

# MORPHOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE PARAMILITARY PERSONNEL

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## *Abstract*

The research investigates the morphological analysis of the coded language of Paramilitary formations in Nigeria, and provides insight into the unique use of the 1 language and brings out the peculiar linguistic forms generated through morphological processes that occur in their interactions in the course of discharging their statutory duties and points out the similarities and differences among the agencies. The theoretical framework adopted and used for the study is Lieb's Theory of Process Model of Word Formation and the Theory of Speech Accommodation. The theories offer comprehensive approaches that account for all processes of word formation in unified ways. The accommodation theory attempts to explain why people adjust their style of speaking to accommodate their addressees (Crystal, 2003). There is therefore speech accommodation among military and paramilitary personnel informed by their interactions, especially at different levels – parades, briefings, their beats and duty posts, sports, departments, in the barracks and such other places. Data used for the study were collected through participant observation and unstructured interview of personnel while on duty within the office environment using random sampling method. The findings indicate that the operatives use English language for their formal conversations to communicate paramilitary ideology. In addition, they were found to use unique lexical choices created specifically to serve the communication needs of the interlocutors. This study will be of immense benefit to Linguists in different fields of linguistics such as, documentary linguistics and corpus linguistics.

**Keywords:** Code, Morphology, Morphological Processes and Paramilitary



## 1. Introduction

**T**he paramilitary forces or agencies are security organizations whose activities, training, tactics, and operations are similar to those of the military. They are not categorized as military and they are not purely civilian. They may be categorized as civilians who have undergone and passed military training. The paramilitary forces gather timely intelligence, maintain law and order, maintain safety of lives on the highways and protect civilians and government installations, (Dambazau, 2011; Ndubueze, 2012).

The coded communication system in the language of the military and paramilitary agencies has been an interesting subject of study over the years. Ebong (2009), Uwem, (2017), and Uwem & Ekpe (2018), worked extensively on the language of the Paramilitary agencies in Nigeria. These studies however did not consider the aspect of morphology. This study therefore investigates the morphological processes in the language of Paramilitary formations in Nigeria.

A paramilitary code is a brevity code, usually numerical or alphanumeric, used to transmit information between law enforcement agents over communication radio systems. Examples of paramilitary codes include "10 codes" (such as 10-4 for "okay" or "acknowledged"—sometimes written X4 or X-4), signals, incident codes, response codes, or other status codes. These code types may be used in the same sentence to describe specific aspects of a situation. Codes vary from agency to agency. It is rare to find two agencies with exactly the same ten-codes, signals, incident codes, or other status codes. While agencies with adjacent or overlapping jurisdictions often have similar codes, it is not uncommon to find differences even within one agency. Different agencies can have codes dissimilar enough to make communication difficult. However, there are similarities among popular sets of 10-codes. The topic of standardized codes has long been discussed in U.S. law enforcement circles, but there is no consensus on the issue. Some law enforcement agencies use “plain talk” or “plain language” which replaces codes with standard speech and terminology, albeit in a structured manner or format. Arguments against plain language are its lack of brevity, variability, and lack of secrecy that is often tactically advantageous or a safety issue when officer communications can be overheard by the civilian public.

In [linguistics](#), morphology is the study of words, how they are formed, and their relationship to other words in the same language. (Anderson1992). It analyzes the structure of words and parts of words such as [stems](#), [root words](#), [prefixes](#), and [suffixes](#). Morphology also looks at [parts of speech](#), [intonation](#) and [stress](#), and the ways [context](#) can change a word's pronunciation and meaning.

Word formation is the fundamental subject of morphology. In [linguistics](#), word formation is the creation of a new [words](#) ( Bussmann 1996). A word-formation process could be the following: a way in which an entirely new word comes into a language or a way in which a speaker creates complex words from already existing simpler word(s). In line with this view, Lieb (2013) defines word formation as forming new lexical words from already existing words using a word formation process. Bryson (1990) cited in Peña (2010) identifies six ways of creating new words which include: adding to them, subtracting from them, making them up, doing nothing to them, borrowing from other languages and by mistake. In this study the researcher considers the word formation processes attested in the language of the NSCDC, one of the paramilitary agencies in Nigeria.

