

## **The Lexicon of Affectionate Terms Used by Nigerian Couples: A Discourse Analysis**

**Bello Muhammad Jajere**

**A Post-Graduate (PhD) Student, Bayero University Kano, Kano State**

**[bmjajere@gmail.com](mailto:bmjajere@gmail.com); +2347032356601**

**&**

**Umar Muhammad-Gombe, PhD**

**Yobe State University, Damaturu**

**[umarmgombe@gmail.com](mailto:umarmgombe@gmail.com); +2347030408351**

### **Abstract**

This study investigates the influence of demographic factors—specifically gender, age, relationship status, and cultural background—on the use of affectionate language in relationships. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to 132 participants. A descriptive research design guides the study, with data analyzed through discourse analysis, and Speech Act Theory providing the theoretical framework. The sample is predominantly female (65.6%), and the largest proportion of respondents falls within the 18–24 age range (60.3%), highlighting a youthful demographic. Engagement is reported more frequently than marriage, a trend likely linked to the age distribution of the participants. Linguistic diversity is reflected in the sample, with Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulani speakers being the most represented groups. Findings reveal that affectionate terms are used either occasionally (36.4%) or consistently (47.7%), with "baby" emerging as the most popular term (46.3%). Private settings are identified as the preferred context for using affectionate language (72.0%), underscoring the association with intimacy. Emotional responses to affectionate expressions are overwhelmingly positive, with 92.1% of respondents reporting feelings of happiness and 87.8% agreeing that affectionate language strengthens their relationships. Cultural background also plays a significant role in shaping affectionate communication, as acknowledged by 69.7% of participants. The study emphasizes the semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic dimensions of affectionate language and concludes with recommendations for encouraging affectionate communication, promoting cultural sensitivity, balancing verbal and non-verbal expressions, accounting for gender dynamics, acknowledging generational influences, and pursuing further research on public and private displays of affection.

*Keywords:* Affectionate language, discourse, Nigerian couples, sociolinguistics, communication

## 1. Introduction

Language is a crucial tool for communication and social interaction, shaping relationships and reflecting cultural values. Among Nigerian couples, affectionate terms play a significant role in expressing intimacy, emotional bonding, and social identity. These terms are deeply embedded in sociocultural contexts, drawing from indigenous languages, English, and hybrid linguistic innovations. However, despite the richness of affectionate language in Nigeria, research specifically addressing the discourse analysis of affectionate terms among Nigerian couples remains limited.

In line with this, existing literature highlights the significance of affectionate expressions in relational communication. Studies on gendered language use (Cameron, 2007; Coates, 2003), the pragmatics of emotional expressions (Adegbite, 2020; Adegbija, 1982), and the interplay between language and emotions (Dewaele, 2008; Kovecses, 2003) provide insights into how affectionate terms function. Additionally, theories of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979) and cultural influences on language use (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990) underscore the importance of affectionate language in shaping relationships. Nevertheless, these studies have largely focused on Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how Nigerian couples utilize affectionate terms within diverse sociolinguistic settings.

Moreover, affectionate language serves as a marker of intimacy and a reflection of cultural norms and societal values (Tannen, 2007; Banjo, 2024). Research indicates that such expressions contribute to emotional bonding, relationship satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Chapman, 2022; Floyd, 2018). While studies on affectionate language have explored its psychological and communicative benefits (Floyd et al., 2020; Guerrero & Floyd, 2019), little attention has been given to how Nigerian couples employ these terms in everyday discourse.

Given Nigeria's multilingual and multicultural landscape, the lexicon of affectionate terms among couples is expected to exhibit significant linguistic variation, borrowing from indigenous languages, Pidgin English, and global influences (Nicholas, 2019). Studies suggest that affectionate language use is influenced by gender and generational differences, with younger couples incorporating more English and Pidgin terms, while older generations prefer indigenous expressions (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Furthermore, the meaning and connotation of common affectionate terms such as "baby" and "sweetheart" may shift depending on relational dynamics and communicative settings (Banjo, 2024; Nicholas, 2019).

Additionally, in Nigeria, affectionate terms vary across ethnic groups, religions, and social contexts. For instance, Banjo (2024) examined how cultural traditions influence affectionate behaviors within Yoruba families, while Adebileje (2012) explored the socio-semantic characteristics of nicknames used by Yoruba brides for their in-laws, demonstrating how affectionate expressions are embedded in cultural practices. Similarly, studies on pet names among couples in Nsukka metropolis reveal that terms of endearment convey emotions and strengthen ties within the Igbo community.

