

## Special English Language Use in the Nigerian Air Force Base, Kaduna

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### **Abstract**

*This study focuses on analysing the linguistic features of the special variety of English used at the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Base Kaduna, employing Halliday's Register analysis as our theoretical framework. Through a corpus of twelve expressions selected through purposive sampling within the NAF domains, the research identifies and explores the linguistic dimensions of military communication using the contextual tools of field, tenor, and mode of discourse. The findings reveal that context influences the usage, interpretation, and relevance of special military expressions, ensuring effective communication, maintaining order, and fostering group cohesion among speakers in the military environment. The paper also emphasizes the importance of employing Halliday's register analysis for comprehending the unique features of the military register within the Nigerian Air Force settings.*

**Keywords:** *Special English, Register analysis, Varieties of English, Military Register, Nigerian Air Force.*

### **Introduction**

Man is a gregarious creature, and as such, he habitually associates with other human beings. For survival and in pursuit of a good life, he follows his communal sense as he participates with

other people as a member of an organized society. In relating to his fellow interlocutors, he primarily uses language for the expression of thoughts and ideas.

In the process of this interpersonal interaction, linguistic variation could occur at a personal level (idiolectal or stylistic) or at the level of group variation from the norms of the standard language. Variant forms of the standard vocabulary, phonology, grammatical, and lexico-semantic features of the language are created, manipulated, and maintained over time by speakers along regional, occupational, temporal, and other sociolinguistic variables. This is the situation in an occupational setting like the Nigerian Air Force Base Kaduna.

The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has an interesting history and has evolved over the years to become one of the most important branches of the Nigerian military. Created by an Act of Parliament in 1964, the primary objectives of the NAF were to complement the other arms of the Nigerian military, assist in aerial logistics and transportation of personnel and resources, defend the country's aerial territorial domain, and coordinate air laws ascribed to the nation (Zighadina 1997:1).

Over time, the NAF has expanded its role and now serves as the branch of the Nigerian military responsible for safeguarding the nation's airspace, protecting its territorial integrity, and facilitating air transportation.

According to Zighadina (1997:2-3), the NAF maintains control and supervision of internal and external air matters through special commands, which received official recognition in 1978. The Nigerian Air Force is made up of six Commands, each with its own headquarters in the major geo-political zones of Nigeria.

These Commands are the Tactical Air Command in Makurdi, Special Operations Command in Bauchi, Mobility Command in Yenagoa, Air Training Command in Kaduna, Ground Training Command in Enugu, and Logistics Command in Lagos.

The Tactical Air Command is tasked with flying operations and maintenance of NAF hardware. Similarly, the Special Operations Command was set up to provide combat support capabilities.

The Mobility Command is responsible for performing the air power role of tactical and strategic airlift in support of military operations and the government.

The Air Training Command and Ground Training Command were established to train personnel as well as plan and coordinate the administrative and operational matters of all NAF training activities. Lastly, the Logistics Command supplies and maintains all NAF operational equipment and infrastructural facilities to ensure the effective accomplishment of NAF assigned tasks. In addition, there are satellite directorates and divisions situated in major geographical zones across the country, including Abuja, Benin City, Calabar, Bauchi, Enugu, Jos, Kano, Kainji, Lagos, Makurdi, Port-Harcourt, and Yenagoa. These commands and directorates work together to ensure that the Nigerian Air Force is able to fulfil its mandate effectively and efficiently (Zighadina 1997:10-16).

The aforementioned military commands and directorates are located on a 'base' in each of the geographical locations. A 'base' serves as both an occupational setting and a residential site for NAF personnel and their families. The base functions as an occupational environment, hosting air force activities such as military training, parade drills, airlift exercises, and other operations. It is also a multicultural setting because the military personnel (who work or reside there), along with some civilian staff, are drawn from diverse linguistic groups in Nigeria, giving the base a multilingual structure. This multi-complex structure of the base as a professional and residential setting lends credence to the creation and manipulation of specialised codes, jargon, and slang terminologies that enhance military communication within the NAF domains.

