



# Gendered English Constructions and Women Invisibility in Nigerian Newspapers

Eunice Omolara Olarewaju<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Ph.D., Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, ILE-IFE, Nigeria.

\* Corresponding author.

Received 3 May 2023; accepted 26 May 2023

Published online 26 June 2023

## Abstract

This study investigates how Nigerian journalists use gendered English in their writings with a view to *inter alia* identifying and determining the occurrences of gender-bias expressions in Nigerian newspapers. The study also shows how Nigerian journalists' use of language has led to women's invisibility in the press. Data for this study are from four widely read purposively selected Nigerian English-medium newspapers. Data gathered were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively using mainly the framework of Fairclough's *Critical Discourse Analysis*. The study's findings reveal an overwhelming use of masculine nouns/pronouns as generic terms, stereotypic references to male gender with respect to professions when referents are for both feminine and masculine genders. The findings also show male precedence in word-pairing, relative references to women with typical masculine words and preponderant references to men which are demonstrative of reduction of female gender to a state of invisibility while affirming the dominance of male gender. The study concludes that the use of gendered English expressions has become the norm in Nigerian newspapers through the indiscriminate use of gendered expressions. It recommends, among others, the need to revisit the general media code of ethics and practice for journalists in Nigeria to include a stipulation on the gender-fair reporting and encourage the usage of gender-neutral English.

**Key words:** Women invisibility; Marginalization; Gender-bias; Gendered English; Nigerian journalists

Olarewaju, E. O. (2023). Gendered English Constructions and Women Invisibility in Nigerian Newspapers. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 26(3), 82-92. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/12989>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12989>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender relation or the status of women in the society has been a recurrent issue in socio-political, economic and literary discourses. In the words of Dare (2009, p.374), "feminists were the first institutionalized group to champion women's cause". They believe that women have been victims of domination, oppression and marginalization in a society dominated by men. The feminists therefore advocate equal rights for women in a patriarchy where men have monopolized power. Tony (1998, p.1) posits that feminist theory attempts to "describe women oppression, to explain its causes and consequences and to prescribe strategies for women liberation". What has been observed by the generality of Nigerian feminists and gender activists and researchers is that, in Nigeria, gender issues have not been adequately and properly addressed by the appropriate government agencies saddled with such responsibilities, that is, the policy formulators of the legislative arm of government. It is also noted that even where there are policies for gender equity and social justice, they only exist on paper, as there are still obvious cases of gender discrimination, gender disparities in education, gender disparities in employment, among others (Dipo-Salami, 2003; Nwankwo, 2000).

English language performs various functions such as that of lingua franca, language of instruction in schools from elementary school, government, commerce, mass media, judiciary, science and technology (Adedeji, 2005; Adegbija, 1998; Bamgbose, 1995; Banjo, 1996; Eka, 2000). Today, in Nigeria, English is an official

language, which serves three broad functions, namely, accommodation, participation and social mobility (Adegbite, 2020). It is indeed the language of journalism in most parts of the world because it is the language of communication – sea, air, and even telecommunications (Babalola, 2002; Chilwa, 2007). So also in Nigeria, other forces that have aided the spread of English include the media. The English language is the language of communication in Nigeria – Radio, Television, Telecoms, Print Media, among others (Olawejaju, 2015). The fact that any media practitioner or newspaper which aims at national coverage must necessarily publish in the English language is a better confirmation of the important role it is playing in our country. In the words of Banjo (1996, p.69):

No African Country is better served with English medium newspapers than Nigeria, and the scene has been further enriched in recent years by profusion in manner of periodicals spanning the whole range from the basilectal to the acrolectal.

The functional load placed on the English language in Nigeria has continued to accord it more and more esteemed status day by day. This is why, today, the language has become indispensable in the Nigerian life. The English language performs various important roles in Nigeria which Bamigbose (1971, p.13) summarizes thus:

Of all the heritages left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration, probably none is important than the English language. This is now the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature, and much internal, as well as, external communication...

However, in spite of the numerous roles that the English language plays in Nigeria, it is disheartening to observe that most of the Nigerian users of the English language, including government officials and most especially, the educated, the professionals such as teachers and even lecturers at higher institutions of learning, judges, lawyers, medical practitioners, administrators, among others in the country. Even some linguists who are regarded as best exemplars of the English language usage in Nigeria, still portray high degree of the use of gender-bias expressions, despite over two decades of global gender awareness and various International Treaties on equity and fair play of which Nigeria is a signatory (Adetunji, 2010; Obilade, 2005).

The attention language use has drawn in relation to gender is partly due to the machonistic nature of the English language itself (Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1998; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Qubein, 2006), and also, as a result of some socio-cultural beliefs of most users of English in patriarchal societies like Nigeria, (Omenugha, 2007; Yusuf, 1988). For instance, Nigeria being a patriarchal society, all aspects of human identification and socialisation pitch the man at the top and the woman below, in an almost permanent hierarchical

structure (Salami, 2004). Although, the major problem lies with the English language itself, the reason being that it had its origins in a male-dominant society, and the concept of male superiority is embedded in the language. English, being a culturally male-dominant language, therefore, has contributed in no small measure to the continuous spread and entrenchment of the societal socio-cultural stereotypes and constructions and beliefs (Spender, 1998; Qubein, 2006; Yusuf, 1988).

English speakers and writers either in L1 or L2 situations are traditionally taught and exposed to use masculine nouns and pronouns in situations where the sex of their subject(s) is unclear or variable, or when a group to which they are referring contains members of both sexes. For example, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s Declaration that it will uphold 'one-man-one-vote' principle to enable free and fair election in 2023; and most of us were taught in elementary school to understand the word 'man' in that context refers to either male or female Nigerian eligible voter. Again, leaders of National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) in virtually all the 36 states in Nigeria are usually addressed as 'chairmen' and each of them is known and addressed as 'chairman'. The generic use of *chairman* (to refer to both the female and male) could be seen as a symbol of the assumption that leadership is an essentially male attribute (Olawejaju, 2015; Yusuf, 1988).

