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THE LANGUAGE OF FEMINISM AND MEDIA POLITICS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines feminism and the politics of media English in Nigeria. In an attempt to situate the relationship between language, media and gender, the paper cites some contentious English words regarding gender and gender roles as noted by feminist agitators; the socio-cultural background of gender-sensitive words and what influences their usage; the alternatives to gender sensitive words in the media planks and their limitations, taking into cognizance the global and the Nigerian media and gender context. The paper argues that issues of gender inequality is a dicey global problem that is difficult to define. It differs in scope, values and patterns of advocacy according to social and media normative settings. The implication is, even the definition of what constitutes woman's right and gender inequality cannot be precise, because of the plurality of cultures that host particular languages that express the constituents of respective definitions. In considering this, the paper looks at some language patterns that the feminist advocates regard as sexist with examples from some purposively selected Nigerian media, namely: Vanguard Nigeria, Premium Times Nigeria, Daily Trust Nigeria, The Sun Nigeria and The Nation Nigeria. In doing this, the paper situates its discussions of gender and linguistic issues within the ambit of Feminist Language Theory. The paper reveals that even the new digital culture had failed to alter the circumstances of female journalists and writers and the language of media representation is virtually a wholesale migration of male dominated cultural codes prevalent in the conventional media space to the networked media platforms. That is to say, the media as means of mass production and mass consumption of content is not equitable economically, ideologically and culturally. The paper further argues that having a gendered language is still not a guaranty for equitable social gender equality in the context of modern feminism.

Keywords: Feminism, Politics, Media, Gender, Nigeria

Your child will learn English most effectively if she or he continues to develop her or his own language at the same time, so try to read to her or him in her or his mother tongue every day – Anonymous

Introduction

The quote above was meant to exemplify the practicability or otherwise, fluency or awkwardness and the pragmatism or worthlessness of adhering to the ideals of feminist language reformers according to various scholarly opinions. Feminist ideology in general is a persistent struggle against convention (Byfield 2018), particularly in the era of expanded media technology; and in an age when gender itself is not a social demarcation based on biological make up, but also

based on the freedom to choose, and the ability to surgically transform an original sexual physiognomy into a sexual make up of choice. And with instant media technology, feminism, like other controversial social issues, has been mired in unending polemics.

Feminism, *inter alia*, seeks to reform conventional language structures (Bodine 1975; Sellers 2007) in a bid to reform the embedded male generic codes in media content production, distribution and consumption. This is because, according to feminist linguistics, the male generic terms have been used to further eclipse the visibility of women on the media landscape. The media have thus been accused of sexism warranting the calls for reforms that target, not only media contents, but primarily the particular linguistic structure such as dictions and newsframing (Wolf 2012).

Meanwhile Chukwuma (1994), Adamu (2006) and Nkealah (2016) specifically contend that African feminism is dedicated and informed from social realities, such as the persistence of sexist socio-psychological paradigm despite the efforts to overcome the androcentricism, which informs social life. The persistent sexism in Africa is, however, matched with women's continued aggressive demand for equal places in men's former citadel of power and privilege. According to Chukwuma, even though men support women's condemnation of women societal deprivations, men's language still shows inclination to sexist socialization.

Statement of the Problem

Whereas in developing countries issues of woman's rights are primarily subjects of practices that affect the life of women directly, such as school enrolment for the girl child, maternal mortality and the right to freedom of expression; in France, however there is a new movement centred on gender role and the diction of expression. The particular maxim that guides this new movement is the "Mum's not the word: when having it all means not having children" (France 24, August 25, 2019). This movement views complete feminist freedom as freedom from having children or having freedom from stigma as a result of decision not to become "a mother". Based on this, one can argue that while these new ideologues advocate for added and freest form of freedom of choice, their quest to be free from language stigmatization, regardless of how unconventional their symbolisms seem, is a form of depriving others of their own freedom of expression. Along this line, it can be argued that even the bastion of foundational democracy, the United States; have failed to break away from the dominance of the "male chauvinist" in the political

circle thereby denying any single woman the position of president in over 200 years of democracy.

