

Officers and men, and fallen heroes: The discursive construction of regimented masculinity in the Nigerian Army

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the use of gendered language in the Nigerian Army's community of practice through the application of insights from language ideology and theory of masculinity. Data were generated by means of participant observation and semi-structured interviews in a one-year fieldwork involving representative sample of 18 personnel of the 6 Battalion, Ibadan and 2 Brigade, Uyo, both in Akwa Ibom State in South-eastern Nigeria. The findings show that the Nigerian Army maintains institutional gendered language practices used among its personnel in regimented functions and social events. The gendered registers occur in the soldiers' generic use of male address terms, adaptation to male-coded voice pattern in parades, masculinisation of Army's workout songs, and the subordination of femininity in institutional associations, all combined to construct the regimented and performative masculinisation of the profession. This practice is observed to be informed by the numerical domination of men in the profession that was originally perceived as males'; a conception that has shaped the linguistic ideology and performance of the Nigerian Army to rehearse masculine orientations. It is however recommended that the Army's language practices should capture modern ideals of a gender sensitive world that connect to the clamour for gender equality and equal social belonging through the inclusion of feminine linguistic markers in workplaces.

KEYWORDS: regimented masculinity; masculine language practices; language ideology; theory of masculinity; Nigerian Army

1. Introduction

The Nigerian military appears to be traditionally conceptualised in regimented masculinity in its practices, ideologies, operations, and language use. Generally, masculinity denotes ruggedness, perseverance, muscular manliness, forcefulness, and self-discipline; it reinforces the plurality of how men perceive the world to maintain power and domination (Lowe, 2019). The notion of masculinity is therefore coded and rehearsed in male-dominated organisations where cohesive ideals are propagated. Masculinity is constructed through attitudes, ideologies, interests, goals, and language practices that define the pattern of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is weaved in fluidity, it is conventionally used to describe the various forms men devise to initiate, maintain, and sustain the practice of hegemonic power (Cornell, 1987, 1995), that is, the exercise of diverse dominations embedded in the organic ideologies of social groups (Gramsci, 1971). The practices, in some instances, are shown in the pursuit of identities not clearly connected with the dominant forms (Anderson, 2007; Swain, 2006). These, and

other dominating practices, are embedded in hegemonic masculinity.

The concern of this study is militarised (military or regimented) masculinity. It is defined in the physical and psychological resilience to instantiate, maintain, and sustain masculine practices in military regimented sites that communicate domination and power dynamics (Eichler, 2014; Pears, 2022). Regimented masculinity is operationally used in this study to mean the practice of masculine military ideals through the use of gendered forms in what members say and the regimented perception it creates to index power and domination. This is practicable because power, domination, emotional stability and open mindedness are aspects of military tenets that enduringly sustain discipline and subordination in the multicultural military formations (Fox and Peace, 2012; Godfrey et al., 2012). These qualities shape the overall mien of the personnel into a productive being in the regimented masculine military culture indoctrinated in soldiers beginning from training.

Military basic training is therefore structured to coerce (new) members to integrate into the coercive mission of effectiveness and conformity that are synonymous with foundational military culture of masculinity (Pendlebury, 2020). This is such that once one is enlisted into the military, the personnel is institutionally expected to “deny all that is feminine and softness in himself (or herself) to embrace traditional role of military aggression” (Goldstein, 2003, p. 266). This is so because the traditional conceptualisation of femininity is connected with power and domination but with domestic aspects of caring, loving, compromise and familial connection (Schippers, 2007; Silva, 2008), considering that women are sexually fragile and physically weak for military combative roles (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This articulation within military practices contradicts the traditional construct of masculinity that show force, gallantry, aggression, physical strength, and domination.

