

Historicizing the Etymology of Naval Language on some English Words

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to historicize and examine some English words that can be traced to some navies including the Nigerian Navy. The paper reminds scholars of some words used as part of the organisations language of command that are used in today's parlance. These words are now used as normal words in the society. The paper recognises the contributions of the Navies to the development of some spoken words.

The study relied on documentary data. The documentary data were sourced from government annual departmental reports, online websites, newspapers and correspondence. The secondary sources used were subjected to internal and external criticism for authentication, and then to textual and contextual analyses.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Among the large population of Nigeria, there are many whose lives are greatly influenced by the fact that they live either on the sea coast or in the great network of waterways of the country. Their culture and traditions are governed by water rather than by any of the other element, and their customs also are influenced by the situation in which they live. There are also many people in Nigeria who, although not of that tradition, have in the past acquainted themselves very well, both for peace and in war, with service afloat Nigerian waters. In other words, historically, Nigerian peoples are not new to the vagaries that come with a force such as the navy.

As far back as 1894, there was a force called The Southern Marine which took over from the Royal Navy the duty of patrolling the waterways of the Oil Rivers Protectorate with small armed vessels. It functioned very effectively and in the few years that it lasted, it left behind a good reputation. Then came the Great War in 1914 and the Marine Department produced a Nigerian Marine Contingent that took part in 1914-1915 in the campaign of the Cameroons, and was present with the Royal Navy at the capture of Duala. Later, elements from this force joined the Inland Water Transport Company in Mesopotamia, a land between the Tigris and the Euphrates. During the Second World War, there was the Nigerian Marine Contingent which consisted of fifty officers and 600 men which performed defence duties off the shores of Nigeria. The Marine Department later engaged itself in port-related activities in Nigeria's maritime environment together with some constabulary roles for the colonial administration. The Nigerian Navy was later established in 1956. Although from the 1956 statement of policy, the intention of the colonial government was clearly stated in the two policy phases the British mapped out as a blueprint for the future development of the naval force.

For the colonial government, the force would be developed into a fully armed service equipped and trained for duty in war whenever the second phase of the development plan began. The duties assigned to the force for the second phase are:

- (a) to carry out training and exercises in mine watching, mine sweeping, anti- submarine work, gunnery etc.;
- (b) to assist where necessary in internal security duties;

- (c) to provide fishery protection;
- (d) to provide air/sea rescue services; and
- (e) to train a Naval Volunteer Reserve.

For this second phase, the force would be organised for rapid expansion in the event of war into a service capable of cooperating with and, in some respects, replacing the Royal Navy in patrolling Nigerian territorial waters, conducting the Port Examination Service and exercising the naval control of merchant shipping. However, the aspirations, of the second phase is beyond the immediate financial capacity of the Government and would have to be carried out, if approved, as and when the Government's financial resources did permit. The littoral space of Nigeria can be seen in terms of its internal and external waters. The internal waters are the rivers and lakes body within its territorial land space. The external waters are the Seas and Oceans within its border environs. The choice of a new naval force was an important turn-around in the history of Nigeria's maritime environment. In layman's language, the Navy was established to protect those resources contained in Nigeria's maritime environment and to fend off any threat to them.

Language is very important to man. It is an instrument of communication among human beings. Every human activity revolves around language. In fact, it is the most important feature that distinguishes man from other animals. Language use involves the special codes that are peculiar to a group of people or an area of human endeavour. Certain words may be originated by (and/or identified with) a group of people within a larger society such that once the words are mentioned, the thought of that group of people quickly comes to the mind. Therefore, one can talk of the language of the navy when referring to the vocabularies of the navy. Language can be used in every naval activity and by any personnel or officer to influence and shape the military society whether positively and negatively. Man's superiority in relation to other creatures on earth can, thus, be easily attributed to his ability to use language for communication purposes by either giving a direct idea of what is being said or by codifying his ideas in order to manipulate, influence, persuade, or impose control on other individuals of the society (Aderimola, 2016). Language and naval power are interconnected as the quest for sea control in wartimes and maybe peacetimes is characterised by ingenious use of language. Besides, those that are involved in naval activities have always resorted to the use of naval language to project power at sea. The ingenious use of language establishes a connection between naval power and language. Naval officers carefully construct their language to communicate their messages to senior colleagues, colleagues, junior colleagues and even civilian colleagues to gain an understanding of the messages and directiveness sent to them. This naval language is sometimes codified, clearly spelt out for those members of the navy. This shows that language involves a set of signs and relational rules as well as the means of discourse in these communication systems.

