prevalent circle language

amongst the prisoners and, to a lesser extent, the workers. Prison subculture and argot are as a result to various pains of imprisonment and deficit inmates suffer in custody. This means the endogenous model argues that the prison socialises inmates into prison life due to the way they are ill-treated.

The import model gives a different point of view. The import model, argues that the bullying of certain social groups gives birth to specific 'criminal world' cants and jargons. This model challenges the endogenous model argument in that it underestimates the importance of customs that inmates bring in prison from the outside. According to Irwin (1985) patterns of inmate language and behaviour form a more general criminal code that is imported into prison. Goodstein and Wright (1989) also argue that "inmate subcultures, norms, and roles are extensions of belief systems and norms to which prisoners had subscribed prior to entering prison and the inmate subculture mirrors prisoners perception social and personal characteristics"

One way of understanding a community is by learning the language used in that community. The same applies when it comes to a prison community. Cardozo-Freeman (1984) contends that "since language carries within it the values, beliefs, attitudes and ideas of a group, anyone speaking the language participates in the 'world-stance' represented by the language". In order for one to understand the prison culture one must understand the language they use and what it means to the people who use it. To Einat and Wall (2006) one can get to know an inmate by knowing how he or she thinks, interprets him or herself, his or her group and his world in his particular societal and cultural context.

Boundesson (1989) argues that inmates live, think and function within the framework defined by the argot. The argument goes on to suggest that the vocabulary supplies alternative names

for objects, psychological state of minds, personnel roles, situations and activities in prison life.

Argot brings interconnection in the lives of the prisoners. To Encinas (2001) the proficient use of argot is "one of the most important symbols of group membership among prison inmates". The use of argot among prisoners is for protection and secrecy even under the presence of intense surveillance. Cardozo-Freeman (1984) argues that it helps inmates to strengthen unity and counteract threat from without.

Just as members of corporations use their own language to define their status and rights code communication and argot allows prisoners to meet the same ends. To Einat (2002) and Sykes and Messinger (1960) the inmate's code includes informal duties, prohibitions, norms and structure of power that socialize prisoners into their new environment and determine their actual behaviour and status. The use argot reinforces the shared identity of the prison society.

According to Encinas and Gilbert (2001) "prison argot often varies very much due to the geographic location and related demographics; in their glossaries the southern states contain many Spanish terms-placa for guard, is one example while those from the North include many from African American slang".

Whawha prison complex contains two different prisons in the same complex which are medium offenders, which is meant for the older inmates that is those above eighteen and young offenders which is for the young inmates that is those below eighteen. These two prisons are separated and inmates from medium offenders barely mix with inmates from young offenders. This means that there are two major discourse communities at Whawha prison complex which are the medium offenders' community and young offenders' community. Within these communities there are sub-communities which are created due to different reasons.

Whawha prison complex is located in the Midlands region. The Midlands region is mainly bilingual and the common languages are Shona and Ndebele. As a result of this factor Whawha Prison Complex is a place with two dominant groups, the Shona speaking group and Ndebele speaking group. Referring to the import model there are two discourse communities in the prison that develop due to the fact of outside cultural norms and values which the inmates bring into prison with them, one made up of the Shona inmates and the Ndebele inmates. These two sides formulate their two different communities within the same place. In other words there are two sub-cultures at Whawha prison complex, and for this research they shall be classified as the Shona discourse community and the Ndebele discourse community.

It is quite common that when two tribes share the same environment the people of the same tribe usually stick together. This is quite visible even at the Midlands State University where there are two dominant tribes, the Shona and the Ndebele. One incident saw students from Bulawayo only renting one house to the extent that the house ended up being called the "Ndebele State", besides this incident students choose friends with regards to being Shona or Ndebele. This kind of attraction to one's tribe is the same thing that happens at Whawha Prison Complex. The moment one identifies himself as a Shona or Ndebele they are absorbed to their side.

At Whawha like most prisons there are gangs. Due to these different gangs the creation of sub-communities is strong as the gangs do not get along and so the creation of argot amongst the groups is necessary so as to maintain secrecy. Some gangs are created due to tribal issues; however some of the gangs are created due to the inmate's behaviour and line of duty in spite of one's tribe. Inmates carry out their duties in different places at different times and once one is assigned to work at a certain area he will be carrying out his duties at that place for quite some time.

Inmates are formally classified into stages depending with the crime they committed and with the number of years they have stayed in prison and these stages range from A to D class respectively. Due to this classification posited by the organization social groups are created as a result of this, this so because inmates spent most of the time with the inmates who are in the same class as they are. Each of the classes from A to D can be termed a sub-community as they share different codes of conduct.

When it comes to carrying out duties inmates are chosen in respect of these classes and inmates from different classes do not mix. The only exception is whereby too many inmates in one class are working at a certain place and time, and a few inmates from another class are chosen to help the officers monitor the other inmates who will be at work.

Due to these factors of classification, line of duty and tribal issues certain groups with common languages are created. Argot develops so that privacy can be maintained since inmates are almost always monitored by the officers. Maurer (1981) and Cardozo-Freeman (1984) argue that secrecy of communication protects inmates' privacy even under intense surveillance. In other words one of the major reasons for the use of argot is to perhaps find ways of easing duties and the inmates occasionally give each other signs so that they work in unity. Bondesson (1989) argues that inmates function in the framework of 'argot'.