The use of military codes and jargon within the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has sparked a debate regarding its potential negative implications and misconceptions. While specialised language is necessary for effective communication and operational precision within the military, its exclusive nature may create a linguistic barrier, isolating military personnel from civilians and promoting a sense of exclusivity. Additionally, the complexity of militarese may contribute to a lack of transparency in communication, raising concerns about accountability and the transparency of official statements.

Furthermore, the negative perception of specialised military jargon and slang may have broader societal implications, including the potential glorification of violence and the normalization of

conflict. These implications may lead to communication breakdowns in joint military and multinational operations and reinforce hierarchical structures.

To address these concerns, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the use of special terminologies in the Nigerian Air Force within the framework of Halliday's Systemic Functional model of register analysis. By examining the prevalence and manipulation of technical and military-specific vocabulary in communication, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights for linguistic analysis and potential improvements in military communication practices within NAF domains.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Michael Halliday's register analysis is selected as the preferred theoretical tool for the investigation of the use of specialised military English language (militarese) within the NAF Base Kaduna. Halliday perceives register analysis as an attempt to examine the linguistic foundations of the language variety that is spoken or written in specific contexts and how such language variety change in line with situational factors. He cites that a register is "a variety of language, corresponding to a variety of situation," with the terms "field," "tenor," and "mode" being applied when interpreting the situational use of language. (Halliday 1985:29). Although the idea of examining the significance of context on language had been in use much earlier by proto-pragmatists like Wegener, Halliday observes that Reid (1956) was the first to adopt the term "register" to express the notion of "text variety" (Halliday, 2007:181). Register analysis is a part of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, which views language as a social semiotic system that shares a symbiotic relationship with the contexts of culture and situation in every given speech event.

M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan (1976) proposed that the concept of "register" as a set of linguistic features that are typically associated with a particular configuration of situational features comprising three key values: field, mode, and tenor. According to Halliday's framework of register analysis, "field" refers to the total event in which the text is functioning, including the subject-matter and the speaker or writer's purpose. "Mode" refers to the function of the text in the event, including its channel (spoken or written, extempore or prepared) and genre, rhetorical

mode such as narrative, didactic, persuasive, and phatic communion. "Tenor" refers to the type of role interaction and the relevant social relations involved among the participants, both permanent and temporary.

As Halliday and Hasan (1976) explain that the linguistic features of a text are determined by these three context-specific values of field, mode, and tenor. This is because of the perception that "the register is the set of meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns, that are typically drawn upon under the specified conditions, along with the words and structures that are used in the realization of these meanings." This implies that the register of a text is the combination of semantic patterns and linguistic forms that are commonly used under specific conditions. In other words, the register is the linguistic manifestation of the situational features, comprising the appropriate words and structures used to convey the intended meaning within a given context.

The principles of Halliday's model of register analysis could be explained as follows: it is realisational as opposed to indexical, as it highlights the co-constitutive relationship between meaning in languages and context-dependent variation; it attempts to clarify variation in language normally rather than merely identify and classify accepted professional or institutionalised varieties; It provides a theoretical basis for large-scale comparative applications but is difficult to automate; hence, proxy or index measurements of functional categories are typically used in automated register analysis; it is multifunctional rather than ideationally or interpersonally oriented alone. These tenets are captured Halliday's statement that:

A register is a semantic concept. It can be defined as a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode and tenor. But since it is a configuration of meanings, a register must also, of course, include the expressions, the lexico-grammatical and phonological features, that typically accompany or realize these meanings' (Halliday 1985:39).

Halliday's perspective on register has generally remained the same over time, despite minor adjustments. It is believed to be: i) a construct that falls under the semantic layer; ii) a multifunctional, multifaceted construct that is not reducible to a single feature or line, such as "degree of formality" or "degree of spoken/writtenness"; iii) a construct that can adapt to settings

in field, tenor, and mode; iv) an essential category that is crucial in driving systems of linguistic distinctly.

This study employs Halliday's register analysis for the identification and examination of field characteristics observed in specialised military terms, examining hierarchical relationships among participants (tenor), and evaluating the various modes of communication employed in the use of these expressions in discourse situations within the various domains of the Nigerian Air Force Base Kaduna. Special attention is given to the exploration of specialised vocabulary, the use of local words, codes, and the influence of standard operating procedures in the manipulation of this special language of the NAF.