Similarly, studies in traditional grammar have shown the grammatical function and relationships between words as subject, object, complement, among others, in sentences. Pronouns, especially, have a system of person – first, second and third; number – singular and plural; case – nominative, accusative, genitive; and gender – masculine, feminine and neuter (Kuiper and Allan, 1996). Sentences that follow the foregoing patterns are said to be grammatically correct, but they may be considered incorrect and offensive within feminist linguistics if generic masculine terms are used in them to refer to all human beings.

This is why the generic masculine terms, represented severally in the noun "man" and the pronouns – 'he', 'him', and 'his' which have been accepted, until very recently, to be adequately representative of both males and females, are now seen as unfair and offensive to the womenfolk, whose gender is said to be marked out as inferior relative to the masculine gender in such contexts (Joseph, 2006). So, the popular maxim "Man is the architect of his own fortune" which refers not just to males but females as well in the past, is now regarded as bias and should therefore, be discarded.

Therefore, feminist scholars and women human rights activists believe that the use of gendered language is unfair, as it tends to give the impression that the average person is a man, and that the visibility of women is reduced (Bartle, 2004; Eckert & McConnell, 2003;

Litosseliti, 2006; Spender, 1998). Thus, some feminist scholars frown at the generic use of *he, him, his; mankind/man; and the man in the street*; when references are made to both male and female genders.

Consequently, through scholarly efforts of feminist linguists and campaigns and lobbies of women human rights activists, most English language readers no longer understand the word '*man*' to be synonymous with '*people*'; the global trend now is that writers today must think more carefully about the ways they express gender in order to convey their ideas clearly and accurately to their readers (Litosseliti, 2006; Qubein, 2006).

These efforts seem to be yielding fruits as some of the cultural practices that are inimical to women are gradually being changed as gender equality has been so much talked about globally. There have been noticeable improvements in the countries like Australia, U.K and U.S.A. (Gupta and Lee, 1990; Christie, 2000, Claire, 2006, Coates, 1986), whereas, in Nigeria, because of the cultural beliefs and religion attached to gender issues, there are still the maximum uses of gender-bias language (Adetunji, 1995; Okereke, 1998; Omenugha, 2001).

For instance, Okereke (1998) posits that within the dominance paradigm, Nigerian women are either silent or silenced, and that in most Nigerian linguistic groups, wives are not expected to speak, whenever their husbands are also part of a multi-participant conversation (for example, family meetings), and if they would, the wives are expected to firstly, seek their husbands' consent, either linguistically or para-linguistically, but it is only for "unserious" comments or banter that such women may be allowed the freedom to self-select their turns (to speak). As such, women lose their vocalicity in mixed-sex dialogues, where "vocalicity refers to audibility in voicing one's views" (Okereke, 1998, p.134).

Adetunji (2010) also observes the loud existence of the subordination of women in language use in a commercial bank, a place expected to be gender-sensitive. He observes (ibid, p.13) one of the mission statements of the Union Bank, one of the biggest commercial banks in Nigeria – "Every worker should do his duty." This reflects subordination of women and gender insensitivity, especially when the pronoun "his" is underlined and thus, fore-grounded". The study confirmed the Bank's presupposition that "his" includes "her" and indicates how linguistic violence is being visited on Nigerian women. Linguistic Violence (LV) is a concept used to capture the psychological and social use of any instance of language to abuse, offend, or hurt somebody or people. It emphasises the linguistic situation of two people or groups asymmetrically, along the lines of power or status, whereby one person or group occupies a higher and therefore oppressive position in relation to the other (Adetunji, 2010).

These efforts seem to be yielding fruits as some of the cultural practices that are inimical to women are

gradually being changed as gender equality has been so much talked about globally. In most parts of the world today, women and women groups are struggling to assert a spirit of independence and a feeling of self-worth. The struggle is precipitated by the wrong projection of women in patriarchal societies. For instance, Adetunji, (2010) observes that Nigeria is essentially a patriarchal society, where the male child is preferred, the man is the 'lord' and the child is expected to inherit his/her father's (not mother's) property.

Okereke (1998) also posits that the situation that Adetunji (op.cit.) describes above is also reflected in language use. Okereke (Ibid.) stresses further that within the dominance paradigm, Nigerian women are either silent or silenced, and that in most Nigerian linguistic groups, wives are not expected to speak, whenever their husbands are also part of a multi-participant conversation (for example, family meetings), and if they would, the wives are expected to firstly, seek their husbands' consent, either linguistically or para-linguistically, but it is only for "unserious" comments or banter that such women may be allowed the freedom to self-select their turns (to speak). As such, women lose their vocalicity in mixed-sex dialogues, where "... vocalicity refers to audibility in voicing one's views" (Okereke, 1998, p.134).

From the outset, the female child is regarded as inferior to the male child. The male child is seen in many African societies as the bearer of the family name, "the heir apparent". The female child, on the other hand is conceived more or less of as a temporary member of the family, who soon becomes a member of her would-be-husband's family. A woman's voice is traditionally not to be heard in public discourse. In some societies, the voice of a male child is "weightier" than that of his mother even in the private sphere (Adetunji, 2010, p.13).