The study of language in relation to military power goes back to the 20th Century, when scholars like Murray Thomas, Adele Wilson, Wayne Silkett and many others developed their notion of 'critical linguistics', a concept in which they put great emphasis on the relationship between Naval Power, change in meanings of words, and language use. According to Osisanwo (?), "language is a human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for the purpose of communication" (W, 2008). Emmitt and Pollock defined language "... as a system of arbitrary signs which is accepted by a group and society of users" (Emmit, 1997). Bolinger also described language as "... a system of vocal auditory communication using conventional signs composed of arbitrary sound units assembled according to set, interacting with the experience of its users" (Bolinger, 1968). Scholars specialized on language have proven that there is a crucial relationship between language and naval power. The Navy is richly endowed, both with its own sign, conventions and its own means of discourse; such as all the familiar verbal and sign modes as messenger's bulletin boards, public telephone, mobile phones, memos, intercoms, mail, "passing the word", and emails. Wayne Silkett adds that "few specialized vocabularies have been as similarly borrowed, copied, and altered as the naval vocabulary" (Silkett, 2008). Thomas Murray opined in his discussion of naval fighter pilot terminology; "The study of English in the 20th Century have shown that members of the armed services... are especially prone to linguistic creativity," (Thomas, 1986) whether soldiers, sailors or pilot. Linguist John Algeo (cf Wilson 2008), claims that words come into being, change their uses and pass out of existence far more readily than either sounds or grammatical construction. In correlation, Neologisms are developed "to achieve linguistic economy", that is, to reduce a complex subject or action to single word or phrase. Words as Scud and stealth, which are relatively military terms are civilianised, such as the banking term meaning 'unenthusiastic broker or customer' (for Scud); and the stealth became the civilian word as 'to kill', or 'hidden', 'undetected', or 'woman covered in black as veiled Saudi Women (Wilson, 2008).

It is clear that language is a human phenomenon that is the nature of man, which is basically vocal and peculiar to a group of people in a society. It should, however, be said, that language can only be identified with man; and not an end on its own, instead a means to an end. Language is a powerful tool by which meanings are conveyed. Language use in naval terms has influenced the English language and other forms of languages in the past. The relationship between naval language and the English language spoken today can be traced to the

background of those words influenced through the activities of the Navy. One cannot but agree with the fact that every naval activity is prepared for, influenced and played out using the instrument of spoken words. Language use in military terms has some characteristics which differentiate it from other varieties of spoken words. Spoken words on the context of the research is “a long or short oral message spoken or delivered by a person to an audience” (Wikipedia, 2015). Speech as a medium of oral communication is that ability to express one’s thought and emotions through the use of speech sounds and gestures. It is important to add that every speech community has a very wide range of vocabularies covering the conflict concerns, occupational views, worldwide views and physical environment of the people to fulfil their communicative needs and meet their interactive demands. There are various forms of speech and they include: Persuasive speeches, Instructive Speeches, Informative Speeches and Special Speeches (Aderimola, 2016). An officer speech can take on different forms, for instance the officers’ speech could be informative and instructive; it could sometimes take a persuasive form. Thus languages and speeches play a crucial role because they are the tools that the naval officers and personnel use in order to shape the thoughts of listeners or audiences with the aim of instructing and subtly selling their ideologies to them.

The word “communication” also applies to almost any of the process as we have directly or indirectly experienced since we all live in a communication friendly environment. It is essential for all human beings to interact. In fact, all humans and organisations are involved in diverse communication tasks most of the time. This is because human beings engage in social interactions in diverse ways. That apart, much importance is attached not only to the language that is used as the means of understanding ourselves, and our society, but also to how we successfully use language to relay our thoughts, feelings, ideas or information to others through speech, writing, bodily movements or signals (Ogude & Balogun, 2006). Hence, communication is seen by various individuals from different perspectives. In simple terms, communication can be defined as actions by which actors impart information to one another. Communication does not have to involve language vocalization only. In the words of Little, Communication is the process by which information is passed between individual and organisation by means of previously agreed symbols such as words, figures, charts, pictures, gestures, drawings...etc (Ogude & Balogun, 2006). In the same vein, Udall and Udall defined communication as “the process by which one person shares and imparts information to another person so that both people and groups clearly understand one another (Ogude & Balogun, 2006). Similarly, Pearsons described communication as sharing of ideas and feelings, a two-way process in which the speaker must have a listener, and a writer, a reader to share his experience (Ogude & Balogun, 2006). Raymond Williams posits that communication is the passing of ideas, information and attitudes from one person to another (Ogude & Balogun, 2006).