Beyond the Yoruba and Igbo contexts, though relatively under-researched, there have been significant contributions toward understanding emotional language in Hausa. Yahaya (2003) in his study on “Language and Emotion in Hausa” observed that the Hausa language has a rich inventory of emotionally expressive terms, often grounded in metaphor, kinship, and Islamic cultural references. Terms like *masoyiyata* (my beloved) and *zuciyata* (my heart) are common expressions of affection, reflecting both sincerity and religious modesty.

Likewise, Aliyu (2012) conducted a lexical study on Hausa terms of endearment and found that Hausa couples frequently use kinship terms (*Ubangiji na*, *Amaryata*) as affectionate expressions, blending traditional values with personal intimacy. He also noted that Hausa affectionate discourse is often framed in indirect language due to socio-religious norms that encourage modesty in public expression of love.

In the same vein, in a discourse-analytic context, Bello (2017) analyzed some Hausa radio drama dialogues to explore how affection and interpersonal relationships are linguistically constructed. His work showed that affectionate terms are often employed strategically, with tone, context, and speaker intent shaping their meanings. These studies point to the importance of examining not only what terms are used but how they function in conversational exchanges among couples.

Further extending this line of inquiry, a study conducted by Tanko & Ahmed (2020) explored the gender dynamics influence on the use of affectionate language in Hausa. Their findings revealed that men are less likely to use overt affectionate terms in public, while women often rely on metaphoric or symbolic language. This is consistent with Islamic cultural norms, which influence Hausa-speaking communities in northern Nigeria.

Despite these valuable contributions, there remains a paucity of research on the discourse analysis of affectionate terms among Nigerian couples, particularly in private versus public communication settings. Against this backdrop, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the lexicon of affectionate terms used by Nigerian couples through a discourse-analytic approach. By examining their semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic implications, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how affectionate expressions function in Nigerian romantic relationships, considering both cultural heritage and contemporary influences.

## **2.0. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Study of Affectionate Language**

The study of affectionate language has been approached from various linguistic and psychological perspectives. Pragmatics plays a key role in understanding affectionate communication, as speech acts and pragmatic markers influence how affectionate terms are interpreted within relational contexts (Fraser, 1996; Mey, 2001). Adegbite (2020) and Adegbija (1982) emphasize the importance of pragmatic competence in expressing emotions, while Searle (1979) classifies affectionate utterances within illocutionary acts that convey relational intent.

Building on this pragmatic perspective, Kalejaiye (2023) investigates the pragmatics of emotive expressions among married elite Nigerians, focusing on anger, love, and coitus invitation. Using a structured questionnaire and Searle's Speech Act framework, the findings reveal that emotive language among married elites is gendered, with specific speech acts confined within the sociocultural linguistic affordances of their culture and gender.

In addition to Kalejaiye's focus on emotive expressions, Okeke (2022) examines pet names used among couples in Nsukka metropolis, Nigeria, identifying pet names, their implications, and the sociolinguistic factors contributing to their use. The study finds that couples use both English and Igbo pet names to express affection, masculinity, femininity, beauty, and respect. Factors such as age, gender, occupation, region, and educational background influence the choice of pet names.

Complementing these sociolinguistic insights, Adams (2021) explores the concept of love languages and their importance in Nigerian relationships. The guide highlights the five love languages—Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, and Physical Touch—and provides practical tips for Nigerian couples to decode and speak their partner's love language. Understanding love languages promotes empathy, connection, and effective communication in relationships.

Furthermore, Chioma and Sulong (2022) explore the relationship between compatibility, leisure activities, and marital satisfaction among Nigerian couples. Using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, the findings suggest a high level of marital satisfaction among Nigerian couples, with compatibility being a significant predictor of marital satisfaction.

In a similar vein, Banjo (2024) investigates the role of culture and cultural traditions in the expression of affectionate behaviors among members of the Nigerian Yoruba family. The qualitative study reveals 18 categories of affectionate behaviors and seven themes focused on cultural traditions that influence affectionate communication.

Likewise, Basse et al. (2021) examine the relationship between love and subjective well-being among married students in Nigerian universities. Their findings reveal a significant positive relationship between love and subjective well-being, with love exerting a positive and statistically significant impact on satisfaction with life, high levels of positive affect, and low levels of negative affect.

On a cultural note, Smith (1981) observes that traditional Hausa cultural norms discourage women from directly mentioning their husband's name. This practice is rooted in modesty and social etiquette, where addressing a husband by his first name is considered taboo. Instead, women refer to their husbands using respectful or affectionate titles such as *Megida* (my husband), *Mallam* (sir), *Baban...* (father of...), or even personal pronouns and indirect

phrases like *Nawa* (mine), *Yayana* (my brother), *Shi* (him), *Kana ji* (do you hear me?), or *Na ce* (I said).

