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Tomorrow May Not Be Yours: Military Slang and Jargon as Linguistic Performance in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article explores the expressive use of slang and jargon by officers and men of the Nigerian Army in a bid to construct social identity, enforce discipline, and conform to work ethics. The study adopts linguistic ideology and community of practice theories which are complemented by the notion of style as performance to provide frameworks for understanding military subjectivities and attitudes represented by these emblematic linguistic resources. Data were sourced through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 30 participants. The study found that military slang and jargon help ease communication between officers and men as they index power, enhance solidarity, facilitate inclusion (and exclusion), and promote varied military subcultures. We conclude that situated language practices provide a site for linguistic creativity and the enactment of style that sustain meaningful relationships between personnel in the army. This linguistic practice, therefore, offers strong social capital in defining collective identities and professional belonging.

Keywords: Nigerian Army; slang; jargon; identity; community of practice; linguistic ideology; style; sociolinguistic competence

1. Introduction

Language plays an indispensable role in the day-to-day operations of armies the world over especially in national defence, intelligence gathering, alliances, occupations, and peace building. The language policies of many armies emphasise knowledge of foreign languages to facilitate effective military missions, intelligence, and strategies. Mensah (2019) argues that such policies are often implemented to ensure that the right language skills are developed to shape events, respond rapidly, and operate globally. The Nigerian Army emerged from an inherited colonial army (Abdulrahman and Mang 2017; Manea and Rulland 2012), and the English language was part of that inheritance. However, contemporary realities and linguistic challenges faced by the army in diplomatic missions and internal conflict situations have caused it to adopt functional multilingualism as its language policy. According to this policy, people who apply for recruitment or commissioning into the Nigerian Army are required to gain competence in English and the three major languages: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba (Mensah 2019). These are recognised as the thread languages in the Nigerian Army. French is a required subject in some career courses and examinations for army officers while Arabic, Swahili, Portuguese, and Spanish are required for peace-keeping operations and armed conflicts in other African countries (and beyond) to provide regional knowledge and cross-cultural training to personnel (Jones 2014). The Nigerian Army's new language policy does not accord an official status to Nigerian Pidgin but it is a language of wider communication in different sociolinguistic domains in the army, and best suits its multicultural and multilingual composition (Akande 2016; Mensah 2019). At the informal level, linguistic tools like slang and jargon, which are familiar and popular in the army's conversational style and in meeting different communicative purposes, are used. The informal linguistic practices in the Nigerian Army are the focus of the present study.

Slang is "an ever-changing set of colloquial words or phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesion within a group or with a trend or fashion in society at large" (Eble 1996, 11). It reinforces intimacy and encodes some shared experiences (Toivanen 2000), and is mainly used in an informal context which is exclusive to a particular social group. We conceptualise slang as a speech style with colloquial forms and expressions whose meaning is fluid. Jargon is a linguistic item or expression devised by a community of practice as a component of its social identity to address its peculiar communicative needs. Hudson (1978) describes jargon as linguistic forms and expressions used by professionals to emphasise high position and corporate identity. Jargon consists of linguistic signs created by in-group members that can only be interpreted, understood, and contextualised by the said group (Mensah and Inyabri 2016). In other words, jargon is invented by in-group members for meaning-making purposes. Grabarczyk (1989, 180) argues that jargon is "used in a professionally limited sphere of human communication." Jargon facilitates connection (inclusion), demarcates social distance, and delineates interactional boundaries (exclusion). Mensah (2021a) argues that such creative symbolic resources may be used to negotiate power and

control. Similarly, Storch (2011, 1) describes jargon as specialised codes or “manipulated language” which is an expression of difference and power. Its use is an attempt by the speaker to preserve some information from the “outsider” who may also be labelled as a “non-initiate.” It is important to note that the concepts, slang and jargon, have been used loosely in the literature as synonyms; in the course of history, jargon may evolve into slang (Galperin 1977; Leff 2000). The common denominators are that both language tools are communicative resources used by a social group to construct social identity and solidarity; they are emblematic resources to preserve secrecy and establish more efficient communication among their users in addition to being highly colloquial. However, while slang is more generic in use with greater expressive impulse, jargon is common to a specific group, and is deliberately mystifying and professionally stratified (Fields et al. 2008; Leff 2000). It is also argued that while slang is more playful and flexible in terms of meaning, jargon tends to have more technical content, and at times is full of abstractions. For example, *weed* is a popular slang term for marijuana in many social contexts while *double up*, which means run (instead of walking) is professional jargon in some military environments.