Methodological and Theoretical Approaches

This paper looks at some language patterns that the feminist advocates regard as sexist (Dennis 1987) with examples from some purposively selected Nigerian media, namely: Vanguard Nigeria, Premium Times Nigeria, Daily Trust Nigeria, The Sun Nigeria and The Nation Nigeria. The paper also appraises the role of the cultural totality in shaping gendered media discourses. The paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- ∞ What are the contentious English words regarding gender and gender roles as noted by feminist agitators in Nigeria?
- ∞ What is the socio-cultural background of gender-sensitive words and what influences their usage in media?
- ∞ What are the alternatives to gender sensitive words in print and news media and what are their limitations?

Feminist Language Theory

The focus of Feminist Language Reform is to acknowledge the unconscious ways by which language both subdues and stresses gender in negative ways (Bracha 2006). It can be conceded that certain languages have decisive gendered words associated with maleness or femaleness. The Hausa language, for example is a (partly) gendered language in both its original native wordings and the ones it borrows from, say Arabic. Words such as *mutum*, even though often used as male generic term for *Man*, is in conversational situations added with a suffix *niya* as *mutumiya* to mean woman. Other examples are *mahaukaci* – *mad man*; *mahaukaciya* – *mad woman*. And the example of Hausanised gendered words from Arabic includes for example: *Attajiri* – “rich man” and *attajirato* mean “rich woman”. *Almajiri* – male migrant; *almajira* – female migrant. The point being made is: such languages do not need noun compounding as obtained in English language, for instance, *Spokesman/spokesperson* etc. to achieve gender definition.

The argument however is, in the African and Nigerian cultural setting; a gendered language is still not a guarantee for equitable social gender in the context of feminism. Even in languages in which we have some gender tolerance, say in

people's names, in Igbo language for example, the patriarchal system does not automatically allow for gender equality as postulated by general modern feminist demands.

Feminist Language Theory also focuses on when words emphasize a break in gender norms - for example, *Lady Doctor* or *Manageress*, *Policewoman* etc. These are positions of power that are typically held by men. Therefore, when a woman holds them, they need a new title to emphasize their break of social norm. Modern feminists argue that feminist language reforms need to reverse the generic masculine forms and create a generic feminine form with words like *he* or *man* being replaced with *she* or *woman* (Gubar 2006; Van Newkirk 1980).

Overview of Related Literature

Sexism and Mysoginism in Global Media

Contemporarily, political discourses are influenced if not invented completely by some era, innovations or personalities on the global corridor of power. The American political and media space is internationally dominant; there are a lot of copycats and diffusion that alter our social and political environments once a particular social phenomenon occurs here. Feminist political concerns regarding the discourses from the high-level politics of the developed world in the era of globalised media is an important issue that should be studied extensively.

Kara Alaimo (CNN January 2, 2019) documents the remarks of the American president, Donald Trump, towards women: he called Denmark's Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen "nasty" after she called his interest in buying Greenland "absurd." the President called Nancy Pelosi a "nasty, vindictive, horrible person" after a Fox News interviewer brought up a Politico report about Pelosi telling Democrats pushing for impeachment that she would rather see Trump 'in prison'. Trump also lobbed the "nasty" epithet earlier in an interview with the British tabloid, The Sun, in which he was asked about comments the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, had made in 2016 to TV host Larry Wilmore, calling Trump "misogynistic."

Alaimo cites that Trump infamously interrupted Hillary Clinton during the last debate of his 2016 presidential campaign to call her "a nasty woman", a remark so obviously gendered that many women responded by trying to reclaim it. Alaimo argues that Trump choosing to use the same words in several occasions targeting women reveals a pattern rather than spontaneous remarks of a politician.

Manne (2018) explains that sexism taken alone involves believing in men's superiority to women in masculine-coded, high-prestige domains, and the

naturalness or even inevitability of men's dominance therein. But *misogyny*, as argued by Manne involves punishing women who do not act the way men want them to. She asserts that this is exactly what Trump does. He called Pelosi, Markle and Clinton “nasty”. He called one-time aide Omarosa Manigault “that dog” after she wrote unflatteringly about him. He said then Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly had “blood coming out of her wherever” after she asked him tough questions at a debate. He said Mika Brzezinski was “bleeding badly from a facelift” after she criticized him. Trump also called Rosie O'Donnell a “pig”. In other instances, the President calls Senator Kirsten Gillibrand a “lightweight” and he described Arianna Huffington and Bette Midler as “unattractive;” and Stephanie Clifford as a “horseface”.