In spite of the different issues which result in the many sub-communities being created at prison all the inmates share on e common language. All the inmates have a common enemy who is the correctional officer. The officer is the one who is not under any circumstance supposed to understand the argot used by the inmates as it might land them in trouble. All the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders keep a common code of conduct such that the officers will not be able infiltrate the world of prisoners. This common code of conduct is important to all the inmates, to Einat and Einat (2000) the code is directly linked to the process of



socialization and adaption to prison life. Cardozo-Freeman (1984) connotes that the secrecy of communication among inmates who share separate languages strengthens unity to counteract from without.

There is one common 'argot' at the Whawha prison complex which for the sake of this research is to be termed the official 'argot'. The research will henceforth not focus on all the different discourse sub-communities at Whawha prison complex but this common language used by all the inmates is the one that is being used to analyse the place as a discourse community. The research will also focus mainly at the medium offenders as it is the part which has a larger population and many inmates who have stayed in prison for a long time.

Most of the terms that make up the official argot used by inmates at Whawha prison complex overlap to street talk, Shona, Ndebele and English terms that means lexical borrowing is very dominant in the making of this argot. Whawha prison official argot borrows words from the outside large society language and give new meanings to the terms which is quite common when slang is created. Terms are given different meanings such that when the language users communicate it will definitely not make sense to a third party who is not part of the discourse community as the terms would mean something else. However the important factor here is that when the terms are used they produce meaning to the users.

"Acquisition requires meaningful interactions in the target language natural communications in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding"  
Krashen (1988).

The issue of lexical borrowing supports the import model of argot creation. Some of the borrowed lexical items are from English. Some terms on the other hand are created by the inmates themselves, there are quite a number of these and they help to make up the 'argot'. Such terms are new to anyone who has not been a prisoner at Whawha prison complex. These

terms however also overlap into the slang used by those outside the prison. This situation occurs when an inmate goes out of prison and would still communicate in the way he had been used to. This creation of new terms from within the prison supports the endogenous model of argot creation. New terms at Whawha are created to aid all the inmates whether Ndebele, Shona and to a lesser extent English. Ndebele and Shona are the two dominant languages and most of the new terms are coined from Ndebele and Shona.

The official argot at Whawha prison complex comprises of Shona, Ndebele and English terms. It's a mixture of these three languages with Shona and Ndebele being the most dominant in the creation of new terms. Some of the terms are also coined by joining words together. Most of the studies on discourse communities have mostly been focusing on academic, computer and political communities. This research thus seeks to take a different course by analysing the prison community as a discourse community. The research will analyse a Zimbabwean prison, Whawha in this case. The analysis will explore the language used by the inmates at Whawha prison complex mostly by the inmates and also to a lesser extent the language used by correctional officers.

The studies on prison language also termed argot have been carried out in most American states and Australia as well as Asia, and barely in Africa. Prison language has mostly been documented rather than studied but still not in most African countries and Zimbabwe is one of the countries lack documented studies of prison lingo something which this research will aim to achieve. The next chapter will focus on the theoretical framework of this research by providing the angle this research will be carried out.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework determines the researcher on the things to consider, it brings out the essence of the research being carried out. Selden, (1983), connotes that a theoretical

framework is a collection of interrelated concepts. The research will mainly focus on the language used by prisoners at Whawha prison complex. The research uses the 'sociolinguistics' theory.

#### ***2.4.1 Sociolinguistics***

Schmitt (2010) argues that the most obvious definition of 'sociolinguistics' is that "it is the study of language in society". Schmitt goes on to argue that there is a social and contextual dimension to every naturally occurring use of language.

There is a social and contextual dimension to every naturally occurring use of language, and it is always these social factors that determine the choice and form of what is written or said or understood Schmitt (2010)

Eble (2005) propounds that "sociolinguistics is the study of how language serves and is shaped by the social nature of human beings...sociolinguistics analyses the many and diverse ways in which language and society entwine". Wardhaugh (2010) argues that sociolinguistics is "the relationship between language and society...the various functions of language in society". In sociolinguistics the focus is on the impact of society on language. The theory of sociolinguistics has other theories that emerge from its concepts. Sociolinguistic theory studies how language varieties differ among groups that are separated by certain social aspects such as status, ethnicity, gender, and or age.

Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, with language as the starting point. Sociolinguistics also examines dialect. "Sociolinguistics is a fieldwork-based discipline" Schmitt (2010).

Heller (1984) argues that there are two branches of sociolinguistics which are 'interactionist' and 'variationist'.

'Interactionist' sociolinguistics is principally interested in what language use can tell us about social processes and therefore a central concern is

the social meaning of language use. ‘Variationist’ sociolinguistics is interested in accounting for linguistic variation and change, at least partly as a product of social distribution of language varieties” Heller (1984)

According to Baker (2010) “interactional sociolinguistics combines anthropology, ethnography, linguistics, pragmatics and conversation analysis to examine how speakers interpret meaning in social interaction”. This is the kind of approach that was used in this research.

Another hypothesis of sociolinguistics is that language is variable and changing. Baker (2010) propounds that “...there are two other important concepts relevant sociolinguistics variation and change”. The argument behind these elements is that language is not homogeneous. Variation can be diachronic or synchronic. Baker (2010) argues that “synchronic variation can also refer to differences between varieties of the same language...diachronic variation, however, refers to variation overtime”. The study relates mostly with synchronic variation.

