

GENDERED ENGLISH USAGE IN THE NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT: *As Nigerian newspapers have been observed as catalysts to literacy development in the country, this paper investigates the use of gendered English among high-ranking print journalists in selected reputable newspapers in Nigeria. This is considered essential to be able to assess the level of gender awareness and sensitivity of the Nigerian journalists, as agents of mass communication and information dissemination who have the opportunity to reach large audience/readers and influence them through their writing. In other words, the study seeks to assess the Nigerian journalists' compliance with the global trend of the 21st century English language in plying their trade as journalists. Data for the study were collected from four widely read English medium Nigerian daily newspapers, namely, The Herald, The Nigerian Observer, The Guardian, and Punch. The study finds out that Nigerian newspapers still portray high degree of the use of gender-bias expressions in their editorials, news, and features, which are usually handled by experienced editors, senior writers/reporters and columnists. Some of these gendered expressions are identified, described and their implication for English language usage in the Nigeria print media discussed. The study makes some suggestions that are capable of bringing about positive and desired linguistic change in the Nigerian print media in adopting gender-fair writing; which will eventually go a long way in improving English literacy in the country in general.*

KEYWORDS: English Literacy, Newspapers, Gendered English, Gender-Bias

INTRODUCTION

Literacy in English as a second language in Nigeria has become an important component if not a cornerstone of literacy promotion nationwide (Dadzie and Awonusi, 2003). Contrary to the non-linguist's view, literacy means much more than the ability to read and write in a given language. According to Hornstein (2008: 3) the need for print literacy "in a democracy extends beyond reading and writing" and suggests the literacy which will be a tool for empowerment and participation. He emphasises the use of print literacy beyond simple recall, conformity and economic functions that will lead to the realm of genuine social participation and creation. Such literacy practices, according to him, "encourage students to become thinkers and actors so they will become thinkers and actors as citizens". He recommends that the kind of "literacy practices developed by Nigerian teachers and students in Nigerian classrooms will need to be those needed to fit the particular needs of 21st century Nigeria".

Therefore, among all other things, one's ability to intelligently conceive and interpret the workings of one's speech community is essential (Orisawayi, 2008). It is such understanding that will make effective learning possible. Literacy is positioned as the foundation for development; it is indeed "the life-support system for sustainable and continuous development of the individual human being, the community and nation as an entity, and the world at large" (Orisawayi, 2008:13). The role of English as a second language, the communicative and performance tool of literacy, is at the centre of the network (Stuckey

(1991). A literate person is that person who brings the knowledge of the language and its culture to bear on their expression of ideas and interpretations of concepts. Thus, second language (L2) learners and users of the English language must pay as much attention to the socio-cultural changes or trends in its usage as they affect its grammatical structures. L2 users of the English language could always bridge the gap indicated in Chomsky's (2000) competence and performance, if they care more to be culturally intelligent, willing and ready to adapt to the global trends in the language use. Competence, by Chomsky's classification goes beyond understanding of grammatical rules to the comprehension of non-linguistic and extra-linguistic strategies that are needed in the context of interaction.

Literacy, according to Hornstein (2008: 2), "entails more than ability to read and write". He (ibid.) posits further that although people and governments have long assumed print literacy as a necessary pre-requisite for economic and social development, the demands of the 21st century will require more expansive literacies than that. He (ibid.: 4) opines that "democratic participation in 21st century will require a literacy that enables citizens to critique both broadcast news and entertainment media". According to him, literacy in a democratic society will require citizens who can unpack and critique the media. This is beyond what individuals can naturally do once they can read and write; "it is a skill and a literacy that is learned through discourse and experience". Also, Stuckey (1991: 19) posits that "becoming literate signifies in large part the ability to conform or at least to appear conformist" and that "the teaching of literacy is a regulation of access. Orisawayi (2008: 16 &17) categorises and elucidates the following literacy demands among others, in "Modern Times":

- Total eradication of illiteracy – making the illiterate literate at all levels.
- Sustaining and enriching the literacy skills of the literate population.
- Identifying and creating new awareness of literacy demands in the light of new development in science, technology, arts, social living and economic survival.
- Literacy requirements for the 21st century have advanced from what they used to be in the nineteen seventies and eighties... Civil society has become more critical, more discerning and more knowledgeable in matters of fundamental rights and privileges...
- It is no longer adequate for the citizens to be able to read, write and calculate.....To be well informed requires higher-level literacy skills acquired through unrelenting reading and acquisition of wider knowledge, in a shared language....
- The media – progenitors of modern public opinion – have now imbued the system with higher level literacy skills in their presentation of facts, opinions and perspectives. The Press in this country has in recent times raised the level of news reporting and the language of communication higher on the plane of informed intellectualism. Now the average literate reader of newspapers and magazines requires higher order to effectively make positive gains from the paper. (ibid.16 &17)