It is an undeniable fact that there are biological differences; for example, men and women do not look alike, they do not walk alike, neither do they talk alike. Differences like these are universal, transcending culture, class, ethnicity, religion, education, and politics. They manifest themselves in all societies, across the modern world, and in every known record back through time. However, apart from these natural differences, the 'man-made' differences occur and the woman is subjected to discrimination as a result of male chauvinism that exists in our society and the domination of all strata of the society by the male gender (Acholonu, 1995; BAOBAB for Women Human Rights, 2003; Bartle, 2004 a & b; Cameron, 1995 & 2004; Christie, 2000; Chukukere, 1998; Kolawole, 1998; Oluyamo, 2009; Spender, 1998).

The present study strongly agrees with Adetunji (2010) who posits that old habits die hard but they will die eventually if conscious efforts are made to kill them. Likewise, Lamidi (2009) advocates the creation of more awareness about gender-fair language, especially

the use of gender-fair pronouns. He (Ibid.) specifically recommends the institution of enlightenment campaigns to sensitize all Nigerians about gender fairness in the English language, the inclusion of gender-fair language in grammar books, and the encouragement of teachers to learn and teach gender-fair language. If Nigerians find the singular 'they' a little far-fetched, at least they can distinguish the sexes and genders with the traditional pronouns ('his', 'her', among others.) rather than stick to generic pronouns.

The motivation to embark on this study stems from an observation of previous studies that asserted that the dominant socio-economic images of Nigerian women that prevail in Nigerian newspapers are mostly based on stereotypes to subject women to poverty by making them appendages of men, and by extension, render them invisible (Okunna, 2002; Oluyamo, 2009; and Omenugha, 2007). The present study's observation is that, on the global trend, virtually all the countries of the world are bracing up for the paradigm shift in the area of challenge of using language in a manner that does not offend gender, that if one believes that women and men deserve social equality, then one should think seriously about how to reflect that belief in one's language use. It holds that even though the English language is male-dominant, it "grammaticalises" sex (Trask and Mayblin, 2005, p.3). For instance, in the English language, if one wants to refer to somebody one has already been mentioned, one must choose 'she' for a female and 'he' for a male. So, the use of 'he' for a person irrespective of sex/gender needs to be corrected in the society. This is why the present study is all about encouraging gender-fair writing by the Nigerian journalists in the performance of their duties in accordance with the global trend. Gender-fair writing is the use of language in a manner that does not stereotype either sex nor appear to be referring to only one sex when that is not the writer's intention (Olawaju, 2015; Lamidi, 2009; Litosseliti, 2006).

Having provided the background above, this study aims to investigate how Nigerian journalists use English in their writings. The specific objectives of the study are to identify and determine the occurrences of gender-bias expressions in Nigerian newspapers; and assess the level awareness of gender-fair writing of the Nigerian journalists and discuss the pragmatic and semantic imports of the identified gender-bias expressions. It also seeks to provide insights into what seems to be the order of communication in the Nigerian press and the level of gender sensitivity of the Nigerian journalists, in order to suggest how to encourage and promote gender-fair writing among the Nigerian journalists in the performance of their duties. Lamidi (2009, p.194) describes gender-fair writing as "the language that is considered fair or neutral to both masculine and feminine genders such that neither would consider themselves to have been disparaged,

insulted, or subsumed under the other". Olarewaju (2015, p.32) simply defines gender-neutral writing as "the use of language in a manner that does not stereotype either sex nor appear to be referring to only one sex when that is not the user's intention".

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: LANGUAGE AND GENDER IN THE MEDIA

Litosseliti (2006:1) opines that "Gender and language is a diverse and rapidly developing field which has both academic and popular appeal". She goes further that the "turn to language" across the humanities and social sciences, and the impact of critical linguistics and discourse analysis, have indeed contributed to reframing of questions on gender and language. The central theme running through her book *Gender and language* is that language both reflects and creates how we see the world, and how we see the world includes assumptions about gender and gender inequalities. She refers to gender as a category. According to her:

If sex relates to a biological and generally binary distinction between male and female, then gender refers to the social behaviors, expectations and attitudes associated with being male or female. Sex is binary, but the traits assigned to a sex by a culture are cultural constructions. (ibid, p.1)

The Sapir/Whorf hypothesis provides perhaps the earliest insight into the interdependence between thought and language summed up in the following words of Carroll, (1974, p.134):

Language is a guide to social reality...Human beings do not live in the objectives of world alone nor in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.

The above hypothesis emphasizes the influence of language on a society's world view. The most obvious function of language indeed is to communicate information. It also contributes to at least two other equally important, but less often recognized functions:

- i). It establishes and maintains social relationships
- ii). It expresses and creates the social identity of the speaker.

These functions according to Sims (2004:1), may be "recognized less often because information such as class or race is conveyed not as much through what we say, as through how we say it". In other words, information is conveyed as much by how we compose our utterances as through the precise character of our thought. This is absolutely true of gender. It then goes on that if language is world disclosing, we must attend to the world and worlds that it discloses. A phenomenology of media language would have as its task, the job of investigating

the connections between media, language and world (Scannell, 1996).

According to Scannell (1998, p.267), “the relationship between media, language and world can be thought along the axis of power/knowledge and that of understanding or truth”. These two ontologies, each with their particular hermeneutic (distrust/trust), should not be thought in an either/or fashion. To privilege one at the expense or exclusion of the other is to distort the manifold reality of the world that we are in to clarify their differences is to restore that manifold reality. Language and media can be thought in various ways, but to think them truly will be to return them to the common world that each and both, in their different ways reveal as the world we and they (language and media) are in.

There have been concerns about how Nigerian media represent women and the attendant images they call up (Okunna, 2002; Oluyamo, 2009; and Omenugha, 2007). For instance, Okunna (2002, p.11) did a survey of the media scene in Nigeria and showed how women fare in them. She concluded that “an examination of gender and communication in Nigeria generate a lot of misgivings and despondency about the possibility of effecting meaningful change in media representations of women, as the media continue in their symbolic annihilation of women”.