Sociolinguistics is a fieldwork-based discipline. Researchers collect examples of language usage in their naturally occurring environments and study them in relation to the findings of other sociolinguistics’ research work. In this sense it is truly an example of applied linguistics: there is no introspection, nor impressionistic evaluation involved. Schmitt (2010)

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided several arguments from prominent scholars of what a ‘discourse community’ is. The chapter provided relevant literature review to the study and it also explored theoretical framework of the research as it provided the angle the study takes to analyse Whawha Medium Offenders. The chapter presents part of the situation of the area under study. This chapter also explores some of the internal and external factors of the place under study that are important to this study for analysis.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide a sociolinguistic description of the argot used by inmates at Whawha prison complex and by so doing analyse the prison complex as a discourse community. To Kathari, (1985) research methodology is a “structured inquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and create new knowledge that is generally applicable.” As a result of its nature the research will make use of qualitative research methodology as compared to quantitative methodology. Denzin, (1994), propounds that qualitative methodology is a study of things in their natural settings, which attempt to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Denzin (1994) goes on to say qualitative research intends to penetrate the essence which the subject of the research attributes to the topic being studied.

#### 3.2 Methods Used

In order to get this data the research used the following methods:

- i. Interviews (informal discussions and conversations: -with ex-convicts at Whawha Medium Offenders). The researcher was able to get hold of at least six ex inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders.
- ii. Personal observation (listening to the inmates communicating whilst they were on duty outside the prison premises). The researcher stayed at Whawha Prison Complex for a certain period.

#### 3.3 Interviews

Milroy and Gordon (2003) argue that “interviews fabricate qualitative data that can complement the quantitative data collected and analysed”. The researcher managed to get

hold of six former inmates at Whawha prison complex. The researcher engaged one-on-one interviews with some of the former inmates. During the interview the research used unstructured questions however the respondents were free to communicate and not necessarily guided by the structure of the questions. Group discussion was also used to gather information. It was hard to conduct the group discussion due to the mode of communication used. The subjects that took part in the discussion however tended to speak freely in the presence of people they are familiar with. According to Milroy and Gordon (2003) ‘‘the advantage of using a group discussion is that the researcher gets to know more about the subjects and how they talk’’. One of the disadvantages of group discussions is that the participants will frequently stray from the topic of discussion. The researcher however went a further step ahead and managed to conduct a one-on-one interview with one of the subjects and it proved to be fruitful as well.

The researcher decided to resort to collect information from the former inmates because it was easier to collect more information from these subjects as they did not speak under any correctional officers’ surveillance and the researcher could easily look up for this subject at anytime of the day. Studies that have been carried out in other countries on prison lingo have shown that the inmates do not give more information if the prison officers are around as they fear to expose their secret language which will in turn expose their secrets and so that’s why the researcher decided to use a different approach in acquiring information so as to access full participation from the subjects. Interviewing the inmates at Whawha medium complex would definitely require a correctional officer to monitor the process and so the subjects would not provide more detail.

### ***3.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of interviewing as a data collection method***

#### *3.3.1.1. Advantages*

- The advantage of interview as a data collection is that one is able to get first hand information. The researcher managed to get first hand information as the interviews were carried out with individuals who had experienced prison life at the place under study.
- The interviews also helped to create a good relationship between the researcher and the subjects (interviewees) and they became open and were not afraid to share information. This helped the researcher to understand some of the aspects of prison life at Whawha Prison Complex.

#### *3.3.1.2. Disadvantages*

- Due to the mode of communication one of the disadvantages faced in this research when carrying out the interviews was that the subjects would at times reply to the questions at their own schedule and time.
- The findings from the interviews carried out provided the information that was used in chapter four of this research.

### ***3.3.2. Mode of communication used to carry out the interviews***

Due to proximity the researcher used the internet to communicate with the subjects, through email and Facebook. Some of the subjects even responded on Whatsapp. The internet has been used for a certain period of time now to conduct interviews in qualitative research. The internet is usually useful when interviewing several people on the same subject who live in different places. Meho and Tibbo (2003) carried out a research and used e-mail interviewing to explore and model the information seeking behaviour of social science faculty and they interviewed 60 different scholars from 14 different.

The subjects used different networks of the internet in which they felt comfortable most with. Some of the subjects responded more on Facebook whilst the others responded through email and some responded to the emails through Whatsapp. Subjects who responded through email and Whatsapp provided more information compared to those who used Facebook.

### ***3.3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of email interviewing faced by the researcher***

#### *3.3.3.1. Advantages*

- Email interviews cost less to administer than telephone or face-face interviews and the researcher had free internet access which is provided by Midlands State University's wireless internet facilities.
- The researcher managed sent emails to the subjects at the same time.
- The researcher was able to communicate with subjects at anytime of the day.
- Communication between the researcher and the subjects was maintained up to the time the research was over because of this the researcher was able to refer back to the subjects at anytime for rectifications. The researcher was not restricted to certain period of time to associate with the subjects.

#### *3.3.3.2. Disadvantages*

- At times the subjects delayed in responding to the questions. The mode of communication did not aid urgency and the at times subjects were not quick to respond.
- Communicating with the subjects was sometimes affected by the frequency of the internet. At times the internet frequency was poor and



this delayed communication as the researcher had to wait for the frequency to improve.

