SEXISM IN SOME OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUITY

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Abstract
The present study examines the lexical and grammatical forms of sexism in some official documents such as the national dailies, legal reports and the Nigeria constitution with a view to highlighting alternative usages that would create awareness for gender sensitivity in language use especially in Nigeria where such awareness is at its embryonic stage. Social constructivism and cohesion were adopted as the theoretical frameworks for the study in order to argue that gender category is a social construction and textual representations are the most efficient ways of sustaining such gender constructions using linguistic features that have become commonsense discourse markers. A qualitative method of data collection was employed; the focus being to identify the linguistic features, especially reference items that track certain antecedents representing important social/political positions in Nigeria, in order to determine whether they are sexist and discriminatory against any of the genders, especially the female. It was discovered that the three categories of Nigerian official documents studied are replete with sexist words and expressions that predominantly relegate the female gender to the background as non-contributors in the ideology-making process in Nigeria. Generic he/man and androcentric expressions observed in the documents studied seem to make women invisible in textual representation in Nigerian national dailies and the constitution. Moreso, the male-as-norm system of address used for both genders in legal reports studied undermines the robust representation of the female gender in the legal profession where a number of women

had attained the highest echelon of office. The study recommends the use of epicene and gender-neutral terminologies to promote gender equity.

Keywords: Epicene expressions, sexism, official documents, gender equity.

1.0 Introduction

Sexism in language is one of the concerns of feminists ho are concerned with whether languages are inherently sexist or that language users are actually the ones that use sexist language. Whichever way one looks at it, sexism seems to be engrained in the language people speak all over the world and the English language, being one of the most popular languages, in the world, is not an exception. Some English words show the lower social status of women by using language that expresses bias in favour of the male gender and thus, treat the other female gender in a discriminatory manner. A cursory observation shows that gender inequality manifests greatly in official documents in Nigeria. For instance, the generic use of male terms to refer to both men and women creates confusion as to whether some groups are excluded and this has profound effects.

Cortese (2004) stated that 'sexism is any attitude, behaviour, institutional arrangement, or policy that favours one gender over another' Guimei (2010) adds that languages is far from merely reflecting the nature of society; it serves as a primary means of constructing and maintaining that society. Its existence and development are closely linked with the social attitudes of human beings and to a great extent, are affected by their social views and values. Goffman (1979) on the other hand, developed a framework for different categories on how women in advertisement are portrayed, which emphasized the submissive, objectified and sexist way women often are depicted. Sunderland (1994) emphasises that the issue of gender and language has continued to manifest in a cross- disciplinary way, such that it is becoming increasingly difficult for authors to be gender blind. Lafky et al., (1996) and

Lindner (2004) suggested that the way women are depicted in the society affects how women's roles in the society are perceived and how a woman should act and behave. Sunderland (2000) pointed out that one of the latest attempts at redefining and restructuring language is that of de-sexing or degendering languages.

Furthermore, the African society is said to be androcentric; it is man- oriented and man-centered. This fuels all forms of gender discrimination through the use of language. Sexism in language use is a reflection of gender domination of men in social realities. However, there appears to be a gap in the study of sexism as it relates to national dailies, legal reports and the Nigerian constitution. The objective of this paper is to determine the (linguistic) lexical and grammatical forms of sexism; the various ways sexist language manifests in official documents; the implication of sexism on gender equity in the Nigerian society and to suggest alternative usages for the identified sexist expressions. This study will also highlight on linguistic items of which a text is composed in a sequence on the basis of the grammatical rules of languages.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

Sexism is defined in this study as a prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. Sexism can affect anyone, but it primarily affects women and girls. Wilson (1997) posits that sexism is a form of expectations of women's appearance, actions, skills, emotions, and proper place in society. A sexist action is therefore, one which is predicted on an assumption of a difference between men and women which is biologically justified and which is harmful to the peaceful and sustainable development and co-existence in the society. Graddol and Swan (1989) see sexism as any discrimination against women or men because of their sex made up on irrelevant grounds. Matsumoto (2001) posits that sexism is linked to stereotypes and gender roles which have been assigned to members of a linguistic community. Based on this argument, the sex or gender of an individual determines acceptable

linguistic role that they are expected to play within their linguistic community and beyond.

In addition, the ideology behind the linguistic phenomena of sexism is that male gender is superior. Sexist language is considered to be any language that is supposed to include all people, but intentionally excludes a gender. This is especially common in situations that describe jobs: common assumptions include that all doctors are men, all nurses are women, all coaches are men, or teachers are women. Most people would agree that these assumptions are largely untrue today, though the language used often perpetuates the stereotypes. According to Atkinson (1993), Linguistic sexism is a wide range of verbal practices including not only how women are labeled and referred to, but also, how language strategies in mixed sex interaction may serve to silence or depreciate women as interactants. Ivy and Background (1994) added that if sexism refers to attitudes and or behaviours that denigrates one sex to the exaltation of the other, then, it follows that a sexist language would be any verbal communication that conveys those attitudes or behaviours.

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) typify the discrimination against women by quoting Graham analogy: If a woman is swept off a ship into the water, the cry is man overboard. If she is killed by a hit-and-run driver, the charge is manslaughter. If she is inquired on the job, the coverage is workmen's compensation. But if she arrives at the threshold marked Men only, she knows the admonition is not intended to bar animals or inanimate objects. It is meant for her.

Obviously, the stereotype for a woman must be everything bad while in the same circumstance, a man is always dignified. This shows the level at which language here demeaned women.