Also, Omenugha (2001), in her study titled “Poverty, Media and Gender – the Nigerian Perspective”, explores how the Nigeria media are contributing to the poverty of Nigerian women. Poverty in the study is used in multi-dimensional way that is not limited to income poverty. It also embraces “loss of rights and dignity, powerlessness, inequality, vulnerability, isolation and also about access and control of resources” (Omenugha, *ibid*, p.2). According to her:

The Nigerian media seem to be caught in this web of discordant culture. By excluding women, by giving them little voice, by demeaning them through various forms of stereotypes, by increasing their vulnerability, the Nigerian media is contributing to trapping women in the vicious circle of poverty. (*ibid*, p.2).

The media audience, in its entirety, is susceptible to the intended message of media projections (Omenugha, 2007), and while individuals will interpret the neglect of female journalists in line with their own beliefs and experiences, it remains a powerful contributing component in the construction of masculine hegemony in journalism. Furthermore, *The Nation* (October 3, 2010, p.24), under its feature article - “Life”, has a report titled “Gender-bias persists in Nigerian media”, study reveals”. The report states that “gender inequality still persists in Nigerian mass media according to the outcome of the 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project (CMMP) research released on September 29, 2010.” The report states further that globally, women, the research indicated are still significantly under-represented and mis-represented in news media coverage despite significant change since

the project began 15 years ago. The report reveals that “women’s participation in the news in Nigeria is relatively low compared with men.” According to the report:

Majority of the news subjects for all the news media Monitored by the 14-member team led by Nkem Fab-Ukozor of The Media and Gender Enlightenment Initiative (MEGEI) were men. In the latest report, 14% of the news subjects were female, while 86% were male. In 2005, 17% of the news subjects were female, while 83% were male (*ibid*, p.24).

This is worrisome because the import of this report is that issues concerning women will continue to witness less media coverage, except there is a gender balance in the number of reporters in the country’s media. Betty Abbah, is reported (*The Nation: ibjd.*) to have said that the result of the research confirmed the fact that women have remained largely under-reported, and in the majority of cases where they make it into the news pages at all, the reports are laced with sentiments and stereotypes. Betty Abbah is quoted in the report to have concluded her views with the following recommendations which, in her opinion, could enable the change of the observed situation for better:

Every newsroom should embark on a soul-search, and affirmative action, and ensure that their charity of justice starts from home. They should empower female journalists, ensure they are entrusted with so-called ‘manly’ jobs because women are capable, that is if they are not better! (*The Nation, ibid*, p.24)

The present study’s observation is that, on the global trend, virtually all the countries of the world are bracing up for the paradigm shift in the area of challenge of using language in a manner that does not offend gender, that if one believes that women and men deserve social equality, then one should think seriously about how to reflect that belief in one’s language use. Furthermore, this study notes that Nigeria, as a signatory to the 1995 Beijing, China platform for action and other international Fundamental Human Rights Treaties is expected to promote policies that would reinforce gender equality, justice and fair play in our society. Language and gender issues such as differences, dominance, stereotype beliefs and ideas, as well as the linguistic uses that discriminate against groups of people, especially women, need to be examined and critically reviewed continuously in order to effect necessary changes from time to time in agreement with Bucholtz (2004) who opines that we need to change the social positions that make certain people powerless.

Indeed, much has been done on the relationship between gender and language, language and the media, as well as, critical analysis of media discourse in general. These efforts on the relationship between gender and language, language and the media, as well as critical analysis of media discourse have however been concentrated on the Western Press (Olowe, 1993). In this regard, we might mention Bell, 1995; Bucholtz,

2004; Cameron, 1990; Cameron and Kulick, 2005; Carter and Nash, 1990; Claire, 2006; Coates, 1993; Davies and Walton, 1988; Gupta and Lee 1990; Kress, 1985; Litosseliti, 2006; Spender, 1998, Fairclough, 2003; Van-Dijk, 2003, among others.

Many scholars have worked on the English of Newspaper Reporting in Nigeria (ENRN). And the areas that have been covered include grammar and structure; the newspapers' ownership and establishment ideological influence and effect on the use of language; the use of sensational and advertorial language; rhythm and intonation; colloquial and idiomatic vocabulary; and sensational disclosures as headlines (Adesanoye, 1973; Akinpelu, 1991; Ayodabo, 2007; Dare, 2009; Olowe, 1983 & 1993, Taiwo, 2007). Some studies are also carried out on the contributions of the Nigerian media to the continuity of gender issues such as discrimination, women image in media advertisements, gender imbalance, women misrepresentations in the media, as well as media insensitivity to the plight of the Nigerian women, among others (Adetunji, 2010; Omenugha, 2001 and 2007; Ogunsola, 2004).

Some scholars have also worked on the roles the media products (i.e. stories or news magazines and newspapers) could perform in enhancing English literacy under formal and informal situations by young and old users of the language in Nigeria (Babalola, 2002; Chiluwa, 2007 & 2010; Obe, 2008). Some other scholars have also been attracted to the use of language in the media for the presentation of conflicting ideological positions, the use of language to achieve political goals; the contribution of the media to the poverty of Nigerian women, objectivity and balance in media-political discourse, media advertisement and the image of women, among others (Ayoola, 2008 & 2010; Olorunyomi, 2007; Oluyamo, 2009). Again, some other vital issues in language and gender that have attracted the attention of Nigerian feminist scholars are the usage of derogatory terms and proverbs to project women as bad in behavioural pattern and nature (Awe, 2004; Yusuf, 1988; 2005); language usage that portrays societal gender socio-cultural stereotypes and beliefs, and demonstrates the persistence of patriarchal and power domination tendencies introduced by colonialism (Azikiwe, 2008; Farinde, 2006 & 2009; Nwankwo, 2000; 2001 & Olaniyan, 2005; Olujinmi, 2004).