Militarised masculinity cuts across global military environments while efforts are gradually being made to integrate women soldiers and gender-neutral language. For instance, Loukou (2020) argues that the Norwegian military is dominated by men and traditionally practices militarized masculinity but is in recent times establishing all-female units and introducing gender neutral forms to the language of its military. Commenting on the low women figure, Loukou argues that women have made progressive entry into the U.S. Army beginning from World War 1&11 even though women are still less in number compared to men in the Army. Loukou has also established traces of gendered language in the U.S. Army used in various contexts of its operation. Also in the UK, Woodward and Winter (2004) demonstrate that the British Army still has gendered terminologies in its language practices. Woolard adds that efforts are being made to change the linguistic ideology of the British Army to that which promotes gender neutrality in language use. Also in Africa, Heinecken (2017) states that the South African Army is immersed in traditional hegemonic masculine practices. Like it is the case with some other militaries, Heinecken argues that the South African Army is in recent times being reoriented to accommodate the differences and alternative values that extend to its language use. These investigations show that, although a gradable level of militarised masculinity exists across world militaries in the use of gendered language as symbolic identities that index power and domination, efforts are being made across the militaries to change the narrative. The efforts to alter the linguistic norms would like to affect their belief that such forms among the discipline services are used to promote solidarity and social inclusion within their regimental orientations (Uwen and Ekpenyong, 2022). This is because such language conveys masculine attributes and behaviours which are within core military ideals (Rosen et al., 2003). It is these practices that establish the masculine descriptions of the organisations.

Masculinity in Nigerian Army

Studies have established that the Nigerian Army maintains masculine practices that institutionalise discipline, integrity, ruggedness, aggression, combative mien and enduring exposure to physical danger (Lukham, 1971; Ogbaji and Anna, 2015). Like in (some) other Armies, the principles of masculinity that situate the contours of gender appear to be practiced in the Nigerian Army (Adesanya and Bamidele, 2022; Mama, 1998). This assertion is corroborated by Dogo's (2016, p. 511) claim that the Nigerian Army "maintains a masculine ideology that portrayed an image of the profession as ideally a man's profession through its values of masculinity as superior to femininity". Scholars have also demonstrated that the Nigerian Army is male-dominated, and women are somehow perceived as incapable of optimal performance in strenuous combat roles (McCristall and Baggaley 2019; Ogbaji and Anna, 2015). This is reinforced by statistics suggesting that women comprise only between 5% to 10% of the Nigerian Armed Forces (Onumajuru et al., 2014). Factors such as the environment, settings, gender relations, contexts of meeting and nature of interactions collectively create and foster the commission of masculinised practices (Boswell and Spade, 1996; Sunday, 1990). Given this background, it could be factual to argue that the ratio of female to male personnel, description of key physical sites relevant to gender construction, sexist language, sociocultural precepts of patriarchy and male domination, are combined to enact regimental masculinity in the Nigerian Army. These attributes point to how the Nigerian military is an institutional site primed to reproduce and promote masculine tropes and norms.

Language practices in such social contexts create and adopt linguistic forms that are commonly used among members. It is the shared knowledge, expectations and experience that provide insights into the meaning disambiguation in situated language usage in social contexts of setting and participants (Uwen, 2023a; Uwen, 2023b; Uwen and Ushie, 2022). The knowledge creates a mutual understanding of the situated meanings of gendered forms used and serves the intragroup communication needs of the Nigerian Army. The objectives of the study centre on the investigation of the linguistic construction of regimented masculinity in the Nigerian Army and how the language practices re-enact masculine ideals that foster solidarity and professionalism. This would show a comparable gendered language use in the Nigerian Army and other militaries and establish any current effort in terms of policy to change the practice. The study is beneficial to sociolinguists and language scholars interested in investigations into the language of social groups. It has generated new horizons in sociolinguistic studies by providing clues to the relationship between language practices, gender, and power dynamics in the use of institutional registers.