Over the decades, Nigerian military personnel have consistently been deployed to foreign operations, domestic peace keeping missions, and other humanitarian services (Emina and Ikegbu 2020). Such exercises are believed to provide a platform to generate slang and jargon to communicate peculiar military experiences and subjectivities. These experiences are significant aspects of their training given the assumption that war is an excitant that quickens, enlivens, enriches, and invigorates language (Howard 1956). Previous studies on military slang and jargon are scanty in the literature, particularly in the context of Africa and Nigeria in particular, which makes our research extremely topical. The thrust of the present study is twofold: it explores the social and thematic categories of Nigerian Army situated slang and jargon, and examines their contextual values to unveil how they are useful in the construction of identity, subjectivity, and the exposition of other military subcultures. The analysis is anchored on linguistic ideology and community of practice frameworks which have been supplemented by Coupland’s (2007) sociolinguistic perspective on style as a mode of performance and social action that is activated in the construction of social identity. The goal of the article is to increase understanding of the indexical features and esoteric ideology of Nigerian Army linguistic practices which are significant in the creation of military persona and their inherent social beings. The study further reveals language as reflective of expressive, evaluative, and emotional processes where multivariate identities can be negotiated and power dynamics richly enacted.

2. Slang and Jargon in the Military Community of Practice

Slang is believed to contribute new words and expressions to the lexicon of a standard language. Howard’s (1956) study of Marine Corps slang in the United States identifies the Second World War as the single historical event that contributed most post-war slang vocabulary which encompasses every aspect of civil life as well. Slang forms of

that era such as *axis*, *jeep*, *flak*, *Gestapo*, *alligator*, and *gremlin* have been conventionalised and adopted in standard usage both in writing and speech. Smith (2011) maintains that this shift in paradigm indicates an increasing openness for new words based on popular and current usage. The advent of modern military technology has also been identified as a source of slanguage in the military linguistic repertoire. Kurganov (2021) corroborates this position when he states that as the world is growing rapidly, technology and terminology in all spheres of life are also growing at the same pace, and this accounts for the changes in the military terminological base.

Military slanguage may be put to both positive and negative uses. Beyond its identity construction function, it may also be used as a form of sexualised or gendered language in constructing and reinforcing discrimination. Castro et al. (2015) argue that calling recruits “girls” and “faggots” as a form of motivation contributes to their further psychological distancing and objectification. One notices the sharp contradiction in the gendering of slanguage. It is meant to serve as a source of inspiration on the one hand, and an instantiation of abuse, on the other. As a result of its varying degree of expressivity, Mensah and Nkamigbo (2016) identify slang as a useful source of information for variationist sociolinguists. It borrows extensively from the resources of other languages, hence its status as a mixed or hybrid language. This also has far-reaching implication for language shift and maintenance.

Jargon in the military is structured to reflect its ideological orientation and power relations (Carreiras and Kümmel 2008). The codes are used to safeguard security, create a bond among personnel in life-threatening situations, and transmit information quickly in relation to military plans and operations. Uwen and Ekpe (2018) note that ideological construction is a prominent aspect of (para)military interactions such that the lexical forms and choices in (in)formal interactions are often organised towards social and professional communication. Disler (2008) also avers that the military speaks its own language where subordinates are schooled to decode positive responses even in frustrated circumstances to align with the institutionalised orientation. Another relevant aspect of military jargon is that it is used to exercise discipline (Gillespie 2012). Some of the jargon helps to impose rules and limitations which facilitate greater discipline and the ability to function effectively. Odebunmi (2016, 6) asserts that the prescriptive function of language is exercised in military sites where linguistic terminology is employed in “giving directives, orders and instructions.” This evidence emphasises the role of external motivations in military social and linguistic practices. Military jargon in this study is mainly created by resignification and is meant to bind personnel socially, enforce cohesion, and elicit humour among other situated functions (Axelrod 2013; Gillespie 2012; Inyabri, Mensah, and Ochagu 2022; Sabar 2018).