In sum, there are several works on how the English Language has been used in the media,

especially in newspaper reporting in Nigeria. The majority of these works concentrate on lexis, grammar and phonology. However, there is a dearth of empirical study on gendered English in the Nigerian print media either at lexico-semantic or syntactic level of language description. Paying attention to gendered English in the Nigerian print media on lexico-semantic and syntactic levels of language description will enable us to have more knowledge about

Standard English usage and will also encourage the use of politically correct gender-neutral English among the print media practitioners.

Although the majority of the media practitioners within the Nigerian print media use good English in terms of grammar and structure, there is no doubt that a critical look at the print media shows that there is a problem of usage of non-inclusive language as a lot of gender-bias expressions are found in the Nigerian print media. However, it seems Nigerian scholars have not done a systematic study on the use of these gender-bias expressions in the Nigerian media. This is the intention of the present study.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Data for this paper were collected from four widely read four (4) purposively selected Nigerian English medium daily newspapers, namely, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Nigerian Observer Punch* and *The Tide*. The selection of these newspapers was based on their national spread. Gendered English expressions were drawn from three news sections: news reports, editorials and features articles, from 40 editions comprising 10 editions from each of the selected dailies. The specific methods of analysis are quantitative, contrastive and qualitative: instances of gendered English usage are shown through frequency counting and percentile ranking scale and the narrative structures are discussed using content analysis.

This study is carried out within the framework of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and complemented with useful insights from Litosseliti's Feminist Linguistics, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Sapir-Whorf' Linguistics of Relativity approaches. One such social and cultural language framework can be provided by certain forms of discourse analysis: methods of language analysis which attempt to answer critical questions about why language conventions prevail, and to see such conventions as the product of relations of power and struggles for power (Fairclough, 1992).

The rationale for choosing the Nigerian newspapers for the study arises from the fact that newspaper being a mass medium with the advantage of permanence offers, a veritable avenue for propagation of any idea (Yadegarfar, 2014). The newspaper is therefore believed to be capable of facilitating the use of ungendered English in our society as a channel of mass communication, if and when the journalists themselves are gender conscious and become well-grounded in the peculiarities and features of gender-fair English and adapt to gender-neutral writing henceforth.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Gendered and Ungendered Expressions in the Newspapers**

Newspaper	News Reports			Features			Editorials		
	Gendered Texts	Gendered Words	Ungendered Texts	Gendered Texts	Gendered Words	Ungendered Texts	Gendered Texts	Gendered Words	Ungendered Texts
Punch	181	194	34	27	47	1	13	14	0
Nigerian Tribune	191	204	14	48	53	0	13	15	0
The Nigerian Observer	121	134	9	47	71	0	1	1	0
The Tide	258	280	14	4	4	0	7	8	0
Total	751	812	71	126	175	1	34	38	0

The table shows that that in all, there is a higher usage of gendered expressions than the ungendered expressions. There are seven hundred and fifty-one (751) instances of gendered texts in the news reports; one hundred and twenty-six (126) in the features articles; and thirty-four (34) in the editorials, all amount to a total of nine hundred and eleven (911) gendered texts in the newspapers of study. It also shows that there are eight hundred and twelve (812) gendered words in the news reports; one hundred and seventy-five (175) in the features articles; and thirty-eight (38) in the editorials, all amount to a total of one thousand and twenty-five (1025) gendered words. There are seventy-one (71) instances of ungendered texts in the news reports; only one (1) in the features articles but none in the editorials, totalling one hundred and sixty-one (72). Again, a comparison of ratio of usage of gendered and ungendered English in the newspapers shows that gendered English expressions are much more than the ungendered ones as the results indicate that the percentage of gendered English expressions was 91.2% while that of ungendered English expressions was 8.8%.

The result of the data analysis show that there are gendered texts/sentences with the use of masculine and stereotypic terms to refer to both the feminine and masculine genders while there are also gendered texts with the use of masculine terms to specifically refer to women. The gendered expressions identified are categorised into five (5) according to the portrayal of sexism in their contexts of use, namely, use of masculine nouns/pronouns as generic terms; stereotypic reference to male with respect to occupation/crime; male precedence in word-pairing; relative references to women; and preponderant references to men. The following are examples of such gendered expressions which are given number and the gendered words related expressions are in italics for identification and easy reference:

### A. Use of masculine nouns/pronouns as generic terms

E1. The *men* of the Nigerian Police led by the Divisional Head of the Azikoro

Police station, Mrs. Rita Grean was supervising the removal of the corpses (*New Nigerian*, News report)

E2. What I ask media *men* is to continue doing their jobs irrespective of the hazard (*The Tide*, News report)

E3. There are more examples of the *common man*'s respective treatments and experiences in the hands of the political wreckers of his fate in different parts of the land to cite. (*Nigerian Tribune*, Feature Article)

The feminine gender seems to be excluded totally from definite referents – *men* of the Nigerian Police, (whereas, the leader of the team is Mrs. Rita Grean), media *men* and *common man*, in the above (E1 – E3) texts. This is because both referents have generic use of masculine words which favour only the masculine gender whereas both sexes are represented in the professions and situations involved in the texts. The use of media *men* in E2 suggests there are no women journalists/reporters in Nigeria and that all the Nigerian journalists are men, whereas, there are some women journalists as senior editors and writers. This is indeed worrisome as there are too many instances of *media men* / '*newsmen*' performing the journalistic assignments in Abuja, Abeokuta, Ado Ekiti, Benin, Lagos, Akure, Damaturu, Gombe, Ibadan, Ilorin, Kaduna, Kano, Onitsha and Port-Harcourt, among others. Where are the '*newswomen*' in journalism in these cities and or what are their journalistic assignments?