### **3.4 Personal Observation**

Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study". Participant observation has been used for a very long time now in anthropological and social studies. Personal or participant observation is one of the methods the researcher used to gather information. "For one to overcome the observers' absurdity participant observation is often employed by the researcher" Milroy and Gordon (2003). It is fairly the case that the subjects would use the language in its natural context when not being watched or under supervision. In other words the advantage of personal observation is that the researcher was able to understand the argot as it is used by the inmates. The information collected by personal observation would be without distortion.

Inmates at Whawha prison complex carry out their duties in groups, at different places at the same time. There are inmates who work at the dairy compound, the garden, the dispensary, the plots, the herdsmen, the Midlands provincial court, at the workshop, the kitchen and the A class inmates who carry out their duties at the correctional officers homes.

The researcher conducted personal observation at the garden; the plots, the herdsmen and the A class inmates. It was easier to gather more information at these particular areas as the interaction with the inmates was easier. The observation at the garden and the plots was done without the knowledge of both the correctional officers and the inmates. Bernard (1994) argues that participant observation requires a certain amount of deception and he also notes

the need for anthropologists to maintain a sense of objectivity through distance. It was not easy however considering the presence of the observer was something bizarre and so the correctional officers would constantly check up on the inmates who made it hard for the inmates to communicate in argot as it would land them in trouble.

Personal observation worked effectively at the A class inmates who worked at the correctional officers homes as they would at times shout certain words to one another since they work under minimum supervision. These inmates were willing to provide information as well when the researcher would enquire to know the meanings of the argot terms the inmates would constantly shout at each other. The researcher would leave the inmates and rush to jot down the new terms and meanings. Participant or personal observation is just the same as carrying out an investigation whereby you should not show the audience you are dealing with your objectives lest they will not cooperate.

The importance of the personal observation was to see the information gathered during interviews in use. In other words the observation was meant to confirm the findings from the group and one-on-one interviews.

### **3.4.1 *Advantages and disadvantages of personal observation***

#### **3.4.1.1. *Advantages***

- The researcher was able to get hold of information at first hand and hear the language being used by its users in its natural context.

#### **3.4.1.2. *Disadvantages***

- The disadvantage of personal observation is that the researcher might have to be in the community under investigation for quite some time, hence it is time consuming and it

might require a lot of effort as the researcher would have to familiarise himself with the group under investigation.

- At times the researcher spent several hours hanging around the inmates and leave with very little information or without any at all.
- The researcher failed to interact more with the inmates as they were frequently under surveillance and interaction with the researcher was not allowed. Due to this frequent surveillance it was hard to observe the inmates.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the research methods that were used by the researcher to collect data that was used in the research. The chapter also highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of the methods that were used to gather data in line with the study. The researcher used interviews and participant/personal observation to collect data. The two methods used to collect data complement each other. The data that was found was used in chapter four of this research.

## CHAPTER 4

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data that was gathered through interviews, group discussions and personal observation. The chapter will show the data and discuss the reasons why the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders use argot when communicating amongst each other and analyse the structures of the words and phrases that make up their argot.

The data collected from the interview will be presented as follows:

- **SECTION A. AN OVERVIEW OF WHAWHA PRISON COMPLEX:**

This section will give a brief overview of the place under study.

- **SECTION B. PERSONAL DETAILS:**

This section will provide the demographics of the respondents such as their age, current occupation, area of residence and the number of years they served their sentences at Whawha Prison Complex.

**NB:** For the sake of privacy and confidentiality pseudonyms will be used.

- **SECTION C. WHY USE ARGOT:**

The purpose of this section is to examine the functions of slang for the group under investigation.

- **SECTION D. WHERE, WHEN and WITH WHOM DO YOU USE ARGOT:**

This section analyses the circumstances when the group under investigation feels more comfortable to use argot.

- **SECTION E. GLOSSARY OF ARGOT TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS:**

This section presents the lexical items and phrases that make up the argot used by the group under investigation, so that the researcher could have the knowledge of the words and what they mean in this particular context. The aim here is to show the speech patterns in order to analyse the group as discourse community. The etymology of the terms will also be provided.

The data gathered using the interviews was complemented by the personal observations.

#### **4.2 Detailed Overview of Whawha Prison Complex**

Whawha prison complex contains two different prisons in the same complex which are Medium Offenders, which is meant for the older inmates that is those above eighteen and Young Offenders which is for the young inmates that is those from the age of 15 – 21 depending with the crime committed. These two prisons are separated and inmates from medium offenders barely mix with inmates from young offenders. It is located in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe, 23 km outside Gweru along Mvuma road. Inmates are formally classified into stages with time and these stages range from A to D class respectively.

The focus of this research is on Whawha Medium Offenders due to the fact that it serves as a prison to the mature inmates and for a much longer period and so the inmates at the Medium Offenders get to experience more prison life than the inmates at the Young Offenders. More data could be deduced from the Medium Offenders subjects.

#### **4.3 Personal Details**

This section will provide the personal details of the individuals who participated in the research.

#### ***4.3.1 Population sample***

All the data was gathered was gathered through interviewing and group discussions. A mini group discussion was held with three former inmates at Whawha medium complex using Facebook. It was easier to work with a small group of people as it would increase attention and participation. However the participants did not participate fully in the session and were barely available. The three main respondents who participated in the data gathering process all served a part of their sentences at Whawha Medium Complex (pseudonyms have been used) one of them Taurai Gumbo (27) is now studying at Mpilo nursing school and served from 2006-2010, the other Timothy Chauta (28) is now working at OK in Budiro 5 as a security guard who moved from Khami Prison to Whawha in Sep 2008- Feb 2013 and the other one Evans Gomba (32) is now a lecturer and pastor at one of the Baptist church assemblies and he stayed at Whawha Medium Offenders from December 2007 – October 2009.

