It's better to die before dishonour: Linguistic creativity and the negotiation of meaning in the Nigerian Army community of practice

Eyo Mensah[1,*], Beatrice Oreoluwa[2], Offiong Ebong[3], Benjamin Nyong[4], God'sgift Uwen[3]

[1] Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA), University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

[2] University of Lagos, Lagos 101017, Nigeria

[3] University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

[4] Arthur Jarvis University, Akpabuyo 541103, Nigeria

* Corresponding author: Eyo Mensah, eyoomensah2004@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: This article investigates emblematic language use and the negotiation of meaning with particular emphasis on generative mechanisms like jargon and slang in two Nigerian Army barracks in Calabar municipality, Cross River State, south-eastern Nigeria. The study is anchored in a linguistic ideology framework which is grounded in beliefs and values people have towards explicit and implicit language use in a particular communicative context. Drawing on qualitative ethnographic data sourced through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 30 participants who were purposively sampled, the authors argue that jargon and slang are indexical linguistic resources that enable military personnel to create diverse new meanings in the informal linguistic ecology of the army. We conclude that beyond helping to create a new linguistic convention in the barracks, jargon and slang also facilitate the construction of professional identity, enact inclusion/exclusion and sustain dominant values and professional ethos. The study focuses on ways of interpreting the specificity of the military world and the reality of dominance through the prism of these linguistic specimens. Jargon and slang, therefore, offer a firmer lens to appreciate the army's social universe and subjectivities, and more broadly to enhance an understanding of contextually embedded social practices in the military.

KEYWORDS: linguistic creativity; identity; slang; jargon; Nigerian Army; community of practice; linguistic ideology; military sociolect

1. Introduction

Linguistic creativity entails a process of making new meaning; recreation and re-interpretation of meaning in all forms and in all mediums (Zawada, 2006). One of Chomsky's (1965) postulations in generative grammar is the ability of a native speaker of a language to create infinite well-formed structures using a set of finite rules. This view emphasises the limitless creative potential of the human mind in generating linguistic structures. Zawada (2006) identifies this predictable productive mechanism in language as structural creativity as opposed to conceptual creativity which deals largely with unpredictable word creation strategies, and which is purely a semantic innovation. It is this latter categorisation of linguistic creativity that jargon, idioms, slang and metaphors belong. According to Hudson (1978), jargon describes a linguistic form or expression used by professionals to emphasise

corporate identity. In other words, jargon is a linguistic sign that is created by in-group members, interpreted, understood and contextualised by the same group members. A jargon is defined as "a technical terminology or characteristic code of specialists working in a particular activity or area of knowledge" (Lindsley, 1991, p. 450). Jargon is also common in scientific vocabulary and plays a crucial role in the development of professional communication. The essentiality of jargon is commented on by Hirst (2003) who remarks that jargon is fundamental for designating new entities for which (existing) language has no name. Further, it permits economy, accuracy and precision which is required in scientific research. In defining the term slang, Eble (1996, p. 11) claims it 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". This bears some relevance in the military community of practice because it enables soldiers to express their views and feelings about their experience of life.

It has been argued that some of the terminologies inherent in military jargon and slang were coined during the Vietnam War (1940–1944) and later in the activities and interoperability of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) for the purpose of communication among personnel from different linguistic backgrounds who were not very knowledgeable in English (Atkinson, 2007; Chambers, 2000). The regular participation of personnel in military operations and domestic conflict situations becomes fertile linguistic sites for the coinage of military jargon and slang. Military jargon and slang are integral aspects of military restricted communication given the tactical nature of its operations. There is widespread use of such codes among other militaries around the world. Liaw et al. (2013) assert that jargon and slang are specifically used during tactical military exercises and training. These codes are also often used as sexualised discourses. Jargon and slang are used in the military as gender representation strategies which are enacted in songs and chants. Attenborough (2013, p. 223) maintains that such songs "demonstrate how discourses allow for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which gender cuts across, and inflects processes of sexualisation". These stereotypes are often re-echoed not only to boost personnel morale during walkouts and exercises but also to represent the military as a powerful institution where male hegemony is constructed and sustained (Uwen and Ekpe, 2023).

In the Nigerian Army's informal spaces, linguistic tools such as jargon and slang play significant roles in the creation of meaning and enactment of conversational style which are used in meeting different communicative functions. These are colloquial terms or expressions which are unique to the military community of practice (Mensah, 2019a). They evolved over time with the involvement of the military in different missions and operations. Jargon and slang in the Nigerian Army are considered to make communication especially at the informal level more efficient; enhance solidarity and facilitate inclusion and exclusion. Uwen and Mensah (2022) propose that such language use sustains meaningful relationship between personnel, and provides a site to sanction the creativity of language. Access to the regimented environment of the army community of practice is usually an impediment to researchers. The dearth of studies on military language is as a result of the lack of accessibility to regimented military sites which hampers the ability to scrutinise the way knowledge in the military arena can impact society and policy (Carreiras, 2006; Carreiras et al., 2016; Disler, 2008). This is a crucial gap in the literature the present study aims to fill. This article sets out to investigate military subjectivities through the prism of jargon and slang to unpack salient ideologies and pragmatic features that are encoded in these symbolic linguistic resources, and how their use constitutes a unifying practice for consolidating military identity and professional belonging (Bucholtz, 2012). We offer a new explanatory approach for understanding military sociolect and ideology that connect military subcultures to their social relations and engagements.