The semantic import of such generic uses when in actual fact both sexes are represented in the situations the texts occur connotes the confirmation of a pervasive attitude that women's basic role is a reproductive one, with associated duties of child bearing and kitchen/ home management. The use of *newsmen* as a stereotypic term to refer to both female and male reporters/journalists is totally offensive and should be discouraged among the Nigerian journalists. This connotes that there are no *women* journalists; whereas there are women in journalism who are Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) officers, senior editors and reports writers at various media organisations in both print and broadcast media in Nigeria.

### B. Stereotypic reference to male with respect to profession/occupation:

E4. The unknown *gunmen* had in a coordinated attack carried out at Dala Police Station (*New Nigerian*'s news report).

E5. ...the *fishermen* whose only source of livelihood has been taken away by the said spill have been left to wallow in abject penury (*The Tide*, news report).

E6. It is hoped that if the regular *policemen* are off the check-points, apart from the occasional distress calls... (*Nigerian Tribune*, Editorial)

The examples (E4 – E6) have gendered words such as *gunmen*, *fishermen*, *policemen*, respectively, involved different professional and commercial roles restricted to men while women are linguistically excluded. In all the texts, there is no single reference to women holding any of the positions mentioned in the texts. Even, E4, which is related to crime, there could be the possibility of some inglorious women to be involved in crime. The semantic import of the use of stereotypic reference to male for profession/occupation is that based on the cultural norms as regards occupational role for women and men, any of such professions in these contexts is considered masculine and meant for men only. The use of *fishermen* connotes there are no women in fishery occupation whereas there are women who are fish farmers and traders. As already identified, women journalists receive less coverage than their male peers in the pages of the newspapers. The massive use of gendered terms such as ‘*newsmen*’ ‘*policemen*’ ‘*gunmen*’ and the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns when referents are for both feminine and masculine genders or their variables, is demonstrative of the male dominance in the Nigerian media. In doing this, the newspapers construct masculine ideals, not only in journalism, but directly into the English language traditional culture. A critical look at these texts reveals that woman is completely excluded from leadership and professional responsibilities through the use of gendered English. It also reflects the wrong impression that the females have no place in position of leadership or authority, professions or careers such as political, legal, commerce, farming, journalism, chief executive officer, military, police medical (doctor), among others. Women who aspire to such positions therefore seem to be occupying unusual positions.

#### C. Male precedence in word-pairing:

E7. The Christians who have over the decades lived in harmony with their Muslim

*Brothers and sisters* are equally not happy with Suntai. (*New Nigerian*, Feature Article)

E8. ...the suspects comprised five *males* and two *females*... (*The Tide*, News report)

E9. God Almighty, creator of the universe is a Sovereign Spirit... No *man/woman* can see Him and live. (*Nigerian Tribune*, Feature Article)

These examples of texts with male precedence in word-pairing portray a habitual practice that in word-pairings that involve the female and male, masculine words are usually placed first. In texts 1 to 8, *brothers* and *sisters*,

*boys and girls*, *his/her*, five *males* and two *females*, *man/woman*, *he or she* and *his/her* are used respectively to further confirm the general belief that the male gender is superior to the female gender because man was the first to be created by God before woman and that woman should consistently take the second position in all situations male and female gender nouns/pronouns are paired. In these texts, the masculine nouns/pronouns precede the feminine ones in conformity with the usual practice, as if it is grammatically wrong to put the feminine words first before the masculine ones. This insinuates that *men* are superior to *women* even linguistically and that the male gender is superior to the female gender; and as a result, a masculine noun/pronoun must be placed first before the feminine noun/pronoun.

#### D. Relative references to women:

\*E10. The *Chairman* of the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ),

Rivers State Chapter, Ms. Enale Ndubere Kodu... (*The Tide*, News report)

\*E11. The former Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) gal turned politician and *chairman*, House Committee on Diaspora Affairs Hon. Abike Dabiri and her jolly good friends... (*The Nation*, News report)

\*E12. ...a former *Chairman* of the Local Council, Mrs. Dupe Ogundiminogha (*Nigerian Tribune*, Feature Article)

E13. To cap it all, *Dr. (Mrs.)* Christie Onokpasa is a *patroness* of Nigeria Union of Journalists, Edo State Council. (*The Nigerian Observer*, April, Feature Article)

E14. In her speech, the *proprietress* of the school, Mrs. Odette Ndatigh said that pupils in the School have continued to show exemplary performances in academics... (*The Tide*, August)

E15. The *actress* was quoted to have said “I am tired and no longer ashamed of saying it (*The Herald*: Feature Article).

\*E10 - \*E12 texts have which relative references to women have typical masculine word ‘*chairman*’ used to refer directly to female referents. The use of *chairman* to specifically refer to a woman is highly demeaning as it suggests that every average person is a ‘man’ might be as a result of an assumption that position of leadership is meant only for male gender as the first to be created by God. This is a further confirmation that women are indeed being marginalized through the usage of gendered language by some Nigerian print media practitioners and by so doing, oppressing and suppressing women into a state of invisibility which is also referred to as a form of linguistic violence against female gender.

The use of ‘*chairman*’ in \*E10 –\*E12 as a result of generic use of masculine nouns for humanity, are instances of sole recognition of male gender by some Nigerian journalists and this suggests that leadership is a basically male attribute. The use of ‘*chairman*’ to refer to a female

referent is indeed demeaning. It is a clear indication that Nigerian *women* are linguistically excluded and marginalised even by the media practitioners. The word 'chairman', is a typical example of sexist morphology because it is compound noun formed from 'chair' and the masculine word 'man'. Also, 'chairman' is used in \*E10 to refer to NAWOJ leader, who is typically a woman leading all other women in the association. NAWOJ is an acronym for National Association of Women Journalists. This suggests that leadership is assumed to be a male gender attribute and not for female gender ideally. This indeed reflects male dominance and the attitude that men are superior in the society.