Academic American Encyclopedia (1989: 171) gives a broad description of newspaper as "an unbound publication issued at regular intervals that seeks to inform, analyse, influence and

entertain". Cheyney (1992) states that newspapers are among the most accessible texts available to the vast majority of people including literate, semi-literate, young and old, students, workers, elites and peasants in a community; because every category of reader stated above can find something they need in the newspaper's pages. Babalola (2002: 406) also posits that another important role of the newspaper in Nigeria is that of serving as a "catalyst to literacy development." Bell (1995: 23) also submits that "Media have long been a focus amongst those working with language and communication as well as others working within the broader field of media studies". He states the following as reasons:

Firstly, media are a rich source of readily accessible data for research and teaching. Secondly, media usage influences and represents people's use of and attitudes towards language in a speech community. Thirdly (and relatedly), media use can tell us a great deal about social meanings and stereotypes projected through language and communication: for example, in the use of foreign languages in advertisements... in radio disc-jockey style-shifting... and in the television portrayal of the elderly...

Fourthly, (and again relatedly), the media reflect and influence the information and expression of culture, politics and social life. (ibid. 23)

In the same vein, Samuel, the eighteenth-century dictionary-writer (as quoted in Aitchson, 1998: 2) said: 'I never open up a newspaper without finding something I should have deemed it a loss not to have seen; never without deriving from it instruction and amusement'. Aitchson then comments: "He does not specify what kind of 'instruction' he was seeking. But almost certainly, if he looked at a newspaper today, he would learn both about the modern language and how to use it clearly." Baker (2005) also notes the following five key concepts the media literate citizens understand:

- All media messages are constructed.
- Media are constructed using unique language with their own set of rules.
- Media convey values and points of view.
- Different people interpret the same media message differently.
- Media are concerned with power and profit.

However, despite the effort of the media to enhance English literacy skills acquisition and communicative competence in Nigeria, Nigerian gender activists and linguists frown at the observation that Nigerian media have ignored or marginalised the views and experiences of large segments of our society. In the words of Omenugha (2001:1), "some of these omissions are the result of conscious biases based on class, gender, culture and religion." She asserts:

One thing is clear: the progression of women representations in the media is inhibited by the major key players - journalists, media owners, and governmental bodies among others who are still non-gender sensitised. Therefore, lobbying and sensitising them on gender issues must continue. Nigerian media should realise that there is exclusion of majority of Nigerians who are trapped in the circle of poverty.

Having given the above background information, the main aim of the present study is investigate the use of gendered English in Nigerian newspapers which have been observed as catalysts to literacy development in the country. This is considered essential to be able to assess the level of gender awareness and sensitivity of the Nigerian journalists, as agents of mass communication and information dissemination who have the opportunity to reach large audience/readers and influence them. In other words, the study seeks to assess the Nigerian journalists' compliance with the global trend of the 21st century English language in writing their news and stories. Secondly, the study is also concerned about the Nigerian female journalists who seem not to see anything wrong in their being referred to/addressed as *newsmen, pressmen, gentlemen of the press, and cameramen* when there are better equivalent words in the language that can be used to refer to them.

THE MEDIA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LITERACY IN NIGERIA

The mass media can be categorised under the print and the broadcast media, the latter can further be divided into radio and television. The print media in Nigeria came into existence as far back as the nineteenth century, with the *Lagos Times* and *Weekly Records* among other newspapers which were published only in English (Aderinwale, 2009; Awonusi, 2004; Babalola, 2002). However, a few local newspapers, for example, *Iwe Iroyin Yoruba* (published in 1859) in Abeokuta, which sprang up towards the close of the century, challenged the supremacy of the English language as the sole language of the print media. In Nigeria today, the picture is not radically different because newspapers are still published mainly in English with only a few in Nigerian languages. According to Awonusi (2004: 78&79):

About 80% of the newspapers produced in Nigeria use English as their medium. In addition, magazines using the same medium, began to flourish from the beginning of the 80s, with serious magazines like *The New Times*, *African Concord*, *African Guardian*, *Newsweek*, *This Week* , among others publishing in English and Pidgin (ibid. 78&79).