2. Literature review

Jargon and slang in the military

Slang as an aspect of situated language use shares some commonalities with jargon. First, both are outcomes of different social and cultural production. They are deeply used by social groups to negotiate power and control as well as to construct identity and solidarity (Mensah, 2021). They are also used to enact inclusion and exclusion, thus to keep social "outsiders" from knowing some elements of a group's internal communication. Uwen and Mensah (2022) argue that both are symbolic linguistic resources which can be manipulated to serve specific group interests. Military jargon and slang are integral components of the linguistic exigencies devised by, and used for in-group communication, tactical operations, and strategic activities of militaries globally. Jargon and slang are in the category of colloquial expressions often restricted to specific social contexts with the aim of achieving specific communicative purposes (Allen, 1990; Mahdi, 2016; Mensah, 2022a). Characteristically, such expressions are typically localized and largely verbal, and where the forms are coined, the meanings could be generalised, extended, changed or substituted, with the value of sharing intimacy and solidarity in interpersonal communication (De Klerk and Antrobus, 2004; Eble, 1996; Leech and Svartvik, 2002). Mattiello (2008) adopts four approaches to the description of jargon and slang. One dimension is the sociological approach which is concerned with a group's social identity and cohesiveness; the linguistic approach shows the distinctiveness of the structure and meaning of the forms; the stylistic approach depicts the devised lexical items as style of language use and the lexicographic dimension looks at jargon and slang as colloquial and informal vocabulary. These descriptive categories portray jargon and slang as linguistic properties of social groups and professions.

Military language is borne out of the conscious attempt to construct the reality of the military's particular professional identity (Asher and Simpson, 1994; Hanaqtah, 2016). The language is immersed with "technical terms, acronyms, abbreviations, specialized terminology, and internal jargon and slang" (Murray, 1986, p. 126). Military jargon and slang are colloquial expressive constructs, devised and utilised for esoteric reasons; to designate military concepts and ideology and to foster interpersonal relationships. The terms are used to include and bond group members thus "creating and intensifying psychological and social unity among group members" (Murray, 1986, p. 126) or exclude or disconnect the significant other. Historically, military jargon and slang are believed to have originated prominently during the World Wars 1 and 11 (Funk, 1978). These wars created a host of words and phrases, many of which are still in active use in everyday life of the military (McCrum et al., 1986). These wars undoubtedly created and circulated more jargon and slang than any other historical event that has had impact on military language (Lighter, 2005; Battistella, 2005). However, military jargon and slang have developed and spread over the years because of the rapid changes in military warfare and operations. The expansion of a military's local and international peacekeeping mandate, advancement in technology and use of modern weaponry, have impacted on the creation and spread of jargon and slang that vary cross-linguistically in many military linguistic ecologies (Hanaqtah, 2016; Jeffords, 1989; Murray, 1986). It is also found that different militaries have devised jargon and slang to communicate the peculiarities of the environment they operate. For instance, Jeffords (1989) observes that the U.S. and Canadian militaries resemanticised lexical items drawn from their sociolinguistic environments to attend to their varied communication needs. The author provides such examples in the U.S. Navy as: *walking mattress* (a female marine), *Navy issue ass* (a female Navy staff with large buttocks and/or breasts), *dorm hoe* (a promiscuous female Navy personnel) and *sea donkey* (a female sailor). The examples in the Canadian Navy include terms such as *barracks rat* (a servicewoman who engages in transactional sex), and *split ass* (a female Navy recruit). In a male-

dominated arena, these slangs involve the use of gendered address terms to label women as a way of sexualizing female professional conduct. The linguistic elements employed here have shifted meanings in the military community of practice. Cook (2013) maintains that slang in the Canadian Army represents the vibrant oral military culture that distinguishes it from the civilian population. The deployment of slang has helped to create wider communication domains to ease military operations in the Canadian Army context. Hanaqtah's (2016) study on slang used during the U.S. military operation in Iraq presents examples such as: *fighter jock* (an Air Force fighter pilot), *grunt* (infantry or marine soldier), *grease pot* (a cook), *top brass* (the highest-ranking officer), *Joe* (an Army recruit) and *flag flasher* (an off-duty soldier who wears his uniform in the midst of civilians). Slang embeds recurrent motifs like register of power, courage, respect and warfare principles which are articulated in collective social practices (Uwen and Mensah, 2022). In Australia, military jargon and slang follow the tradition of British military culture to create forms that describe its operations and activities (Garfield, 2014). The patterning is within the in-group intelligibility of its users. User (2012) investigates Turkish military jargon and slang which reveals that the pattern follows a deliberate metaphorisation of lexical items to represent military exploits and affairs. These figurative colorations facilitate soldiers' deep engagement in combative assignments.