The use of 'patroness' is used in E13, whereas 'patron' would have been used if the referent were to be a male gender. The adding the suffix '-ess' to 'patron' in the case of a female is seen as sexist and discriminatory. Again, the use of *proprietress* for a female school founder as used in E14 is discriminatory. Since 'proprietor' is the word that could have been used if the person referred to in this text were to be a male. The adding of the suffix '-ess' to 'proprietor' to become *proprietress* in the case of a female referent is seen as discriminatory.

Similar explanation goes for 'actress' which is formed from 'actor' which would have been used if the referent in the text were to be a male. The use of *actress* for a woman actor as used in E15 is regarded as discriminatory. Since 'actor' is the word used for men in acting/theatre art profession, it should be the same word to be used for the women in the profession, changing it to 'actress' in the case of women is therefore sexist and discriminatory, which should be discouraged. Likewise, we do not have to refer to women in print journalism as *newswomen* or the *newsmen*, both should be referred to as *journalists*. The same thing goes for a woman radio or television journalist; we do not refer to her as a *broadcastress*, but *broadcaster*, same as a man in broadcasting.

#### E. Preponderant references to men:

E13. At the *Manpower* Development Centre... *New Nigerian*: June, News Reports)

E14. However, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumgwu Ojukwu, as he is fondly called by his *kinsmen* is no more (*The Tide*, Editorial)

E15. The *common man* everywhere in the land waits and waits for his new world and epoch (*Nigerian Tribune*: Feature Article)

The use of 'manpower' in E13 connotes the masculine gender as the powerful and the feminine gender as the powerless while 'kinsmen' in E14 suggests that all Dim Chukwuemeka Odumgwu Ojukwu's people or relatives are men. The use of 'common man' in E15 suggests non-existence of 'woman'. The use of nouns and pronouns in generic sense is considered by feminists as suggestive of the erroneous belief that the woman is a sub-specie of man and that female subservience to the male is natural

(Olawejaju, 2015). It is evident from the above examples of texts of preponderant references to men that women are excluded in the use of language by some Nigerian journalists.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on this study's observation, one is justified to conclude that the dominant images of Nigerian women that prevail in Nigerian newspapers are mostly based on stereotypes to make women appendages of men, and by extension, render women invisible. This is because the massive use of gendered expressions by experienced journalists and senior editors/reporters observed in just 40 editions is enough evidence to conclude that Nigerian women are linguistically excluded and marginalized even by the media practitioners, who are expected to be agents of change because of their vantage positions in mass communication and information dissemination in the country. Also, most of them especially because of their training background and because the English language is their professional tool, they are expected to have heard and known about or have been exposed to gender-free writing. If senior journalists with lots of experience who are saddled with writing of editorials could write with almost zero awareness of gender-fair writing, then one can assume that many Nigerian journalists (print and broadcast media) would be guilty of the same offence.

The marginalization of women and linguistic exclusion through the use of masculine words as generic terms, stereotypic references to men for profession or occupation, male precedence in word-pairing, relative references to women which favoured the male gender and preponderant references to men. One is therefore justified to conclude that the use of gendered English is the norm in Nigerian newspapers based on the indiscriminate use of gendered English by some Nigerian media practitioners among who are experienced senior editors, reporters and columnists.

In order to ensure the desired change and enhance non-sexist situation in our society, the media practitioners as agents of change and important tools of communication, need regular and periodic capacity workshops on gender awareness and gender-fair writing as a matter of urgency. There is also the need to revisit the general media code of ethics and practice for journalists in Nigeria to include a stipulation on the gender-fair reporting and encourage the usage of gender-neutral English. This hopefully would inspire conscious efforts by the journalists to always endeavour to write their stories and give their reports in a gender sensitive manner. This hopefully would go a long way in change of attitude and breaking the cycle of myths and stereotype socio-cultural and religious ideas and beliefs, especially, the stereotype images of women in the media. It would also help in shaping the mentality of the Nigerian populace as the Print media are very important

sources of information dissemination to the people, and most especially, contribute meaningfully to acquisition and enhancement of English literacy in Nigeria.

There is urgent need for radical transformation of the institutional structures and cultural practices in a society that excludes women in order to pave way for enhancement of communication rights. The women groups earlier mentioned are addressing these issues but it is hardly a task for them alone. However, their efforts seem to have inspired more concerned bodies and feminist individuals to pursue the task. According to Omenugha (2001:2), the centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) organised training for media practitioners and local leaders on poverty eradication in Nigeria. The workshop called on media practitioners among other things to 'analyse policies and sift gender redistributive policies that recognise the contexts of the beneficiaries. Similar workshops should be organised regularly in forms of training and retraining in order to pave way for impacting new orientation in the use of gender-neutral language in the Nigerian mass media.

The appropriate organs of government at the local, state and federal levels should be organizing gender capacity building workshops where feminist linguists would be the resource persons. Series of workshops should be organised continuously and continually by various concerned government bodies and NGOs for media practitioners, local and national leaders, government officials at all levels, among others. The theme of such workshops could be 'How to eradicate gendered/sexist English usage in Nigeria media– the way forward'. Feminist linguists who are experts in this area should be the main resource people for such workshops.