2. Theoretical framework

Linguistic ideology and the theory of masculinity are key theoretical frameworks relevant to this study. Linguistic ideology is an anthropological linguistics framework that describes a set of beliefs about language articulated by its users as rationalization or justification of perceived representations of the structure and forms that define situated meanings among the speakers (Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994). These beliefs are viewed as ideological frames based on the use of certain linguistic forms associated with a social group or speech community. The idealised perception of the speakers is communicated through complex representations of some features of language(s) formulated and used by a social group to define its social world (Irvine, 1989). The representations exemplify the linguistic concepts and ideas identified in the discourses among members. This suggests that speakers in social groups could formulate and determine the communicative forms they use and the roles they perform in their language practices meant to shape and situate their social world and realities (Woolard, 2016, 2020). Language practices are

therefore essential in theorising how speakers linguistically mediate their social structures and ideologies (Rodríguez-Ordóñez, 2019). Ideology here, is the key motivation for defined social group and institutional language practices. It is the symbolic capital for domination and subordination that introduces the link between language and other social phenomena including gendered and social identity that negotiate a group's character (Woolard, 2016). This explains the reason for relying on the features of some discourse communities for the evaluation of their identities and ideologies. This also makes language ideologies well positioned to provide a useful framework for the evaluation of the connection between contexts and group language in institutionally structured language patterning (Canese, 2018; Uwen, 2023b). On this, Kroskrity (2007) argues that language ideology symbolises an ingroup's beliefs that certain language practices are created to serve the intragroup interest. Situating this conceptualisation in the Nigerian Army implies that the use of masculine terms among soldiers also communicates the profession's language ideology.

The other key framework relevant to this study is the theory of masculinity. The theory anchors on the dictates of hegemonic masculinity which guarantees or is taken to guarantee the legitimacy of the male domination of women and other marginalised men in the social world (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell's idealisation of masculinity, whether hegemonic (male's ability to claim and use power), marginalised (the manner in gendered order is positioned to interact with other socioeconomic, ethnoracial and social identities), subordinate (expression of qualities that are somewhat opposed to core hegemonic ideals) or complicit (practiced by complicit men who participate, promote and sustain hegemonic masculinity) are practiced to show dominating roles and have dynamic relationship and attitudes towards femininity (Connell, 1987, 1995). It propagates the legitimisation of patriarchal ideals which are dynamic across cultures. The understanding of the ideals of masculinities is relevant to the interpretation of the (linguistic) behaviours of men, particularly on their advance for power and dominance. Another version of masculinity is Pitt and Fox's (2012) performative masculinity. It describes the adoption and practice of masculine traits in order to attain acceptance and inclusion in a social group (workforce) or society. The practitioners are usually affected by internal and intragroup attitudes demanded by a given career which allows the description of masculinity in terms of institutional and sociocultural contexts. Citing the adaptation of men to the demands of the nursing career, which is traditionally a career choice for women, Simpson (2009) argues that such men require the renegotiation of feminine emotions to adapt to the caring demands shown in terms of language use and performance in the profession. This strand of masculinity provides a broad spectrum of emotions in terms of fluidity, contingency, and performativity to meet the complex demands of a profession (Pitt and Fox, 2012; Simpson, 2009). From the strands of masculinities discussed, hegemonic and performative masculinities are seen to be of more relevance to this study. This is because the study is about power semantics which deals with the representation of the concept of masculinity (power and other emotions) in the discursive practices in the Nigerian Army which the female colleagues have willingly renegotiated and integrated as requirements to gain social inclusion and acceptance in the profession. This description produces the regimentation of masculinity in military sites. The synthesis of the frameworks shows their relevance to the study because both account for the connection between gendered language and ideology, and the adaptation of women to masculine linguistic performance for social cohesion and solidarity in the Nigerian Army.

3. Data and methods

The research population is a purposive sample of the Nigerian Army personnel of the 6 Battalion,

Ibawa and 2 Brigade located at Abak and Uyo in Akwa Ibom State, South-eastern Nigeria. The study is a one-year fieldwork involving the consultation and recruitment of participants based on their knowledge of the gendered practices in the military. Thirty-eight personnel were consulted but 18 willingly accepted to participate. They were recruited on the basis of their years of experience utilised to examine their deepened understanding of the dynamics of gendered language in the Nigerian Army. On gender distribution, 14 of those recruited were males while four were females. For their ranks, 16 were soldiers (non-commissioned officers) while two were commissioned officers. The participants' ages ranged between 26 and 55 who had also worked in the Army from five to 30 years. In terms of the level of education of the participants, they separately had qualifications such as Senior School Certificate, Ordinary National Diploma, National Certificate for Education and University degrees. It is believed this could have an impact on their proficiency in the English language. The recruitment of participants from each gender was intended to ascertain gendered perceptions of military masculinised language. The research followed specified standards as approved by the University of Calabar Ethical Committee.