The language of militaries in Africa also has components of jargon and slang. In the South African military, slang-type expressions are used to improve communication, understanding and interpersonal relationships (Picard, 1993). Adika and Kevogo (2014) maintain that in East Africa, the military borrowed from the dominant Kiswahili language to form its jargon and slang. Examples of this are: *vita* (war), *ngao* (shield), *risasi* (bullets), and *mtutu* (barrel), resemanticised lexical items from Kiswahili that are used in military warfare lexicon. It is also reported that the army promoted certain slang-type expressions to legitimize military coups in Gambia, and borrowed the language of the Acholis to create slang used by Ugandan military (Amone, 2014; Wiseman, 1996). The common features in military jargon and slang are that they are regimentally productive, flexible, restricted, and secretive, and are also key instruments for social inclusion, exclusion and cohesion (Hanaqtah, 2016; Mahdi, 2016; Saber, 2018). Beyond these metapragmatic functions, they also promote solidarity and discipline within the regimental space of the military (Uwen and Ekpenyong, 2022; Uwen and Mensah, 2022). Liaw et al. (2013) assert that the terms are specifically meant to account for the multiple aspects of military exercises. These exercises ranged from warfare, exploits, ideological construction, intelligence gathering and sharing, intragroup relationships and military-civilian cooperation.

The language situation in the Nigerian Army's sociolinguistic landscape has received little attention in the literature. Mensah (2019a) critiques the compulsory introduction of Nigeria's major spoken languages, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba as the official languages in army training, intelligence and peacekeeping at the expense of minority languages. It is also argued that such a policy will deny speakers of the lesser-known languages their fundamental linguistic rights and compromise the unity of the deeply heterogeneous composition of Nigeria. It therefore calls for the strengthening of the capacity of Nigerian Pidgin to meet the emerging sociolinguistic challenges facing the army. The multilingual setting of the Nigerian Army barracks is the concern of Akande's (2016) study which profiles the linguistic ecology of numerous army barracks in Nigeria and concludes that most soldiers are functional multilinguals who use different languages to suit different communicative ends and construct professional, religious and ethnic identities. Bamigbola (2022) also offers a pragmatic interpretation of the creative language of the army parade ground, and reports that such a language is garnished with verbal and non-verbal codes in communicating meaning. The author maintains that alerting, informing and commanding acts are the key pragmatic strategies in the army parade discourse. From these accounts, it is evident that the Nigerian

Army is a highly multilingual army that utilises language in both formal and informal contexts as determined by social and interactional engagements. Jargon and slang are parts of the linguistic repertoire of the army mainly in the informal setting which shape the soldiers' social universe.

3. Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in the linguistic ideology framework which is concerned with locally constructed views, beliefs, opinion and conceptions that speakers have towards their emic language practices. Silverstein (1979, p. 193) argues that language ideologies are "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use". This implies that ideologies are assumptions held about a language, its speakers and situated sociolinguistic uses. Irvine and Gal (2000, p. 36) maintain that communicative discourse is "held by immediate participants in a local sociolinguistic system" which links language to identity norms and values in every speech community. Linguistic ideology thus shows how language and discursive practices intersect with a speaker's ascribed meaning of utterances in a particular language. Woolard (1998, p. 3) sees the theory as "the representations, whether implicit or explicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world". Linguistic ideology reveals information of varied elements of cultural life built to form the feeling and bias a speaker has about a language. This kind of emotion often represents the interests of a particular social community. This corresponds with Woolard's (1992, p. 238) claim that "ideological concepts and notions are viewed as derived from, rooted in, reflective of, or responsive to the experience or interests of a particular social position." Thus, ideologies are rooted in the social experience and positionality of language speakers.

Language, therefore, does not function in isolation but with "attention to the historical, political and economic factors that shape power in social life" (Messing, 2009, p. 357). The concern of linguistic ideology is to reinforce language use in a way that makes it functional to serve social ends by linking linguistic phenomenon to social and cultural settings of language use. Members of a certain sociocultural group are able to use language to defend, protect and promote the interest of their group as expressed in their day-to-day discursive engagements. This claim echoes Kroskrity's (2006) view of language ideology as a representation of perceptions of language and discourse that are constructed in the interests of a specific social group. In other words, language ideologies embody beliefs and perceptions that shape speakers' social worlds and reveals power dynamics in linguistic performance particularly at the interpersonal level of interaction. Understanding how ideology works helps us to appreciate the complexity of language within a cultural system. It also has the capacity to be used as a strategy for maintaining social power and dominance (Woodard and Shieffelin, 1994). Powerful or majority languages, for example English, are regarded as pathways to modernity and social privileges. Power asymmetry permits such languages which are ideologically believed to be superior to overshadow local languages and cultures, and result in eroding their values, norms and heritage (Mensah, 2022b).

This study finds that participants use linguistic expressions which are represented in jargon and slang to accentuate collective belonging and enhance solidarity with members of their community, and such situated language use are framed in an ideological foundation. This is why Weber and Horner (2012) assert that ideologies tend to be imbued with vested interests and can play a role in a group's membership, boundary negotiation and social exclusion or inclusion. The use of jargon and slang in the Nigerian Army community of practice is grounded in social interactions and experiences of its officers which require shared knowledge and values to shape their social conditions and define their ethical principles as core professionals (Uwen and Mensah, 2022).