The application of these contextual features would uncover the the importance and implications of employing such terms in military-military and military-civilian communicative situations. By understanding and dissecting the complex nature of language use within this military context, the study hopes to provide a foundation for enhanced discourse strategies, fostering clarity, understanding, and effective communication within and beyond the NAF Base Kaduna domain.

### **Review of Related Literature and Justification of Study**

This section evaluates existing scholarly works on military linguistic studies to identify possible gaps that this paper intends to fill in research studies.

Nargizaxon Hashimova and Temurkhon Sattorov (2021:162) examine military expressions in the English language and their usage in ordinary people's speech. The findings reveal that military slang aids defense personnel in conveying information and bonding as a unit. The paper also supports the long-held assertion that the armed services have long been a hotbed of incredibly creative (and sometimes vulgar) vocabulary, all of which translates into military slang utterances that stick in the memory. Although this work is related to our current study because it is in the realm of military slang expressions, our work is different due to the employment of Halliday's register analysis in the investigation of the contextual use of these jargons and slang terms.

Rashidova Munavvar Xaydarovna (2020:502-504) conducted a study on the challenges faced by educators teaching communicative English to cadets at the National Guard Institute of Uzbekistan. The paper suggests ways for educators to enhance their English classes' communicative aspect while considering the cadets' constrained daily schedule. Our study is not only focused on the educational dimension of the specialized military codes in the NAF domains but also on the general intricate issues associated with the creation and manipulation of military code terms.

Sergio Edgardo Castillo (2017:22) analysed the military terminology used by peacekeepers, asserting that English serves as the common language in multinational missions involving Argentine armed forces in United Nations assignments. The research examined English's role in peacekeeping through focus group analysis of Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) in Cyprus missions from 1993 to 2016. The article highlighted issues hindering communication, including intercultural communicative competence challenges. This work differs from the current study, which focuses on a register analysis of military expressions in the Nigerian Air Force.

Saodat Zafarovna Mirpayazova (2023: 140-151) explores ways by which educational institutions can adopt technologies to enhance foreign language education for cadets attending higher military educational institutions. The paper used pedagogical tools to ensure educational outcomes align with societal norms and standards and differs greatly from the current work in terms of theoretical tools, geographical scope, and objectives of the study.

Sidra Ahmad, Iqra Iqbal, and Shahzadi Sumra (2023:16-21) investigated Pakistani and Indian budget speeches for lexical choices using corpus-driven analysis. Their study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches in looking at diverse aspects of society (including the military/defense ministries of both nations) with a particular focus on budget speeches from 2009 to 2013. The research concluded that budget discourse employed distinct language to achieve government goals. Our work is in stark contrast with this study because our focus is on the use of specialized military codes in a Nigerian military domain.

The review of literature has revealed that linguistic studies on the register of militarese are inadequate, especially concerning the contextual usage of this special type of English language in varying military domains. This work is aimed at filling this research gap by showing the diverse contextual situations (field, tenor, and mode) where the selected specialized military expressions could be used appropriately and acceptably by military personnel in the NAF Base Kaduna. Moreover, the research serves as a tool for sensitizing the civilian populace on the etymology, relevance, and implications of this variety of militarese as a functional register in the NAF Base Kaduna.

### **Methodology**

This study is a qualitative ethnographic research conducted at NAF Base Kaduna. The qualitative ethnographic method is preferred for this study because it involves the textual analysis of linguistic expressions following a close examination of language use within an occupational or specialised setting like the NAF Base Kaduna. Data for this research were primarily sourced from the vocabulary of military personnel living and working within various domains, including parade grounds, training camps, administrative offices, residential quarters, and centers of socio-economic activities (such as schools, religious institutions, markets, and sports centers) in NAF Base Kaduna.