For the methods of data collection, participant observation and semi-structured interviews were used for the generation of data while field notes were utilised to document the observations. It has to be noted that the Nigerian Army is a somewhat inaccessible site to non-members. It was the lead author who was granted access to the principles of esprit de corps, having been a member of one of the uniformed agencies for about a decade. This facilitated the researcher's regular interface with members of the Army during joint security forces' events and other social gatherings. Such fora facilitated the recruitment of the participants, collection of data and making of field notes, particularly during the one-year period of the research. The events provided avenues for the officers and men (male and female personnel) of the two regiments (6 Battalion and 2 Brigade) to "naturally" use their institutional language in the various Army's regimented sites and other contexts where gendered language practices were constructed. During these events, the researcher keenly observed the gendered constructs in all the interactions among the soldiers. The semi-structured interviews complemented the observational notes in the interrogation of the construction of masculinity in the Army. Questions were asked to generate answers that would indicate the dimensions of the gendering of the Army's communication. Participants' responses to the questions are reported in each section of the analysis alongside the observations (where necessary). Twenty participants were interviewed, but only 12 of the reports were captured in the analysis to avoid overlapping opinions and unwieldiness. Among these were two Army officers' wives who were members of the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA). These women were interviewed specifically to elicit information on gendered expressions used in their meetings. Some of the reports that were not rendered in good English due to the educational background of the participant(s) are translated without tempering with the content and meaning. The interviews provided deepened knowledge of the essence of the gendered forms and practices in the military social contexts.

The lead author conducted the interviews using a random sampling method. The researcher had a face-to-face interview with the participants. The data were collected after debriefings during joint security forces' jogging exercises and "operation show of force". Other avenues were the parade ground, Army premises and meetings organised by members of NAOWA. The questions (though informally administered) were purposive with guides provided by the authors. The data were coded based on their relevance to the study. The themes (derived from the data) were not identified in advance as the data were not very predictive. The data analysis adopts content and qualitative approaches which are descriptive in nature. The data are described based on meaning orientations within the social context of the Nigerian Army.

4. Results and discussion

The gendered expressions are grouped into five headings to capture the use of masculine address terms, generic masculinisation of dead colleagues, adaptation to male-coded voice patterns, masculinisation of Army's workout songs and subordination of femininity in the institutional associations. Each of these themes is discussed in the institutional frame of meanings that linked the language practices with the masculine ideals of the Nigerian Army.

4.1. Use of masculine address terms

The prominent use of gendered forms in the Nigerian Army is seen in the use of masculine address terms to refer to male and female officers and soldiers. The researchers' interface with the participants showed the generic use of *sir*, *officers and men*, *officers and gentlemen*, *manned and unmanned weapons*, and *boys* in the discursive practices of the Army to construct masculinity and power dynamics. *Sir*, in its literal usage, is a politeness and complimentary marker used to address a male. In this form, it is used to show respect, narrow social relation, and distance. However, in the Army's discourse community, *sir* is used by subordinates as an address term for male and female superiors. As observed during the study, *sir* served as a complimentary marker, show of loyalty and call for attention. Another observation was that *officers and men* and *officers and gentlemen* were not only used as segregation forms, but the gendered terms also constructed social and hierarchical divides in the Army, particularly between the officers and soldiers, irrespective of gender. Aside from the use of *officers* to represent both genders, the use of *men* as address terms for the males and females in the soldiers' cadre psychologically projects devisualisation of women in the organisation. This devisualisation of women by the Army's linguistic constructs shows the Army as a masculine site where "all officers and officer cadets are traditionally referred to as officers and gentlemen [and not gentlewomen]" (Luckham, 1971, p. 38). These masculine terms are used by senior officers to address their contemporaries and subordinates in formal military events and social gatherings. The generic address terms were used discursively for the ideological construction of power and dominance which masculinity propagates. It is established that these sorts of masculine terms ascribe power and authority to social superiors and establish a sense of hierarchy and inequality because everyone is not licenced to use them reciprocally given the sense of hierarchy in the Army (Uwen and Mensah, 2022). In the same vein, the generic *boy(s)* as used by the Army to address male and female subordinate personnel, showed aspects of the regimented linguistic norms used among participants to construct masculine identity, subordination, controlled regimentation and indexation of social distance during interactions. The implication of this linguistic ideology embedded in the use of *boy(s)* is that the Army's hierarchy operates in ascending order. This is such that the next subordinating rank becomes *a boy* to the next and immediate superior, and so on.