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative design towards data collection, interpretation and analysis. Data for this study were obtained during nine months ethnographic fieldwork exercises in two army barracks situated at 146 Battalion, Eburutu Cantonment and the 13 Brigade, Akim, usually called Eburutu Army Barracks and Akim Army Barracks respectively in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, South-eastern Nigeria. Thirty participants were recruited through purposively sampling technique in the Mammy markets of both barracks. The Mammy market is a place where soldiers relax and engage in recreational activities such as games, drinking and dining. They were selected based on their deep knowledge of jargon and slang in the Army community of practice, coupled with their willingness to participate in the research. The demographic characteristics of participants such as gender, age, rank, education, and religion were documented. There were 25 male and five female soldiers who participated in the study. The unequal gender proportion was justified on the ground that female personnel do not commonly visit the Mammy market after regular working hours. The Mammy markets were the setting we observed and interviewed participants on their use of jargon and slang. Participants' age bracket was between 22–60 years. Ten participants (33.3%) belonged to the senior (commissioned) cadre while 20 participants were junior and non-commissioned officers. All senior officers were graduates from the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and are holders of university rated degrees. Junior officers were mainly holders of secondary and primary school certificates. In terms of religious affiliation, 15 participants (50%) were Muslims and another 15 participants (50%) stated their religion as Christianity. Participants gave informed consent for all interviews, observations, conversations and recording in writing. The research was approved by the Ethical Committee of the University of Calabar.

Two ethnographic approaches were taken for data collection: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Participant observation allowed access to the army community of practice where the use of slang and jargon is a deeply entrenched discursive practice. We were immersed in this community to gain an understanding of the creative manipulation of jargon and slang as viable communicative tools among participants. We observed social interactions and directed communicative behaviour of participants, and how exchanges involving jargon and slang were intersubjectively employed in varying social contexts. We adopted the positionality of objective observers and passive participants. In other words, we were not in a position to influence behaviour and discourse but to comply, record what we saw and were told. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to pose rigorous sets of questions which were open-ended to explore participants' thoughts on creative language use particularly on jargon and slang. Close conversations with participants generated army jargon and slang, and helped to understand their meanings in the varied social contexts they were employed. This interview approach allowed for flexibility in expanding the lines of interrogation and offered the researchers a better understanding of military jargon and slang. We posed questions on how military sociolect evolved in the barracks; the meanings of X jargon and Y slang, and how such meanings are negotiated; the social context they can be used in; the perception of superior officers towards their use; and the type of ideologies that informed their use.

Data were coded based on identified thematic categories. Thematic analysis is used to sort the data into relevant themes to allow for flexibility in their interpretation. It is useful in identifying commonalities in patterns of meaning to draw interpretation from the data (Castleberry and Nolan, 2018). This method enabled the researchers to flesh out relevant layers of signification across data set, engage collective experiences, identify common denominators and make sense of these commonalities. Data were checked for accuracy during a follow-up, transcribed and translated. A digital audio recorder was used to

document all interviews and conversations. Field notes were useful in documenting metadata of transcripts of interviews such as date, place and time of interview. The descriptive and analytic methods have been adopted for data analysis and interpretation. These approaches aim to highlight the main features of data based on the linguistic experiences and perspectives of participants. They also embody the narrative accounts of participants in their own words which help in the development of in-depth appraisals of the research problem.

5. Results and discussion

In the analysis that follows, we examine professional jargon in the context of the Nigerian Army community of practice to appreciate how new knowledge is created and resemanticised, and in linking military experience with subjectivities. The second part of the analysis deals with slang terms of address which are mainly used to portray the significant other in a negative light and diminish their self-esteem and valuation but which have pragmatic reinterpretation.

5.1. Professional jargon

5.1.1. Supremacy of a superior

A dominant theme in the social categorisation of military jargon is the recourse to the supremacy of a superior officer. A participant informed us that a superior officer in the Nigerian Army has the status of a demi-god; he has a transcendental image that is revered and almost "worshipped". He maintains that superior officers are highly respected because of their knowledge, rank, status and experience, and given that respect is a vital behaviour in military values expressed in their orientation and discipline. Examples of jargon that resonate the supremacy of a superior are represented below:

Example 1:
You can never be a winner in an argument with a superior.
If you offend a higher authority, carry your cross.
Do not look smart before your superior; look stupid.
When your superiors look at you, do not keep them waiting.
Never contest a woman with a superior.
Two rules of the job: 1. Your boss is always right. 2. Refer to Rule 1.

Participants see the use of these fixed structures as expressions of respect not necessarily for the person but for the rank and position the person holds. A participant argued that respect is what every soldier hopes to gain, and it is not just imposed or given but is usually earned as a matter of military courtesy. Based on observations, we noticed that respect is displayed and shown through different forms: verbal and gestural cues. In the verbal context, the subordinate is courteous and defensive, while in the non-verbal aspect, the subordinate pays compliments to every sighted superior. Example 1 demonstrates the invincibility and infallibility of a superior officer; he wins every argument and he is always right. It also shows that there are dire consequences if you offend him; keep him waiting; or appear smarter than him. A participant remarked that respect is an important trait to be shown towards a superior officer in the military chain of command; it is not expected to be solicited for. To this participant, respect is what enables soldiers to appreciate the best in their superior colleagues, and ensure effective and efficient service delivery.