News is that part of communication that keeps people informed of the changing events, issues and characters in the world outside (Lasky, 2000). Ohu (2011: VI) views news as “the knowledge of the new, the unknown, the unfamiliar, and the outside”. Another characteristic of news according to Ohu (*Ibid.*) is that it is a report, and being a report, it is a relay of an account of what is seen, what is heard or what is said. At the forefront of the management of news are journalists, who with broadcasters and publishers are called the press. Journalists are primarily reporters. They report news of events, set agenda for commentaries about issues and elicit reaction (feedback) from the masses, who are consumers of news. They do this by employing sophisticated equipment such as radio transmitters, television, satellites and daily publication of the written word on paper that can transmit information to a great number of people, with a great speed, and at the same time; hence, the name mass media (Alao, 2003).

The importance of English in most facets of life in Nigeria has made it imperative for anyone with pretensions to advancement in society to be proficient in it and endeavour to conform to the 21st century global trend of the language use. It is the language used in formal situations,

in services, in schools, for commerce at a higher level, in our law courts and in the majority of items in the mass media. In the words of Dadzie and Awonusi 2003:17):

No doubt, English occupies a pride of place in Nigeria as a second language and indeed necessary language... The second language learner places so much store by literacy that, many a time, he tries to mask his foreign accent by pretending to a mastery of the language, up to and even surpassing what the native speaker does; it is in such situations that the measure of success is seen as a function of performance at the literate level.

Awonusi (2004: 79) posits further that “the use of English in the Nigerian print media encouraged the development of characteristics which today mark off the variety we now call ‘Nigerian English’”. Thus, the Nigerian media, just like the book industry, has been an agent for the emergence of this variety. This is as a result of the fact that Nigerian Television Authority stations primarily use English as the language of operation. News is read in English and so are the drama presentations, children’s programmes, features, documentaries, among others. However, some stations now devote time slots to the use of local languages and Pidgin. Such programmes constitute only 35% of air time, thus giving English about 60%. This analysis excludes the period spent on educational television which employs English as the medium of instruction about 90% of the time (Awonusi, 2004: 79).

Becker and Dunwoody (1982: 217) generate data which buttress the fact that media use has a positive relationship with knowledge. Also, Tichenor *et al.* (1970: 170) find print media to play an essentially reinforcing role in growth in public knowledge. The media has played an important role in the development of the English language. Language change, on the other hand, recorded by media professionals, who hear or read new forms and use them in their news, reports and other programmes; media professionals themselves promote the change by letting millions of people hear or read ‘neologisms that might have developed at slow pace’ (Norbrook and Ricketts, 1995: 300). Aitchson (1998) goes further:

A new variant arises in some section of the community and competes with an existing one. Then the newer form is likely to expand and gradually oust the older ones, like a young cuckoo pushing a previous occupant out of the nest. Old and new forms therefore coexist and compete: the old is not magically transformed into the new. These young cuckoo takeovers typically have a slow beginning, then a sudden upsurge... But the media did not initiate these changes; they were reflecting current usage.

Aitchson (1998: 17) also gives an instance of the prefix *mini-* which provides ‘a blueprint’ for the slow beginning and sudden upswing of a typical change which also illustrates the role of the media. According to Aitchson’s account, the prefix occurred as early as 1845, when the *Scotsman* newspaper carried a notice of an ‘important sale of horses harness and carriages’, which included ‘one excellent 12-inside omnibus’ and ‘one handsome minibus’, both horse-drawn. He states further that ‘after a fairly long time, other sporadic *mini-*forms arrived in the language:

mini-camera came in the 1930s, *mini-piano* in the 1940s. The prefix therefore gradually crept into the language... Take-off point came in the 1960s when *mini-cab*, *mini-van* and other transport words became widely used, alongside clothing words, such as *mini-skirt*, and *mini-dress*. Then *mini-* started appearing on other types of word: a *mini-boom* occurred in economics; a *mini-bar* became standard in some hotel rooms, *mini-computers* were widely used, and a writer commented that he must have been out of his *mini-mind*. The media nurtured the *mini-explosion* by reporting the news, *Vogue*, the fashion magazine, noted *mini-skirt* first in 1965. Television several *mini-series*; Newspapers also joined in a total 125 stories contained a *mini-prefix* in *The Times* and *Sunday Times* in the first three months of 1993... (Aitchson, 1998: 17)

From the foregoing, the media could be regarded as the 'linguistic mirrors' because they reflect current usage and extend it. Journalists are observant reporters who pick up early on new forms and spread them to a wider audience. As a matter of fact, they do not normally invent linguistic forms; they only bring them to limelight through usage in casting news, report giving or writing and any other programme. Radio and television reproduce the various ways of speaking we hear around in their programmes while newspapers and magazines do so in writing their news and reports.