The issue of age and gender did not matter in this study as Whawha Medium Offenders is a male prison and all the inmates are supposed to be 18 years and over respectively. All the inmates use argot to communicate and this is so because all the inmates familiarise with each other only without looking at age and they do not want the correctional officers to familiarise with their language as they are considered to be enemies, unlike slang that is used by the people outside prison whereby there is a certain age expected to use slang by society due to its explicitness. Statistically 100% of the inmates' population at Whawha medium complex use argot.

#### ***4.3.2 Demography of respondents***

Of the three, two of the respondents gave more information and were much more cooperative. The interviews were not taken on a large population and so the response can be rated as higher, even though all the participants did not respond the information gathered was enough to carry on with research. One factor that resulted in some of the participants not responding is the fact that the researcher conducted the interviews through email; it was a bit difficult to hasten the respondents to hurry in responding as they would respond at their own time and schedule.

### ***4.3.3 Predominant language***

Shona 65%

Ndebele 30%

English 5%

### **4.4 Why Use Argot**

According to Deitrich and Graumann (1989) “language is something acquired for communication, as an instrument, as a tool, as a key component in socialization and development and perpetuation of behavioural codes, and ultimately as means of survival as a member of the human race”. Slang is a language that is common among certain people who use it and in general the reasons why people use slang to communicate vary; it could be just for the fun of it, to be fashionable, as a form of protest from societal norms, to be secretive or to belong.

Gregory and Carroll (1978) argue that the ideational function of language is related to the field of discourse. Doughty et al (1972) argues that “Field refers to the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs”. Argot is a secret language which is and has been common to criminals for a long time now and is quite popular in the prison community. This research

indicated the main reasons why inmates at Whawha medium prison complex use argot is, to be secretive and to belong or for group identity and solidarity. Secretive in the sense that the correctional officers are not supposed to know what the inmates will be doing at certain times as it might be something which is not allowed. Eble (1996) propounds that researchers on slang regularly argue that slang is usually used in informal settings. The important goal of language is to deduce meaning; one of the major arguments in Stephen Krashen's theory of second language acquisition is that the form of language does not matter as long as the subjects using the language understand each other.

#### ***4.4.1 Secretive***

One of the subjects in an interview argued that the inmates are usually under surveillance and it is hard to communicate with each other and in order to do so they need to have signs which the correctional officers will not understand. He went on to say that it is used for hiding the dissemination of information to the next person. As indicated earlier in chapter two, prison lingo consists of slang, jargon and cant. Cant is a language used to conceal meaning completely from those not accepted by the in-group. In the prison community the individuals who are not accepted in the group under study are the correctional officers, they are the major reason for the development of argot at Whawha Medium Prison.

Sykes (1958) argues that "the totality of the prison experience produces a unified body of prisoners who have a functional shared identity, group cohesion and solidarity against prison staff", the prisoners intent to communicate freely even in the presence of the correctional officers but do not want the officers to understand what is being said. Maurer (1981) propounds that "secrecy of communication protects inmates' privacy even under intense surveillance". One of the interviewees furthered on the issue of privacy of information by indicating that the correctional officers are not the only ones who are considered to be outsiders and argued that some of the inmates are considered to be outsiders. In the interview



the subject said that there are some inmates who are sell-outs and highlighted that such individuals are excluded from other inmates and are not meant to understand and learn everything.

The interviewee furthered his argument by saying that this results in the rise of groups among the inmates, however the correctional officer is the number one enemy of all the inmates and at the end of the day they are united by the fact that they share a common enemy and so the sell-outs are not deprived of everything by the other inmates.

#### ***4.4.2 To belong or for Group identity and Solidarity***

It is necessary to understand the language used by people in a certain community you are living in. Prison is a community that uses language in a peculiar way and so once one goes in prison he or she must understand how the people of the prison community communicate in order to fit in. Encinas (2001), argues that the capability to use argot is "one of the most important symbols of group membership among prison inmates". Results from the research showed that the inmates want to fit in with other inmates in order to ease the stay in prison. For an inmate to stay well in prison he should be able to understand the way of life in the particular prison as it is obviously different from that of the outside world. One of the interviewees argued that the inmates are able to interact together freely in secret language and the use of this language develops an identity for the group.

The language is only understood by the people who belong to this group and this was supported in the interviews with one of the subjects who argued that argot is a secret language that would give one the impression that people are talking of something when in reality they are talking of something else. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986) defines language as the carrier of culture, and so the same applies at the prison level just like any other community,

the language used in prison carries the prison culture and for one to be a part of this culture they should be able to communicate in this particular language.

Language is a tool of socialization and most sociologists believe that prisoners have a common identity. For the inmate argot is directly linked to socialization and adaption to prison life. The researcher also discovered that prison slang acts as an agent that strengthens relations among the inmates and increases solidarity. The inmates are unified by a certain code of conduct which discourages a non-exploitative relationship with the correctional officers.