Another participant argued that respect for the superior officer is rooted in military ethics and discipline, and it helps soldiers to learn on the job, appreciate their role and understand one another. We align with the views of the participants that respect is an essential component of military leadership

which has empowered soldiers to do their work and fulfil their duty calls and also guided the officers to exercise command and control. The ideology that guides the use of these expressions is basically rooted in respect for authority and military values. This promotes the army as a social institution. Enforcing traditional values and behaviour, and showing concern for, and respect to established authority are believed to be sources of social stability. While this ideology attracts a larger-than-life status to the superior officers, it limits the freedom of the subordinates within the professional and social space. Further evidence of this power dynamic is seen in the way superior officers are addressed. Their subordinates address them as "Sir" or "Madam" and they are entitled to be saluted at the same time. Superior officers simply call their subordinates by their names or ranks. A participant explained that this interaction between the superiors and subordinates is the standard in a bid to remain professional at all times, and anything else is disloyalty. This highlights linguistic ideology as an instrument of power as part of larger ideological complexes in the army (Piller, 2015). Understanding the discursive values of these expressions is an essential part of any personnel's ability to function in their community of practice where they are engaged in mutual meaning-making processes which entail shared experiences and insights over time and a commitment to shared understanding (Eckert, 2006). This mutual relationship and shared enterprise help to reflect participants' perspectives of their social world. Based on our findings, these regiments of linguistic practices are useful in military socialisation and allow access to understanding the way social power is implanted in language (Mertz, 1992). In fact, they are distinctive style features that provide cues to assessment of seniority, positioning and social class in this community of practice.

5.1.2. Physical and moral courage

Physical and moral courage expected of soldiers in the performance of their duties whether in the battlefield or workplace is a recurring theme in our data corpus. Physical courage or bravery entails providing a line of defence in the face of danger, fear or adversity. It may also involve making the ultimate sacrifice as part of their job. Moral courage on the other hand makes a soldier stand for what he or she believes in in spite of torrents of criticism of such actions or decisions. It also requires personnel to take responsibility for their actions even when things have gone wrong irrespective of the severity of the consequences. The following jargon illuminates the virtue of courage and brevity in the Army's professional jargon repertoire:

Example 2:
Do not beg for mercy; it is a sign of the weakling.
Be brave even if you are a coward.
It is better to die before dishonour.
Do not think of tomorrow; it may not be yours.
Patriotism includes the laying of your life.

Participants agree that professional courage involves enduring physical duress and risking one's personal safety or life, and that soldiers put their life on the line for the freedom and comfort of others. According to one participant, physical courage involves taking risks especially on the battlefield without the thought of injury or death. The revelation is suggestive of the willingness of the soldier to pay the supreme price in defence of nationhood. The expressions above are used to bolster the morale of soldiers in the face of fear or danger. A soldier must always be bold, brave and never waiver as a fundamental ethical value of his or her line of duty. Bravery entails being strong and aggressive, and taking up challenges in dangerous places; putting up with uncomfortable conditions and risking one's life. This justifies why Kugel et al. (2017) link bravery to increased resilience and greater feelings of personal

competence. A participant maintained that courage is a factor of strength and one is expected to be selfless and fearless when danger beckons.

The participant further argued that moral courage entails an ability to tell the truth to the establishment when it is unpopular or dangerous to do so, and to always do what is necessary and deemed fit, and that moral courage is equally important for military integrity and honour. Based on this interrogation, it is evident that soldiers need both physical and moral courage to help themselves and others to succeed. Military personnel that exhibit physical and moral bravery is believed to be a leader of character as the study found out. These attributes provide purpose, direction and motivation to soldiers; make them stand up for oneself and empower each other for the accomplishment of military exploits. A language ideology that defines courage, character and confidence is what informed the construction of these expressions which are a prerequisite for team leadership especially on the battlefield. This ideology aims to lessen fear and social pressure, and appreciates courage as an accolade. In this regard, internal standards are used to evaluate actions which are considered to be courageous and those which are not. The virtue of courage entails acting on some basic principles which help to develop a relationship with team mates. Ozkaptan (1994) corroborates this position and argues that a soldiers' courage is shaped by army values and a set of training principles which helps to develop their spirits, and their relationship with their comrades. This shows that courage is the soul of military tactics and performance, hence it is a virtue that is held in high esteem by both leadership and followership in the army. The metalevel characterisation of language in Example 2 highlights participants' professional cultures and how they ideologically interrogate social relations through language (Miller, 2004). Their participation in this community is facilitated by diversity of experience and common interests which may lead to new capabilities and strengthen their skills on the job. It is also knowledge of the jargon that has projected their place and space, and enabled their community of practice to thrive. This shared system of language and style allows access to interactive engagements that signal participants' peculiar indexical fields in their varied contexts of use.

5.1.3. Warfare philosophy

Another dominant characterisation of military jargon is the deep representation of local warfare philosophies and ethics in our corpus of data. Certain aspects of these expressions overlap with the demand for courage or bravery. These expressions combine observation on strategy with just cause and right intention. Some of the jargons are shown in Example 3 below:

Example 3:
Take the battle to the enemy's camp while you watch your back.
The job is for anywhere no matter how dangerous.
Intelligence wins battles more than weapons.
In warfare, there's no retreat no surrender.
Be everywhere at every time.
Riffle and ammunition are more important than one's life.

Participants believed that these expressions serve as command philosophy or military doctrine which has been described as one of the conceptual components of war (Sloan, 2012). A participant said that these principles are useful in training and operation, and to facilitate the pursuit of strategic objectives. These expressions contain a mix of creativity and street wisdom which provide experience and resourcefulness for survival in a community of practice like the army. A participant argued that these expressions are untapped wisdom and ideas everyone needs in a working environment like the army.

They teach salient lessons of professional life such as resilience, patriotism, intelligence, doggedness, perseverance and how to take responsibility. They also help to change the working culture by providing answers to a team's teething problems. Another participant described jargon as an ethical tenet that is necessary in the pursuit of their duties.