The communicative needs of the Nigerian paramilitary formations particularly necessitates the use of several but peculiar lexical choices, some of which are formed through the conventional morphological processes: blending, clipping, borrowing, compounding, debasing and acronyms/abbreviations. In other studies, bail bond, check point, death trap, traffic offences, oil thief, among others, were listed as collocations in paramilitary expressions while sitrep, intrep, notal, pasep and so on were considered as blended words. Also, clipped words such as: info, loc, ops and ack, and acronyms/abbreviations such as : SARS, FIR, CERP, CIPU, SWAT, CID and many others were described as morphological properties in paramilitary language (Uwem, 2017; Uwem & Ekpe, 2018). However, a thorough investigation of the morphological features of the language of the Paramilitary goes beyond what has been done in these studies.

Although there have been a few researches on the language of the military and the paramilitary, there is a dearth of investigations on unique words they generate for use through morphological operation - word formation processes. For instance, Megbulem (1991), Alabi (2014) and Ogundele (2016) conducted researches on the context of military parades (where the paramilitary derives in Nigeria). Megbulem(1991) took on the linguistic perspectives, Alabi (2014) viewed parades as unique speech situations that portray linguistic ‘deviation and choices’ while Ogundele (2016) saw the parade scene as the contextual interplay of the three semantic constructs: field, tenor and mode of discourse. Each of them discovered unique lexical choices influenced by the situational contexts in the parade drills of the military.



Conversely, Amafah (1990) carried out a study on the English language of the Nigerian Army. Ebong (2009) investigated style in the language of the Nigeria Police Force while Uwen (2017); Uwen & Ekpe (2018b) examined language use in paramilitary formations, particularly; Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). Amefah (1990) and Ebong (2009) did a skeletal description of the subject. Uwen (2017) enumerated a few morphological features in the language of the paramilitary while (Uwen & Ekpe, 2018b) aver that the morphological forms in (and) the group's language enhance national development. The dominant findings among the scholars include the description of the prescriptive nature of the military (and by extension paramilitary) language without details on the application of the word formation processes to generate (new) words for use by the group in their conversational encounters. This study discusses word formation processes as conventional methods for generating linguistic items as they apply in the language of paramilitary operatives, with a view to examining the uncommon forms arising from such 'creations' that exist in their vocabulary.

## **2. Methodology**

The primary data used for this study were collected through participant observation and unstructured interview of personnel when on duty within the office environment using the random sampling method. Samples of these usages which are few in number, were collected mainly through interviews and participant observation in very casual and naturalistic settings, with documents and online sources as supplementary sources providing additional data. The participants were observed at different times and places while on joint official assignment. No form of permission was sought from the participants as the researcher desired real and natural flow of conversation rather than obtaining permission (which would amount to prompting) and hinder originality of their conversations.

## **3. Method of Data Analysis**

The usages were categorized into three sub-headings namely:

- a. Morphological processes
- b. Slangy Expressions, Meaning, and Standard English Equivalences
- c. Coded words

## 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

### Paramilitary Alphabet

The NATO phonetic alphabet is the most widely used radiotelephone spelling alphabet. It is officially the [International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet](#), and also commonly known as the [International Civil Aviation Organization \(ICAO\)](#) phonetic alphabet, with a variation officially known as the International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)) phonetic alphabet and figure code. The [International Civil Aviation Organization \(ICAO\)](#) assigned code words acrophonically to the letters of the English alphabet, so that critical combinations of letters and numbers are most likely to be pronounced and understood by those who exchange voice messages by radio or telephone, regardless of language differences or the quality of the communication channel. Such spelling of the alphabet is often called "phonetic alphabet", but they are unrelated to phonetic transcription systems such as the International Phonetic Alphabet.