Similarly, Pandey (2017) notes a parallel cultural practice in rural India, where many women refrain from saying their husbands' names aloud. This is often seen as a sign of reverence and respect, and she reports that millions of Indian women have never addressed their husbands by name throughout their married lives.

## **2.2. Gender Differences in Affectionate Communication**

Gender differences in affectionate communication have been widely studied. Research suggests that men and women use affectionate language differently, often influenced by societal norms and expectations (Bailey & Timm, 1976; Crawford, 2006; Tannen, 1990). Coates (2003) and Cameron (2007) explore masculinity and femininity in linguistic expressions, highlighting how affectionate terms reinforce gender roles. Similarly, Kellner (2009) and Pichler (2009) examine how cultural and social factors shape gendered communication within intimate relationships.

## **2.3. Cultural and Emotional Dimensions of Affectionate Discourse**

The intersection of language, culture, and emotion is another critical aspect of affectionate discourse. Kovecses (2003) and Dewaele (2008) explore metaphorical and emotional dimensions of affectionate terms, demonstrating how linguistic expressions of love are shaped by cultural frameworks. Gray (1992, 1995) discusses the role of affectionate communication in maintaining romantic relationships, while Hawkins et al. (2008) analyze how relationship education impacts couples' verbal expressions of affection. Additionally, studies on emotive language (Macagno & Walton, 2014; Stankiewicz, 1964) and taboo language in relationships (Mbaya, 2002) provide insight into the boundaries and acceptability of affectionate terms. The lexical choices of couples are often influenced by sociocultural taboos, power dynamics, and historical linguistic shifts (Goddard, 2013; Nnaemeka, 2006).

## **2.4. The Role of Language in Romantic Relationships**

Affectionate language is a fundamental aspect of romantic relationships, serving to enhance emotional connection and relational satisfaction (Chapman, 2022). Research suggests that verbal expressions of affection contribute to intimacy, reassurance, and relationship stability (Floyd et al., 2020). Studies in Western contexts have demonstrated that affectionate terms such as "love," "darling," and "honey" function as markers of relational closeness and commitment (Guerrero & Floyd, 2019). However, the linguistic realization of affectionate terms varies across cultures and languages.

## **2.5. Cultural Influences on Affectionate Terms**

In African contexts, affectionate communication is often mediated by cultural norms and values (Bamgbose, 2021). Among Nigerian couples, affectionate terms may differ based on ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. For instance, Yoruba couples commonly use terms like "ololufe" (beloved), while Hausa couples might use "masoyina" (my love). Similarly, Nigerian

Pidgin English has integrated affectionate terms such as "baby," "sweetie," and "my heart," reflecting both indigenous and global linguistic influences (Aboh, 2022). Research suggests that the adoption of affectionate terms in Nigerian relationships is influenced by exposure to media, globalization, and inter-ethnic marriages (Okonkwo, 2021).

## 2.6. Gender and Generational Differences in Affectionate Language

The use of affectionate terms is also shaped by gender and generational differences. Studies highlight that women tend to use more affectionate terms than men, as they are generally socialized to express emotions more openly (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Generational shifts further influence how affectionate language is employed. While older generations may prefer traditional terms rooted in indigenous languages, younger couples often incorporate English and Pidgin English terms influenced by social media and popular culture (Olanrewaju, 2023). Understanding these variations offers valuable insight into evolving relationship dynamics in contemporary Nigerian society.

## 2.7. Pragmatic and Semantic Aspects of Affectionate Language

The pragmatic use of affectionate terms involves context-dependent meanings, frequently influenced by tone, setting, and relational dynamics (Mey, 2018). Certain affectionate terms may take different connotations depending on the context in which they are used. For example, the term "baby" could signify endearment in one context but irony in another. Additionally, the semantic properties of affectionate terms reveal patterns of metaphorical usage, where terms related to sweetness (e.g., "sugar," "honey") are commonly employed to convey affection (Lakoff & Johnson, 2021). This study explores these linguistic aspects within the Nigerian context to uncover patterns in affectionate discourse among couples. Despite extensive studies on affectionate language, there remains a need for a focused discourse analysis of affectionate terms used by Nigerian couples. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the linguistic structures, pragmatic functions, and sociocultural influences that shape affectionate language within Nigerian romantic relationships. By synthesizing insights from pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and gender studies, this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of how language constructs intimacy and cultural identity in the Nigerian context.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Speech Act Theory (SAT), originally developed by Austin (1962) and later refined by Searle (1969), which emphasizes the performative and expressive functions of language in communication. Within romantic discourse, affectionate terms function not just as labels but as acts that convey intimacy, identity, and social positioning. The theory posits that language is not merely a vehicle for conveying information but is also a form of action—people *do things* with words. In the context of affectionate terms, SAT helps explain how expressions like "baby," "honey," or culturally embedded terms like *megida* or *nawa* are more than mere words; they perform specific social functions such as expressing love, maintaining harmony, asserting intimacy, and negotiating roles within relationships.

