

SEXISM IN ENGLISH AND IGBO

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Abstract

This paper investigates the representation of women as espoused in selected English and Igbo titles and names. The aim is to analyze the traditional and contemporary views on the perception and the roles of women as well as how power relationships of different gender are determined through linguistic choices in English and Igbo societies. Using Interpretivist paradigm and critical discourse analysis, both English and Igbo titles and names randomly selected from both oral and written sources are examined. Furthermore, the data have been categorized and analyzed to examine how women are perceived, symbolized and portrayed through English and Igbo titles and names. The study also examines whether the stereotypical image of the woman is same in English and Igbo traditional and contemporary societies. The findings reveal that both cultures in the traditional setting have some elements that motivate their men to maltreat, even “man handle” women. Findings also reveal that there are a lot of positive changes in the contemporary time in favour of the feminine gender courtesy of civilization. It also brings to the limelight the current image and representations of women in both societies which is far better than that of the traditional English and Igbo societies.

Keywords: Sexism, Women, English, Igbo, Names, Titles

Introduction

Language which is a system of habitual vocal symbols by which humans communicate, is a socio-cultural phenomenon. Different socio-cultural groups have different levels of perception of language forms and meaning. This is in order to suit their communicative needs and intentions. This paper investigates sexism in two languages; English and Igbo. The aim is to undertake a linguistic analysis of selected gendered titles and names and to provoke a deeper understanding of the intersection between the use of titles and names and sexism. This is in line with the fact that language is the sole of the people, through which the cultural norms and values of the people are inculcated. As such, the notion of sexism in English and Igbo can be said to be influenced by the cultural values which holds between these two different linguistic communities.

Sexism is a common social phenomenon, which can be reflected in languages (Lei, 2006). It refers to any discriminatory use of languages which is detrimental to any member of the opposite sex (Mills, 2006). According to Butler, (1993) the dichotomy male vs. female has always shaped our perception and interactions and that it even affects the way language is used on daily basis. The word `sex' however, should not be confused with gender; while the former refers to biological differences as Pitcher (2011) stipulates, such as, chromosomes, hormones physical appearances etc. the latter on the other hand is all the acceptable characteristics and behaviours that culture, society and politics confer on what is masculine and feminine. This is why Atang et al (2013, p1) refer to gender as "a set of ideas, that is, what is thought, said and written about women, men, girls and boys; what they are like and do, what they should be like and should do, these ideas are often expressed through gendered discourses."

In the light of the above, this paper seeks to examine sexist forms and pattern in English and Igbo and the explication of gender bias expressed in both languages by investigating some sexist formation and constructions and accounting for their variations in use.

Review of Relevant Literatures

Many scholars have examined the representation of sexism in language and have argued that language encodes a culture's values and, in this way, reflects sexist culture. Although Cameron (1990) suggests that rather than seeing language as a reflection of society or as a determining factor in social change, it could be seen as a carrier of ideas and assumptions which through constant re-enactment in discourse, became so familiar and conventional that we miss their significance. However, Scholars like Kendall and Tannem (2001, p. 248) note that 'language and sex research tends to focus on three main areas; (1) documenting empirical differences between women's and men's speech, especially in cross-sex interaction; (2) describing women's speech in particular and for many;(3) identifying the role of language in creating and maintaining social inequality between men and women'. The above stance is an indication that men and women are perceived differently with men seen as being superior to women. Chan (2016) asserts that sexism is a belief system based on the assumption that the physical differences between males and females are so significant that they should determine virtually social and economic roles of men and women. In the same vein, Xiaolan (2006, p. 87) demonstrates that sexist language is used to

express “bias in favour of one sex and thus treat the other sex in a discriminatory manner”. In most cases, the bias is in favour of men against the women.” Similarly, Fuss (1989) points out that there is no linguistic reason for the biased nature of English in favour of the male in both Syntax and Semantics. Fuss’s study finds out that many of the words for woman have sexual overtones and despite the fact that there were more words for men, of smaller sample assigned to women, that there were found 220 words for sexually promiscuous women and only 20 for sexually promiscuous men. As a result, Chan (2016) ascribes all these, mediating that the English language as a system embodies sexual inadequacy.