#### ***4.4.3 A means of survival***

The interviewees argued that it was necessary for one to use the language of the prison in order to understand and survive the conditions of the prison world. Prisoners are always under the surveillance of correctional officers and so they need to find ways of easing life. In Britain the Prison Reform Trust in collaboration with the Prison Service provides a book called the *Prisoners' Information Book* to the new inmates so that they settle easily. Inmates have a code of conduct that makes it easier for them to survive the conditions of prison life. Kaminiski (2003) argues that “inmates who have been incarcerated for a long time have a conduct that is constantly changing such that it suits their needs”.

Fisher et al (1990) argue that inmates have a code that represents a shared and functional stand for coping with the prison environment. Relating to Kaminiski and Fisher's argument the researcher observed that the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders use prison slang to ease their duties especially when under surveillance and it can be used to pass a warning to other inmates. One of the subjects gave an example of when they use slang to get out of danger when they would constantly warn each other about inspection. The researcher also observed that the inmates who work outside the prison premises during the day manage to

smuggle some things that are not allowed in prison such as food, alcohol and marijuana. These goods are given code names such that when the inmates are talking of these things the officers will not understand what is going on and so the inmates are able to enjoy some luxuries and the code helps them achieve this goal.

#### ***4.4.4 Bilingual Situation and Cultural Variation***

Whawha Prison Complex is located in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe and there are two dominant languages in the province which are Shona and Ndebele. One of the reasons why 'argot' is used by the inmates at Whawha medium prison complex is due to this situation whereby the region is dominated by two languages and so the inmates need to share one common language as they are all unified and put in one community whether Shona or Ndebele. There is a language barrier as some of the inmates are either Shona speakers only or Ndebele speakers only and since they are supposed to be able to understand each other since they stay together they develop a common language.

One of the interviewees argued that when you are in prison other prisoners become your new family and so there is need to understand each other. 'Argot' is secret language used by criminals but it is distinct from prison to prison and so the argot used at Whawha Medium Offenders is peculiar to the inmates. This also brings out the issue of various cultures that are found at Whawha Medium Offenders. Though located in the Midlands the prison also carters for prisoners from all over the country and so the inmates need to create one common culture in order to co-exist, and the best way to share a certain culture is to share a common language and so the inmates develop the prison lingo. Bondesson et al (1989) propounds that "the norms and values of the inmate code form the core of an inmate subculture".

Through personal observation the researcher observed that there are inmates from Matebeleland, Midlands, Mashonaland and Mashonaland West. Whawha Prison Complex is

large institution and most certainly it caters for inmates all over the country. With the inmates coming from different areas they each come to prison with their cultures and if they decide to live like they used to whilst outside prison there would be a lot of problems in the prison as they would be division. Cultural cohesion is enforced through the argot they use which operates above the language and cultural barriers from the outside world.

From the information gathered through the interviews and personal observation these are some of the possible reasons as to why the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders use argot when communicating. The reasons shall be described below statistically

- Secretive 100%
- To belong/Group identity and Solidarity 99%
- A means of survival 99%
- Bilingual Situation and Cultural Variation 95%

#### **4.5 Where, When and with Whom do you use argot**

Information gathered through the interviews indicates that the inmates prefer to use argot with members who identify with their peculiar language and usually these are the other inmates. As indicated earlier in this chapter prisoners have a world and subculture that is created which the correctional officers are not supposed to penetrate and so the argot is a carrier of the cultures' values and norms, thus the language cannot be used when talking to the correctional officers as they are considered to be outsiders in this community.

One of the interviewees argued that argot is used very often and he referred to other inmates as colleagues. He went on to say that it can be used by inmates even in front of other people as long as those people do not familiarise with the language. All the subjects agreed to the fact that inmates use argot all the time and it is their code of conduct which they use on a day to day basis. Hayner and Ash (1940) argue that the prisoner does not live with the officers,

however, but with his fellow convict. They are the people with whom he eats, works, sleeps and talks with.

#### *4.5.1 Field of Discourse*

Inmates use argot everywhere as long as they are with other inmates; it is their way of life. It can be used anywhere as long as the ultimate goal is attained which is to convey the message and understanding. To Halliday (1978), field is the ongoing activity and function that the use of speech serves. The subjects argued that almost everything used in argot is appropriate at anytime especially in the presence of outsiders since the major function it serves is to disseminate information from the outsiders especially the correctional officers. The inmates are not affected by the place and people around them they can communicate in any environment as long they are together.

#### *4.5.2 Mode of Discourse*

Doughty et al (1972) argues that mode of discourse is “ the channel of communication adopted”. The channel of communication can either be written or spoken. The interviewees argued that the inmates communicate quite often through the spoken medium, written medium is also used especially when conveying important messages. One of the interviewees argued that there is risk in conveying messages through the written channel because if the correctional officers come along the letter or note used they definitely suspect a heist unlike using speech they just ignore it and take it as the norm of the prisoners.

#### *4.5.3 Tenor of Discourse*

Halliday (1978) defines tenor of discourse as “the relationship between participants”. In other circumstances issues such as age, social status, ethnicity and background would come in handy when analysing the language situation. The thing that matters the most in this case is the relationship between the participants and they are joined united by the fact that they are

all inmates. Prison is a society and the issue of social status also determines the interaction and use of argot among the inmates. Age does not matter as they are all defined by one thing which is the fact that they are all prisoners and their number one enemy the correctional officers looks at all of them in the same way. The inmates communicate in a certain way when they are together and if any outsider comes they revise their speech. Thomas et al (2004) talks of style-shifting and argues that “speakers take into consideration whom they are addressing and alter their style speech accordingly”. The interviewees propounded that the inmates can communicate in the common language that is without using argot and the moment a third party joins them they would shift their speech to argot or they might actually be communicating using argot and they would switch to the language which is understood by the person.