The general consensus among participants is that the use of jargon has always caused them to remain alert for anything that might happen. This consciousness prompts their swiftness in reactionary response to combat threats and invasion. They are guiding principles that have helped them to stay focused and active and they require cognitive role-taking given their generalising approach. They also provide a framework for understanding military norms and conventions. These principles direct soldiers on how to act, and alert them on everyday challenges they might encounter in battlefield and/or office. The expressions above share a concern with the virtues of courage and intelligence as hallmarks of army combat performance. This ideology aims to prepare personnel for rigorous and stressful tasks and activities. The ideology may also be seen as morale boosters to encourage personnel to compete in high-risk skills and complex assignments in a challenging environment that will ensure the excellence of officers. The expressions in Example 3 reveal participants' roles as agents in constructing meaning in how they contextualise warfare which represent a rigid and defensive linguistic style. This style is significantly a mark of stereotyped military persona and character. Based on observations, participants have a common understanding of their linguistic practices which have shaped their linguistic behaviour and social selves as well. These are a prerequisite for constructive participation in their community of practice.

In the following analysis, we provide contextual nuances that surround the application of jargon in language practices in army barracks based on examples from each of the identified categories above:

Excerpt 1:
Speaker A: If *nyarinya* be your problem, no go *chop Oga meat* (If you are looking for a girlfriend, beware of boss' own).
Speaker B: Say *wetin* happen? (Why should it be so?)
Speaker A: Never contest a woman with a Superior. Bone go hook you for throat (You will face the consequences).

Excerpt 2:
Speaker A: Halt there! Unrepentant *Otondo*! (Stop there! Foolish recruit!).
Speaker B: Sorry *Oga* (I'm sorry sir).
Speaker A: Which of our schools was this idiot trained?
Speaker B: Sorry sir.
Speaker A: Be brave even if you are a coward.

Excerpt 3:
Speaker A: Where were you when *Oga* (boss) was looking for you?
Speaker B: I bin follow go operation (I joined in the operation).
Speaker A: When you know you ought to be everywhere at every time?

In Excerpt 1, the jargon, never contest a woman with a superior, is used to emphasise a given meaning and produce interactional and social identities linked to the meaning (Bucholtz, 2012). A mark of informal style in this interaction is the recourse to indigenous lexicon like Hausa's *nyarinya* (young woman) which is reconceptualised as "girlfriend" and which falls within the same semantic domain as *Oga meat*. The ideology that is expressed here is the gesture of power and control which is exercised by a superior officer and which cannot be contested by a subordinate. Power dynamics reveal hierarchy and

inequality which are instincts of the regimented military space. We can also see instantiations of power semantics in Excerpt 2 where Speaker A, a superior officer is using derogatory forms to address Speaker B, a subordinate. The junior officer is variously subdued and labelled as unrepentant, fool, idiot, coward etc., but he keeps apologising for his (un)doing. An ideology of dominance versus submission is discursively enacted here between the superior and the subordinate officer respectively. The jargon, *be brave even if you are a coward*, is therefore used to reinforce the structure of power and dominance.

In Excerpt 3, Speaker A discursively articulates warfare military value of alertness which should be imbibed in every aspect of everyday military life. According to a participant, this virtue makes a soldier to react to the present situation, allowing the mind to be fluid and mobile. The ideology in the jargon, *be everywhere at every time* speaks to the dynamics of mental power, exposing it to adversity and making it tougher in every circumstances. It also entails appreciating a sense of urgency in addition to being organised, responsive and creative. One participant explained that Speaker A was encouraging Speaker B to create speed and adaptability in making timely decisions, and described the jargon as a timely warfare strategy. From the aforementioned analysis, we have seen how jargon is used to amplify the understanding of socially situated professional language of the army within its community of practice.

5.2. Specific category of slang

Participants in this study also made use of specific slang which is confined to their community of practice. These forms and expressions are different from other Nigerian registers, most notably fluid registers such as those coined from Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English which are widespread and in active use. The category of slang displayed in **Table 1** are mainly metaphors thus corroborating the claim by Mensah (2021) that an important conceptual characterisation of slang is that it functions as metaphor and/or semantic extension. Metaphor commonly means saying one thing while intending another; making implicit comparisons between two things linked by a common feature, perhaps even violating semantic rules (Holcombe, 2007). Metaphors are important modes of communication that shape the way people view the world around them and "the essence of metaphor is understanding one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Semantic extension in **Table 2** involves extending a form's meaning according to the context or logical relations in order to obtain a new meaning different from the source language. In this regard, while metaphor employs explicit comparison of one thing or idea to another through parallel observations, semantic extension gives an additional meaning to a word, phrase or sentence as we can see in **Tables 1** and **2**, respectively.

Table 1. Specific category of slang (metaphor).

Slang	Gloss
Mosquito	A monitoring team against bribe collection
Refugee	Personnel who extort money from the public
Palliative	Bribe
COVID-19	False alarm
Escort	To kill (a criminal)
Mole	Informant
Papa Yankee	Salary
He-goat theory	Couple or lovers in the same military formation
Cross-fertilisation	Couple or lovers from different military formations
Eagle	Boss

Table 2. Specific category of slang (semantic extension).