According to Taiwo (2007), newspapers are particularly known to lead in the initiation of discourse on key national issues by picking on statements and actions of prominent national figures, celebrities and happenings around the world and exposing them to their readership. He (*Ibid.*) posits further that the initiation, advancement and sustenance of discourse by newspapers are not often devoid of some embellishment, determined by their own angle of the story. These Nigerian newspapers including the few ones published in indigenous Nigerian languages which complement the ones in the two groups in news reporting are good instruments to promote English literacy and enlightenment (Aderinwale, 2009; Babalola, 2002).

Babalola (2002: 408) recognises newspapers as useful tools for promoting literate communities. According to him, newspapers, the world over, perform invaluable functions of informing, educating, entertaining and constructively bringing the activities of the government nearer to the people; and as a result, they are now very popular and common with adults and young alike. He stated further:

Nigerians, whether young or old love to read the newspaper. This is because the newspaper has got something for every category in the society. To the school children or teenagers, entertainment, sports and arts pages are always of interest to them. But beyond this, teachers can effectively use the built-in organisational and design features in the newspapers head-lines, pictures, and graphics, and so on to aid their teaching. A typical English language lesson in composition, comprehension or summary can start with reading of newspapers. (Babalola, 2002: 408)

Furthermore, English like any other ‘tongue’ maintains its own patterns and keeps itself organised as a language, ‘like a thermostat’, regulates itself constantly. In the words of Aitchson (1998: 19), “some inbuilt property in the human mind maintains all languages, everywhere.” Again, he (Aitchson, 1998: 20) further asserts that the “public reads newspapers avidly because they are written in a way which attracts attention and then sustains it”. Such writings, according to him, “require training and practice by the journalists involved.” Obe (2008) also observes that newspaper is a veritable agent of literacy in Nigeria because, according to him, an average Nigerian believes that the best way to personally enhance one’s spoken and written English skills is through regular reading of newspapers. He asserts that:

Testimony and personal reflection from people have shown that repeated exposure to media products that are written in English language has greatly improved their understanding of English language. That is why the media have been regarded as a veritable agent of English literacy in Nigeria (*Ibid.* p.180).

LANGUAGE AND GENDER IN THE MEDIA

The observation and assertion of the Nigerian feminist activists and researchers against the Nigerian media practitioners on how they continually contribute to the Nigerian women’s exploitation and marginalisation in the society are some of the issues the present study seeks to address through the evaluation of the usage of the English language in the Nigerian print media in order to ascertain the level of gender awareness and sensitivity of the print media practitioners.

Moreover, in spite of the numerous roles that the English language plays in Nigeria and worldwide, it is unfortunate that the Nigerian media as the main forms of mass communication, agents of information and very important sources for enhancement of English literacy skills acquisition, still portray high degree of the usage of gender-bias expressions, even despite over two decades of global gender awareness.

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.

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 sensitise 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.

Gender awareness creation is a pre-requisite for accomplishing behavioural change within our society, and an important component in establishing an enabling environment where women and men work with better understanding, mutual respect, mutual empowerment, justice and fair play. This is why scholars such as human rights activists, social science researchers, linguists and applied linguists who are feminists have been, from well over twenty years ago, grappling with how to improve gender sensitivity of the people globally in order to encourage the existence of the situation that promotes equity, justice and fair play in the world (Bartle, 2004; Cameron, 1990 & 2004; Litosseliti, 2006; Obilade, 2005; Omenugha, 2001 & 2007; Owonibi, 1999; Spender, 1998; Kolawole, 1997 & 1998; Yusuf, 1988). For instance, Obilade (2005: 3) affirms that our society is indeed "definable in relational terms which, more often than not, are underscored by prevalent gender relations". She also notes that gender is not just about women; it is about relations between men and women, and that raising awareness about gender issues generally, and promoting gender balance are both essential and integral parts of society mobilising, management training, poverty reduction, capacity building, income generation and empowerment. In the words of Obilade (ibid: 3), creating gender awareness helps to:

- (a) recognise women and men as individuals;
- (b) recognise and acknowledge the contributions of women to the sustenance and development of the community;
- (c) improve knowledge about similarities and differences in gender cultures/relationships;
- (d) understand the impacts of these differences on work relationships and team performance; and
- (e) learn how to improve cross-gender communication and effectiveness (ibid: 3).

