

Stylistic Analysis of The Command Terms and Expressions Used for The Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on an aspect of the military, which is command. Command is based on language use, and it is the core facilitator of military functions. The study investigates the functional significance of command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade to reveal the stylistic features and stylistic effects of this variety of language use. The military profession is not open to the public, considering the secluded nature of the profession. The study brings to light the core element of the military operation, which is the use of language, specifically, the use of command terms and expressions in the coordination of Nigerian Army activities. This is reflected in the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day celebration Parade (NADCEL). The study examines the spoken data obtained through a non-participant observation method, qualitatively analysed, using the theoretical tools of J.L. Austin's (1962) Speech Acts Theory, as a communicative theory. The research demonstrates that language use, specifically, command terms and expressions, with distinctive stylistic features, are used as a core coordinator of military activities. The study shows that the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade reflect peculiar stylistic features like the use of imperatives, commanding and imposing tone and rendition, dominant use of Military jargon, elliptical structures, symbolism, and a reflection of Nigerian English and English-based pidgin. The study also reveals that the stylistic techniques used in this context aid familiarity, emphasise meaning, and elicit immediate response from the troops. The study concludes that the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade are laden with peculiar stylistic features and devices that aid the meaning potential of the terms and expressions and subsequently encourage urgent responses from the troops in the parade.

KEY TERMS: Command, Parade, Nigerian Army, Speech Acts, Stylistics

I. Introduction

Trentman (2018) emphasises that "... language cannot be separated from social function, or what humans do with language." Indeed, an investigation of discourse is an assumption that language is active in nature because it is used in creating actions that can be linked to the context of usage. This is the case with the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade, performed during the Nigerian Army Day Celebration (NADCEL). The Nigerian Army, a branch of the Nigerian Armed Forces, performs the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade annually. This activity is a national function carried out by the Nigerian Army to celebrate the Nigerian Army troops for the sacrifices they made for peace during the civil war. It is also used to remind the Nigerian populace of the need for continued peaceful coexistence in the country, Nigeria. The parade presented in this function accords the Nigerian Army the opportunity to display expertise and showcase high Military skills and style, especially in the use of language for parade. This is particularly reflected in the use of command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade.

Though there are general features in the use of language by the Nigerian military and their foreign counterparts, there are still differences that arise because of the influence of the environment of use. The command terms and expressions in the Nigerian Army are influenced by the indigenous languages of the users, who adapt some expressions from their local languages. This reveals the influence of their background. Bamigbola and Tunde-Awe (2022) explain that "... certain idiosyncrasies – slogans and clichés – have been imbibed and assimilated into the Nigerian military system since the pre-colonial, the colonial and even, post-colonial times." These form the soldiers' background and make their language use differ from the British who initially trained the troops.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the stylistic features of the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade.
2. Explicate the stylistic techniques featured in the use of the command terms and expressions for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade and their uses.
3. Elucidate the stylistic effects of the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade and the subsequent influence on the troops.
4. Examine the relationship between the context of use of the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade and their stylistic implications.

2.1 Speech Act Theory

Austin's (1962) Speech Act theory is adopted for this paper. It explores the acts performed in making an utterance. The theory provides a lucid understanding of human actions captured through their utterances. It encapsulates explanatorily adequate concepts necessary to account for the communicative efficacy of command terms and expressions in the Nigerian Army Day Celebration. Nordquist (2025) indicates that Speech Acts theory "studies how words are used not only to present information but also to carry out actions" (Key Takeaways). Hussain and Khan (2024) also state that "Speech Act Theory is a linguistic theory that investigates the performative side of the language, demonstrating how utterances not only carry information but also execute actions." (p.385).