The gendered linguistic terms were also seen to have manifested in the objectivisation of military weapons. For instance, in the Army's discourse community, *manned and unmanned weapons* describe assault weapons that are operated by personnel (*manned*) usually trained for such purpose. Also, any weapon configured to operate by itself to destroy targets is tagged *unmanned*. These male address terms for inanimate objects symbolise the extension of regimented masculinisation to military ammunitions and weaponry. The connotation is to communicate the masculine personification of the weapons' belligerence. On the participants' perception of the masculine address terms in the Army, a 44-year-old male Sergeant reported: "I think they are aspects of the initial conception of the Army to be a somehow male profession. The modern Nigerian Army integrates its personnel beyond this language practice to produce a gallant workforce". The soldier emphasised that the language with the masculine

colouration is not a hindrance to the performance of the force. Also, a 30-year-old female Corporal argued that she was not worried about the use of generic male address terms, stressing that she was confident that with time, feminine gender inclusive forms would be used in line with the new policy direction of the contemporary Nigerian Army. This account corroborates Lye's (2020) argument that the contemporariness of military linguistic practices calls for a change from its traditional gendered language (such as "sir", "manned", "unmanned", and many others) to a discourse on the ability and performance. Although the clamour for change is commendable, the terms in their current forms and meanings, are ideologically framed to present the Nigerian Army's beliefs in masculine orientations.

4.2. Adaptation to male-coded voice pattern

The nature of voices in certain Army tasks is tailored towards the communication of masculine traits. Women and men tend to show some differences in the phonological features of their communicative activities (Tannem, 2000). This, in some instances, manifests to the extent that, on mere hearing of a voice, one could easily distinguish between the one that is male or female depending on the degree of force it carries. In the course of the study, it was discovered that some military tasks also elicit the use of such energetic and forceful male-coded voices to communicate the regimental intention of the message. This pattern of voice re-echoing occurs especially during parades, drills and issuing of orders and commands by superiors. Parade commands, as keenly observed, were unique military assignments and evidently bear the features of a male-like voice. Such voice is usually coarse and forceful, and often characterised by snaps, inflection, distinctness, and loudness that is meant to obtain the desired response from the parading soldiers. This observation corroborates Salter's (1995) argument that military parade voice is an indexation of the male speech pattern that is coarse and loud. On this, a 50-year-old Warrant Officer 1 reported that it is the male soldiers who predominantly take part in parade commanding positions, but there were a few female colleagues who naturally have and/or have developed such speech skills and often perform very satisfactorily. According to him, such duties require so much strength in echoing a voice that is loud enough to effect the appropriate command and response. The participant stated that male colleagues whose voices do not conform to the hegemonic norm are often being ridiculed as they feel feminised. Also, a 37-year-old female Sergeant who had commanded parade in some military events reported that:

Parade commands and drills do not take the low, soft spoken and euphonious female voice. It requires a very aggressive, sonorous, coarse, and deep baritone voice that pulls on and unifies the collective psychology of soldiers to focus on the parade commander. As a female soldier, I was not born with that kind of voice. It took me some training and time to adapt and function commendably during parades.