Babalola (2007:107) observes that the global trend is that "virtually all the countries of the world are bracing up for the challenges of modern life and Nigeria should not be an exception". This study totally agrees with this view especially in the area of challenge of using language in a manner that does not offend gender. English speakers and writers either in L1 or L2 situations have traditionally been taught to use masculine nouns and pronouns in situations where the gender 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 2015; 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 (Yusuf, 1988).

However, as women have become increasingly involved in the public sphere of life, writers have reconsidered the way they express gender identities and relationships. Feminist scholars and women human rights activists believe that the use of sexist 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 (Spender, 1998 and Qubein, 2006). It is believed that using ungendered language may be a way of improving the treatment of women. Thus, feminist scholars frown at the generic use of *he, him, his; mankind/man; and the man in the street*; when references are both male and female genders as it is considered as a symbol of male superiority and female suppression (Litosseliti 2006: 14). 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-species of man and that female's subservience to the male is natural (Litosseliti, 2006, Spender, 1998).

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 users of the English language today must think more carefully about the ways they express gender in order to convey their ideas clearly and accurately to their readers/audience (Litosseliti, 2006; Qubein, 2006). As a result of this, feminist scholars now are in the habit of using gender-neutral words to replace the gender-bias ones. For instance, gender-neutral word "chairperson" is now to replace "*chairman*". However, instead of being used exclusively as a gender-neutral word, it is being used, in some cases, to refer to only the female. There have been noticeable improvements in the countries like UK and USA, (Gupta, 1994; Qubein, 2006) whereas, in countries like Nigeria and Singapore, because of the cultural beliefs attached to gender issues, there is still maximum use of gender-bias language (Adetunji, 2010; Gupta, 1994; Omenugha, 2007).

The present study holds that even though the English language is male-dominant, it "grammaticalises" sex (Trask and Mayblin, 2005: 3). For instance, in the English language, if one wants to refer to somebody of the opposite sex, 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 21st century global trend of use of the English language.

Gender refers to socially-learned attributes, behaviours and expectations that are associated with members of a biological sex category, or otherwise found in the expression of masculinity or femininity, while feminism is mainly a socio-political movement which focuses on women's issues. It concentrates on eradicating the oppression of women in the male dominated societies. Sexism is the portrayal of one sex as naturally superior to the other. Sexism is believed to derive from the assumption that the world belongs to men, to understand and possess, while women remain junior partners, or worst still, some "invisible others" (Omenugha, 2007: 3). In the distant past, the gender question did not arouse interest in scholars and the society at large. The oppression of women was regarded as a normal phenomenon, and efforts made by women to reverse this unequal relationship was regarded as an affront to cultural values and norms. However, as a result of modernisation, industrialisation and development, the need to work towards the elimination of sexism or the improvement of the condition of women became more widely felt. The Women's Liberation

Movement, later called the Feminist Movement, championed the propagation of the awareness (Owonibi, 1999: 1).

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: 374), “feminists were the first institutionalised group to champion women’s cause”. They believe that women have been victims of domination, oppression and marginalisation in a society dominated by men. The feminists therefore advocate equal rights for women in a patriarchy where men have monopolised power. Tony (1998: 1) posits that feminist theory attempts to “describe women oppression, to explain its causes and consequences and to prescribe strategies for women liberation”.

Hence, the main concern of the study is that the Nigerian print media as a tool of communication, information and English literacy in the country should be gender sensitive and adapt to the use of the language that would not favour or offend any gender. Against this backdrop of our discourse on literacy and national development, the English language in the Nigerian situation must of necessity respond to the global current settings and demands or pressures from its users (L1 and L2 speakers). Practitioners in the teaching, learning, as well as assessment of the English language, would need to respond to the modern demands and international pressures in a number of ways among which de-genderisation of gendered English is one pertinent aspect of gender issues which of course are global.

Therefore, in this work, an attempt is made to draw attention to the necessity of embracing and encouraging gender-fair writing by all Nigerian users and speakers of the English language in order to conform to the international standard of usage of good English that is free of gender bias in whatever guise or form. The need for continuous gender sensitisation of the Nigerian journalists and by extension, the entire people in the country as a society to give room for gradual adaptation of gender-fair writing is also emphasized. 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 (Litosseliti, 2006).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data for the study were collected from four widely read English medium Nigerian daily newspapers, namely, *The Herald*, *The Nigerian Observer*, *The Guardian*, and *Punch*. The selection covered the period between January and October, 2012 based on convenience and accessibility. The examples in this study are drawn from news reports, editorials and features writings of the selected newspapers. The instances of gendered expressions found are given numbers for easy reference while the gendered words in them are put in italics for easy identification.