There is also need to target the intellectual platform on which many gender ideologies are fashioned. So, the curricula of all educational institutions in Nigeria from primary to tertiary must be reviewed to include subjects and courses on 'Gender and the Society'. In the universities of Nigeria most importantly, the inclusion of courses on 'Gender and the Society' in "General Studies" curricula could go a long way to build the much-needed awareness about 'gender parity'.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Acholonu, C. O. (1995). Motherism: The afro-centric alternative to feminism. Owerri: AFA
- Adegbite, W. (2020). *Sociolinguistics and the sociology of English in Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Adetunji, A. (2010). Aspect of linguistic violence to Nigerian women. *International Journal – Language, Society and Culture*. URL: HYPERLINK "http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL" www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL, (Accessed on 15 April, 2023).
- Babalola, E. T. (2002). Newspapers as instruments for building literate communities: The Nigerian experience. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 11(3), 403-410.
- Bamgbose, A. (1971). The English language in Nigeria. In J. Spencer (Ed.), *English Language in West Africa* (pp.35-48). London: Longman.
- Banjo, A. (1996). *Making a virtue of necessity: An overview of the English language in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Bartle, P. (2004). *Gender awareness and balance (indent)* www.scn.org./cmp/Awareness
- Bell, A. (1995). Language and the media. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 15, 23-41.
- Bucholtz, M. (2004). *Language and woman's place: Text and commentaries*. Revised and expanded edition, Original Text by R. Lakoff & M. Bucholtz (Eds.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carroll, J.B. (1974). *Language, thought and reality*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Chiluwa, I. (2007). Discourse feature articles of Nigerian news magazine reporting. In R. Taiwo, A. Odeunmi, & A. Adetunji (Eds.), *Perspectives on media discourse* (pp.222-249). Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Dare, S. O. (2009). Womanism: An African oriented gender theory. *Journal of the School of Languages* (pp.374-382). Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.
- Dipo-Salami, B. (2003). The human rights movement in Nigeria: What are the issues?. In *Under the BAOBAB Tree: A Quarterly Publication by BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights* (No. 2, pp.14 & 15). Lagos: Akolas Ltd.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press.
- Eka, D. (2000). *Issues in Nigerian English usage*. Uyo: Scholars Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Kuiper, K., & Allan, W. S. (1996). *An introduction to English language*. London: Macmillan.
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and woman's place*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Lamidi, M. T. (2009). Gender-neutral pronoun usage among selected second language users of English in Nigeria. In A. Odeunmi, A. E. Arua, & S. Arimi (Eds.), *Language, gender and politics: A festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf* (pp.191-211). Lagos: Concept Publications.
- Litosseliti, L. (2006). *Gender and Language: Theory and Practice*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Maryam, Y. (2014). *A contrastive analysis of headlines in native & nonnative English Newspapers*. Islamic Azad University of Larestan branch.
- Nwankwo, O. (2000). *Inheritance rights of women in Africa*. CIRDOC Series No. 4, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Obilade, O. O. (2005). *Gender awareness and disaggregation of data*. A paper presented at the capacity workshop for administrative staff training and development unit, Obafemi Awolowo University.

- Okereke, G. E. (1998). African gender myths of vocality and gender dialogue in African literature. In M. E. M. Kolawole (Eds.), *Gender perceptions and development in Africa* (pp.133-158). Lagos: Arrabon Academic Publishers.
- Okunna, C. S. (2002). *Gender and communication in Nigeria: Is this the twenty-first century?*. Paper Presented at the Conference organized by International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). Barcelona, 21- 26 July, 2002.
- Olarewaju, E. O. (2015). A critical investigation of gendered English usage in the Nigerian Newspapers. (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis). Obafemi Awolowo University.
- Olowe, J. H. O. (1993). *Language and ideology in Nigerian newspapers in the medium of English* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis). Obafemi Awolowo University.
- Oluyamo, M. O. (2009). Media advertisements and the image of women. *Journal of the School of Languages* (pp.267-278). Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo.
- Omenugha, K. A. (2001). *Poverty, media and gender-The Nigerian perspective*. [http://wacc.visionwt.com/es/layout/set/print/regional.association/Africa/Africa\\_articl...2/22/2001](http://wacc.visionwt.com/es/layout/set/print/regional.association/Africa/Africa_articl...2/22/2001). Accessed on 07/03/2023.
- Omenugha, K. A. (2007). Playing unfair: The synergy of culture and sexism in Nigerian news discourse. In R. Taiwo, A. Odebunmi, & A. Adetunji (Eds.), *Perspectives on Media Discourse* (pp.156-181). Munich: Lincom Europa Publications.
- Qubein, N. R. (2006). *How to be a great communicator in person, on paper, and on the podium, pinnacle*. Grace Publishing, Benin City, Nigeria.
- Salami, O. L. (2004). Deference and subordination: Gender roles and other variables in addressing and referring to husbands by Yoruba women. *Linguistik Online*, 21(4). Accessed on 8 April, 2023.
- Scannell, P. (1998). Media –language – world. In A. Bell & P. Garrett (Eds.), *Approaches to media discourse* (pp. 251-267). Blackwell, U.K.
- Sims, A. (2004). Gender and language. *Gender and language online* (pp.1-4). HYPERLINK [http://www.glbgt.com/social-science/language\\_gender.html](http://www.glbgt.com/social-science/language_gender.html), [www.glbgt.com/social-science/language\\_gender.html](http://www.glbgt.com/social-science/language_gender.html) (Accessed on 10 April, 2023).
- Spender, D. (1998). *Man made language* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Pandora Press.
- The Nation* (2010). Feature Article: Life: “Gender bias persists in Nigerian media”. Edition of October 3, p.24.
- Tony, R. (1998). *Feminism thoughts*. New York: West View Press.
- Trask, R. L., & Bill, M. (2005). *Introducing linguistics*. U.K.: Icon Books Ltd.
- Yusuf, Y. K. (1988). A critique of the linguistic arguments for the possibility of desexing thought by degendering English. *Ifè Studies in English Language*, 2(1), 87-92.