#### **4.6 Glossary of Argot Terms and Expressions Used at Whawha Medium Offenders**

At the end of every interview the subjects were supposed to write down the lexical items and phrases that the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders use when communicating and provide the explanation. The glossary of the terms and their meanings was gathered from the interviews and before they were presented in this chapter the research went on to undertake a personal observation of the inmates at Whawha Prison Complex.

#### **B**

Base – Mattress

Bhozvongo – An inmate charged with theft

Bomb – Something you have hidden from prison officers.

Boma – Prison

Bongirifaya – Peeping

#### **C**

Cash – Bathing Soap (Geisha in particular)

Censa – Razor Blade

Chakahaka – When every inmate goes to the fields to work

Chayi chayi – Mahweu (traditional drink made through fermenting sadza)

Chibhengebhenge – Useless person

Chibhonda – A person of no fixed abode.

Chikopokopo – Tractor

Chihandake - Kitchen

Chikepe – To escape from prison

Chikwerekwere – Cigarette lighter made from burnt cloth

Chitima – A group of prisoners who are working 2 usually the term is used to refer to inmates who are watering the garden in line form.

## **D**

Dambarefu – Serving life or sentence of not less than ten years

Dzokufa – Beans

## **G**

Gavhunga – Vegetables (which have been cut using a hoe)

Getsi getsi pascreen- opening statement when someone is telling a story or movie

Ginyabvu – An inmate charged with rape

Girongi – Chicken meat collected from the rubbish pit.

Gozhla – Groceries

Gwangwata – Bread

## **H**

Haghan – Prison

Haghan grooves – prison songs

Hero – A container used to carry sadza (Usually a dustbin)

## **J**

Jamzan – Prison officer

Jiti – Sellout/snitch

Jega mudhuri – Leaning on the wall when the officers are counting prisoners in the cells

John Cena – Word, rumour

## **K**

Kaza – Mercedes Benz truck used to transport prisoners. The windows very small in size with a thick mash wire

Kibheni – Prison/Correctional Officer

Kikita – House girl

Kucheka – Sexual intercourse

Kudhonza tambo – pretending to be sick or demonstrating

Kukitsha kitsha - laziness

Kumbakumba – UD Nissan truck used to transport prisoners. The windows are very tiny and have a thick mash wire. It is like a moving prison

Kule – Male Prison Officer

Kuzande - Prison

## **M**

Mawera – Leftovers of sadza or porridge

Makadhibhokisi – An inmate who leaks information to the prison officers

Mari – anything used for barter trade

Matabawo – Tablet

Mazhiya - Prison/Correctional Officer



Mavhiri mudenga – Punishment from prison officers (beating underneath the feet in particular)

Mbuya – Female Prison Officer

Muchini – Needle

Munyoro – New inmate

Musoro wechitima – Gang leader

Mutsara – Meat

Mutsunda Muchini – Needle

Mwana – Gay (male partner who takes the female role)

## **N**

Ngayaya – Marijuana

Ndege - a) Maniac (b) Mentally challenged person

Ngwera – Prisoner/Inmate

Noczim - Cooking oil

Nqondo – Female homosexual

Nzondora – Homosexual

## **O**

OK (Supermarket) – Rubbish pit

## **P**

Panze – Outside the prison parameters

Police – Snitch. An inmate who leaks information to the prison officers

## **R**

Razor – A small place to sleep on

## **S**

Segulanzi – Prison officer

Seridha – Cell

Shop dambu – Shoplifting

Stodart – movie/story telling

## **T**

Thornhill - a) Maniac (b) Mentally challenged person

TM (Supermarket) – Rubbish pit

TV – Window

## **W**

Whiters – Milk

## **Z**

Zvibhezhi – Hospital, clinic, dispensary

Zwiwanikwa/zvikejura/zvidekedeke – Illegal things e.g cigarettes

### **4.7. Characteristics of Whawha Medium Offenders Argot**

#### **4.7.1. Coinage**

Eble (1996) argues that slang exploits existing forms and their meanings in several ways. During the interviews the subjects argued that most of the words had other meanings but meant something else when they were being used by Whawha Medium Offenders prison.

#### **4.7.2. Lexical Borrowing**

According to Crystal (1997) lexical borrowing is “a situation whereby a linguistic form is taken over by another language and is usually known as a loan word”. The terms gathered showed that the argot used at Whawha Medium Offenders used a lot of borrowed words and it borrows words from the outside community and some from English. The following are

some of the terms and their actual meaning outside prison, which have been borrowed to make up Whawha Medium Offenders argot:

John Cena – American wrestler

Noczim – National Oil Company of Zimbabwe

Thornhill – from Thornhill airbase

Razor – Razor blade

Ndege – Aeroplane

#### **4.7.2. *Shifting***

De Klerk (1955) suggests that shifting is a process whereby Standard English words have shifted denotations. The data gathered showed that Whawha Medium Offenders argot contains a lot of word shifting. For example:

Bomb – Something you have hidden from prison officers

Cash – Bathing Soap

OK (Supermarket) – Rubbish pit

TV – Window

Police – Snitch

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter presented an analysis of the data that was collected through interviews and personal observation. The chapter examined the demographics of the respondents, how often the group under discussion uses argot, why and where they feel comfortable to use it most. A brief overview of the area under study was also provided in this chapter.