## **4.0. Research Methods**

### **4.1. Research Design**

This study adopts a mix-method (qualitative and quantitative) research approaches, employing discourse analysis to investigate the lexicon of affectionate expressions used by Nigerian couples. It aims to examine the semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic aspects of affectionate language within romantic relationships.

### **4.2. Data Collection**

Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Responses were collected from participants representing diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The questionnaire sought to capture the use and interpretation of affectionate terms in various relationship contexts.

### **4.3. Participants**

The study included 132 respondents from different ethnic and linguistic groups. Participants were recruited through social media platforms, community networks, and personal referrals. Ethical protocols, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly maintained.

### **4.4. Data Analysis**

The collected responses were organized and analyzed using Google Sheets/Excel. Descriptive and thematic analysis techniques were applied to identify recurring linguistic patterns, semantic categories, and pragmatic functions of affectionate terms. Responses were systematically coded based on their linguistic origins, contextual applications, and variations in usage across genders.

## **5.0. Results and analysis**

The following represents the findings of the study using descriptive and thematic analysis techniques.

A key observation from Figure 1 below is the majority female representation, with 65.6% of the participants being women, as indicated by the blue segment. This suggests that the dataset is predominantly composed of female respondents. In contrast, male representation accounts for only 34.4%, marked in red. This highlights that men form a smaller proportion of the dataset compared to women.

**Figure 1: Gender**

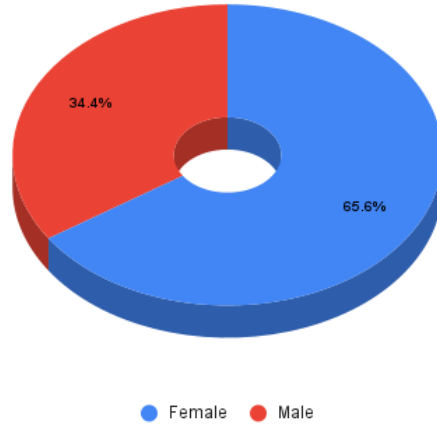


Figure 2 illustrates the age distribution of respondents, revealing a strong skew toward younger demographics. The largest age group is 18-24 years, comprising 60.3% of the total participants, represented in green. This suggests that the majority of respondents are young adults, likely students or individuals in the early stages of their careers. The second-largest group, aged 25-34 years, accounts for 22.9% of the dataset, represented in blue. This indicates a notable but smaller proportion of slightly older adults, who may be in the workforce or pursuing higher education. In contrast, older age groups form a significantly smaller proportion. The 35-44 age group represents 10.7% (red), while respondents 45 years and older make up just 6.1% (yellow). This suggests that the study or survey may be less appealing to or relevant for older individuals.

**Figure 2: Age**

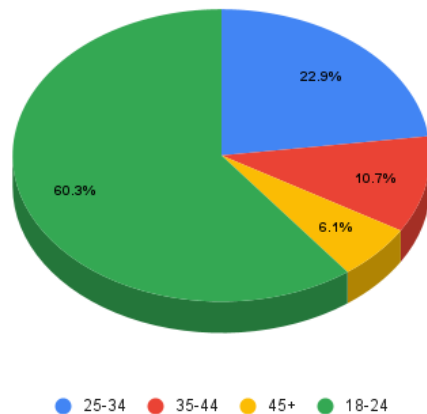


Figure 3 illustrates the relationship status of respondents, showing that engagement is more common than marriage among participants. The largest group, representing 63.3%, consists of individuals who are engaged (marked in red). This suggests that a significant portion of respondents are in committed relationships but have not yet transitioned to marriage. Conversely, the married group accounts for 36.7%, represented in blue, indicating that fewer respondents have moved from engagement to marriage. This highlights a notable difference in relationship stages. A key takeaway from this distribution is that engagement is more prevalent than marriage, which may be influenced by the age range of respondents. Given that the previous age distribution chart showed a majority of participants were between 18-24 years old, it makes sense that many are engaged rather than married. Additionally, these results may reflect broader cultural or social trends, where individuals tend to get engaged at a younger age but delay marriage.