Examples of the Gendered English Expressions in News Reports

The following are some of the examples of gendered texts identified in news reports in the newspapers studied being categories into three, namely; gendered texts in the front pages (FP), headlines (H), and photo captions (PC):

- (i) Examples of Gendered English Expressions in the Front Pages (FP)

E1. Kwara State Government has inaugurated an *eleven-man committee* on Drug Abuse

Control... (FP) *The Herald*, news report

E2. ... he told *newsmen* in Asaba (FP). *The Nigerian Observer*, news report

E3. The *24-man* Economic Management Team is led by President Goodluck Jonathan with Dr.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala the coordinating Minister for the Economy. (FP) *The Guardian*, news report)

E4. Father of three killed by *gunmen* buried in Lagos (H) *The Punch's* news report).

(ii) Examples of Gendered English Expressions in headlines (H)

E5. ...Unknown *gunmen* killed 3 in Kaduna (H & FP) *The Herald*, news report)

E6. Man charged with pouring faeces on *policemen* (Headline, *The Nigerian Observer*, news report)

E7. Custom's *men* assault teacher for punishing colleague's son (H) *The Guardian*, news report)

E8. Soldiers, *Policemen*, Civil Defence Corps take over streets (H & FP) *The Punch's* news report)

(iii) Examples of Gendered English Expressions in photo captions (PC)

*E9. *Chairman*, Irepodun LGA, Bashirat Muhammed (PC) *The Herald*, news report)

* E10. Barr. (Mrs.) U.C. Uzamere, Ag. Rector, Institute of Continuing Education, Edo State.

(PC) (*The Nigerian Observer*, September).

*E11. *Chairman*, of the state Board of Internal Revenue, Mrs. Rauta Bitrus ... (PC) *The Guardian*, news Report)

*E12. *Chairman* of Hyggea Nigeria Limited, Mrs. Fola Laoye... (PC, *The Punch's* news report)

The use of *eleven-man committee*, *24-man* Economic Management Team (has a woman – Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as its leader) *newsmen* and *gunmen*, *policemen*, and custom's *men* on the front pages (in E1 to E4) and in the headlines (E5 to E8) of some Nigerian newspapers is capable of enhancing the continuous spread of the usage of gendered English in the society, because it will be easy to read the gendered words by a very large audience who enhance their literacy skills in the English language based on the general belief that the newspapers English is the standard. This is because just as vendors display their newspapers and several people, including passersby and casual readers are able to take a glimpse at the headlines, so also, one does not need to buy a newspaper to read the contents on its front page. The Nigerian journalists will therefore continuously contribute to the use and spread of the

gendered English in Nigeria if they continue to write as they did in all the newspapers studied in this present work. This is because reports and research have confirmed that majority of users of the English language believe that the journalists are good exemplars of standard English; and when such people read newspapers to enhance their literacy skills in the language, the tendency is for them to be emulating the journalists by using the language as they are using it.

The use of '*policemen*' in E6 and E8 as if all persons in the police force are men, whereas there are women in high positions of command in the Nigerian Police Force. Mrs. Ngozi Braide, is the Police Public Relations Officer of Lagos State Police Command; the Police Public Relations Officer, Adamawa State Police Command is Mrs. Altine Daniel; the Divisional Head of the Azikoro Police station, Bayelsa state is Mrs. Rita Grean; erstwhile Osun State Commissioner of police was Mrs. Dorothy Gimba; and the Police Public Relations Officer in Osun, Mrs. Folashade Odoro is a female cop, among others. This is a confirmation of marginalisation of women in the media through the use of gendered language and it further confirms the societal stereotypic role culturally assigned to women. This suggests assumption of the superiority of men and inferiority of women and reduces womenfolk to invisibility.

Texts *E9 to *E12 are examples of gendered texts in photo captions (PC) and spectacular examples of gendered expressions (this is why each one of them has asterisk). The pictures and names of the referents in the three texts (*E9, *E11 and *E12– Bashirat Muhammed, Mrs. Rauta Bitrus and Mrs. Fola Laoye, respectively, are enough evidences that confirm beyond reasonable doubt that they are indeed women. Yet they are addressed by the journalists as '*chairman*'. This is a clear confirmation that the reporters ignorantly used '*chairman*' for the women. The use of '*Chairman*', for female referent is sexist as it confirms the assumption that 'woman' is subsumed in 'man' and this portrays lack of dignity and respect for the females. There are clear evidences that the three persons being referred to are women through their marital title and names and photos, thus confirming beyond doubt that the use of '*chairman*' in the three texts is a clear case of marginalisation of women.