This account suggests that the Nigerian Army adopts a predominantly male-like voice in its parade's commands. The parade voice is characterised by high pitch, coarse, telegraphic, and sonorous sound, and vowel lengthening to show soldiers' readiness and preparedness (Opoola, 2018; Yahaya, 2019). These features allow the soldiers to be physically and psychologically prepared to affect the orders of the parade commander. The participant also argued that female soldiers (who do not have male-like voice) usually adapt to the sonorous voice in order to participate as parade commanders. This adaptive practice aligns with the position that in some situations, females usually and consciously integrate into the masculine nature to advance social inclusion in some professions (Enloe, 2000; Pitt and Fox, 2012). As it was observed, the female adaptations in this context correlate with performative masculinity. Also, the coarse and deep baritone male voices were used to construct masculine ideologies and power dynamics. By so doing, they become institutional linguistic cues for individual (parade commander's) and collective

(troop's) ideological expression of power. The parade commands and the psychological impacts the force has on the troop are institutional rehearsals of power play. The commands are meant to generate appropriate parade positions or movements which are influenced by the power that such commands and the commander wield. Collectively, the cautionary command, mental alertness, agility, regimented turns, and uniformed actions in positioning and movements are components of power construction in military parades.

4.3. Masculinisation of dead personnel

Another avenue where the Nigerian Army uses generic male terms is during the funerals of their dead colleagues. In the Nigerian sociocultural context, the social group a deceased person belonged to, such as professional, religious, or educational, among others, tends to have a significant role in burying the dead of its member. The Nigerian Army, as a professional group, also has institutionalised rituals that are performed at the funeral of a member. It is in such events that the coding of *hero* is regimentally conceptualised. The coding of *hero* is often associated with maleness and masculinity across cultures (Aley and Hahn, 2020; Sun et al., 2023). Heroism is conceived in the social, civil, and martial dimensions, and is influenced by individual, schematic and collective perception of who leads through crisis to boost social cohesion (Bigazzi et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Heroes are conventionally (male) social actors who show courage, determination, bravery, selflessness, inspiration and willingness to take risks in order to save orders (Sun et al., 2023). In Africa, the conceptualisation of hero is a male symbol and representation (Carrier and Nyamweru, 2016; Ericson, 2014). The Nigeria's Army conceptualisation of *hero* represents the martial dimension. The generic use of, and the gendering and coding of *dead hero(es)* or *fallen hero(es)* as used in military funerals tilt towards the construction of masculinity. As it was carefully observed in one of such funerals, the masculine marker *hero* (not heroine) is used in the Nigerian Army's context to show power, a sense of belonging, admiration and comradeship of a dead (male or female) colleague. *Hero(es)*, in the military discourse community, symbolises the heroic efforts of the dead to show bravery, courage, determination and patriotism in military exploits and operations while he or she was alive. *Fallen*, used in the Army's social context to qualify and modify *hero*, represents a euphemistic term that connotes death and its unpleasant consequences. On death and Army rituals, a 36-year-old male Sergeant argued that:

Death is a recurring prediction in military sites and once one is enlisted into the Army, he prepares for death anytime and as often as he participates in military operations. So, in the real sense of it, in the Army, the personnel do not own their lives. It is the Army that owns the lives and deaths of the personnel. This is because, depending on the nature of one's death in terms of the time, the place and the nature of the operation, it is not compulsory for the deceased family to have access to the corpse. However, wherever the corpse is buried, it is often so prominently eulogised and given a heroic burial that shows a sense of belonging and is described in masculine terms.

The participant's opinion situates patriotism, warfare, heroism, and masculinity as ideological practices in the Army. As participants reported, the practice of allowing discretionary access to the corpses to family members (where possible), is connected with the fact that some deaths resulting from military operations, caused the bodies to be either badly shattered or irrecoverable.

Also, a 26-year-old male Private recounted his observation when he attended a late female colleague's funeral. There, according to him, the officers who read the deceased's tributes used the masculinised terms *our dead hero* and *fallen hero* to eulogise the dead as a powerful soldier. On this, Millar and Tidy (2017) have also demonstrated that the celebration of the heroic dead of servicemen validates

the hypermasculinity in life and a hero in death. Nigerian Army here, regimentally conceives masculinity as a symbolic attribute of male ruggedness, courage, and perseverance as ideologies that index the power dynamics that exist between soldiers and civilians. This is because the indexical features and ideologies of the Nigerian Army language practices are significant in the creation of a military persona and their inherent social beings (Uwen and Mensah, 2022). The choice of the heroic male persona in the tributes that form the formal discourses in funerals of members conventionally constructs the ideologies in the Army's language practices.