**Figure 3: Relationship Status**

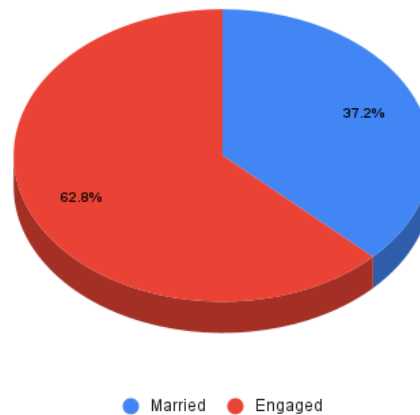


Figure 4 illustrates the linguistic diversity of respondents based on their native language. The Kanuri ethnic group is the most represented, making up 35.0% of respondents, followed by Hausa speakers at 22.2%, reflecting its role as a lingua franca in northern Nigeria. Fulani speakers account for 12.0%, indicating a significant presence. Smaller ethnic groups, including Babur (6.0%), Kilba, Kare-Kare, Bade, Yoruba, Duguranci, Bolewa, Ngizim, Ngamo, and Shuwa Arab, are also represented. The findings highlight a multilingual population, with Hausa likely serving as a bridge language for communication.

**Figure 4: Cultural Background (Native Language)**

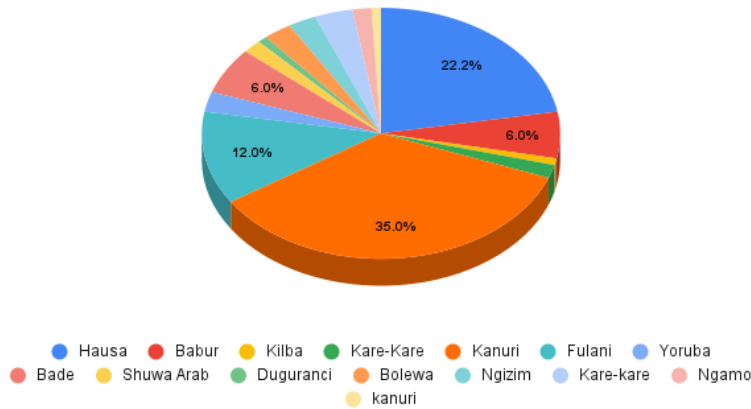


Figure 5, which asked, ‘How often do you use affectionate terms with your partner?’, illustrates variations in the use of affectionate terms among respondents. The largest group (47.7%) uses them occasionally, indicating a moderate and situational approach to verbal affection. A significant 36.4% use affectionate terms frequently, emphasizing the role of words in emotional connection. Meanwhile, 11.4% rarely use such terms, and a smaller fraction never does, likely due to cultural norms, personality differences, or alternative expressions of affection. Overall, over 80% of respondents use affectionate language at least sometimes, highlighting its importance. The findings align with speech act theory, suggesting that verbal expressions of love help strengthen relationships.

**Figure 5: How often do you use affectionate terms with your partner?**

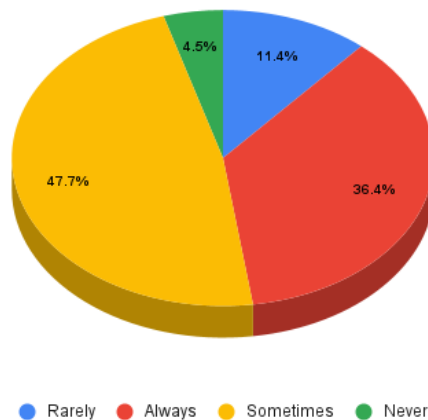


Figure 6, which asked, ‘what are your most commonly used affectionate terms for your partner?’, highlights the most commonly used affectionate terms for partners, showcasing both universal and culturally influenced choices. ‘Baby’ is the most popular term, used by 46.3% of

respondents, reflecting its global acceptance and endearing tone. “Darling” and “Honey” follow at 9.8% each, while “Love” is chosen by 8.9%, indicating a deeper emotional connection. The data further reveals culturally specific terms such as “Habeeby” (Arabic), “Alanguburo” (Kanuri), emphasizing the role of language and culture in romantic expressions. A small percentage of respondents use no affectionate terms, likely due to personal or cultural factors. Overall, the findings highlight a balance between universal and culturally inspired affectionate expressions. Semantically, terms like “Baby” are neutral in endearment, while others, such as “Alanguburo,” carry deeper cultural and social meanings, reinforcing the link between language, identity, and romantic communication.