Thirty subjects (Commissioned and Non-Commissioned Officers, 15 Males and 15 Females) aged between 16 and 65 years were interviewed via the diary method, which involves recording data using a pen and notebook. In total, a corpus of 50 special military expressions was generated from the various domains, of which 12 terms were purposively sampled, presented, and analysed in this paper using Halliday's model of register analysis along the parameters of field, tenor, and mode of contextual examination.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

This segment investigates the contextual use of some specialised military expressions within selected NAF Base Kaduna settings using Halliday's register analysis. An additional segment is added to every analysed term to discuss the findings and provide additional information on these special military expressions.

### **i. Ajuwaya:**

Field: 'Ajuwaya' is used in the section of Drill and Parade and is an important part of military command and instructions.

Tenor: The tenor is of a high rank, typically an officer or drill instructor addressing soldiers of lower rank or reviewing a parade.

Mode: Ajuwaya is primarily spoken and is used during training and ceremonies. In terms of register, it is a technical/formal part of the specialised vocabulary within the military.

Discussion: Ajuwaya semantically connotes the sense of 'as you were' (an order asking the soldiers to halt with the intention of making corrections or giving further instructions). Some persons also argue that 'Ajuwaya' has its roots in a Hausa word that signifies "stand firm" or "back."

### **ii. Air Police:**

Field: The primary field of this expression is specifically that of Air Operations and Law Enforcement. The term is technically used within the NAF to refer to their police unit responsible for law enforcement and security.

Tenor: The tenor is of high rank, as the term refers to an official law enforcement unit within the Air Force, thereby implying authority and power. In terms of role relations, the Air Police personnel is seen as the 'Maintainer of Order and Security'. They are responsible for upholding the law and ensuring the safety of personnel and assets within the Nigerian Air Force.

Mode: The mode is both spoken and written as the term could be used in verbal communication within the NAF, as well as appearing in written communication, such as official documentation or reports.

Discussion: It is important to note that "Air Police" is an alternative expression for the official term "Air Force Police Unit." Other lexical items that are used for this unit include 'A.P.' and 'White Cap'. The term 'Air police' metaphorically adds a layer of casualness and camaraderie to the meaning of 'military police' by drawing a comparison between the Air Force police unit and

civilian police forces. This further highlights the unit's responsibility for law enforcement within the Air Force.

### **iii. Body Count:**

Field: Body count is a term used in the military sub-field of Combat and Warfare, referring to the number of enemy forces killed in an operation.

Tenor: Though utilised by various ranks (Combatant, Commander, Intelligence Officer, or Analyst), it often originates from individuals in authority involved in planning, executing, or assessing operations. However, lower-ranking personnel might use it when reporting casualties.

Mode: It appears in both spoken and written communication within military operations, reports, briefings, and assessments.

Discussion: "Body Count" belongs to the Technical/Formal Register used within the military for communication and documentation. However, its informality and potential emotional association set it apart from strictly technical terms. The use of this jargon can euphemistically lead to desensitization to the human cost of warfare by reducing lives to mere numbers, fostering competition in statistically objectifying casualty figures on both sides of a conflict. Additionally, it can contribute to the dehumanization of the enemy by focusing solely on the quantity of deaths rather than the individuals involved.

### **iv. Brat:**

Field: The term 'brat' could be considered a part of the broader Social Field, specifically the military sub-field of Family and Identity, implying certain traits or experiences associated with growing up in a military family.

Tenor: The term does not inherently indicate a specific speaker, rank, or role within the military hierarchy. It could be used by parents within the military (self-referentially or toward their children), by other service members, or even by civilians with connections to the military.

Mode: It is primarily spoken, though it might appear in informal written communication like online forums or personal letters.

Discussion: The term 'Brat' (or military brat) can carry various connotations, both positive and negative. It can imply an individual's resilience, adaptability, and a strong sense of communal affiliations due to shared experiences. However, it can also suggest challenges related to frequent relocations, parental deployments, and potentially strict upbringing.

#### **v. Fatigue:**

Field: 'Fatigue' is military jargon used in the sub-fields of Logistics, Health, and Maintenance. It refers to the environmental sanitation exercise of the NAF and forms a crucial part of military operations.

Tenor: "Fatigue" can be used by personnel of any rank, but its usage may carry different connotations. Lower-ranking personnel might use it with some resignation or even resentment, while officers might use it in a more neutral or instructional manner.