According to Manne, misogynists need not hate women universally; they tend to hate women who are outspoken. The implication is, as noted the way the American President speaks about women does matter, because he is the most powerful person in the world, his comments set the tone for national and global discourse and for the way others, including ordinary citizens and governments, treat women in every aspects of life.

Hall and Gordon (1995) found that messages containing *misogynous* views are found commonly in the media. One of the ways to corroborate this argument is to view it within the perspective of the limits of media democracy itself. The media as means of mass production and mass consumption of all kinds of messages is not equitable economically, ideologically and culturally. Here the concepts of “mass” and “elite” media relations can relate to the arguments, despite the fact that the negativity associated with the original sense of the concept “mass” is changing (Croteau and Hoynes 2018). The idea that certain people lack the economic strength to demand more efficient media materials shuts majority of potential media users from freer *prosumption* of what affects the particular media users. In essence those who have greater cultural and economic power are more visible on the media space, and have more power to own, access and use the media materials and content; they thus monopolise the media space putting a dent to the idea of internet democracy. This is exactly the assumptions of the “man's world” adage.

This argument equally gives credence to the notion that the more powerful, the more visible you can be on the media, supporting the argument that what is erroneously called the media ideology, is in reality the ideology of a powerful media conglomerates whose ownership are concentrated in the hands of a few, who according to Croteau and Hoynes (2019), McQuail (2010), Siapera (2018) are the

ones controlling all means of media hardware and content production, circulation and consumption.

To further corroborate this view, Cooper (1985) cited in Hall and Gordon (1995)- a study of popular music of over 30 years, asserts that there was a tendency to describe women in terms of physical attributes or as evil, as possessions of men, or as dependent upon men. Some musical themes and lyrics can be compared to the negative attitude toward women found within some pornographic movies and magazines. This negative attitude and acceptance of violence towards women shows the possible likelihood of rape or sexual coercion.

According to Stephen Tomkins (BBC News 2 June 2015) the abundance of female bloggers is a measure against the sexist indignities perpetrated by the media, Hollywood, and Capitol Hill. The feminist blogosphere is providing nontraditional channels for young female journalists to rise. In addition, there are possibilities for women and women of color to have their voices heard in respected media outlets, such as Washington Post and its ilk.

But, do these seeming positive developments add up to the transformative change in journalism that the cyberfeminists had hoped for? Do women online wield more leadership, exert more authority, claim more space in the media landscape globally?

Feminism in Nigeria

Nigerian feminism is a struggle by women in Nigeria, synergizing with the overall African women in the struggle to address the needs of African women resident in Africa. *However, Omenugha* observes that because Africa is a plural social space, the various feminist ideologies found here are not all reflective of the experiences respective African women have. For example, there are problematic areas regarding such nomenclatures as Black Feminism or African womanism, perceived as feminism by and for African women in the diaspora, or those in diaspora, but coming recently from Africa. Following the 1982 national conference, the inauguration of Women in Nigeria (WIN) organizes feminism in Nigeria in its present form with clear objectives. In spite of rough beginnings, many scholars pay tribute to WIN for acting as training grounds for the emergence of organized feminist struggles in Nigeria (Omenugha 2007).

Some of the challenges of feminism in Nigeria are the culturally engendered socio-economic inequity between males and the females typical of a strict patriarchal society. Most women are unemployed, where in most cases even if they

are, the employment is not gainful, this hampers women's ability to mobilize and advocate. Another difficulty is the power of patriarchy in both urban and rural African communities influencing domestic politics within the household and in every community, which sways women to act against their own beliefs and against other women as well (Majstorovic, and Lassen 2011)

Sexism in Nigerian Media

Nigeria is a patriarchal society and any discussion of gender generally is merely a part of the overarching culture of the country. It is however noteworthy that Nigeria is a microcosm of the African continent in terms of its social plurality. The heterogeneity of the country poses a problem in any attempt to define the concept of feminism against extant normative assertiveness.

Meanwhile the media observably, use the terms *sexism* and *misogynism* often interchangeably to refer to sexist/misogynist discourses or words users who are in action or speech opposed to gender equality, or even those who show, using caustic language open hatred to women or gender parity. The terms are often weaponised, particularly in the political arena to criticize or attack players perceived as anti-women. The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language defines sexism as attitudes and institutions, often unconscious that judge human worth on the grounds of gender or sex; it is explained as prejudice or discrimination usually against women, based on their gender. Sexism takes many forms, often rooted in socialization, where by children are brought up to imbibe attitudes that discriminate against women on the grounds of their gender (Pauwels 2003).