Amore, Adeyemo, and Orisadare’s (2020) study of the use of slang by military and paramilitary formations in Nigeria examined 70 forms and expressions which were categorised into slang items, localised abbreviations, and loanwords, and concluded that the use of these terms is designed to fit the communicative needs of men and officers,

and to prevent others from understanding them. They are also useful in maintaining group membership, identity, and solidarity. The study did not, however, contextualise the use of these terms from the nuanced perspectives and narratives of the participants in the study. This is the point of departure in the present study, to address this oversight. This justifies the framing of linguistic performance in this study as the actual use of language in concrete situations (Chomsky 1965). It entails language production and comprehension as well as contextualisation and variation. In this way, linguistic performance is a quality of styling practices.

3. Theoretical Framework

The concepts of linguistic ideology and community of practice as framed within linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistic literature have been adopted to drive the analysis and discussion of findings in this study. They are supplemented by Coupland's (2007) notion of styling in performance when the need arises. Linguistic ideology deals with a set of beliefs and attitudes about language as it defines a group's social world. Woolard (2020) describes linguistic ideologies as morally and politically loaded representations of the structure and use of languages in a social world. They link language to identities, institutions, and values in all societies. Linguistic ideology can also be understood as the feeling and perception speakers have towards their language in terms of what it represents and how it can shape their social universe. The relationship between language and ideology is symbiotically expressed. Language constitutes the locus of ideology; it is used to propagate ideologies of different kinds, and ideology is used to highlight the socially-situated uses of language (Mensah and Inyabri 2016). This demonstrates that one can hardly find a social context where language and ideology do not overlap. Kroskrity (2006) argues that language ideology represents perceptions of language and discourse that are constructed in the interest of a specific social group. Significantly, Woolard (2020) also argues that linguistic ideology is not only about language in all its manifestations but can also forge a link between language and other social phenomena such as identity, authenticity, universality, and personhood. This shows that ideology may emanate from the issues of power, social organisation, and hegemony which are entrenched by social interests or experience and are shaped in a particular cultural setting. Importantly, it also demonstrates that beliefs about language are mediated by the relationship between linguistic forms and social structures.

Irvine (2012) argues that ideology examines how people construe a language's role in a social and cultural world, and how their construal is socially positioned. Such understanding includes their perception of the language, ways of speaking such a language, and how the language can shape their social reality. For the participants in this study, slang and jargon have become ideological tools through which linguistic variety and processes merge with sociocultural dynamics. This is Agha's (2007) idea of enregisterment, which he defines as processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognised (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorised semiotic registers by a population. This implies that people use linguistic and semiotic

codes which were hitherto downplayed to index sociocultural meaning which is increasingly linked to a place or made more prominent.

The concept of community of practice defines a group of people with common interests, beliefs, values, and ways of talking in a specific domain in an attempt to advance knowledge about the said domain (Eckert and Wenger 2005; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2009; King 2014). This position shows that people can be brought together to form a community through shared practices, mutual engagement, and participation in varied activities and in their interactions with each other. Community of practice also provides the framework on how power is organised and exercised in everyday linguistic practices (Eckert and Wenger 2005). The claim is that power relations and conferment of power according to positions are significant conceptualisations of this sociolinguistic model. By virtue of being a tool for building and maintaining social relationships, language is used to establish a hierarchy of power. It is also demonstrated in discourses that favour a particular group over others and the power of language to maintain inclusion and exclusion. This aligns with the claim by Bruns (1984) that language is not a designation but a command and the aim of discourse is to have control over reality in the interest of the speaker and his (or her) pleasure. In the present study, the use of military slang and jargon functions within a specific community of practice. It is a stylistic practice in which participants have created distinctive ways of speaking with nuanced social meaning (Eckert 2008). In this respect, linguistic resources are sourced, adapted, and combined to construct novel meaning or available meaning may be modified to construct new references and significations in daily localised discursive practices. In this community of practice, there is sharing of interest and passion in the use of slang and jargon; there is daily creation and sharing of new knowledge to advance their professional training and a collaborative space to connect and conduct other social activities. Slang and jargon, in this respect, are indexical tools to foster this shared identity and collaboration.