Mode: The expression is employed in both spoken and written instructions, reminders, schedules, notices, and discussions about the cleaning exercise.

Discussion: 'Fatigue' falls within the formal register and refers to the scheduled environmental cleaning exercise held within the NAF Base vicinity and conducted by the NAF authorities. Closely related jargons would include 'clear' and 'chop grass'. "Fatigue" can be seen as a euphemism for the less appealing act of cleaning, potentially making it seem less tedious or burdensome. This might be particularly helpful for motivating personnel to participate. Officers assigning and overseeing "fatigue" tasks can highlight their authority, while lower-ranking personnel might feel obligated to comply without complaint.

#### **vi. Gas:**

Field: Gas is a military slang, specifically in the sub-field of Discipline and Personnel Management. It refers to an unauthorized absence from military duty.

Tenor: While its usage might extend across ranks, it is used by Lower-Ranking Personnel and civilians in informal settings among peers. Individuals higher up the chain of command would typically employ formal terminology like AWOL (Absent Without Leave) or "unauthorized

absence." The tenor's role typically involves someone discussing or observing another's AWOL status. It might also be used by someone planning their own unauthorized absence (that is why such persons opt for such cryptic slang due to the seriousness of the offence).

Mode: Primarily Spoken as an informal slang in casual conversations or private communications among service members

Discussion: "Gas" acts as a euphemism for the serious offence of AWOL, downplaying its gravity and legal implications. This might reflect a coping mechanism or covert attempt to avoid serious consequences. Other related slang terms are 'cut out' and 'light one.'

### **vii. Groundnuts**

Field: The term 'groundnuts' (or 'geda' in Hausa language) is used within the domain of Military Combat and Operations, specifically referring to ammunition or bullets.

Tenor: The term 'groundnuts' establishes a particular informal social relationship among all members of the NAF personnel, contributing to a sense of camaraderie and shared understanding within soldiers in the military community.

Mode: The mode of communication for 'groundnuts' is typically spoken, informal, and occurs in casual conversations among soldiers in the battlefield, the parade ground, or during training exercises.

Discussion: The act of casually branding bullets or other ammunitions as "Groundnuts" potentially contributes to desensitization to the seriousness and consequences of armed conflict. "Groundnuts" acts as a euphemism for deadly ammunition, replacing a harsh term with a seemingly harmless one. This further reflects a coping mechanism within military communities. It belongs to the 'Informal Register,' indicating its use in casual settings among service members, away from official communication.

### **viii. Guardroom:**

Field: 'Guardroom' is an expression used within the Military Correctional domain, particularly in the sub-field of Discipline and Detention. "Guard room" refers to a temporary holding facility for military personnel awaiting disciplinary action or trial.

Field: Although its usage cuts across various ranks, the term is often employed by individuals of higher ranks involved in disciplinary procedures or guard duty, as well as lower-ranking personnel when referring to their confinement or that of others. The tenor's role can vary depending on the context. It could be that of a Commanding Officer, Guard, Detainee, or Observer.

Mode: 'Guardroom' appears in both spoken and written discourse in matters related to detention procedures, orders, official reports, and discussions about confined personnel within the NAF domains.

Discussion: As a part of the formal register adopted within the military for official communication, "Guardroom" can be seen as a euphemism for "military cell." It potentially softens the harsh reality of being detained, with terms like 'galo' and 'cooler' serving as alternative jargons. However, the usage of this jargon can also contribute to dehumanization by associating confinement with a generic space rather than acknowledging the individual experiences of detainees. The term also reinforces the power dynamics within the military, highlighting the authority of those who control access to and information about the guardroom. Lastly, it is important to note that being confined in a "guardroom" can have a significant emotional impact on individuals, potentially leading to feelings of isolation, shame, and anxiety.

### **ix. Katakò:**

Field: The term 'katakò' (or 'wood' in the Hausa language) informally overlaps with the military Social Field with the use of the legs during parade drills, physical training, and combat situations..

Tenor: While used across ranks, "katakò" thrives in informal settings among soldiers who share a Hausa background or familiarity with the language.