Austin (1962) believes that there are acts performed in making an utterance. According to him, these acts are the locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. The locutionary act is the speaker's utterance, which is meaningful, with certain references and aligns with certain grammar. It has three components. They are the phonetic component (pronouncing words), the phatic component (uttering words with phonological and syntactic rules), and the rhetic component (meaning, both sense and reference). The illocutionary act is the function of the speaker's utterance, like ordering, promising, instructing, or warning. It is the communicative force of the speaker's utterance. Nordquist (2025) states that "It is an act accomplished in speaking" (Illocutionary Act and Illocutionary Force). Austin (1962) classifies the illocutionary act into five types. These are the verdictives (give verdicts or judgment, value), exercitives (exercise power, command, influence), commissives (commit one to a future action), habitives (express attitude), and expositives (clarify reason, expound arguments) (Barrero and Andrés Felipe:2023, Oishi:2013, Kirsten:2002). Oishi (2020) also indicates that Austin (1962) classifies illocutionary acts "according to the types of effect that they bring about" (p3). Austin (1962) further explains the conditions that should be met for an illocutionary act to be successful. He called this the felicity conditions. They are the conditions that should be met to validate the illocutionary acts performed. The felicity conditions include the sincerity condition, the preparatory condition, the executive condition, and the fulfilment condition. When these conditions are met by an illocutionary act, it is termed felicitous, and when they are not met it is termed infelicitous. The perlocutionary act is also the result or the effect of the utterance on the hearer. It causes a change in the behaviour of the listener. This can be persuading, convincing, annoying, or comforting.

Austin (1962) further explains that verbs play an important role in speech acts. There are the constative verbs and the performative verbs. The constative verbs reflect true or false statements. They describe situations or events. According to Austin (1962), the performative verbs perform actions, instead of describing the actions, merely by being uttered by the speaker. They pronounce the acts performed by the hearer. The performative utterance is doing something by saying something. The performatives are divided into explicit performatives and implicit performatives. The explicit performatives explicitly state the verbs that pronounce the acts performed, while the implicit performatives do not state the verbs explicitly.

Stylistics

Stylistics, as an area of study, interrogates how language used for activities, such as those in the Armed Forces, is carried out so that they become identifiably distinctive as an occupational variety. This study argues that command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade are laden with stylistic flavouring.

Missikova (2003) classifies stylistics into two categories. They are literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics. Catter and Simpson (1989) note that linguistic stylistics is carried out when "practitioners attempt to derive from the study of style and language a refinement of models for the analysis of language and thus contribute to the development of linguistic theory" (p. 4). Kirsten (2002) believes that "A full stylistic analysis of a given

spoken or written text would describe the text at all the traditional levels of linguistic description – i.e. sound, form, structure and meaning” (p. 510). Similarly, Crystal and Davy (1986) distinguish interrelated levels of stylistic description which they believe seem most satisfactory in the realization of the general aims of stylistic analysis. These levels, according to them, are phonetic, phonological, grammatical, lexical and semantic levels. In addition, Rugaiyah and Ismail (2024) conclude that “Stylistics uses linguistic techniques to describe and analyze literary works, and it examines the creativity in the use of language” (p.40).

In considering the stylistic use of language, we investigate how language changes in different contexts with new outcomes. The Army is a distinctive context where language is used in a peculiar way and consequently, yields interesting forms with new meaning dimensions, like military activities, with the idea that every situation demands a unique form of language. Simpson (2004) buttresses this when he explains:

Stylistics is interested in language as a function of texts in context and it acknowledges that utterances (literary or otherwise) are produced in a time, a place, and in a cultural and cognitive context. These ‘extra-linguistic’ parameters are inextricably tied up with the way a text ‘means.’ (p. 3).

Hence, the understanding that stylistics is significant to the study of command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade provides the zest for this linguistic investigation.

Command Terms and Expressions for Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade

Table 1 (A): Stylistic Analysis of Command Terms and Expressions for Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade

Event: Nigerian Army Day Celebration Ceremony

Context: Nigerian Army Day Parade

S/N	Expression	Meaning	Stylistic Features	Stylistic Implication	Remarks
D1	Battalion Shun!	Battalion stand at attention.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone / Rendition Commanding. Imposing.	Battalion stand still.	Instructing. Ordering.
D2	Colour Party will advance; by the centre quick march!	The officers holding the National flag, and the Nigerian Army flag, move forward in a quick march.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Compound sentence. Tone / Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Repetition March is repeated (D2, D6, D7, D10, D11). Colour is repeated (D2, D4).	Colour Party begin the quick marching.	Instructing. Ordering.