This version of the alphabet was brought into being by the 1956 alphabet published by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). This alphabet is used by the police and other paramilitary. It consists of the following letters:

<b>CHARACTER</b>	<b>CODE WORD</b>	<b>PRONUNCIATION</b>
A	Alpha	AL fah
B	Bravo	BRAH voh
C	Charlie	CHAR lee
D	Delta	DEL tah
E	Echo	EKK oh
F	Foxtrot	FOKS trot
G	Golf	Golf
H	Hotel	HO tell
I	India	IN dee ah
J	Juliet	JEW lee ett
K	Kilo	KEY loh
L	Lima	LEE mah
M	Mike	Mike
N	November	NOH vem ber
O	Oscar	OSS car



P	Papa	PAH pah
Q	Quebec	Keh BECK
R	Romeo	ROW me oh
S	Sierra	See AIR ah
T	Tango	TANG go
U	Uniform	YOU nee form
V	Victor	VIK ter
W	Whiskey	WISS key
X	X-Ray	EKS ray
Y	Yankee	YANG kee
Z	Zulu	ZOO loo

The police alphabet and the military alphabet have been instrumental in helping provide clear communications and help personnel respond to emergencies. Although there might be slight differences between departments throughout the country, the outcome is the same: helping personnel communicate and making their duties a little easier.

### 5. Morphological Processes in the language of the Paramilitary agencies

The morphological processes attested in the language of the paramilitary agencies include blending, clipping, borrowing, compounding, acronyms, debasing and slangy expressions.

#### Blending

Blending is the combination of parts of two or more existing words to form new words without any regard to where one morpheme ends and another begins; a kind of amalgamation of parts of different words (Ndimele, 2003; Kemmer, 2016; Nordquist, 2017). In blended words, letters, rather than syllables of word, are combined together to form new words. Blends found to be used by the operatives of these agencies include the following:

- |      |              |                     |
|------|--------------|---------------------|
| (1). | <b>Blend</b> | <b>gloss</b>        |
| i.   | Sitrep       | Situation report    |
| ii.  | Intrep       | Intelligence report |
| iii. | Wilco        | Will comply         |
| iv.  | Pasep        | Pass Separately     |

- v.      Ingenpol    Inspector General of Police
- vi.     Comgen      Commandant General
- vii.    Corsec       Corps Secretary
- viii.   Forsec       Force Secretary
- ix.     Compol      Commissioner of Police
- x.      Commace     Corps Marshal

In the blended words above, *Sitrep*, *intrep*, *Comgen*, *Corsec*, *Forsec* and *Compol* are realized by joining the first three letters of the two words. Also, *wilco* takes the first three letters of the first word and two from the second, *pasep* takes two from the first word and three from the second, whereas *Ingenpol* combines two letters of the first word, three from the second, ignores the third and takes three from the fourth. Similarly, in realizing the blend; *Commace*, the initial two alphabets of the two words are combined in addition to the ‘importation’ of the medial ‘m’ and the ending ‘ce’. These indicate that the formation of blended forms does not take a regular pattern in terms of the number of alphabets considered from the two or more component words to form the new word.

### Clipping

Clipping is a word formation process where the existing word is reduced or shortened without changing its meaning; derived by deleting parts of the base word (Kosur, 2014; Nordquist, 2017). The deletion of the initial or end (part) of the word does not alter in any sense the meaning of the original word. The clipped forms found to be in the lexicon of this group include:

(2).	<b>Clipped Word</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i.	int	Intelligence
ii.	ack,	Acknowledged
iii.	serg	Sergeant
iv.	eons	Constable
v.	morn	Morning

In the clipped forms above, the first three words: *int* and *ack*, are reduced from their basic form to the three initial letters, while there are four letters in the other three words; *serg*, *cons* and *morn*. This also ascertains that clipping does not take into consideration the length of the original word in the realization of the ‘shortened’ form. The number of letters in the ‘reduced’ form is also found to be irregular as seen above; while some have three, the others have four.



## Borrowing

Language use in the paramilitary formation is dependent on the bulk of lexical forms that altogether constitute the language associated with the paramilitary as a profession. The operatives also make use of words ‘borrowed’ from indigenous Nigerian and foreign languages which in most cases are used in the informal context. The borrowed words and their meanings include:

(3). i. **Yoruba**

- a. *Ọlọgbá* - Policemen
- b. *Ọgá* - boss, leader or superior.
- c. *Égunje* - bribe, kickbacks, inducement

ii. **Igbo**

*Éwúr* - a goat or someone who behaves in a similar (confused) manner, usually used to refer to recruits.

iii. **Hausa**

- a. *Kái* - Exclamation expressed most often to correct or alert someone.
- b. *Yárínỳà* - used to refer to a female paramilitary operative.
- c. *Damsade* – Police Newspaper
- d. *Damkadede* – Sir (Master)

iv. **Nigerian pidgin**

*Otondo* a fat and lazy person. A term used to refer to recruits who are reluctant to adapt to paramilitary regimentation.

v. **French**

*Éspirit dè còrps* - moral of a group, spirit of oneness, usually expressed by the operatives to show solidarity.

vi. **Spanish**

*Guerrilla* a member of a small group fighting against irregular forces

vii. **Russian**

*AK-47* An assault rifle named after the Russian manufacturer.