Nevertheless, sexism in the real sense of the word is practiced in the Igbo language society. Mmadike (2014) demonstrates that Igbos see women as lower-class citizens, who require just minimum attention in comparison with their male counterparts. Ikonne (2002) Drawing inferences from the Igbo traditional and contemporary societynoted that sexism in the real sense of the word is practiced in the Igbo traditional society. Ikonne (2002) further reveal that there is a level of antagonism towards women in different contexts in Igbo society which shows that majority of the Igbo folk are still holding tenaciously to the old practice of sexism against women. Afigbo (1989) noted that sexism has been an age long practice in Igbo society. Right from the pre-colonial era women are meant to be dependent on men in Igbo society, women are educated mainly on soft and easy works such as: cooking, washing, cleaning of the house and taking care of children, while men are trained on hard but socio-economic related works such as: blacksmithing, craft, fishing, hunting and other kinds of farm work presuming women to be weaker vessels. Obi, (2016) revealed that even in our contemporary age too, most of the difficult and life-threatening roles in Igbo society are restricted to men only. Think of hard works like mechanic, wheel barrow pushing, carpentry, driving of commercial vehicle and heavy-duty vehicle, bricklaying, etc. are strictly done by men in Igbo society. Obi (2016) concludes that the assuming of the hard and life threatening role in Igbo society by men projects them to be unequal with women. Chavez (2000) argued that the real danger in sexism is that it can often time take shapes in covert forms as opposed to overt forms. Chavez (2000) accordingly avers that overt sexism refers to sexism that is explicit and visible in its nature whereas covert sexism is difficult to pinpoint and often times comes in a cover up form such as; wage difference, employment opportunity and women in academia, but that covert

sexism lies in things we pick up from our surroundings as we grow up and are harder to identify, explain and point out. Chavez's view is that, sexist language often comes in covert forms. There include: the use of degrading words such as "bitch" "whore" and "slut" that perpetuate the notion of women as immoral by nature, whereas the same language will describe men as "pimp" and "player" thereby given men power and pride. On the other hand, Chavez (2000) contends that sexism is intensified by the imbalances of power among people differentiated by class, age, race, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability. According to him, this has been the excuse for numerous acts of violence including battering, sexual harassment and rape especially against women.

Sexist studies have shown discrimination in language in referring to women and men respectively, (Lei 2006; Mills 2008). Mills and Mullany (2011, p145) observe that 'women are portrayed negatively through languages or are generalized through language based on men and women stereotypes'. According to them, examples of generalization in English include: the use of generic nouns to refer to both men and women. For instance, 'man is mortal' where man in this case refers to both man and woman. Similarly, the use of the pronoun 'he' as a generic pronoun. For example; 'someone must be aware of what he is going to encounter'.

The use of 'man' and 'he' in both examples refers to both men and women, thus, they are generic in favour of men as the equivalents for females; 'woman and she' cannot be used to refer to males consecutively. Lei and Mills further stated that the terms used to refer to females are routinely derived from that of the males. For instance: manageress from manager, goddess from gods, princess from prince, sailorette from sailor etc. Lei (2006) observed that most of such terms referring to females, derived from males' terms have different connotations from their parent terms. For instance; mistress derived from mister, whereas mistress refers to a partner in extramarital affairs and is actually negative as compared to 'mister' which simply means a male counterpart. Similarly, 'governor' refers to a person appointed to govern a province or state but the word 'governess' is used for counterpart female refers to as nurse. Moreover, Lei, (2006, p88) posits that "some titles are traditionally man oriented; implying that women were not thought of in holding such titles". Examples of such titles are; chairman, congressman, newsman, footballer, foreman, professor, engineer, lawyer, doctor etc. More exhibition of sexism in language is the

tendency to associate female candidates with negative connotations in the circumstance where a common term is used to refer to both male and female. The case in point is the term professional which is generic for both male and female. Nonetheless, the connotative meaning of professional is only used for women to mean a prostitute.