Coupland's (2007) notion of styling-in-performance highlights variations within a language with specific social meaning. In other words, style is a social frame of language use that enables speakers to convey their attitudes and emotions towards the subject of discourse and the addressee. Eckert (2008) redefines style as a quality of indexicality. According to this position, linguistic variables index a social group and by so doing index certain linguistic traits associated with members of the said group. Style can also be conceptualised from the perspective of linguistic ideology. According to Irvine (2001), it is an ideologically mediated interpretation made by speakers in a social group. This shows that style is a local language practice held by members of a community of practice. Bucholtz (2015) argues that it is this ideology that connects the stylistic features of a group to its social relations. For Eckert (1996), linguistic style defines the patterned way of speaking that is peculiar to a community of practice. This characteristic speaking pattern indexes traits that are associated with a particular group and contributes to its construction of social meaning. It also demonstrates how language is used to negotiate relationships. In this study, style is broadly understood as a mode of

production and interpretation of slang and jargon in the context of interpersonal interactions. It entails the lexical choices, rhetorical devices, and other signals which language users employ to communicate and interpret other speakers' meaning. Slang and jargon are forms or expressions within indexical fields of social meaning (Eckert 2008) which can be interpreted and understood in the context of the linguistic tradition established in the Nigerian Army community of practice.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach that involved a six-month period of fieldwork at two army barracks in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, south-eastern Nigeria, situated in 146 Battalion, Eburutu Cantonment, and the 13 Brigade, Akim, usually called Eburutu Army Barracks and Akim Army Barracks, respectively. Thirty participants were recruited in the two study areas. They were consulted in areas within the barracks popularly called Mammy Market, where soldiers and officers engage in recreational and interactional activities after a day's work. It was at these places that we informed participants about the purpose of the research and defined their roles. They were selected using purposive sampling based on their willingness to participate in the research and coupled with their experience and deep understanding of military slang and jargon. Participants' demographic characteristics such as sex, age, rank, education, and religion were documented. Twenty-eight participants were males and only two were females. This unequal proportion in participants' sex was because female soldiers/officers were rarely found in Mammy Market after official working hours. Participants' ages ranged from 28 to 59. All participants were junior and middle cadre officers. Their educational qualifications ranged from First School Leaving Certificate, Senior Secondary School Certificate, Ordinary Diploma, and Degree. Fifteen participants were Christians and the rest were Muslims. All participants gave informed consent in writing for interviews, observations, and recordings.

Two ethnographic approaches were used in the data collection process: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Participant observation allowed access to participants' natural environment and facilitated close and intimate relationship with them in their communities of practice. The approach helped the researchers to learn about the use of military slang and jargon in the barracks through observing their contextual applications. As rightly noted by Bernard (1994), this approach involves a process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community. The researchers immersed themselves in the military community of practice to understand the subjectivities and socio-cognitive situations that give rise to the use of slang and jargon. We also studied the linguistic and social behaviour in the course of these interactions. An essential component of these observations was the recourse to informal conversations on how soldiers use such terms to create their social space and reinforce social division within the rank and file. It identified further areas for the researchers to probe and opened up other aspects of their linguistic performance like addressing women as men or men as women which enacts

gender inequality. This aspect of slang vocabulary is often taken for granted by both the participants and the researchers. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to gain access to participants' social world. It was through this approach that we sought to unveil the peculiarities of military slang and jargon, such as its origin, forms, and functions within the military circle. Questions were also asked regarding the situational contexts of usage and interpretative conventions of the slang and jargon.

Data in the form of interviews and observations were documented using a digital audio recorder. Field notes were used to record transcripts of interviews and participants' metadata, such as the place, date, and time of the interviews as well as contextual applications of military slang and jargon. Data were coded and categorised based on the emerging social themes, checked for accuracy, transcribed, and translated. The descriptive method is used in the interpretation, analysis, and discussion of data. It permits flexibility in the interpretation of naturally-occurring data and provides descriptive summaries and accurate details of the data collected (Neergaard et al. 2009; Sandelowski 2000). This method highlights the main features of the data and offers an in-depth analysis based on the participants' nuanced perspectives, narratives, and opinions, usually in their own voices.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the analysis that follows, we examine the core thematic categorisation of military slang and jargon in our data corpus in an attempt to explicate how these terms are used to index various military subcultures and subjectivities, and to determine how they serve to reinforce a sense of military identity. We provide a detailed analysis of the identified themes in military language and jargon.