Table 1 (B): Stylistic Analysis of Command Terms and Expressions for Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade

Event: Nigerian Army Day Celebration Ceremony

Context: Nigerian Army Day Parade

S/N	Expression	Meaning	Stylistic Features	Stylistic Implication	Remarks
D3	Shoulder arm!	Take the rifle up to your shoulder level by your right side.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Elliptical Structures Ellipted subject. Repetition Arm is repeated (D3, D5, D12).	Be ready to perform some acts with your raffles.	Instructing. Ordering.
D4	Enzymes to the colour, take post!	The officers holding the National flag, and the Nigerian Army flag, take three steps forward and halt.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Elliptical Structures Ellipted subject. Repetition Colour is repeated (D2, D4).	The officers with the flags, take your position and align with the sub-guard commanders.	Instructing. Ordering.
D5	Under arm!	Take your rifle down and place it in a position where it will align with your right leg and at the same time place the butt of the rifle on the ground.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Elliptical Structures Ellipted subject. Repetition Arm is repeated (D3, D5, D12).	Relax.	Instructing. Ordering.

Table 1. (C): Stylistic Analysis of Command Terms and Expressions for Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade

Event: Nigerian Army Day Celebration Ceremony

Context: Nigerian Army Day Parade

S/N	Expression	Meaning	Stylistic Features	Stylistic Implication	Remarks
D6	Parade will march past in slow and quick time; division into	Both squads begin to march slowly, aligning with the first person at	Imperative Exclamatory.	Begin the slow march	Instructing. Ordering.

	column, by the right; right wheel; slow march!	the right, and then break into four columns. Before you salute the reviewing officer return to two squads. Then after you have turned to the right, form four columns again before taking off with a quick march. Follow the same procedure also as you march in quick march. Then return to your original position and formation.	Diction/Lexical Choice. Military jargon Grammatical Status Compound sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Repetition March is repeated (D2, D6, D7, D10, D11). Parade is repeated (D6, D11).	and quick march.	
D7	Number one guard, open order march!	Number one guard let the troops in the front row continue moving while the centre row misses a step and the rear misses two steps.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Repetition March is repeated (D2, D6, D7, D10, D11). Number one guard is repeated (D7, D10).	Create space for inspection.	Instructing. Ordering.
D8	Eyes right!	Look at your right in salute of the reviewing officer.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Elliptical Structures Ellipted subject. Repetition Eyes is repeated (D8, D9).	Honour the reviewing officer.	Instructing. Ordering.

Table 1. (D): Stylistic Analysis of Command Terms and Expressions for Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade

Event: Nigerian Army Day Celebration Ceremony

Context: Nigerian Army Day Parade

S/N	Expression	Meaning	Stylistic Features	Stylistic Implication	Remarks
D9	Eyes front!	Look straight ahead of you.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing.	Look ahead and continue with the normal marching.	Instructing. Ordering.

			Elliptical Structures Ellipted subject. Repetition Eyes is repeated (D8, D9).		
D10	Number one guard, close order march!	Number one guard let the front row miss two steps while the centre row misses one step and the rear should continue to march forward.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Simple sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Repetition March is repeated (D2, D6, D7, D10, D11). Number one guard is repeated (D7, D10).	Return to the normal files and continue the marching.	Instructing. Ordering.
D11	Parade will march in review order; by the right, quick march!	Parade (troops) will march fourteen steps towards the saluting dice and halt, aligning with the first person at the right.	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Compound sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Repetition March is repeated (D2, D6, D7, D10, D11). Parade is repeated (D6, D11).	Move closer to the reviewing officer.	Instructing. Ordering.

Table 1. (E): Stylistic Analysis of Command Terms and Expressions for Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade

Event: Nigerian Army Day Celebration Ceremony

Context: Nigerian Army Day Parade

S/N	Expression	Meaning	Stylistic Features	Stylistic Implication	Remarks
D12	National salute; Present arm!	Take your rifle, from the side of your right shoulder, throw them to the front, and simultaneously strike them in unison and the officers kiss their swords, and the flags are lowered in a perpendicular form in salute of a Federal Government representative (President, Minister etc.)	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice Military jargon. Grammatical Status Compound sentence. Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing. Elliptical Structures Ellipted subject. Repetition Arm is repeated (D3, D5, D12).	Honour the reviewing officer (National Figure).	Instructing. Ordering.
D13	Three hearty cheers to the reviewing officer; Hip, Hip, Hip!	Raise your caps up with your right hand and respond with 'Hurray,'	Imperative Exclamatory. Diction/Lexical Choice	Honour the reviewing officer by raising your caps.	Instructing. Ordering.

		three times, as I say 'Hip, Hip, Hip.'	<p>Military jargon.</p> <p>Grammatical Status Compound sentence.</p> <p>Tone/Rendition Commanding. Imposing.</p> <p>Elliptical Structures Ellipted subject.</p>		
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III. Discussion

The command terms and expressions in Table 1 (A-E), which were used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade on the 6th of July 2013, at Eagle's Square in Abuja, reveal distinct stylistic features found in the military context. The Parade Commander's utterances are imperative. Some of the expressions are simple, short, crisp, and pungent. In essence, short phrases, clauses, or sentences are used to represent entire expressions. For example, 'Shoulder arm!' (D3) 'Under arm!' (D5) 'Eyes right!' (D8) and 'Eyes front!' (D9).