Sexism in news discourses in Nigerian print media is not only about an examination of news texts, but also inappraising a link between what is termed as sexist news discourses and other gender-insensitive codes prevalent in Nigerian cultures. In essence discursive constructs such as *mysogynism*, according to Hamilton (1987, p. 123) "is not a word useful simply for describing particularly nasty bits of behavior, but rather it directs us to a set of relations, attitudes, and behaviors that are embedded within all social relations - violence in the form of linguistics is in fact a form of physical violence". This is because, as Omenugha (2007) asserts, discourse is a fusion of language and performative social practices. These views thus hold that news is merely a construction, which feeds from the dominant ideology of a given normative atmosphere used in creating meanings via significations (Finn 2012).

It is, however pertinent to rehash that the argument (Hamilton 1987; Omenugha 2007) that their perception of a universal mediated ideology is a problematic one, particularly when we recognize that women are not as visible as men in the media landscape and elsewhere in the social and political economy space. In fact, (Siapera 2018), the more powerful an individual or group is, the more visible they get on the media space, and this, goes to show that the more dominant male is the determinant of the media ownership, processes and the media product.

The media-gender situation in Nigeria is partly exemplified by Omenugha's (2007) that the Nigerian media space portrays gender role that suggests women are a weaker sex mentally and physically. He uses four Nigerian newspapers: The Guardian, The Punch, Daily Champion, and New Nigerian to examine how, through various cultural codes, sexism is discursively circulated within both the news and Nigerian society. The data collected reveal the portrayal of Nigerian women within narrow repertoires of images of wives, mothers, mothers-in-law, nurturers and as appendages to the men in their lives. During the period of study, out of 53 women that made news as individuals, 21 were portrayed as wives, mothers or mothers-in-law. The 'first ladies' who received the most coverage are cast in sex role stereotypes. He outlines certain indicative headlines and leads from the Nigerian newspapers to back up his claims:

Ogun first lady urges parents to de-worm children [headline] (The Guardian 27 June 2002, p. 14)

The wife of late Obafemi Awolowo Chief (Mrs) H.L.D. Awolowo has offered to assist the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) in mobilising people of Ogun State for the forthcoming voters' registration exercise [lead] (New Nigerian 6 August 2002, p. 25).

*Gaius Obaseki loses mother-in-law [Headline] (The Punch 9 August 2002, p. 10).
O. Akintola's wife dies at 87*

Male Generic-Terms and Media

Feminist ideologues advocate that all mediations should use explicit feminine nouns when referring to women in leadership roles, stressing that it is crucial in order to increase female visibility in domains that have been traditionally male, sending the message to young girls and women that they can, and should aspire to be the boss (Anderson, Sue and Clack 2004; Kassian 1992).

In a bid to challenge the status quo, feminist language reformists make extended arguments on gender compatible diction spanning from the spiritual to

the mundane. In fact, it is interesting to note that, despite the penchant of the religions to resist change, the controversy about the correct words to represent the gender of the divine is not a new phenomenon, for example, the question of God's gender goes back to the early Christian Church (Stephen Tomkins BBC News 2 June 2015). He says the Christian Church has always had a bit of a problem with God's gender. "*He* (God) doesn't have one", but - as that statement demonstrates – it is hard to talk about God without giving (HIM?) a gender. And syntactically, pragmatically and stylistically, avoiding pronouns altogether is cumbersome, because

It seems a bit rude, talking as if God was an impersonal force like gravity or inflation. So God has to be "He" or "She", and in a patriarchal society there's no contest. As The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: "God is neither man nor woman: he is God". Other Christian groups have gone further than this though. A church in third-century Syria seems to have been in the habit of praying to the Holy Spirit in female terms (Stephen Tomkins BBC News 2 June 2015).