5.1 Military Slang

Slang is an important discursive tool whose use covers a wide range of sociolinguistic domains in the army community of practice. For the purpose of our analysis, we focused only on slangy terms of address.

5.1.1 *Terms of Address*

The use of terms of address constitutes an essential aspect of military slang. The interaction between personnel involving the use of terms of address mainly aims to express differentials of power and delineate hierarchical boundaries. The terms of address are mostly derogatory and non-reciprocal in usage, and are bound up in dominance. Examples of such terms of address include: *Éwú* (goat), *Ótòndò* (a newly recruited and inexperienced soldier), *Animal*, *Guerrilla*, *Idiot*, *Baggar* (a foolish person), *Máma* (an old woman), and *Boy*. These terms can only be used by a superior to a subordinate. Based on our findings, they were meant to diminish the intellectual competence and capacity of the addressees. They were also used to express displeasure towards the behaviour of the addressees in certain contexts. This echoes the claim by Brown and Gilman (1960) that terms of address have diverse contextual variables such

as solidarity, power, and formality. In this study, terms of address were used discursively for the ideological construction of power and dominance because not everyone is licenced to use the terms reciprocally, given the sense of hierarchy in the army. These power dynamics are also observed in the addressees' reactions to the derogatory terms of address, as can be seen in Excerpt 1 below:

Excerpt 1

Speaker A: Ewu! You are a real goat. Won't you hurry up? Are you stupid?

Speaker B: Yes sir! Thank you sir! (Hurrying in the direction of Speaker A)

In Excerpt 1, terms of address (*Ewu*, goat, stupid) are used to enact a power differential between a superior (Speaker A) and a subordinate (Speaker B). Speaker A acted overtly towards Speaker B in a dominant way, not only by the use of diminishing terms of address but by the use of direct command and imposition which leave Speaker B with no option but to admit that he was a goat, and to thank his superior for addressing him as such, and subsequently hurried to meet with him. Ishikawa et al. (1981) identify this kind of interaction as power semantics which is a fundamental property of hierarchical characterisation of relationships. Based on this assertion, it is evident that the use of terms of address ascribes power and authority to social superiors, and establishes a sense of hierarchy and inequality. In this regard, slangy terms of address in Excerpt 1 are used to subdue and dominate, and to maintain power and dominance. The impolite terms and the non-reciprocal response from the subordinate suggest meaning reversal and accommodation of indecorous language in superior-subordinate interaction as the linguistic norm in this community.

From the account of community of practice framework, engagement between the interactants in the social context of Excerpt 1 involves a dual process of meaning-making (Wenger 1998). They engage directly in a dialogue that reflects their shared regime of sociolinguistic competence, knowledge, and experience and around which they organise their participation. In this way, we see the interplay of participation and reification where power dynamics are projected and enacted. The interactants in this dialogue share a common interest, assumptions, and awareness of social protocol which enliven their community. They used the strength of their social identity to reinforce their professional relationship as both were familiar with the linguistic repertoire of their community. This evidence, therefore, underpins the use of language as a tool of power (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002). Significantly, we have also noted the activation of style in the discursive frame in Excerpt 1. The superior officer utilises social positioning and embodied actions to index some form of regimented masculinity. This stance signals an investment in what Bucholtz (2015, 45) calls "stylistic agency" which claims that a style is not only an act of defining the self but simultaneously an act of defining others. The superior officer also deployed questions as a stylistic device in the communicative event in Excerpt 1 to broaden interpersonal distance, promote a sense of self, and enact power. Mensah (2021b) argues that such a stylistic strategy also

attracts semantic dimensions like respect and authority even in the informal context of the conversation. The subordinate, on the other hand, demonstrates submissiveness in order to reaffirm absolute loyalty to his superior. This state of affair shows how style is at work and how performance is indexed within a specific genre.