Aside from the borrowed items from foreign languages; *esprit de corps* and *guerrilla*, the lexical forms from Nigerian Pidgin; *otondo*, Igbo; *ewu*, Hausa; *kai* and *yarinya*, and Yoruba; *oga* and *egunje*, portray the operatives as bilinguals drawn from the Nigerian diverse sociolinguistic environment.

## Compounding

Compounding as a word formation process involves the ‘joining together’ of two bases to form one word. According to Katamba (1993) compounding refers to the ‘appropriate’ combination of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs or prepositions to form complex words. Kemmer (2016) also defines compounding as the formation of a word from two or more root morphemes. It occurs with a hyphen (-), space or without space between the elements, or two bases joined together without a separation. Like other English compound words, the meaning of the new word often differs from the meaning of the individual words put separately. Also, there is a limit to which words can collocate; this limit defines some restrictions on how words of the same or different parts of speech can be used together. Uwem (2017) sees such combinations as collocating compounds. These include the following:

(4).	<b>NOUN</b>	+	<b>NOUN</b>	<b>COMPOUND</b>
i.	traffic	+	offence	traffic offence
ii.	team	+	leader	team leader
iii.	oil	+	thief	oil thief
iv.	parade	+	commander	parade commander
v.	head	+	gear	headgear
vi.	Gun	+	Shot	Gun shot

These compounds, though not exhaustive, are contained in the enlarged registers of the paramilitary formations. These are realized through the combination of nouns and nouns. Aside from the two nouns that form the compound ‘headgear’ in which the two words which form the compound are fused together, the other forms have space between the two words. Although no hyphen (-) is used in any of the examples above, the meanings of the compounds are different from the individual words viewed separately.

(5).	<b>Adjective</b>	+	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Compound</b>
i.	Principal	+	Suspect	Principal suspect
ii.	Criminal	+	Gang	Criminal gang
iii.	Inflammable	+	Liquid	Inflammable liquid
iv.	Private	+	Security	Private security



These compounding are realized through the combination of adjective and nouns, they have space between the two words. No hyphen (-) is used in any of the examples above, the meanings of the compounds are different from the individual words viewed separately.

**Acronyms/abbreviations**

Acronyms are more often represented in upper case. They are formed from combining the initial letters of other words. Abbreviations rather take the initial alphabet and/or the medial or final alphabet. The examples peculiar to the language of the paramilitary agency under study are:

(6).	Acronym	Gloss
i	BU	bring Up
ii	PA	put away
iii	KIV	keep in view
iv	OC	officer in charge
v	SOJ	staff officer (junior)
vi	CRU	complaint response unit
vii	CID	criminal investigation department
viii	SOS	staff officer (senior)
ix	FIR	first information report
x	SO	station officer
xi	DO	duty officer
xii	OPS	operations
xiii	SHOOPS	sector head of operations
xiv	POWA	police officers wives association
xv	CLA	corps legal officer
xvi	SPEO	sector public enlightenment officer
xvii	ROSOWA	road safety officers wives association
xviii	CTU	counter terrorists unit
xix	CIPU	critical infrastructure protection unit
xx	SWAT	special weapons and technical team
xxi	ACO	area command's office
xxii	CDOWA	civil defence officers wives association

The above acronyms take the initial letters of the entire words represented in capital letters. However, *ROSOWA*, *SWAT*, *OC* and *OPS* show that most acronyms and abbreviations also contain some irregular patterns. In the acronym *ROSOWA* for instance, the first two letters are derived from the word ‘Road’, the final letter ‘T’ for the acronym meaning ‘Team’ is omitted in *SWAT* and no letter represents the ‘in’ between ‘O’ and ‘C’ in *OC* while the abbreviation *OPS* takes the two initial letters ‘op’ and the final letter ‘s’.