Chen (2016), investigating sexism from a critical discourse analysis perspective says that language is a mirror of a speaker's ideology and that sexism is a common social phenomenon reflected in languages. The source concludes that there is a great number of sexism against women in language use and suggest that much attention should be given to it to enhance the critical language awareness.

Theoretical Framework

This study, owing to its nature, is based on more than one paradigm. It takes on an interpretivist paradigm based on the notion that reality is socially constructed. Interpretivist paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation and focuses on the need to put analysis in (socio-cultural) context (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). For the current research, Critical Discourse Analysis provides the second paradigm as it provides the opportunity to see the power positioning of the feminine gender in terms of social role assigned to them and attributes associated with them. Lazar (2005), for instance, argues from Critical Discourse Analytical (CDA) perspective that 'issues of gender, power, and ideology have become increasingly more complex and subtle' in present times. It can be argued that names and titles by their nature present more complex and subtle understandings; that is, by their opaque and sometimes ambiguous meanings, names and title often hide their intended meanings, thereby making their ideological underpinnings subtle, but quite pervasive. Names and titles can therefore serve to sustain (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements, in which the woman is disadvantaged, and these may be presented in very subtle ways. The work of CDA is to critique such unequal gender relations. It is in this light that we find it a useful analytical approach for this study.

According to Litosseliti (2006), CDA 'has an explicit interest in making transparent the "hidden agenda" of discourse - which, for instance, may be responsible for creating and sustaining gender inequalities' (pp.55-56). Wodak, however, describes it as fundamentally 'interested in not only analyzing opaque

but also transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language' (2002, p.11). Similarly, Van Dijk defines CDA as a 'discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (2001, p. 352). CDA therefore critiques social inequalities as reflected in language. In critiquing social inequalities then, CDA's interest ties in with the emancipator goal of feminism. Accordingly, the overriding aim of CDA is to develop an analytical resistance to these unequal gender practices.

Source of Data and Process of Data Collection

Data for this study are taken from English and Igbo languages respectively. From both languages, sexist words and phrases ranging from names to titles in line with the scope of the present study were drawn. For this study, the investigation of the nature of sexism in English and Igbo languages was restricted to these two categories. From both sources, the data for this study are drawn from oral sources.

Categorization of Data for Analysis

Owing to the nature of this research and to facilitate the analysis of the data, the following categories were developed:

- 1) Sexism in Titles
- 2) Sexism in Naming

Sexism in Titles

Under this category, findings from both English and Igbo titles are presented respectively. From the English titles, instances were used to examine the nature of sexism as may be gleaned from the following samples presented in table 1.

Table1: Presentation of Data on Sexism in English Titles.

Male	Female
Prince	Princess
Dr.	Dr. (Mrs.)
Doctor	Woman doctor
Lawyer	Lady Lawyer
Mr.	Mrs.

Engineer	Woman engineer
Chairman	Chairlady
God	goddess

A critical examination of the examples in table 1 show that sexism is a salient social category in English speaking societies. As the titles in Table 1 imply, there is deep rooted discrimination against women, that is, women have to be dependent on men and are seen as just some appendages of men.

In comparison with the English titles, the Igbo titles found under this category include the following as presented in table 2.

Table 2: Presentation of Data on Sexism in Igbo Titles

Male	Female
<i>Mazi</i> (Mr.)	<i>Oriaku</i> (Mrs/consumer of wealth)
<i>Onyeokikpe</i> (Lawyer)	<i>Nwanyi onyeokikpe</i> (woman lawyer)
<i>Onyeisioche</i> (chairman)	<i>Nwanyi onye isi oche</i> (chairlady)
<i>Eze</i> (king)	<i>EzeNwanyi</i> (Queen)
<i>Dibia</i> (priest)	<i>Dibia Nwanyi</i> (priestess)

A close analysis of these titles is the understanding that sexism is highly evident in Igbo language as women are fully dependent on men for their titles. Little wonder the biblical injunction that woman was made out of the man. In other words, without man there will be no woman. This is sexism; pure and simple. The above examples also show the dominating force of the male gender as oppose to the feminine gender. In the light of these, we see the nothingness ascribed to the feminine gender as the woman is the consumer of the wealth produced by the man.