The study also presented the data that was found from the interviews and personal observation. The chapter provided a glossary of some of the terms and phrases that make up

the 'argot' used at Whawha Medium Offenders. Most of the words that make up the argot are borrowed from outside prison. From the data gathered most of the terms are in Shona and a few in English. The argot used at Whawha Medium Complex is characterised by more Shona words with a mixture of English words and a few Ndebele words.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide the researchers' conclusion based on the research. The chapter also provides recommendations for further research.

#### **5.2 Conclusions drawn on the aims and results of research**

The aim of this research was to analyse the prison community as a discourse community and analyse the argot used at Whawha Medium Offenders. The study's objective was to present data that would be used to analyse the prison as a discourse community and this was done by presenting a sociolinguistic description of the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders; providing a sociolinguistic explanation of why they use argot and its function to their lives whilst in prison and presenting the situation in which they prefer to use argot.

Hewings and Hewings (2005) argue that "a discourse community is a group of people who share particular 'registers' and use the kinds of text (both spoken and written) in which these 'registers' occur". Canagarajah (2002) contends that "discourse community cuts across 'speech communities' ". Speech community refers to people who identify their language as peculiar to others.

John Swales provided the six components of a discourse community which are:

- vii) A set of public goals
- viii) Mechanisms of intercommunication among members
- ix) The ability to provide information and feedback
- x) The possession of genres of communication

- xi) The acquisition of a specific lexis
- xii) A group of members with similar expertise about a subject

These components show the basic characteristics of a discourse community. Almost all the components prove that the prison can be defined as a discourse community. To draw the conclusion the researcher shall link these components with the place under study, Whawha Medium Offenders.

#### *5.2.1 A set of public goals*

From the results on the data analysis the research shows that all the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders use argot to communicate which is a language peculiar to them only. This is so due to the fact that they are all identified in a similar way and the issue of age or gender does not affect them. Prisoners use language to achieve certain goals. The results also showed that the inmates have a number of reasons for using argot which are: to be secretive, for group identity and solidarity, as a means of survival and for cultural coherence. Several scholars argue that the main purpose for using slang is to be secretive. Maurer (1981) propounds that ‘‘secrecy of communication protects inmates’ privacy even under intense surveillance’’. The inmates need to be secretive and language is one of their major tools to attain this goal. Results also indicated that argot is used as a means of identification and solidarity among the inmates. One of the purposes for using argot is for survival in prison; the argot makes life in prison easier. The research also indicated that argot is also used as a tool which brings together different cultures and creates one common culture. Bondesson et al (1989) propounds that ‘‘the norms and values of the inmate code form the core of an inmate subculture’’. The reasons given from the findings of this research are the set of public goals that the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders share.

### *5.2.2 Mechanisms of intercommunication*

Looking at the research from the empirical study results showed that the inmates use both speech and written modes of communication. Speech is used more often though and this is so because it is less risky to communicate through speech.

### *5.2.3 The ability to provide information and feedback*

It is easier for the inmates to provide information and feedback as they use a secretive language. Results showed that the inmates are able to communicate anywhere and anytime especially under surveillance.

### *5.2.4 The acquisition of a specific lexis*

Argot is language common to criminals but it is distinct from prison to prison. The researcher came across of quite a number of words and phrases that are peculiar to Whawha Medium Offenders. Some of the words are borrowed from other languages and societies but mean something totally different.

### *5.2.5 A group of members with certain expertise of a certain subject*

The prison is a place where prisoners are sent to for rehabilitation. Prisoners are also identified as criminals and they happen to share quite a number of things which include their way of life in general. Every inmate is placed in prison in a bid to rehabilitate them and so they happen to share common knowledge based on criminal life.

Linking Swale's six components of a discourse community with the place under investigation in this study, Whawha Medium Offenders, shows that the prison can be identified as a discourse community. As indicated in chapter two discourse means language and so the

results in the data analysis showed that the inmates at Whawha Medium Offenders have a common, peculiar language which they use whilst in prison.

### **5.3 Recommendations and Suggestions for further research**

This research attempted to analyse the prison as a discourse community and to do this the research also provided lexicographical and sociolinguistic description of the argot used at Whawha Medium Offenders by the inmates. During the research the researcher discovered that prison slang has been studied and documented vastly in Western Countries and hardly in Zimbabwe and several African countries. For further research these are some of the recommendations and suggestion:

There is need for further lexicographical and sociolinguistic studies on Zimbabwean prison lingo. The slang gathered should also be documented in books and on the internet. This would be important to the relatives of an inmate especially when he or she leaves prison as it helps them understand what the ex convict would be saying. When the inmate leaves prison certain traits and characteristics of prison life would be attached to him or her especially language and so to help with socialization process the relatives should take it slowly and the process needs to be carried out smoothly.

### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a conclusion of the study and the suggestions and recommendations for further research. The researcher concluded that the prison (Whawha Medium Offenders) is a discourse community. The inmates have a set of public goals, they are able to provide information and feedback, they have mechanisms of communication, they have specific lexis, they have certain expertise of a subject and they have genres of communication. Results from the research also indicated that the inmates have their own argot. With these characteristics Whawha Medium Offenders can be categorised as a discourse community.



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