Thus, the thrust of all the definitions given above is that communication involves sharing information. That is, for communication to take place, information must be shared. It is shared because the communication process involves an exchange and not a one way transfer of information. In other words, without information exchange, communication cannot be said to have taken place. Hence, for any meaningful communication to take place, information is exchanged through words. The position of language as a building block of words in communication mode is well understood. Over a century of study in semantics, semiotics and linguistics have produced words that have been understood and generally accepted. Languages are built from words and communication are shared words with other personalities.

Naval language (or naval speaking) relates to the process of struggling and projecting for power. It involves the struggle for control and command in order to put certain doctrine, philosophy, and belief into practice. Military language flows, therefore, from the employment of resources that sharpen the beliefs and behaviours of the command. The researchers are, therefore of the belief that the language of the navy is an embodiment of doctrines and ideologies that are used so much for manipulative and controlling effects. In essence, the study holds that naval language have some underlying meanings that are revealed when the etymology of the words are brought to the fore. Generally, it is possible to make the following assertions: Language cannot exist outside a human society; language is a means to an end; language distinguishes the characteristics of man; and language is rule governed. Language is a powerful tool by which meanings are conveyed. With this in mind it is important to say that naval verbal communication is not a fully-fledged language.

Historical Context

Many words and expressions in English Language originated from contact with the sea (naval language you may say). They have gained much worldwide usage that their origins are almost forgotten. Most words and phrases carry a double cargo; that is, along with their meaning, they convey an echo of history, or perhaps a whisper of folklores, or a hint of attitude. The sea also has a language; and as you learn the language, you will learn of its history, mythology and some of the psychology of those in the naval profession.

Learning a language involves knowing something about the country where the language is spoken. This can be in the form of knowing the history, culture or religion of the country. A society loses an essential

part of its culture if it mislays her language. The language of a people epitomises their culture, history and civilisation. The predominance of a language shows the native speakers of the language are superior in terms of military, trade, and political power. For example, a lot of nations speak the English Language today because of the superiority of the British sea power and America's technological prowess.

A by-product of colonisation is the imposition of the colonisers' language upon the colony. For this reason, there must be a correlation between the superiors' 'power', the element of power (the sea) and the colony inhabited. It is from this context that a history of naval language within the syntax structure of the English language becomes significant. Many words used in the English language originated from contact with the sea; most especially the Dutch navies' activities at sea (source). In linguistic terms, English words such as Buoy, Keelhauling, Deck, Drill, Yacht, Skipper and Cruiser were adapted from Dutch naval words like *Boei*, *Kiehalen*, *Dek*, *Drillen*, *Jacht*, *Schipper* and *Cruise* respectively (wikipedia, 2017). Dutch seems to have added a lot to the English language either directly or indirectly. Also words like "Mast", "Deep", "Boat", "Sea", and "Ship", comes from old English words like "Maest", "deop", "bat", "Sae", and "Scip" respectively (wikipedia, 2017). Historically speaking, England's naval tradition can be traced to the time of Henry the Eight whose capital ship was 'Mary Rose'. It should be said that some words which emanated from the naval organisation has entered into an everyday use today. For instance, if you are employed into other organisation (not the naval force), you are likely to be welcomed aboard (a word from the navy). Expressions such as; 'getting the project "Under way"; keeping an even keel; seeing that everything is "ship shape", or phrases as "you don't make waves", or the expression, "go overboard", and "everything will be smooth sailing" were words or phrases derived from the naval language. Paradoxically, when the language that characterizes an organisation enters common usage, it no longer differentiates that organisation. Naval language has also been sexualised, especially slangs that are overtly marked by references to sex. Trnka offers a number of examples of such chants, to reference the female anatomy. For instance, one chant begins, as written in a personnel letter to member of his family, "if I die on the Russian front, box me up with a Russian cunt". More of those examples are abound among soldiers, naval ratings and officers.