Other instances on the nature of sexism in English and Igbo are demonstrated in the next category.

Sexism in Names

Some English names are clear indication of the existence of sexism in the language.

Table 3: Presentation of Data on Sexism in English Names.

Male	Female
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Eric	Erica
Aubrey	Aubree
Audrey	Audree
Robert	Roberta
Malvin	Malvina

The examples presented in table 3 again, exemplify the sexist nature of English societies as portrayed by their naming system. The names in table 3 are clear indication of sexism as the female names emanate from the male names. In comparison with the Igbo names, examples of Igbo names under this category are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Presentation of Data on Sexism in Igbo Names.

Male	Female
<i>Okoroেকে</i> (male child born on eke day)	<i>Mgbeke</i> (female child born on eke day)
<i>Okebugwu</i> (Male child is an honour)	<i>Nwanyi abu nwa</i> (a female child is not a child)
<i>Nwaesiaba</i> (a child we boast with)	<i>Amuru nwa</i> (Is a child born?)

A close examination of the above names is the understanding that sexism has eaten deep in the Igbo speaking communities as a male child born on eke day is called *okoroেকে*. The opposite should be *agboghoেকে* but the girl is stereotypically named *Mgbeke* which connotes ugliness, prostitute, stupidity, etc. A male child is named *Nwabugwu*, *Nwaesiaba*, *Okebugwu* etc, which semantically denote honorable, while a female child is named *Nwanyiabunwa*, *Mgbechikwelu*, *Amurunwa* etc. which depict nothingness, worthless and so and so. A man who expected a male child and unfortunately got a female child would name her *Mgbechikwelu* 'whenever it pleases God. This name simply means whenever it please God to give him a child, meaning that a female child is not a child as some people will just name theirs *Nwanyiabunwa*.

Developmental Trends on Sexism in English and Igbo

The belief that the woman is less important in English and Igbo societies is far becoming a thing of the past. In recent times, everywhere in the world, the woman is industrious, enterprising and supportive. Women are said to have made a lot of gains in education, politics, business etc. Today, many women are liberated and are celebrated for it. This is as a result of educational exposure and

cross-cultural contacts. Moreover, education of women is on the increase to the extent that even lower educated men marry more highly educated women. In addition, families now confess that their utility children are mostly the females. A typical example is the positive change in the naming system of contemporary Igbo societies where a female child is now named:

<i>Nnekasi</i>	Mother is the greatest
<i>Nneamaka</i>	Mother is beautiful
<i>Nwanyibuihe</i>	Woman is/worth something
<i>Nwanyi bu ugwu</i>	Woman is honour
<i>Nnebuugwu</i>	Motherhood is an honour
<i>Nwakaego</i>	Child is greater than money/wealth
<i>Egodi</i>	There is money/wealth, Wealth personified
<i>Ije-ego</i>	Journey/race/walk of money/wealth

The above names are now given to female children in contemporary Igbo society as compared to the erstwhile '*Nwanyiabunwa*' - a female child is not a child, '*Amurunwa*'- is a child born? etc. Similarly, a couple that has more girls than boys is no more derided as '*amandom*' - compound of women. Now, there are names that are unisex in Igbo society unlike in the past that naming system is sex inclined. Such names like: *Udoka, Uzoma, Mmesoma, Chidera, Chisom* just to mention but few.

The use of names to depict the dependence of women on men or to portray the fact that women are just some appendages of men in the Igbo society is also embedded in the English socio-cultural context. Names such as Erica, Aubree, Roberta, etc. which are used to show women's dependence on men are gradually being eroded. Similarly, there are names that are unisex in the English communities' noun. Names like Ashton, Avery, Jamie, Kelsey etc. are unisex, demonstrating the equality between the two sexes. This is as a result of the fact that in domestic and social relations, women's investments complement those of their spouses, they now form part of decision making in and out of their families and social environments. Also, women are becoming their husband's next of kin.