Another instance is the marital title 'Mrs.' For all the women in the four texts (i.e. *E9 to *E12). Also, the use of '*chairman*' and '*men*' in examples 6 and 7 are instances of generic use of nouns to refer to all human beings as if there are no women in existence. Also, the gendered expressions in *E10 is indeed discriminatory and demeaning, as it has the marital title 'Mrs.' added to the professional qualification title of the woman being referred to in the text, whereas, if the referent were to be a man, the writer would not have added the male title – 'Mr.', which is not even a marital name, to the professional title, – 'Barr. (Mr.)'. There have never been appellations like 'Barr (Mr.) or Prof. (Mr.) in the L1 and L2 situations of the English usage from time immemorial. Even the fact that almost all the women in the news are identified with their marital status has scholarly been criticized; and addressing women as 'Mrs.' Or 'Miss' has been argued by feminist scholars to indicate sexual availability or not. The fact that the corresponding 'Mr.' usually used for men does not indicate the man's marital status makes it sexist to address women in a manner that would put any form of pressure on them (Omenugha, 2007: 167).

The use of words like '*chairman*' and '*men*' when referring to both male and female assumes women are just 'one of the boys' and denies their social relevance in the scheme of things in the country (Omenugha, 2007: 170). This buttresses Ogundipe-Lesile's (2002) assertion which notes the manner of media portrayal of women as the 'other' who are not part of

normal society. This is indeed a demonstration of oppression or suppression of women folk through language use. Thus, the Nigerian press could be said to be strengthening and maintaining subordination of the gender through the portrayal of women in this manner through the use of gendered language that favours and recognises only the male gender.

Examples of Gendered English in the Editorials and Features Articles

The following are some examples of the gendered English expressions in the editorials and features articles in the selected newspapers with the gendered and significant words used them in italics:

- E1. The body went further to declare that *whoever* has part of *his* plans, among others, to address all areas of community life... will win the people's hearts (*The Nigerian Observer*, Editorial).
- E2. There is no need to pay more practical attention to the conduct of *policemen* in terms of crisis; and to emphasis to *policemen* that the law will not spare them... (*The Guardian*, Editorial)
- E3. The following day, being their burial, saw the gathering of their loved ones and sympathizers, including the lawmakers, set to give their *kinsmen* a mass but befitting burial. (*Punch*, Editorial)
- E4. *Every artist* dips *his* brush in *his* own soul, and paints *his* own nature into *his* pictures (*The Herald*, Feature article)
- E5. ...Fishback told *The Guardian* that once a prospective *student* could establish that *he* *orshe* has been admitted, possesses genuine transcripts, evidence of adequate funds for *his/her* education, passes security checks and could convince the visa officials that *he/she* would return to Nigeria after the completion of their studies, a visa would be issued (*TheGuardian*, August, September, Feature Articles Article)
- E6. The implication of this is that once *a worker* opens a retirement savings account with a PFA, *he* has no opportunity of changing *his* PFA whether or not *he* is pleased with its services or not. (April, *The Punch*, Feature Article)

The feminine gender seems to be excluded totally from— *policemen* and *kinsmen* (in E2 and E3) and indefinite referents – ‘*every artist*’, ‘*whoever*’ ‘*a person*’, ‘*a student*’, ‘*a worker*’, in the above 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 ‘*kinsmen*’ (in E3) suggests non-existence of women in that community; it reduces women's visibility through linguistic exclusion. The semantic import of such generic uses when in actual fact both sexes are represented in the situations being described confirms the belief by many that women's basic role is a reproductive one, with associated duties of child bearing and kitchen/ home management. In E1, masculine pronoun ‘*he*’ is used as a proform of ‘*whoever*’ also for an indefinite referent which could be either of two sexes. This connotes linguistic exclusion of women in the media. The use of ‘*his*’ a masculine pronoun for an indefinite referent “*every artist*” in E4 above suggests all artists are men, that no female artist exists. This is another evidence of women's marginalisation through the use of masculine pronoun as generic term for all human

beings, as if all the people in the society are men. It is evident that women are excluded through language use as if they are not in existence.

These examples of texts (E5) with male precedence in word-pairing (*he or she, his/her*), portray a habitual practice in word-pairings that involve the female and male, where masculine words are usually placed first. This reflects the belief that women are inferior to men. Even the use of expressions such as man/woman; he/she; him/her; which may be seen as an attempt to discourage the exclusion of the female is not very acceptable to feminists, because it exhibits another feature of sexism that has to do with male precedence in word-pairing. The consistent placement of male gender before female gender in a situation of word-pairing connotes the superiority of male gender over the female gender while the female gender maintains the second fiddle position.