**Figure 6: What are your most commonly used affectionate terms for your partner?**

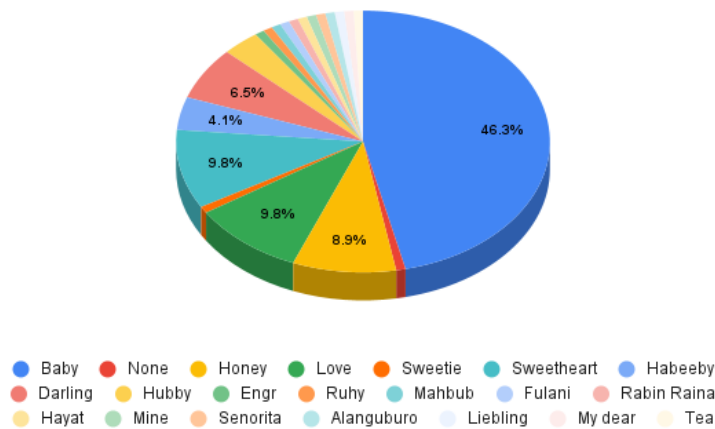


Figure 7, which asked, “*in what contexts do you mostly use affectionate terms?*”, highlights the contexts in which people use affectionate terms, emphasizing the role of privacy and intimacy in romantic communication. The majority (72.0%) use affectionate terms in private conversations, showing a preference for expressing love in personal settings. Additionally, 17.6% use such terms in text messages or on social media, reflecting the increasing role of digital communication in relationships. Only 7.2% of respondents use affectionate terms in public, suggesting a reluctance toward verbal displays of affection due to cultural norms or personal comfort levels. Affectionate terms are rarely used during conflict resolution or special occasions, indicating that their use is often linked to positive emotions rather than reconciliation. Overall, the preference for private and digital communication underscores the importance of intimacy in verbal expressions of love. Pragmatically, the data suggests that considerations such as politeness, social norms, and the appropriateness of affectionate language influence how and where people use it.

**Figure 7: In what contexts do you mostly use affectionate terms?**

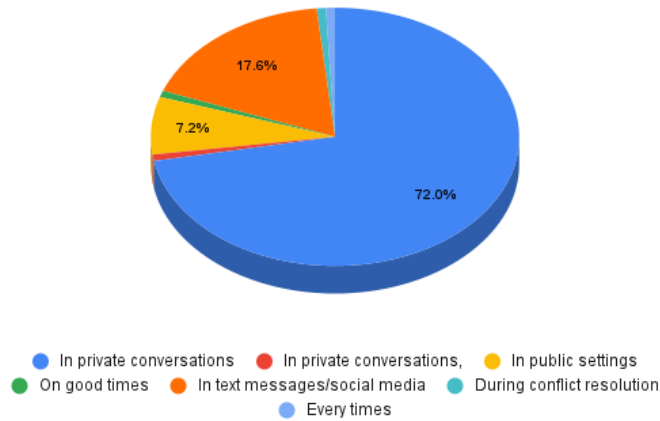


Figure 8, which asked, ‘‘how do you feel when your partner uses affectionate terms for you?’’, illustrates how people feel when their partner uses affectionate terms, revealing overwhelmingly positive reactions. The majority (63.0%) feel very happy, highlighting the role of affectionate language in strengthening emotional bonds. An additional 29.1% feel happy, bringing the total positive response to 92.1%, demonstrating widespread appreciation for affectionate terms in relationships. A small minority feels uncomfortable, possibly due to personal preferences, cultural influences, or past experiences. Some may not be accustomed to verbal affection and instead prefer other forms of expressing love. A tiny fraction remains neutral, indicating that affectionate language does not significantly impact them. The findings suggest that verbal affection enhances emotional intimacy, though individual differences exist. The preference for private expressions of affection may explain why some individuals feel uncomfortable receiving them in public. Semantically, affectionate terms carry strong positive emotional weight, reinforcing their importance in interpersonal relationships.

**Figure 8: How do you feel when your partner uses affectionate terms for you?**

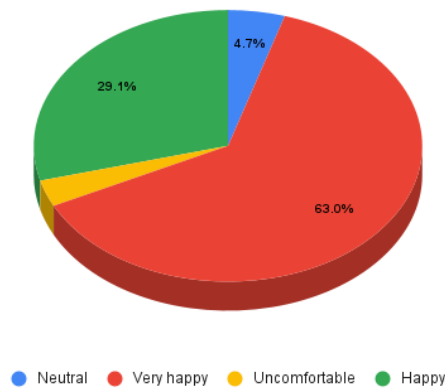


Figure 9, which asked, ‘*do you think affectionate terms strengthen your relationship?*’, reveals a strong consensus on the role of affectionate terms in strengthening relationships. The majority (54.2%) strongly agree, and an additional 33.6% agree, meaning 87.8% of respondents believe verbal affection enhances emotional bonding, trust, and intimacy. A small percentage (9.9%) remains neutral, suggesting they do not dismiss affectionate terms but may prioritize other forms of emotional connection. Only a minimal number disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that affectionate language is rarely seen as detrimental. The findings align with previous data showing that most people feel happy when their partner uses affectionate terms. Since these terms are mainly used in private settings, this suggests that intimate conversations contribute to relationship strength. However, some individuals may value actions over words due to cultural or personal preferences. Overall, affectionate language plays a key role in relationship dynamics, though different expressions of love exist.