Mode: 'katako' is primarily employed in spoken discourse such as informal conversations, barracks life, or friendly banter among soldiers.

Discussion: "katako" falls outside the standard Formal Register used within the military. Employing the term "katako" in parade drills showcases the influence of the Hausa language and culture within the Nigerian military by signifying shared identity among soldiers who understand the term. Moreover, using informal slang like "katako" contributes to humour and camaraderie among soldiers, allowing these military personnel to express themselves in a relaxed way outside the formality of military structures.

#### **x. Kurata**

Field: "Kurata" is a military term that is specifically used in the sub-field of Training and Education. It refers to cadet/trainees within the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) program.

Tenor: "Kurata" is usually employed by military personnel such as drill instructors, training officers or senior NCO trainees when addressing or referring to NCO cadets. It might also be used among trainees themselves in informal settings, but with potential power dynamics at play depending on seniority within the NCO cadre.

Mode: The expression is usually spoken as an informal slang during training exercises, instructions, and feedback sessions within the NCO training program.

Discussion: In terms of register, "kurata" falls outside the standard formal register used within the NAF. It is a slang particularly specific to the NCO training context, indicating the close-knit nature of the cadre and shared experiences during training. The meaning and usage of "kurata" has evolved over time from the Hausa language and is used across different training environments within the NAF Base

#### **xi. Neutralized**

Field: 'Neutralized' is part of the military sub-field of Combat and Warfare, referring to an action taken against enemy forces. It could be used when discussing the legality of rules of engagement as well as military operations involving technology or weaponry.

Tenor: The term could be used by high-ranking military personnel involved in planning/executing operations or lower-ranking individuals reporting on events.

Mode: The term could be used in spoken form (during communication within military operations, reports, or briefings) or written discourse (in official reports or documentation).

Discussion: As a euphemism for the expression of temporary incapacitation, permanent elimination, or even capturing and rendering enemy combatants non-threatening, the jargon "Neutralized" belongs to the Technical/Formal Register used within the military for communication and documentation. It is precise and avoids ambiguity while adhering to military terminology.

## **xii. Pay Slip**

Field: 'Pay slip' is a military jargon for monthly salary in the administrative domain, specifically sub-fields of Finance and Payroll.

Tenor: The jargon is applicable to all ranks, as all military personnel receive pay slips. The role of the tenor is that of a Recipient or Observer as he is either receiving the pay slip or discussing it with others.

Mode: "Payslip" is used in spoken and written discourse regarding monthly salary payments.

Discussion: The term does not directly refer to the cheque or slip containing the details of the salary, but it represents the cash as salary paid to the personnel. 'A.E.E. (Authority to Expend Expenditure)', 'Aisha', 'pepper rest', 'rainfall', and 'Commander Wife don born' are alternate slang forms.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the linguistic contexts in which some specialized military terms and expressions are most relevant, how such lexical items are used in fostering communication within the military community, and the extent to which societal changes have a great impact on the linguistic properties of the expressions as vital elements of military discourse. The work underscores the relevance of Halliday's register analysis in probing the ways on how special

military terms are used for encoding entities, processes, and relationships within the NAF domain.

The work also reveals how the soldiers construe the real world and its operations (for example, employing the euphemism "neutralize" instead of "kill" when reporting combat operations). This helps the interlocutor describe actions and events with emphasis on efficiency, urgency, and precision in military communication. Also, the study explores how special expressions establish and maintain power dynamics and hierarchies within the military community. Furthermore, the paper considers the mode by which military jargon utilizes specialized linguistic structures to ensure clarity and conciseness in military-military and military-civilian communication.

This research contributes to knowledge by unveiling the distinct lexico-semantic features of English within the Nigerian Air Force Base Kaduna. By employing the theory of register analysis, the study illuminates the role of linguistic contexts in shaping the relevance and impact of these military expressions in professional and social relationships within the NAF community. Additionally, the research evaluates the influence of societal variations on linguistic change, thereby enriching our understanding of language's intricate ties to specialized contexts, communication dynamics, and the broader societal forces that shape linguistic evolution in the NAF Base Kaduna.

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