In the present day of Okpanam in Anioma Kingdom of Delta and Uwana Kingdom of Afikpo in Ebonyi states women chiefs are crowned alongside men chiefs. In Anioma for instance, the male chief is in charge of the men, male youths and the lands, while the woman chief is in charge of the women, female

youths, markets and custodian of the ancestral shrine. Same applies to the English societies where there are men and women Mayors. Thus, the use of titles to depict man's superiority in English and Igbo societies no longer holds as women are now participating in leadership and administration in our societies today.

In the English societies, discriminatory titles such as the use of 'miss' and 'Mrs.' for females' representation of unmarried and married women is gradually fading away. There are reported successes in making language gender neutral in the English societies. For instance, Mills and Mullany (2011) report a study of gender related language change that was exhibited and observed that the representation of women and the style of language have changed a lot over time, denoting that the campaigns against sexism have been a success, thereby making language gender neutral. A typical example is the use of 'Ms' instead of 'miss' and 'Mrs.'. Also, substituting the use of 'man' as a generic term with 'someone', 'he or she' in a sentence in place of the generic 'he' for both sexes is another success.

In addition, there have also been the introduction of gender sensitive terms, like saying 'person to person' instead of 'man to man', 'police officer' instead of police man, 'business executive instead of businessman', 'Chairperson' instead of chairman, 'artificial' instead of 'manmade', 'layperson' instead of layman, 'human resource instead of manpower etc (Lei,2006).

In a related view, the Igbo socio-cultural context which holds the position of placing the man above the woman no longer holds because the women now support and complements the man. The woman is now viewed positively and is also encouraged to queue in for opportunities. In this societal context, husband and wife are no more addressed as *Mazi /na oriaku*- Mr. and consumer of wealth, but, *Mazi na odoziaku*, -Mr. and keeper or custodian of wealth. Similarly, women are now addressed with titles like; *Osodieme*-One who works with her husband, *Omaobidiya*-One who knows the mind of her husband etc. these show the extent to which women status have been changed.

Discussion

The representation of women in English and Igbo is in conformity to the traditional gender stereotype and ideals, and is socio-culturally accepted as it reproduces or reinforces gender stereotype and ideals, but there have been a lot

of positive changes with regards to the fight against sexism courtesy of civilization, which has seriously elevated the image and position of the feminine gender in both societies.

In our interpretation of how language reinforces traditional gender stereotype and ideal, we make reference to the approaches we adopted for this study: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Interpretivist paradigm. According to Van Dijk, (2008, p85), 'the ultimate aim of CDA is to expose, understand and ultimately resist social inequality'. Our reference to the Interpretivist paradigm is based on the notion that reality is socially constructed. The Interpretivist paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation and focuses on the need to put analysis in socio-cultural context (Rerves and Hedberg, 2003).

Similarities between the Two Cultural Contexts

Owing to the two categories of female representations in the current research, some elements of similarities have been revealed. For instance, under the title category, in both languages there is dependence of women on men in that the female titles are derived from those of the males. Typical examples are; princess derived from prince, Lady Lawyer derived from Lawyer, etc. Such dependence is also common in the Igbo traditional society as we see in; *Onye okikpe-Nwanyi onye okikpe*, *Onye isi -Nwanyi onye isi*, etc. all depicting similarity in the traditional setting of the two socio-cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This study has examined the linguistic nature of English and Igbo Societies. It draws a parallel between language, gender and culture of the English and Igbo socio-cultural contexts. That is to say, it examines the gender parity between men and women, especially when it comes to rights and power positioning. Women are seen as weaker beings in the society and as such, found to be dependent on men in many aspects of life. However, some of these positions no longer hold in modern times because of civilization where women are no longer confined to the kitchen. Civilization has brought some positive changes in favour of the women that has brought some elements of equality between the two sexes.

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