**Figure 9: Do you think affectionate terms strengthen your relationship?**

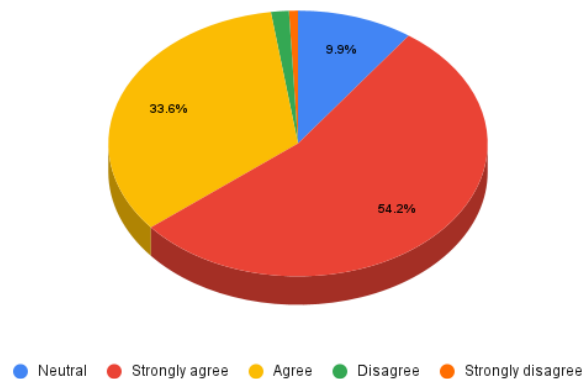


Figure 10, which asked, ‘*do you believe cultural background influences the choice of affectionate terms in relationship?*’, highlights the significant role of cultural background in shaping how affection is expressed. A majority (69.7%) believes that culture, traditions, and language influence the use of affectionate terms, supporting the idea that verbal affection varies across cultures. A smaller portion (18.2%) expresses uncertainty, acknowledging culture’s influence but suggesting other factors, such as personality and relationship dynamics, also play a role. Only 12.1% view affectionate terms as universal, indicating that some people see them as personal choices rather than culturally shaped. Cultural differences in affectionate expressions may lead to misunderstandings, especially in intercultural relationships. For example, partners from cultures with different norms for affection might misinterpret each other’s gestures. This underlines the importance of understanding cultural influences for healthy communication. Overall, the findings emphasize that affectionate language is shaped by cultural norms, with speakers adjusting their language use based on societal expectations and relational context.

**Figure 10: Do you believe cultural background influences the choice of affectionate terms in relationship?**

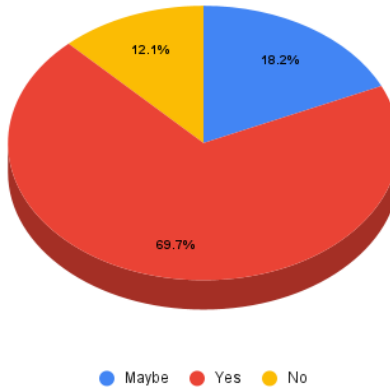


Figure 11, which asked, “*How has digital communication (e.g., texting, social media) affected the use of affectionate language in relationships?*”, reveals varied perspectives on the role of technology in romantic communication. A significant majority of respondents (73.8%) believe that digital communication has increased the use of affectionate terms, highlighting how tools like texting, emojis, and social media platforms help couples maintain emotional closeness, particularly when they are physically apart. In contrast, 15.4% of participants reported no significant change, suggesting that for them, face-to-face interactions remain the primary and most meaningful way to express affection, with digital communication serving as a secondary channel. Meanwhile, a smaller proportion (10.8%) felt that digital communication has decreased the use of affectionate language, which may stem from the perception that digital exchanges lack emotional depth or that affectionate terms become overused and less meaningful in virtual conversations. Overall, while digital communication has provided new ways to express affection, some individuals prefer traditional methods, believing that face-to-face or physical expressions are more genuine. The findings indicate that while technology has generally increased affectionate language, its impact varies based on individual preferences and relationship dynamics.

**Figure 11: How has digital communication (e.g., texting, social media) affected the use of affectionate language in relationships?**

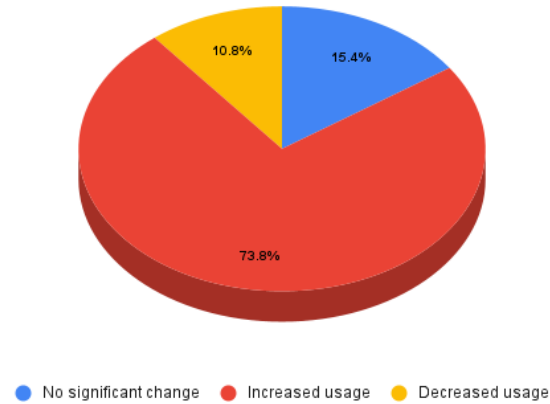
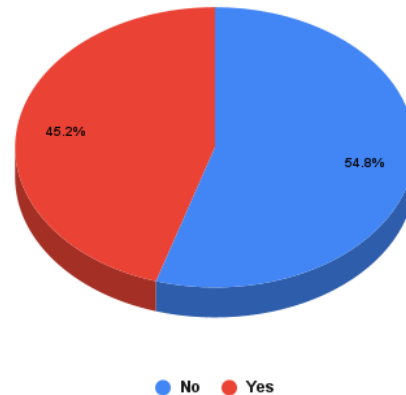