### **Debasing**

Debasing is a label coined by Uwem (2017) to account for forms retained in the register of Nigerian paramilitary formations that are formed through the ‘corruption’ of their original English lexical items. Such words created through this process, a lot of which are phonologically conditioned, are believed to be occasioned by mother tongue interference, but have been crystallized over the years for use by these agencies. The unique characteristic of these ‘debased’ forms is that they convey the meaning(s) of their original English lexical terms. The examples are:

(7).	<b>Word/Phrase</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
i	Ajwaya	as you were
ii	Standa ais	stand at ease
iii	Sharap	shut up
iv	Hep high	left right
v	Shun, tion	attention
vi	Peri	parade (as in commands)
vii	Atis	at ease

As indicated above, *ajwaya* is a corrupt version of the phrase ‘as you were’ which means calling a parade to a relaxed position, *shun* or *tion* is the shortening of the longer word ‘attention’, *sharap* is the corruption of the two words ‘shut up’ while *atis* is realized from the pronunciation of ‘at ease’ as a single word instead of two as they appear. Similarly, *prei*, *hep* ‘high’ and *standa ais* have the English equivalents as ‘parade’, ‘left right’ and ‘stand at ease’ respectively. They are all ‘deviations’ from their original forms. Aside from the debased form *sharap*, other expressions are also imperatives used exclusively during parade drills which in the parade context denote commands. These commands generate corresponding professionally-prescribed body movements decoded and encoded by the operatives.



## Slang

Slang is a linguistic phenomenon ever present in every speech community. Slang is the use of informal words and expressions that are not considered standard in the speaker's language or dialect but are considered acceptable in certain social settings. Slang expressions may act as euphemisms and may be used as a means of identifying with one's peers. Slang normally refers to particular words and meanings but can include longer expressions and idioms. Slang is vocabulary that is used between people who belong to the same social group and who know each other well. Slang is a very informal language. It also sometimes refers to the language generally exclusive to the members of particular [in-groups](#) in order to establish [group identity](#), exclude outsiders, or both.

(8).	Slang	Meaning	Organisational Usage	Standard English Expression
i.	Baggar	fool	an irresponsible person	A person who behaves out of point
ii.	Russia	right	advance to Russia	turn to the right side
iii.	Lagos	left	advance to Lagos	turn to the left side
iv.	buba	money	has he given buba?	has he paid his levy?
v.	close bucket	keep quiet	everybody close your bucket	everybody keep quiet
vi.	kásàlà	problem	in case there is kásàlà tin out	take to heel if there is problem
vii.	para	noise/shout	the personnel are making para	people are making noise
viii.	shark	man	the shark is ready	the man is ready
ix.	gang-way	give way	gang-way for the OC	give way for OC passage
x.	papa yanki	salary has been paid	are you aware of papa yanki?	are you aware that salary is ready?
xi.	November	no	the police response November Oskar	the police said no
xii.	Yanki echo	yes	Sir, yanki echo serial	Yes sir

It is observed that slang terms are colloquial, transitory, connotative and restricted in reach as they are used only for in-group communication. This attribute of slang sets members of a group apart from non-members such that an attempt by a non-member to use another group's slangs is easily detected, as such a person is very likely not going to use it with competence.

## 6. Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that the paramilitary in Nigeria adopt the use of traditional word formation processes to generate new and uncommon words. They create words through blends, compounds, clipped items, debased forms, borrowed terms and acronyms/abbreviations which portray the peculiarity of the paramilitary linguistic pattern. The forms are believed to be intelligible among group members in the research area. These isolated forms often exclude outsiders from participating in speech events involving the operatives, especially in official contexts. The use of such unique terminologies has proven to have facilitated the performance of their official tasks which are safety and security inclined. The study also shows that institutional practices and job schedules have enormous influence on language. The study reveals that officers and men of these security outfits do not just use these expressions in their speeches; they also use them in writing. These usages are like the official language of men in uniform in Nigeria as these communication codes have found their way into formal language use in Nigeria military and paramilitary organizations.

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