Additionally, the tone and rendition are commanding and imposing. The expressions are exclamatory, and some terms are made louder and longer for emphasis; hence, the expressions differ from the conventional pronunciation of words. For instance, in the expressions, 'Battalion shun!' (D1) and 'National salute, Present arm!' (D12) 'Battalion,' is pronounced as /bataliɔ:(ɔ)n/ instead of /bətaliən/ and 'Present' is pronounced /pre(e)zent/, instead of /preznt/. This style, which is peculiar to the Nigerian Army, reinforces the expressions as commands and reflects the Nigerian English pronunciation, revealing the troops' background. Also, making some words louder and longer is used in this context as a foreground to help the troops interpret the meaning of the Commander's utterance. In addition, the term 'attention' is shortened and pronounced as 'shun,' hence, we have 'Battalion shun.' This is clipping. The expression is a hybrid of Nigerian English, Military jargon, and English-based pidgin. Though 'shun' started in the Nigerian Army as a mispronunciation, it has been adopted as Nigerian Pidgin English and is widely used by the Nigerian populace. But the original term is still pronounced 'attention' by the British Army. The use of clipping in this context aids familiarity and effective command.

Furthermore, some of the expressions are used in sequential order. Some of these include, 'Shoulder arm!' (D3) and 'Under arm!' (D5); 'Eyes right!' (D8) and 'Eyes front!' (D9). The command 'Under arm!' is given after 'Shoulder arm!' Likewise, the command, 'Eyes front!' is given after 'Eyes right!' This creates an organized structure and helps to achieve meaning. Moreover, the expressions, 'Under arm!' (D5) and 'Shoulder arm!' (D3) reflect the use of antonyms for local coherence.

Along with these, some of the terms and expressions are participatory in use. Some of these are, 'Number one guard, open order march!' (D7) 'Number one guard, close order march!' (D10). The use of 'Number one guard,' means that some other guards are present. In essence, each of the sub-guard commanders gives these commands to their different guards. In addition to this, the expression, 'Three hearty cheers to the reviewing officer, Hip, Hip, Hip!' (D13) is participatory in use. When the Commander gives this command, the troops respond with, 'Hurray,' three times, that is, according to the number of times the Commander utters the expression, 'Hip, Hip, Hip!' At the same time, the troops raise their caps with their right hand. This encourages interaction, and the stylistic implication is that the guest of honour is effectively honoured by the troops present.

Besides these, there is the use of imagery to create a vivid image of honour. This can be seen in the expressions, 'Colour Party will advance by the centre quick march!' (D2) 'Enzymes to the colour, take post!' (D4) and 'National salute, Present arm!' (D12). The term, 'Colour,' means the honour, dignity, and strength of the unit. The National flag, and the Nigerian Army flag, are the symbols of the 'Colour' in this context. Hence, as soon as the flags are 'marched in' by the 'Colour party,' it is believed by the troops that the honour, dignity, and strength of the Army is present, hence they respect this. In a like manner, the expression, 'National salute, Present arm!' (D12) creates a mental image of a national figure who should be honoured by the troops. This can be the President, Minister, or other national personalities. These expressions, therefore, are used stylistically to create an air of honour and dignity in the context of this parade.

Moreso, the Commander's utterances reveal the use of repetition for clarity, emphasis, and lexical cohesion. Some examples are, 'Arm,' (D3, D5, D12) 'Eyes,' (D8, D9) 'Number one guard' (D7, D10) 'Parade,' (D6, D11) 'March,' (D2, D6, D7, D10, D11) and 'Colour,' (D2, D4). The stylistic implication of this usage is that the troops can process and retain the information passed to them by the Commander.

Along with these, elliptical structures are featured in some of the command terms and expressions used in this parade. For instance, the expressions, 'Shoulder arm!' (D3) 'Under arm!' (D5) and 'National salute, Present arm!' (D12) have the elliptical subject structures common for commands. This is used for cohesion, and to catch the immediate attention of the troops. The stylistic implication of this structure is that information is passed to the troops instantly to enable them to perform the acts with urgency.