This further confirms belief of some people 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. This is as a result of the patriarchal nature of the English language and socio-cultural beliefs due to the traditional socialization processes in many societies that naturally place man above woman in permanent hierarchical order (Salami, 2004). The consistent placement of masculine nouns and pronouns first confirms the belief that man is the superior being.

Evidence of use of Gendered English by Nigerian Female Journalists

The present study observes that the female journalists themselves use such words probably out of ignorance or lack of awareness of gender-fair writing. This is probably why they, especially the female journalists, do not see what is bad in being referred to or addressed as 'gentlemen of the press' and they themselves use the language that is not fair to their gender and does not recognise them as a separate species of human being. Ironically and unfortunately, the female journalists themselves are also using gendered English as the analysis of the study confirms, probably in line with the ethics of the profession or journalism writing style. Research has confirmed that the female journalists are in the minority and the unexpected human species in the career of journalism at the inception of the profession (Omenugha, 2007). This further confirms the notion that men are the owners of the world and everybody or everything therein including language and women, among others.

The following are some of the examples of gendered texts identified in *The Nigerian Observer* of March 31, 2012, in a feature article entitled "Counselling: Anger Triggers Fight or Flight Response", written by Oluchi Cindinma Madu (A female senior editor):

- E1. As long as the *businessman* works in a hurry, anger, hate, fear, jealousy, among others, *he* will not be at *his* best.
- E2. It is *man's* ignorance and superstition that keeps *him* from working with this vital force that lies within the glands.
- E3. *Man* must learn to live in harmony with the forces within *himself*.

- E4. *Man* meets *man* in business. They still fight and flee.
- E5. Animals seem to live in harmony than *men* and nations.
- E6. We must get away from the destructive forces of the “fight or flight” evolvement. We cannot build the human system and consciousness unless we learn to stop inhibiting. Our natural forces sickness is but an inhibition of the natural forces of *man*.
- E7. There will be no sickness, when *man* finds mental and physical freedom. Anger affects our mental capabilities. It also causes us to lose our sense of humour and to alienate people.

The above-listed seven (7) gendered texts are identified in one feature article written by a female journalist, Oluchi Madu, a Senior Editor in *The Nigerian Observer*. In E1 to E5 and E7, there are uses of masculine nouns (man and men) and pronouns (he, his, him and himself) as generic terms to refer to people of both feminine and masculine genders. E6 clears the possibility of confusion or ambiguity about the referent(s) of the masculine nouns (man and men) and pronouns (he, his, him and himself) with the use of ‘we’. The use of ‘we’ (a collective pronoun) means that the writer, a female, who must grammatically and normally be a woman with proforms/pronouns such as ‘she’, ‘her’, ‘herself’ confirms beyond doubt that this writer believes and agrees that she and other members of her gender are inclusive in ‘man’, ‘men’, ‘he’, ‘him’, ‘his’, and ‘himself’.

This is a confirmation that the women journalists also write like their men colleagues, most likely as a result of lack of gender awareness or probably to maintain status quo of the traditional communication style of the Nigerian press, not minding their being subjected into a state of invisibility as a result of language use which favours only the male gender. The fact that the user of these gendered expressions is a senior editor and a female journalist confirms that female journalists also use gendered English and probably do not see anything wrong in its use due to the peculiar manner of communication in the Nigerian press and ignorance about the global awareness of gender-fair writing.

CONCLUSION

It seems as if using language in this manner is just part of the communication style of the Nigerian press or elements of journalistic styles and techniques or they are probably preferred and used by the female journalists who seem not to see anything wrong or unfair in referring to themselves as *newsmen*, *pressmen* and *gentlemen of the press* due to lack of awareness about the 21st century global trend of gender-neutral writing. One is therefore justified to conclude that some of the ‘*newsmen*’, and ‘*pressmen*’ used in the identified gendered expressions in the newspapers studied were used by female journalists judging by the extent of usage of gendered expressions by a female journalist, who is even a senior editor. This is why the present study believes so much that gender awareness creation continuously and continually by the feminist linguists among the Nigerian journalists would go a long way to sensitise the Nigerian journalists to get adapted to using the English language that is not offensive in terms of gender in their writings henceforth.

In conclusion, in order to ensure the desired change and enhance non-sexist writing in our society, the media practitioners as agents of change and important tools of communication, need training and capacity building in gender awareness, especially, in gender-fair writing. 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 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. This, we hope, will contribute meaningfully to acquisition and enhancement of English literacy in Nigeria.

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