And more interestingly, such ways of talking about God were only occasional until the past 50 years, with the pervasive media technology, when feminist theologians started to persuade churches that traditional religious language unnecessarily excluded women, (Kassian1992), for example:

If God is male, then the male is God". Furthermore, Since the 1980s, new translations of the Bible have used inclusive language. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" in the King James Bible, became in the New Revised Standard Version of 1989, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Stephen Tomkins BBC News 2 June 2015)

Stephen Tomkins (BBC News 2 June 2015) asserts that, over the past decades, language reform has been undermined by the conflation of anti-sexism with

political correctness. Tomkins citing Sarah Mills (unpublished) as observing that political correctness has spawned the invention of absurd terms that mock sensitivity to minority groups and which no campaigner ever argued for. In Sara's words: "the short become vertically challenged and the bald follically challenged", Tomkins cites words such as "manhole cover" that has been *reformed* to "personhole cover" and he argues that this kind of interpolations, ridicule not only the values of women's experiences, but also removes attention from the social and economic challenges they face.

Feminist language planning takes a largely sociolinguistic approach in which the goal is to enact social change through the reform of language and language use. This is a problem that spurs, according to Manne (2018), the feminist literary criticism as a subgenre of feminist theory as inspired by the politics of gender, language and power relations. It is an approach that uses the ideology of feminism to critique the language of literature. This school of thought seeks to analyze and describe the ways in which literature portrays the narrative of male domination by exploring the economic, social, political, and psychological forces embedded within literature. The dominant avenues of disseminating literary texts are the media hence the significance of multidisciplinary approaches, as noted, to studying the media, gender and language.

Kaplan (1982) in Liddicoat (2011) observes that literary texts are constructed from within ideology, and the reality they articulate is dependent on the historical culture which surrounds them; so too are the literary critical claims about their truthfulness or authenticity determined by the culture from which they arise. Exposition and analysis of sexism in language through a grassroots feminist linguistics movement continued throughout the 80's and 90's, including study across languages and speech communities such as Germany and France. Study and documentation of gendered language has since spread to cover over 30 languages (Peter 2002)

One aspect of English that is certainly easier than in some other languages is gender. Males are a *he*, females and ships are a *she*, and everything else (including most animals) is an *it*. However, this does not mean there is never any problem in choosing the correct pronoun, considering the added agitative feminist voices as enhanced by the new media technology. *VanNewkirk (1980)* cites the following examples in the following sentences and decide which of these pronouns would you put in the gaps:

a. *him* b. *her* c. *him or her* d. *her or him* e. *them*

- ∞If you know anyone who can help me, please ask ..to come to my room.
- ∞“There's somebody on the phone for you.” - “Tell ..to call back later!”
- ∞When I find out who broke my calculator, I will punch ... on the nose!

Before deciding which pronoun is best, it is necessary to concern ourselves with a little social history, in particular with the influences of feminism on the English language. From the mid-1960s, some feminists argued that English not only reflected the lack of equality between the sexes but also in some ways was responsible for it. For example, they objected to the fact that all adult males were referred to as *Mr*, whereas adult females were called *Mrs* or *Miss*, according to whether they were married or not. As a result, the new form of address *Ms* was suggested for women of both types of marital status, and this has now been widely accepted. They also objected to words like *fireman*, *spokesman*, etc., preferring *fire fighter*, *spokesperson*. And they particularly disliked the automatic use of the male pronouns *he*, *him*, *his* etc. in sentences where the sex of the person being referred to is unknown or unimportant (VanNewkirk 1980).

According to Pauwels (2003) there is a meta language called *Láadan*, which is a feminist constructed system created by Suzette Haden Elgin in 1982 to test the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis (Pauwels 2003), specifically to determine if development of a language aimed at expressing the views of women would shape a culture; a subsidiary hypothesis was that Western natural languages may be better suited for expressing the views of men than women. *Láadan* language was included in her science fiction *Native Tongue* series; it contains a number of words that are used to make unambiguous statements that include how one feels about what one is saying, designed to counter male-centered language's limitations on women in instances of “I know I said that, but I meant this”.

In another instance, some language reformers directly work with identifying and changing sexist undertones and patriarchal vocabulary through a method called “linguistic disruption” (Liddicoat 2011: P.12). An example: In the United States, the word “herstory” became popularized to refer to history which is not only about men. The ongoing feminist movement acknowledges language as a powerful instrument of patriarchy. The goals set for linguistic reform aim to achieve linguistic equality of the sexes.

Liddicoat (2011) cites a study of Australian newspapers from 1992 and 1996 where it was found that the word “chairman” was used to describe all people holding the position, including women. This is an example of a linguistic issue that feminists

seek to reform, based on the notion that occupational nomenclature reflects gender bias when professional nomenclature used in employment-related contexts displays bias in favour of men leading to women's invisibility in the linguistic feminist context.