Slang	Gloss
Incubation	A sexual act involving a senior officer
Night parade	Hunting for girls
Presidential errand	Hunting for women for superior officers
Antivirus	A personnel who does not accept bribe
Malicious software	Bribe taker
Oga meat	Girlfriend of a superior officer

There are many sources of the category of military slang in **Tables 1** and **2** ranging from military operations and intelligence (night parade, escort, mole, presidential errand, mosquito, Yankee), biological terms (incubation, cross-fertilisation), and contemporary challenges (COVID-19, palliative, refugee, antivirus). An epistemic correspondence is established between a mosquito and a monitoring team. Mosquitoes are common flying insects that transmit and spread malaria parasites and other human diseases through their bites. Just as mosquitoes have caused considerable health risks that result in millions of deaths around the world, the monitoring team set up to fight against bribery and corruption can also be harmful to bribe collectors by making them face the full wrath of the law. Such an action, according to a participant, may result in suspension, demotion or dismissal depending on the gravity of the offence. This is why bribe collectors are equally labelled as refugees metaphorically because they stand the risk of being forced to leave the Army if caught. Bribe itself is metaphorically constructed as *palliative* because it is meant to optimise quality of life and mitigate poverty or suffering. A person who rejects a bribe is an antivirus, because he prevents and detects malicious software (bribe takers) to enable the service to function effectively.

The reconceptualisation of COVID-19 as *false alarm* represents the initial perception and misinformation at the outbreak of the pandemic. This misinformation or rumour informed people's attitudes towards the disease. To the community of practice focused in this study, COVID-19 was merely a false alarm, and every subsequent false alarm was labelled as such. Slangs like *he-goat* theory and cross-fertilisation are used to describe marriage relationships in which one of the spouses is insider and outsider respectively. A *he-goat* in Nigerian Pidgin depicts an image of a man with insatiable sexual desire which may sometimes be incestuous. A male officer who marries from within his extended family circle is perceived metaphorically as a *he-goat* and such a union is likened to the incestuous behaviour of a *he-goat*. Cross-fertilisation*,* on the other hand, is considered more dignified because it contributes to improvement of relations and promotes social cooperation with sister agencies. According to a participant, it also opens a new world of different beliefs and professional traditions which is significant for the personnel's social integration and assimilation.

Some of the forms and expressions are used as sexual metaphors which provide a conceptual structure for understanding and processing one domain of experience in terms of another. In this regard, sexual intercourse is reconceptualised as an incubating process and engaging in night parade is characterised as a hunting expedition. In this way, there is a structural similarity between the domain of sex and hunting. Emanatian (1996) states that the purpose of hunting is to obtain a creature that one can consume for sustenance and satisfaction, and much of this knowledge carries successfully to the male experience of trying to find a sexual partner. Hunting is a male domain, and men are hunters in the slang above thus making women their prey. This evidence is a pointer to social exploitation and vulnerability of women in a patriarchal space like the Army barracks.

The idea behind the use of these slang is basically to promote exclusion and to foster belonging. There is a deliberate manipulation of language in an attempt to participate in group activities and acquire

social capital. As they use slanguage to fully exclude civilians from their specific situated setting of their everyday discursive encounters, they equally used it to foster solidarity and build interpersonal relationship among personnel. More broadly, participants use slang to accomplish a wide range of social and linguistic goals (Roth-Gordon, 2020), and slang becomes a predictor of their group membership. Sociolinguistic competence and the community's interpretive conventions were activated in learning and assigning meaning to slang in order to participate and collaborate effectively in the community of practice. This will enable participants to gain control of their appropriate discourse situations and reinforce identity and belonging.

In the following analysis, we used the interactional sociolinguistic approach to contextualise the way slang is used in the army discursive context to provide a clearer understanding of how this linguistic tool is linked to personal and professional interests:

Excerpt 4:
Speaker A: Where you bin do night duty? (Where did you work last night?)
Speaker B: For *Oga* house (At our boss' home).
Speaker A: That mean say you bin do presidential errand. Na real night duty be that one (It means that you ran presidential errand. That is a proper night shift).
Speaker B: Duty na duty (Any work is work).

Excerpt 5:
Speaker A: You bin dey wait for long for *Oga* domot in the evening. (You waited for a long time at our boss' residence in the evening).
Speaker B: Ah, Eagle bin dey incubation na (Ah, our boss was incubating).
Speaker A: Him bin get import walahi (He truly had an import).
Speaker B: You no say *Oga* dey practice *he-goat* theory? (You know our boss practices *he-goat* theory?).
Speaker A: Wait for ya time! (Wait for your time!).

Excerpts 4 and 5 are conversations between two junior officers or who were generally referred to as "rank and file". The reciprocal use of slang is used to index equal status, friendliness and physical closeness. They also employ the resource of slang to make strategic judgment about their bosses' private lives. In both instances, the interactants' discursive practices were influenced by moral interests and values in their community of practice. In Excerpt 4, Speaker B uses innovative slang terms to position his boss as promiscuous by "assigning social meaning to particular linguistic forms" (Bucholtz, 2012, p. 276). This ideological dimension is about sexual conduct or behaviour which is not pleasing to speaker B who was critical about his boss' casual sexual relationship. However, Speaker A who works directly with the boss does not share Speaker B's stance on the sexual misdemeanour of their boss. He justifies the errands he runs to connect women to him as part of his official responsibilities. In Excerpt 5, Speaker B discursively articulated the social profiling of their boss as one with a penchant for sleeping with female officers. He uses slang expressions like *incubation* and *he-goat* theory to indirectly satirise the sexual behaviour of their superior. However, Speaker A was not favourably disposed to such a criticism. He dismissed him immediately and encouraged him to wait for his time. Through slang and shared social and professional identity, these interactants have been able to connect to the social and cultural systems they belong to. This claim reinforces the position of Bucholtz (2012) that slang is a contextually embedded social practice whose social meanings are based on the peculiar experience of users.