Figure 12, which asked, “*are there affectionate terms that you or your partner avoid using due to cultural or personal reasons?*”, reveal that cultural and individual preferences significantly influence the use of affectionate language in relationships. The majority of respondents (54.8%) report that they do not avoid using affectionate terms for cultural or personal reasons, indicating a broad acceptance of verbal affection regardless of societal norms. However, a significant portion (45.2%) avoids certain affectionate terms, suggesting that cultural and personal factors still play a crucial role in shaping how affection is expressed. These factors may include cultural taboos, religious or traditional norms, and personal discomfort based on individual experiences or preferences. Overall, while cultural influences on affectionate language are important, they are not universal. Some people are comfortable using affectionate terms freely, while others may be restricted by cultural or personal factors. This highlights the importance of understanding a partner's comfort level and cultural background when expressing affection.

**Figure 12: Are there affectionate terms that you or your partner avoid using due to cultural or personal reasons?**



## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study offer compelling insights into how affectionate language is used among Nigerian couples, revealing patterns shaped by age, gender, culture, and communication context. The predominantly young, female respondent base underscores a demographic that is both expressive and open to discussing romantic communication. The high prevalence of affectionate term use — especially terms like *Baby*, which transcends cultural boundaries — demonstrates the influence of globalized popular culture on Nigerian relationship discourse. In the same vein, the emergence of culturally specific terms, such as *Habeeby* and *Alanguburo*, affirms that affectionate expressions are deeply rooted in native linguistic and cultural systems, echoing the sociolinguistic principle that language and identity are intertwined. The preference for private and digital contexts over public use reflects social and cultural norms surrounding the expression of intimacy, especially in collectivist societies where public displays of affection are often moderated.

The overwhelming positive emotional impact reported by respondents when hearing affectionate terms from partners highlights the performative and relational strength of such language, supporting existing theories on speech acts and emotional bonding. Additionally, the strong consensus that affectionate terms strengthen relationships, combined with the acknowledgment of cultural influence, suggests a dual dynamic: while affection is a near-universal relational need, its expression is deeply shaped by the sociocultural environment. The role of digital communication in increasing the frequency of affectionate language emphasizes the evolving nature of modern relationships, where technology facilitates emotional closeness even across distances. However, the significant portion of respondents who avoid certain terms for cultural or personal reasons reveals an underlying complexity: while affectionate language is widely valued, its use is still negotiated within cultural, religious, and personal frameworks.

Overall, the findings highlight how affectionate language functions not only as a marker of intimacy but also as a reflection of cultural identity and evolving relationship practices in contemporary Nigerian society.

## 7. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted role of affectionate language in romantic relationships, shaped by semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic factors.

Semantically, affectionate terms convey both universal and culturally specific meanings, ranging from neutral endearment (e.g., *baby*) to expressions carrying deeper social and emotional connotations (e.g., *rabin raina* in Hausa, *Alanguburo* in Kanuri and *Habiibi* in Arabic). The emotional responses of respondents further affirm the positive semantic value of these terms in reinforcing intimacy.

Pragmatically, the study reveals that affectionate language is context-dependent, with greater usage in private and digital interactions than in public settings. This aligns with politeness strategies and social appropriateness, where speakers adjust their language based on situational factors. Additionally, frequent use of affectionate terms functions as expressive speech acts, strengthening emotional bonds and enhancing relationship satisfaction.

In sociolinguistic context, gender differences suggest that women are more engaged in affectionate language, consistent with theories on emotional expressiveness. Younger individuals, particularly those aged 18-34, exhibit a higher tendency to use affectionate terms, possibly influenced by social media and evolving cultural norms. Relationship status also impacts linguistic behavior, as engaged individuals use affectionate expressions more frequently than married couples. The multilingual and multicultural background of respondents further underscores the dynamic nature of affectionate language, with cultural identity shaping both the choice and acceptability of these terms.

Overall, affectionate language is a crucial element of romantic communication, fostering emotional intimacy while being shaped by social norms and cultural expectations. The increasing role of digital platforms in romantic interactions reflects broader shifts in contemporary relationship dynamics, emphasizing the evolving nature of affectionate expression in modern society. The recommendations involve promoting warm communication, fostering cultural sensitivity, maintaining a balance between verbal and non-verbal expressions, analyzing public versus private displays of affection, and conducting further studies on expressions of affection in both settings.

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