According to this view, the invisibility of women in such linguistic purview by sentences predominantly using male pronouns, audience are more likely to think of men before women and therefore women get overlooked. More importantly power positions are gendered to be conventionally male and the persistent multiple use reflects the fact that far more men than women continue to occupy powerful positions. This study further investigated and found instances of female professionals being specified as women while men would just be titled with the profession itself, for example “female judge,” “woman engineer,” and “woman politician” (*Ferguson 1983*).

This standpoint has been corroborated by McQuail (2010) in his analysis of the normative theories of the press propounded by Siebert et al. (1970). Normative theories of the media assume that whatever the media produces, circulates and publishes take the colouration of the political, social, economic and cultural colouration of their host society.

The major concern of the feminist language reformists/planners is the reconstruction of language particularly the media diction to reflect the social, cultural, political and economic interests of women. Linguistic activism and feminist authorship stemming from second wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s began to draw attention to gender bias in language, including “the uncovering of the gendered nature of many linguistic rules and norms”. *Feurer and Winter (1988)* assert that scholarship such as Dennis Baron's “Grammar and Gender” and Anne Bodine's “Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar” uncovered historical male regulation to promote male-centric language such as the use of “he” as a generic pronoun. (*Baron 1987*)

Rona Fairhead: BBC Trust “Chairman”

But there are some high-profile women who use a generic male term to refer to their high-flying position, for example Rona Fairhead as the first woman to head the BBC Trust, spurs questions. Fairhead took the helm of the trust in 2018, but on the media plank, there were debates on what she is vis a vis her gender and her new position: is she a chairwoman, a chair or a chairman? Despite the seeming pettiness of the issue, considering the real tasks of the head of the Trust, feminist linguist

reformers argue that the nomenclature debate does matter, for instance, they argue that using the -man suffix sends a message, particularly to young girls, that certain occupations, roles or positions are meant for men.

Another strand of the arguments, however asserts that, while male generic terms could fly as the convention, but the very fact that she is the first woman to lead the BBC Trust should tell us that there are not enough women in powerful roles yet to make the male generic nomenclature conventional. This implies that, the problem is not solely a linguistic one, it is a social, political, economic and above all a cultural one and it is global.

Another feminist concern regarding male generic terms and particularly in respect to Fairhead is in the Google key-wording that would not pop up any feminine word as a title compatible to the head's gender by suggesting "chairman" as the word. In The Telegraph's headline, Fairhead was referred to as both a "businesswoman" and a future "chairman", while the Mail Online proclaimed that she would be the BBC's first "female chairman". More confusingly, Nicky Morgan, the women and equalities minister, tweeted her congratulations to "the new BBC chairman" as well using the male generic name and Fairhead herself was quoted as saying that she was "honoured to have the opportunity to be the chairman of the BBC Trust". From the audiences, when one reader used the term "chair" in a comment below the article, another retorted: "Chairman, if you please. A chair is something you sit on or dance with if you're Elvis in prison".

Media Politics in Nigeria

First, Endong and Edim (2015) observe that media contents in Nigeria are fine-tuned according to societal beliefs and realities so as to appear realistic/believable, appealing to audiences' emotions and ultimately to win audiences' consensus. They argue that a more promising approach to the eradication of women stereotyping and misrepresentations in the Nigerian media should therefore not only deal with andocentric disposition of the media, but start from a holistic social change approach to emancipate women in ideological apparatuses such as family, education, religion, law etc since these, to a large extent, control the media.

Also, according to Emelogu and Saskatchewan 2019, p. 1)

For several decades, the Nigerian home video industry, dominated by Igbo culture-themed films,

has been one of the most influential media forms across Nigeria and Africa in general. These films are a staple in many homes; the images, narratives, and ideas that they disseminate go a long way in shaping or reinforcing public perceptions about the role of women and their status in society. Taking a critical look at how feminism has evolved in Nigerian films... films merely reflect the existing reality of Igbo patriarchal societal structures or persist in propagating dated and unrealistic stereotypes...

The issues do not rest only on the verbal linguistics, but they are in nonverbal media clues as well, such as the portrayal or the verbalization of the ideal woman based on a dress code. Female dress pattern tends to be condemned and profiled, be they tending towards Western Europe for example or towards the middle east. Unfortunately, Endong and Edim (2015) much of the debate in the media has involved men attempting to lead the conversation 'sympathetically', or men who have reintegrated old prejudices into a 'modern' setting, or men who have simply made gender issues about men.