Other significant features of military slang in Excerpts 4 and 5 reveal its expressiveness and the creation of humour. With the linguistic tool of slang, junior officers are able to deride and criticise their

superiors' sexual escapades in a way a formal context would not overtly permit. Slang therefore provides avenues for subordinates to air their feelings freely especially in their regimented environment where they are mainly seen and not heard. The study discovers that the army community of practice is not immune to workplace gossip which facilitates co-operation among junior officers as well as enhance camaraderie between them. We have also seen how humorous contents are used to enhance social interactions and promote workplace cohesion in the excerpts. The use of forms such as "presidential errand", "incubation" and "*he-goat* theory" activates comic motifs which licence open engagement in sexual narratives which are usually seen to operate at the realm of the unspoken (Izugbara, 2005). In this way, junior officers use local idioms humorously as alternative platforms to talk about the subject of sex which is against essentialist norms. Broadly speaking, these characteristics seem to be the basis for using slang as a colloquial variety.

The study has also found some word formation processes in Nigerian Army sociolect mainly from jargon and slang which are the focus of the present study. There is extensive degree of borrowing from Nigerian English, Nigerian Pidgin and sparsely in Hausa as we can see in the following words: *idiot*, *problem*, *halt* (Nigerian English), *wetin*, *Oga*, *chop* (Nigerian Pidgin), *nyarinya*, and *walahi* (Hausa). These languages in addition to Igbo and Yoruba also form the main linguistic repertoire of most army barracks in Nigeria (Mensah, 2019a). These loan words have been used to enrich the linguistic resources and vocabulary of the army sociolect. They have been conventionalised and put into popular use in the army. From our observation, borrowing is a productive mechanism in the creation of military sociolect. There is also preponderance of code-switching in our data set. This involves the alternation of two or more languages or varieties of languages in conversation. The alternation may affect words, phrases, clauses and sentences due to the contact of speakers with different languages. In our data corpus, we have seen many cases of English-Nigerian Pidgin code-switching, example in Excerpt 1 (replicated here for emphasis:

Speaker A: Never contest a woman with a superior. Bone go hook you for throat. (You will face the consequences).

Where code-switching is employed as a form of style shift to mark group identity and create social space for interactants. The switch from English to Nigerian Pidgin is used to reiterate certain actions which will not be favourable to the addressee. If the potential outcome (of contesting a woman with one's superior) was expressed in English, its pragmatic import would not be firmly achieved. We also found that the speaker uses code-switching as a strategy for the development of discourse given his access to a large range of linguistic repertoire (Mensah, 2019b). What this tells us is that code-switching may not necessarily compensate for lack of proficiency but may be utilized as a norm. There are also instances of semantic extension as could be seen in words like *he-goat* theory "promiscuity" and eagle "boss" which are created as extensions of their respective conventional use. The new words are created on the basis of similarity in meaning, and are used in different context, and with reference to different sorts of features (Robins, 1989). There is a direct semantic link that holds between "*he-goat*" and "sexual promiscuity" while no such correspondence exists between "eagle" and "boss". Eagle is the king of birds and boss is in charge of an organisation. So, the correspondence in meaning of these two words is understood in a related and recognised way.

6. Conclusion

Drawing insights from the linguistic ideology framework and employing a content analysis method, this article interrogated the scope of meaning making and meaning negotiation in the Nigerian Army

community of practice with particular reference to the indexical use of jargon and slang. We have demonstrated how jargon and slang are used to index power and hierarchy and in labelling the significant other. The various ramifications of the use of jargon and slang were identified as those that embody military values like respect and courage, warfare philosophy and address terms. Linguistic ideology has offered insights towards explaining the role of language as a driver of the army personnel's social experience especially in constructing regimented identities and professional belonging. We have also explored how these situated linguistic tools are used to create boundaries and divisions as well as enact inclusion and exclusion. We have found that these jargon and slang are embedded with enormous pragmatic features and style especially in their meaning making sense and meaning negotiation. The study also reveals the power semantics that plays out in the interactional relationship of personnel. The study has contributed knowledge to understanding the informal workplace communication of the Nigerian Army which is a pointer to uncovering their various subcultures and subjectivities. The study concludes that situated language use among personnel of the Nigerian Army work effectively in their everyday interaction as it enables personnel to express feelings, emotions and needs particularly in relation to the risks of their military assignments. Significantly, we have seen how junior officers used jargon and slang to satirise and gossip about their superior sexual behaviour, an act that cannot be done explicitly in a formal context. This evidence reveals that jargon and slang offers greater expressiveness in informal interactions between personnel. The study aims to increase understanding of situated linguistic practices in the army which, to a large extent, informs the personnel's social conditions and strengthens their professional belonging and identity.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, EM and BO; methodology, EM; software, OE; validation, EM, BO and OE; formal analysis, EM; investigation, BN; resources, BN; data curation, GU; writing—original draft preparation, EM; writing—review and editing, BO; visualization, EM; supervision, EM; project administration, EM. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interests.

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