4.4. Masculine codification of Nigerian Army's workout songs

Military workout songs were also observed to bear gendered linguistic elements. Songs convey different meanings depending on the social contexts of the producers and consumers. Songs in the Army's community of practice, aside from functioning as recreational instruments that boost the morale of soldiers, are also composed with linguistic forms that acclaim male ruggedness, courage, and resilience. This corroborates the claim that such songs are perceived, [and as indexed in the linguistic resources in military sites], as instruments for the construction of masculine gender and ideologies (Ojo, 2014). The two songs that show this category of masculinisation are listed below.

1A

If you see my mama (papa)

Tell am say o

I don dey rugged

Sime sime no dey Army

If you come by my mother or father

Inform them that I am now rugged

Army does not accommodate weaklings

1B

If you no get heart, no come o

Army no be for children

Army no be for shaky shaky Nyarinya

Army na for strong men

If you are not strong enough, don't join the Army

Army is not meant for children

Army is not for weak women

Army is for strong men

In the excerpt above, the linguistic choices in the songs *I don dey rugged* (I am now rugged) and *sime sime no dey Army* (Army does not accommodate weaklings) in Song 1A and *Army no be for children* (Army is not meant for children), *Army no be for shaky shaky Nyarinya* (Army is not for weak women) and *Army na for strong men* (Army is for strong men), are all indices of masculine language, ideology and identity. The specification of the category of women (energetic females) that could join the Army with the caveat that *Army is for strong men* and *does not accommodate weaklings* and *weak women* index the Army's linguistic

ideology and masculine performativity. This supports the claim that women in the Nigerian Army are somehow previously perceived as weak and incapable of engaging in vigorous warfare tasks (Ogbaji and Anna, 2015). This is because ruggedness, energetic disposition, aggressive posture, and muscular strength as contained in the songs, are traditional attributes of masculinities. This also suggests that the Army maintains masculine ideology and its initial image portrayed the profession as ideally a males' job that provides contours for the gender divide (Adesanya and Bamidele, 2022; Dogo, 2016). On the changing perception of the songs among soldiers, a 28-year-old male Lance Corporal argued that:

The songs are meant to psychologically motivate and energise both gender in the Army to be as rugged and courageous as "men". The songs spur us to look ahead to the next task and do not necessarily intend to demean the strength and cooperation of female colleagues who are partners in the achievements. The languages in the songs also show the different ethnolinguistic identities of the personnel who are united by the tenets of the Army to achieve common goals.

A 32-year-old female Sergeant corroborated the male participant as she reported that the genders in the songs appeared were not meant to demean feminine performativity. The songs, in the accounts of the participants, are motivational instruments rehearsed to actualise the troop's ruggedness in executing military tasks. In addition, the songs are potentially about disciplining men to maintain particular heteronormative standards and excluding potentially queer men or men perceived to be effeminate as much as it is about women who agree with masculine ideals. Also, the code mixed and multilingual elements in the songs, portray the interethnolinguistic interface of the personnel drawn from the Nigerian multilingual setting. Uwen and Ekpe (2023) have examined the two songs (1A and 1B above) among others, to establish the contents as evidence of the sociolinguistic configuration of the Nigerian Army as a regimented and multilingual workforce. The authors argue that songs in this category are narrations of Nigeria's multilingualism exemplified in the Army as a regimented institution that utilise the multilingual identities to function maximally in the protection of the nation's sovereignty. The workout songs also provide clues to the explication of ideologies in the language used in defining the Army's hegemonic masculinity as shown in their thematic threads.