It is easier to produce opinions out of bias, and reason through prejudice. We then impose a male superiority from misguided learning, solidifying it in the name of culture, in the name of religion, and in the name of law (Owl2016). This smug satisfaction with our biases is derived from what the experts call male privilege. Men easily claim complexity as physical, intellectual and emotional beings. We claim a diversity of feelings and desires and a yearning for the freedom to pursue the goals derived from these which are all stemming from another social construct male privilege akin to the man's world maxim (Kateazuka and Omenugha2007).

Similarly, Adamu (2006) asserts that the feminist's movement after taking the initiative to become a recognized body in Nigeria, there are still concerns about the negative press and societal orientation against feminists. Based on the traditional and cultural stereotypes on the roles of women, women especially those who identify as feminists are considered rebels and dissident due to the feminist ideologies that challenges the patriarchal status quo.

There are culturally coded media expressions in the Nigerian media such as

“strong” usually it is subtly implying that she is “good enough” for a task; a similar stereotypic expression is the phrase “iron lady”; “independent woman” etc at the face value of which are positive attributes, but underneath they merely signify some rare occurrences from the feminine “weak” world. By the time a woman self-describes or is described with any of the “praise” codes, she is in another way denied some more basic social, emotional and political entitlements, such as a denial to fragility and romance. Men seem unable to grasp that women can be truly and fully as human in exactly all the ways men attribute to their own sex and gender role definition. For example the Daily Trust of Wednesday, October 2, 2019 has this: “The third is the Mahmood HaliluModi group which comprises of BabachirLawal, Markus Gunduri and the 'iron lady', this group is made up of members of the All Progressives Congress (APC) but they played a very vital role in the victory of Fintiri over Bindow; then the Atiku group...”.

From the newspaper excerpt above, the male political players have dominated the stakeholders featured in the above excerpt, and the lone woman in the group is the “iron lady” who has not been identified by name in the listing of those who played key roles in changing the baton of power in Adamawa State. Meanwhile the reason the “iron lady” is described as such, it is because of her unique powers inimical to “non-iron” ladies.

This is inline with the observation which Endong and Edim (2015), undoubtedly include, specifically the language of intrapersonal, interpersonal, mass and media communication. And it is rather challenging that conventions so challenged can uproot, to some significant extent, deep rooted culture of patriarchy and its pervasive bedeviling of the media diction. Just as the male generics gain dominance in books by renowned authors and by news writers and journalists and film makers all over the world, the same applies to Nigerian media landscape.

The pronouns Him or her, for example, is quite commonly used in some situations in the Nigerian Press, but in a bid to reform mediation texts to accommodate feminism, this is also problematic, since it is awkward to use the pattern in broadcast media. The interpolation is too formal for the conversational feature of broadcast language. In fact, even in interpersonal communication, such as in telephone conversations or WhatsApp chats the rule is followed including by majority of women themselves. Several examples, suggest that in Nigerian media, both female and male writers find it convenient to use male generic terms. In fact, opponents even puncture the collocation or syntactic arrangement whereby, probably to soothe linguistic reformists, the female pronoun *her* is placed before

him in a format of *Her or him*. Critics argue that this arrangement does not roll off the tongue so easily as *him* or *her*.

Reformists however, argue that the suggestion is acceptable, and would sound more natural if more people started to use it. One problem with both *him and her* or *her and him*, however, is that they can make for some very convoluted sentences, especially because of non-pervasive use, socialization underpinnings that pinned language learning, particularly within the Nigerian cultural milieu.

Proponents of this view, based on Liddicoat (2011), *argue that the pronoun them* is a very common choice, especially in British English. Although, it does not seem grammatical to refer to a singular person with a plural pronoun, it is quite widely accepted; even they are politically incorrect, but semantically correct. This choice avoids any of the problems of the other pronoun possibilities. One can also argue for application of the plural of honour that is present in many linguistic subcultures in Nigeria.