We identified gendered forms of terms of address in our data corpus which also constitute an essential aspect of military slang. They are represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Gendered slang terms of address

Slang	Gloss
Bush meat	A non-military sexual partner
Oga meat	Girlfriend of a superior officer
Donatus	A promiscuous female personnel
Hot tea	A girl who can satisfy her partner sexually
Angel Lucifer	A female personnel who offers sex to senior officers only.
Import	A sexual partner from another town
Ashe	A (female) prostitute
Sama	A beautiful lady

The slangy terms of address in Table 1 describe the character of women who offer sexual services to male military personnel. A number of assumptions can be made from the use of these gendered slang terms of address: first, they reinforce the subordination of women to male dominance (Import, Donatus); secondly, there is objectification, commoditisation, and portrayal of women as sources of sexual pleasure (Bush Meat, Oga Meat, Hot Tea). Importantly, there is the representation of heterosexual identity as the dominant sexual orientation in the army community of practice where there is mutual sharing of pleasure between sexual partners of the opposite sex. On the whole, participants used slangy terms of address which are gendered to construct and reproduce hegemonic masculine ideologies which perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination (Mensah 2021a). These terms also provide a window that resonates with their lived sexual experiences.

Another intriguing use of terms of address involved the adoption of male-gendered terms of address as generic terms for both sexes. Such forms of address include *Sir*, *Men*, *Boy*, and *He*. This practice constitutes a crucial aspect of sexist language defined by Vetterling-Braggin (1981) as any language whose use creates, constitutes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant distinction between the sexes. Participants had ambivalent attitudes towards this sexual stereotype in terms of address. One participant argued that these terms have a growing and expanding meaning that suggests gender neutrality and solidarity with female personnel in the force. According to this line of argument, although these address forms are associated stereotypically with masculine identity and solidarity, they are markers of generic professional camaraderie where both sexes are seen to be equal in all ramifications. Another participant maintained that the

use of terms of address with explicit masculine referents is a kind of social default because they specifically represent a particular sex and creates the impression that all soldiers are males. Warren (1994) corroborates the latter position by stating that the use of masculine-gendered terms of address (in the army) deletes the female segment of the profession and reinforces the assumption that only males are proper professionals. The forms further reinforce the masculinisation of the army even in its linguistic terms as a male (dominated) profession that celebrates courage, exploits, and gallantry. Generally, the adoption of this category of terms of address as generic terms informs attitudes and perceptions about the status and worth of female personnel, and contributes to clouding their visibility in the force. This evidence shows how forms of address have become a site for gender inequality, domination, and marginalisation (Inyabri, Offong, and Mensah 2022).

The linguistic ideology behind the use of derogatory and sexist terms of address in the army is informed by power dynamics. The terms are used to foreground a relationship between superior officers. They are markedly used to establish interpersonal links with women and foster professional connections with female colleagues. These terms of address mainly create an imbalance between rank and position, and indicate impoliteness and group cohesion (Unuabonah 2018). Significantly, this ideology also aims to exclude “outsiders” from the vocabulary of power that is prevalent in this community of practice. It also defies cultural conceptions of language use with respect to terms of address, where there is excessive regard for age, especially in the local mainstream culture where the study is situated. From the perspective of community of practice, the use of gendered terms of address constitutes part of soldiers’ participation in their community, and identity is often negotiated in the course of such participation (Eckert and Wenger 2005). Based on our observations, such participation further defines a relationship between participants’ linguistic behaviour and their social network. It also shows how terms of address define hierarchy, and enhance social relations which are useful in building participants’ social solidarity. These forms of address are linguistic styles that constitute a conversational ritual that can reinforce community membership, as this study discovered.

5.2 Professional Jargon

The use of jargon was widespread in the army community of practice. Jargon refers to rhetorical devices with variation in social meanings. The following analysis interrogates some of the thematic threads in participants’ employment of jargon as indexical discursive tools.

5.2.1. Forms of Professional Jargon

In the following analysis, we examine specialised military jargon which is related to military operations, welfare, and death. These are some of the topical issues of concern in the army community of practice.

One of the primary duties of the army is to defend the territorial integrity of a country from external attack and aggression thus preserving human lives, property, and national security. Over the years, the Nigerian Army has deployed troops to military operations overseas and responded to domestic conflict situations at home such as the Boko Haram insurgency, agitations for self-determination by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), various acts of terrorism, banditry, and cattle rustling in many parts of the country. In these military operations and missions, jargon plays an indispensable role in enhancing cooperation and understanding. Barnes (2008) asserts that such military operations influence language change in various ways, and are responsible for the creation of new words and expression. Based on our findings, military jargon is used to describe the opposing side(s) during conflict situations (Thorne 2006), and to prepare soldiers linguistically for the challenges of the mission. Table 2 demonstrates examples of jargon related to military operations.