4.5. Subordination of femininity in institutional associations

The last in the consideration of the dimensions of the Army's gendered language is the set of male-eulogising linguistic forms used in the meetings of the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA). The naming of associations in all contexts is a pointer to the goals and ideologies of such groups. Such nomenclatures provide clues on whether the group is gendered (even in terms of language use), ethnic, religious, professional, or even academic. Given this background, NAOWA is identified as a gendered forum of Army officers' wives across Nigeria in terms of its nomenclature and discursive practices. Babangida (1988) argues that NAOWA was formed to foster the bond of friendship, unity, and peaceful co-existence among officers' wives in order to douse the emotional trauma that surfaces as a result of the absence of their husbands. Apart from portraying woman as a perpetually dependent on, and emotionally attached to man for survival and relevance, language use during the meetings of the female group, has been observed to extensively eulogise masculinity and its attributes. For instance, a 35-year-old female Sergeant who was designated to assist the chairperson in one of NAOWA's regular meetings recognised the use of gendered language. When interviewed, the participant reported that members used gendered expressions such as: *you know we depend on our husbands, our husbands are strong and gallant officers and men, they provide our needs, we should not reward their good efforts with troubles, they are brave in the battlefield, we have to make them happy whenever they are around*, among others. The researchers

who had also observed their meetings on three occasions confirmed the use of linguistic forms interpreted as presenting their husbands as multiple power bearers. Also, two members of NAOWA who were interviewed separately, argued that the fora were avenues where officers' wives, aside from encouraging one another, discussed masculine exploits of their husbands. These exploits are constructed in masculine terms that present the male officers as powerful. Such forms eulogise masculinity and present their sole source of females' comfort.

Extensively, the expressions support the superiorisation of the male against the weak female in terms of physical strength, characteristics, and responsibilities. It is on this basis that Mama (1998, p. 1) contends that through these kinds of programmes and associations, the Army has reinscribed women into limited domestic roles, and "neutralized the potentially subversive and inherently antimilitarist notion of women's liberation, and propagated a gender politics which normalizes the practices." Therefore, NAOWA and language use in its meetings within the social context of the Army, conform to military linguistic ideology and present the divides in power dynamics between men and women which in this context show imbalances.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on insights from language ideology and masculinity theory, the study has demonstrated that the Nigerian Army, in its present language practices, makes use of gendered forms that account for the domination of men and the power they wield. This domination is enacted on how the construction of masculinity is reproduced, maintained, sustained, or excluded in the discursive practices of the Nigerian Army. From the study, a set of contributing factors in the construction of masculinity in the Nigerian Army's community of practice was revealed; they are characteristically historic, institutional, ideological and gendered. As observed through the participants, the use of the gendered terms is viewed to be connected with the traditional perception of the Army as a male profession, institutional ideologies and the grossly imbalanced ratio of male and female personnel that comprise the numerical strength. These manifested in the generic use of masculine markers as address terms during certain events, adaptation to male-coded voice pattern, masculinisation of Army's workout songs and subordination of femininity in the discourse among Army officers' wives. These practices provide avenues for gendered language use and are combined to promote sexist language as internalised culture of the Nigerian Army. These linguistic norms are perceived by both genders as aspects of the regimented norms understood and used by the troops to demonstrate a sense of belonging and engender solidarity. As the participant(s) argued, the sexist language might not have any negative impact on the female personnel and does not hinder their chances of career progression. However, given the low figures of women in the Army, combined with the limitations of this study, could possibly suggest some negative impact of the use of masculine forms on female personnel.

However, it is recommended that given the increasing global concerns on gender equality in workplaces in terms of general official practices and language use, the Nigerian Army should reconsider the use of linguistic forms that capture the attributes of both genders as co-canvassers for a modern Army that suggests ruggedness, agility, gallantry, and courage. This reconsideration should be established in its policy trust to align with the emerging changes that foster gender inclusiveness in the linguistic ideologies of the world militaries. The implication of the study is that it has opened critical gender issues pertaining to the Nigerian Army and other institutions that would stimulate new horizons in academic investigations.

Statement and declarations

The study strictly complied with the ethical standards in the following order.

Consent for publication

The authors have given their consent for the consideration of the manuscript for publication.

Author contributions

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

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Conflict of interest

The study has not been submitted to any outlet and it is not being considered for publication in any journal. There are absolutely no competing interests among the authors.

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