Data Analysis

Hindu Rufai Waziri: EFCC “Chairman”

Punch Newspaper of 14 January 2016 carried a headline:

“Buhari mourns as ex-EFCC *chairman*, *Waziri*, loses husband ...” (emphasis added)

Hindu Rufai Waziri was confirmed by President Umaru Yar'Adua as EFCC chairman in May 2008. At the outset of Farida Waziri's reign as the head of EFCC, the tone of the media had seemed to be of treating an exceptional case. There was in fact a brief debate on the title of her new top position in relation to her gender, and it was settled that since the Act establishing EFCC calls the agency's head “chairman” (Leadership Newspaper 2008), then the debate about a feminine compatible word was a non-issue. This implies that the problem is not only a linguistic and media one; it is rather a complex web of issues found rooted in our statutes, culture and politics.

In another postulation, Castle (1984) in Hall and Gordon (1995) dismissed arguments about whether to use *chairman* or *chairwoman* as mere psychological frills that distract feminist agitations from serious tasks. For her, it does not matter whether, when a woman presides over a meeting, she is called a chairman or a chairperson, being called a *chairman* is akin to capturing a citadel, rather than

surrendering one. But the tenability of Castle's argument has also been punctured: Bracha (1992) argues that if male terms are accepted as generics while female ones are not, should be seen as a clear sign of gender inequality – his analogy is exemplified with the assonance of referring to a female head as a chairman, but not a male head as new “male chairwoman”.

Incidentally, it is arguable that the Nigerian media landscape is generally more inclined towards the male generic terms in reporting about women and in many other cases the media use the noun *female* as a grammatical modifier to designate women in some executive positions, for example the *Premium Times* of August 11, 2019 writes in a piece of news thus: Lagos Govt says negotiation not foreclosed *on* sacked *doctors*... “I couldn't remember a thing in there,” the *female doctor* later told colleague...” (emphasis added)

Also, *Premium Times* of August 18, 2019 wrote “*PREMIUM TIMES* learnt the ... Other members were the *female* hall warden...” (emphasis added).

Also, *Daily Trust* of September 29, 2018 wrote about “5 top female Nollywood directors

- Mildred is one of *Nollywood's* most respected *directors*. She and Rita Dominic are the duo behind the production company The Audrey Silva...” (emphasis added).

In addition, The Nation of March 10, 2019 writes: “Although I did not have a *female* boss in my years in the newsroom, many *female journalists* and media professionals have played...” (emphasis added).

There are many long standing maxims floating unperturbed in the Nigerian media space, for example, *Man is a political animal*, *Our men are on top of the situation*, *Female Soccer Players*, *Female reporter*, *man-made fibres* etc.

Vanguard (September 09, 2019) had the headline thus: A *Zambian female banker* has been suspended for allegedly *sleeping with* over *200 men* while promising them jobs...(emphasis ours).

“Men at Work”

It is quite common to see the wooden fabric mediating the piece of information “Men at Work” on Nigerian roads that are under construction. The implication of the crude mediation is to alert road users to be cautious while driving past the spots of the construction work. The issue in such instances is that, the essence of the words is not contradicting realities on ground regarding the gender of

labourers usually found on site. They are indeed men. This kind of situation amplifies the feminists' agitation that women can do even the seeming difficult and physically and mentally exerting vocations such as pilots, civil engineers, surgeons etc. but the society denies them such employment opportunities and consequently views women as weaklings. Thus any attempt to find a middle ground, say by assigning to the women a less strenuous activities on the construction sites, for example, on account of their biological occurrences: pregnancy, nursing etc. can still be viewed as gender profiling, since it only further emphasizes the physical weakness of women who are presumed as fitting only in simpler tasks.

Conclusion

To situate the relations between media, language and gender relations within the Nigerian context, this paper notes that the new digital culture had failed to alter the circumstances of female journalists and writers and that the language of representation seems to be a wholesale migration of male dominated cultural codes prevalent in the earlier conventional media space aligning with Adamu (2006) and Nkealah (2016). The paper purposefully selects relevant discourses from selected Nigerian newspapers – the analysis reveals that, media discourses are still tilted against gender parity; the major argument is: the problems of inequality in the language of the media stems from the actual normative cultural setting of the media in Nigeria as argued by Kateazuka and Omenugha (2007). The paper then argues that having a gendered language is still not a guaranty for equitable social gender equality in the context of modern feminism just as postulated in Majstorovic and Lassen (2011). But the paper notes that at the core of feminism in general, is the struggle against conventions, and in the process of such struggles, social groups seemed to provide red lines against gender role reformers, partly based on the limitation of the touted media nay internet democracy agreeing with Owl (2016) as cited in this paper.

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