In addition to the above, there are many other expressions and words that have found their way into the day to day usages in the larger society which were originated from the navy. Such expressions include: "In these days of Economic Recession, how many people can afford three square meals?" Unknown too many, square meal was purely a nautical expression, this communication emanated from sailors. On board ships, full meals were served on square tables- hence the expression square meal (Duyile, 1988). This expression originally denotes a good and satisfying meal as distinct from snacks or tea breaks. "In the 2014 World Cup, Germany walloped their Brazilian counterparts 7-1 in thesemi-final match of the tournament". Little did most English speakers know that the splendid word 'Wallop' immortalises the early 16th Century English Admiral Wallop whom Henry VIII sent to war against the French raiders. Wallop's fleet accomplished the mission so well that 'Wallop' has come to mean, a devastating blow. "Feeling blue" was strictly a nautical expression (Akinfemi, 1988). In the days of poor ships navigation, if a ship was lost in a voyage, the ships company would be sad and hopeless. A blue band would be painted on its entire hull and blue flags flown upon her return to home port. This expression is now used informally of people and conditions to mean sad and without hope.

"Mind your p's and q's" are an expression that has come into everyday use. It means simply that you should be careful of what you say or do so that others are not displeased. How did this expression originate? Sailors serving on government ships could always buy drinks on credit at the tavern till the pay day. The barman would mark on a scorecard, how many pints and quarts each customer had. Deeper into the months, the sailors were usually advised by the barman to mind their p's and q's (Akinfemi, 1988)! "Remember this maxim: if you want something done, tell a chief". The expression has to do with the fact that two naval senior's enlisted men were called Chief Petty Officer and Warrant Chief, hence the need to meet them on board the ship for attention (Duyile, 1988).

Words and phrases often heard in naval environment include "ratings" meaning "other ranks" in the Army or Air force; a shipwright means a carpenter, an artificer is known as technician in civil life, liberty men are those off watch and are at liberty to go ashore for a specified period. Other words are ship shape, this means neat and tidy; turn to, for to commence a job; port and starboard mean left and right sides respectively. The Navy has a different way of naming a place. Navy buildings have decks, not floors; deck heads, not ceiling; bulkheads, not walls; heads, not toilets; cabins, not rooms; bunks, not beds. Naval kitchen is galley and the passage is alleyway.

Most of these words have crept into the English Language today. It might be difficult to get the naval meaning of the words unless you study the naval language. These words have found their places in the English Dictionary without a hint of the historical perspective that gives a proper meaning to the words. This implies that apart from borrowing words from other languages, it is also possible to borrow words from a section of the society to be used in the larger society of a people who speak a common language. The navy has its own vocabularies which include a set of lexical items that are peculiar to the navy. The Nigerian Navy names its

onshore and offshore platforms after animals, water gods, past heroes, and natural elements. NNS Beecroft, an onshore platform was named after a past colonial figure called John Beecroft; it was later recommissioned NNS Olokun, a Yoruba word for mermaid, currently it now bears NNS Beecroft the old name. Same can also be said of NNS Victory, which was formerly NNS Anansa, an Efik word for water goddess. NNS Umalokun, the Nigerian Navy onshore platform in Warri, Delta state was named after the Itsekiri word for water goddess. NNS Pathfinder was named after an old Nigerian Navy Ship commissioned at its origin. NNS Ekpe, NNS Damisa and NNS Ekun were named after the Leopard, an African catlike creature known for its agility to capture a prey. The words were Efik, Hausa and Yoruba respectively. NNS Ruwan Yaro named and means child of water.

II. CONCLUSION

They may think a ship is an inanimate object, a mere machine, or only a useful arrangement of engines and propellers; the crews on board ships know that the ship has a distant personality, a soul of her own. A ship is alive and feminine. No one knows with certainty or why ships came to be of feminine gender. Is it because her 'face' is always painted? or because her "bottom is always wet? Or, usually when she enters harbour she head for the buoys ("boys")? However, in referring to the ship, the English Language adopts for the ship a feminine connotation. Hence the expression, the naval ship is alive and feminine. The sea is, an element long used by those who have some affiliation with it. From the sea comes a distinct language that has contributed to the enhancement of the English language, when we speak these expressions. Language scholars can, however, pay closer attention to these naval speaking or words that have crept into our everyday usage of English.

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