Table 2: Jargon for military operations

Jargon	Gloss
Langa-langa	Early morning parade
Assault	Take the battle to the enemy's camp
Double up	Run faster
Active army	Personnel on duty post
Day room	A relaxation spot for soldiers
K9	Military battle dog
Fruit salad	Medals worn on uniform
Alert	To be psychologically prepared for an emergency
Klick	Distance to a battle ground in kilometres
Dash down	Hide
Rack ops	Short permissible time for a nap during warfare
Iron assignment	An assignment that is tougher than a subordinate
Blue falcon	A betrayer

Bucholtz (2015, 46) calls these codes “social signs” which have been reassembled into new configurations which are put to new semiotic use as they travel into new contexts. Apart from *Langa-langa* which is coined from Nigerian Pidgin, other forms and expressions are derived from English and are given new twists in meaning which defines a stylistic feature of resignification. The ideology of using jargon, according to the participants, links soldiers' social experiences to their professional interests given the specific contexts in which they operate. This ideology therefore becomes a source of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991) in which soldiers orient to their social world. It has also been noted that the multilingual and multicultural composition of the Nigerian Army has facilitated the reinforcement of this linguistic capital.

It is widely believed that welfare is essential for warfare (Mittelstadt 2018). Every military formation has a system of support to compensate for the rigour and sacrifice of

military life. According to a participant, the welfare activities of the Nigerian Army include health care, financial assistance, and housing schemes which have been floated to enable soldiers to perform maximally in good health and in a favourable environment. As a result of the importance of welfare to the army as an institution, participants have invented jargon with which they express their subjectivities about their welfare concerns and social engagements. Such jargon is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Jargon related to welfare and social engagements

Jargon	Gloss
Frock	Promotion without pay
Subsistence	Allowance for food during operation
May Day	The day salaries are paid
Boye	Solid food
Fags	Anything that can be smoked
Dinning out	An event a soldier can attend with a spouse
Book of record	Accumulated misbehaviour of a subordinate
Regrets only	A soldier is unable to attend an event
Pass	Permission to be away for some time

Some of the jargon in Table 3, for example, *frock* and *subsistence* are used by participants to express their discontent with their poor welfare packages, and the way the system maltreats them. *May Day* is derived from the International Workers' Day which is celebrated on 1 May each year in many countries of the world to commemorate the gains and struggle of workers and labour movements. A *book of record* details a subordinate's inappropriate behaviour in the assessment of their superior, and a *pass* is an official permit from one's unit to be away from the battlefield for a period of two weeks. This speech repertoire is a product of shared knowledge and experience in the army's community of practice and is useful in the negotiation of meaning. It helps participants to understand what matters to them, and how they can engage with each other productively.

Death is an inevitable end for all mortals, and the risk of death and grief is higher in the army. Participants believed that as human beings they have strong emotional reactions to death but their call to duty has taught them to view death not as a loss but as a peaceful transition that may come unexpectedly. One participant argued that death is a facet of their work rigour and training and what they value most in the army is the concept of "dying with dignity" or "dying courageously." Given the perception of death as an immaterial phenomenon in the army, jargon has also been mobilised as a meaning-making resource to talk about it in this community of practice. Examples of death-related jargon are demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Jargon related to death

Jargon	Gloss
KIA	Killed in action
Obedience in pain	An assignment that may take one's life
Supreme price	Death in a battle
Kpai	Death outside battle
Greet one's ancestors	To die
Kiss the boot	To die
Tomorrow may not be yours	One (a soldier) may die at any time

Based on our observations, the data in Table 4 are entirely novel constructions in comparison with death-related jargon in mainstream society. This is because military jargon does not build on the foundation of existing social meanings but relies on its peculiar experience, and shared semantic field. It echoes the claim by McGroarty (2008, 99) that “linguistic practices of a group are not merely contingent but represent the essence of the group.”

In the ensuing analysis, we use an interactional sociolinguistic approach to contextualise military jargon which is used intersubjectively in the military social landscape to manage social activities, construct stance, style, and performance within the confined space of this community as participants interact.

Excerpt 2

Speaker A: It's hard to win battles with *blue falcons*.

Speaker B: That's the job of the intelligence.

Excerpt 3

Speaker A: We thank God for your promotion.