Also, the diction and lexical status reflect the use of jargon to give instructions. Some examples include, 'Battalion Shun!' (D1) 'Parade will march past in slow and quick time; division into column, by the right; right wheel slow march!' (D6) 'Number one guard, close order march!' (D10) and 'Parade will march in review order, by the right, quick march!' (D11). These expressions are military jargon and are accepted as a formal language use in the Nigerian Army. This is a prominent style of the Nigerian Army's use of language for parade.

In addition, the Parade Commander's utterances exhibit stylistic implications that are only obtainable in the context of the Nigerian Army's formal use of language for parades. This can be seen in the expressions, 'Enzymes to the colour, take post!' (D4) and 'National salute, Present arm!' (D12). The stylistic implications of these two expressions, that is, 'The officers with the flags, take your position and align with the sub-guard commanders' (D4) and 'Honour the reviewing officer (National Figure),' (D12) are context specific. Beyond the context of the

Nigerian Army's formal use of language for parade, the stylistic implications of these utterances may change.

Findings

1. The study revealed that the peculiar stylistic features reflected in the use of the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade include the use of imperatives, dominant use of Military jargon, commanding and imposing tone and rendition, elliptical structures, simple sentence structure, clipping, sequential usage of the terms and expressions, symbolism, repetition, imagery, and antonyms.
2. According to the research, the stylistic techniques featured in the use of the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade comprise the following:

Lexical Level

The command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade reflect a dominant use of imperatives to order or instruct the troops to achieve set military goals. The exercitives, a class of primary performative verbs, are prominently used in this manner, to instruct or exercise power over the troops. The diction and lexical choice also reveal a dominant use of military jargon to command the troops. This aids familiarity and emphasises meaning. In addition, clipping is used to achieve familiarity and to enable effective command, especially as it reflects a hybrid of Nigerian English, Military jargon, and English-based pidgin. Antonyms are also used for local coherence. Moreso, repetition is used for clarity, emphasis, and lexical cohesion to help the troops process and retain the information passed to them.

Grammatical Level

The grammatical structure reveals mainly the use of simple sentence structures. Short and pungent expressions are used to pass urgent information, considering the military context where long narratives are not required. Ellipsis is used for cohesion and to catch the immediate attention of the troops. In other words, information is passed instantly to the troops to aid them in responding urgently. There is also the use of sequential command terms and expressions, which helps to create an organized structure, achieve order, and emphasize meaning.

Semantic Level

Imagery and symbolism are used to create a vivid image of honour, that underscores the essence of this parade. The use of the term 'Colour' creates a clear image of honour among the troops, as it represents the honour, dignity, and strength of the Army. Moreso, the National flag and the Nigerian Army flag are used as a symbol of 'Colour.'

Phonetic Level

The tone and rendition are commanding and imposing. The pronunciation of the terms and expressions is mainly exclamatory, with some terms and expressions made louder and longer than others. It differs from the conventional

pronunciation of words, and it is used to reinforce the terms and expressions as commands. The 'louder and longer' style of pronouncing some of the terms and expressions is used for emphasis, and as a foreground to help the troops interpret the meaning of the Commander's utterance. Also, the pronunciation of some of the terms and expressions reflect the Nigerian English pronunciation.

3. The study demonstrated that the stylistic effect of the command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade is that the use of the terms and expressions aids familiarity, emphasises meaning, and elicits immediate response from the troops, considering the stylistic devices used.

4. The analysis revealed that the relationship between the stylistic implications of the terms and expressions and the context of use is that the stylistic implications of the terms and expressions reflect the formal use of language for the Nigerian Army context of Parade, specifically, the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade. Beyond this context, some of the stylistic implications of the terms and expressions may change.

Conclusion

Command terms and expressions used for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration Parade are minimal texts, but meaningful. They reflect the distinctive style of the Nigerian Army for National Parades, which emphasises the honour, dignity, and strength of the Nigerian Army.

The study concludes that the command terms and expressions in this context are laden with peculiar stylistic features and techniques that aid the meaning potential of the terms and expressions, and subsequently encourage urgent responses from the troops in the parade.

Suggestion for Further Studies

The command terms and expressions should be further studied from a Sociolinguistic perspective.

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