Speaker B: There's no joy. That is a *frock*.

Excerpt 4

Speaker A: Have you heard from your course mate, Sule (pseudonym)?

Speaker B: *KIA*, so bad!

Anyone who is not initiated into the army community of practice can hardly make sense of (i.e., interpret and comprehend) these jargon. Eckert (2004, 44) refers to these codes as “stylistic resources by virtue of their place in local discourse.” In Excerpt 2, Speaker A uses *blue falcons* to frame the issue of betrayal in the army during warfare. He constructs a stance that is clear and pervasive, and which condemns traitors and acts of backstabbing in military operations. Speaker B supports this ideological position by emphasising that it is the responsibility of the intelligence unit to forestall the activities of betrayers during such operations. This analysis reveals the use of *blue falcons* as a valuable rhetorical strategy to convey interpersonal meaning (Martin and Rose 2003) and construct a stance that strengthens participants' level of commitment to the course of their duty. The indexical style shared by these interactants has linked the semiotic

sign, *blue falcons*, to a context-specific social meaning (Bucholtz 2015), which also underlies the construction of identity.

In Excerpt 3, Speaker A congratulates Speaker B on the latter's promotion. Speaker B, however, seems to be unhappy with the promotion because it was not accompanied by any financial benefits or pay increase. In other words, it was a dry promotion.

In Excerpt 4, Speaker A enquired about Speaker B's old course mate, and was informed that he was killed in action (KIA). This jargon is built on a style that uses abbreviation in communicating social meaning. For obvious reasons, this jargon is utilised as a euphemism to lessen the emotional impact of death on the consciousness of Speaker A. Speaker B uses this innovative and conventional element to sound more cautious in dealing with the sensitivity of a subject like death in order not to create some distressing mood. This style involves the use of balance to make death less harsh.

6. Conclusion

Relying on linguistic ideology and community of practice frameworks as they have been framed in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology literature, this study explored the intersubjective roles of slang and jargon among a sample of Nigerian Army personnel in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, south-eastern Nigeria. We identified the relevant thematic categories of slang and professional jargon that embody military values like hierarchy, respect and courage, and warfare philosophy. These forms and expressions are used to perform a number of socio-cognitive functions in the army's community of practice. First, they manifest power and dominance as essential traits in the institutional structure of the army in defining social status and professional rank or position. They are used to communicate nuanced experiences in individuals' everyday interpersonal relationships. To place it in a broader context, slang and jargon are also useful in constructing social identity and in indexing varied military subcultures and subjectivities. They are tools for belonging and exclusion; while they enable personnel to fit into their community of practice, and confer social personality on them, they exclude other individuals who do not have the required linguistic knowledge to make meaning of them from their social relations and institutions. The use of these symbolic and indexical linguistic resources, therefore, offers strong social capital in defining collective identities and professional belonging.

This study has demonstrated how linguistic ideology is a useful framework for understanding the motivations of Nigerian Army situated language practices. There are recurrent motifs like the register of power, courage, respect, perseverance, and warfare which are articulated and embodied in individual social practices and linguistic performances, and in the institutional structure of the army as a whole. This confirms the description of linguistic ideology by King (2000) as the mediating link between language use and social organisation. We have seen the use of resources from Nigerian English, Nigerian Pidgin, and Nigeria's indigenous languages in the construction of these forms and expressions which have served significant social, cognitive, and

pragmatic functions. The community of practice framework has set the parameter for social practices where language is reproduced and reconceptualised through different forms of participation and engagement in localised daily interactions (Mensah 2021c). It is evident that participants in this study share certain values and norms, learn together from each other, and share tacit knowledge of their professional challenges. Community of practice, therefore, enables insights into the inner workings of their discourse-driven formation and maintenance (King 2014). It also shapes and sustains their social interactions. The army's community of practice is a fertile ground for linguistic creativity especially in the construction of new meanings and styles. The deployment of style helps to understand power and solidarity relations in linguistic performance. It also expands knowledge and awareness of linguistic choices and the expression of social meaning. Situated language practices in this context are useful in defining the structural conditions of individuals' daily existence. This study increases knowledge of language as reflective of cultural and social processes, and evaluates the use of slang and jargon by military personnel as a participatory mechanism to shape their social conditions and define their ethical values and principles as core professionals.

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