Another issue critical to this study is, language and gender. Language is far from merely reflecting the nature of the society; it serves as a primary means of constructing and maintaining the society. Its existence and development are closely linked with the social attitudes of human beings and to a great extent are affected

by their social views and values. Therefore, people of socio-cultural behaviour and attitudes as well as thoughts are reflected in their use of language. Historically and sociologically, the Nigerian society is man-oriented and man-centered.

Halliday (1978) describes language as a "social semiotic" that means that, language is constructed out of a system of arbitrary signs and symbols which can be encoded and decoded by its users as meaningful. These meaningful signs and symbols are realized as meaningful in a "text" or "discourse" which can be either spoken or written. Language is a means through which its users perform actions and fulfill their social purposes and obligations. Schumacher (1973) pointed out that man provides the primary resource and the key factor of all economic development comes out of his mind. Apart from planting, man uses language to instruct and evaluate his programmes. Language generally plays a very important role in national development because it helps to promote unity, understanding and a sense of belonging. On the contrary, it can equally help to promote discrimination and gender bias among others.

Furthermore, Gender in this context, refers primarily to the classification of nouns into a gender class which, in most languages, consist of three gender categories, masculine, feminine and neuter. It is typical for articles and adjectives to take different forms in order to "agree" with the gender of the noun (Britannica 1-15). For example, the agreement between "boy" and "his" is based on the relationship involving the male entities. It can be said that language such as English, Spanish, German, French etc. have grammatical gender.

According to Okoro (2005) gender "is used to describe those characteristics of men and women which are socially determined in contrast to those which are biologically determined. The differences are reflected in roles, responsibilities, access to resources, constraints, opportunities, needs, perceptions and views etc. held by both men and women. Gentry (2003) posit that gender "Is the symbolic role definition attributed to interpretation of the

nature, disposition and role of members of that sex". It differs from a classification based on sex in that there is little evidence to suggest that gender differences are only sociologically evitable, and that "inevitability" may diminish with time. Creedon (1993) also explains that gender "is a verb, the act of naming someone or something. "It is imposed and constructed by the society; therefore, it is learned and not innate. She further buttressed that "gendering" the gerund, is the process that begins the moment a baby takes its first breath of cultural pollution. Thus, masculinity and femininity can then be examined as "a set of social expectations, created and maintained in a patriarchal society." In support of the fore-going definitions of gender, CIRDDOC (2001) states that it is "a system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined, not biologically, but in the social, political and economic context.

Gender can equally be seen as the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male and female become the social categories of masculinity and feminity. It is pertinent to note that beyond biological differences, all other differences between men and women are socially constructed and have no logical relationship with their biological compositions. Therefore, gender is a social construct used in the classification of roles and relationships of men and women in a given cultural setting. It is anchored on sociological stereotypes which is different from biological make-up.

Another important aspect to consider in this paper is the classes of sexism. There are two types of sexism, modern sexism and traditional sexism also referred to as "hostile sexism". Traditional sexism is generally recognized as an open antipathy towards women who challenge male power (Sibley, Overall, Duckitt 2007). Traditional sexism is also characterized by the endorsement of traditional gender roles coupled with the ideas that a woman's role is subordinate to that of a man (Becker and Swim 2012). Traditional sexism started to decline in the United States during the latter part of the twentieth century (Cortina et al 2013).

With the decline of traditional sexism came the advent of an interesting phenomenon, Modern sexism. According to Swim et al. (Date) modern sexism is much more innocuous than traditional sexism. It is characterized by the use of benevolent sexist beliefs, gendered language, and dismissal of ongoing and continued gender inequality. However, modern sexism is based on the idea that discrimination based on gender is an outdated notion. This causes people to overlook modern sexist characteristics in their everyday interactions. Apart from the two major types of sexism recorded above, Unger and Sandra (1993) have classified sexism into individual, social, institutional and cultural levels.

Individual sexism entails negative cognitive biases against women in the form of in-group/ out group categorization; Social sexism refers to interactions between individuals that involve negative behaviour directed at targets as a result of their gender; Institutional sexism involves the differential impact of institutional structures on men and women (e.g. the strength of the relationship among educational experience and income differs depending on one's gender, such that men reap greater benefits); Cultural sexism encompasses social assumptions and beliefs about the value of gender categories (e.g. that "male" characteristics are better than "female" ones) as well as the general social practices that maintain gender discrimination (e.g. legislation).

At each of these four levels, the expression of sexism may differ in dimensions such as visibility, intent, degree of harm inflicted on recipient, ease of documentation and availability of remedial measures, such that sexism can be manifested in blatant, subtle or coven ways (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995). These four levels interact with each other, reflecting and reinforcing each other (Unger & Sandra, 1993).

Another factor to be considered is Sex and Gender. Social Scientists refer to Sex as the genetic and physical characteristics of persons that identify them as either male or female. Gender, in contrast is a concept referring to the culturally accepted behaviours and ways of relating to others expected by the two sexes. First, sex

refers to the biological differences between women and men; gender relate to the normative expectation attached to each sex. Gender is viewed, therefore, not as a trait inherent in an individual but as something that is socially constructed. Again, from this derived meaning, it shows that "gender" is learned, whereas "sex" is biologically given. Sexism has served through the ages because it embodies privileges that men are unwilling to surrender. These privileges are not only material but also sexual and psychological.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The framework of this study is based on Vygtosky's Theory of a "*Social Constructivism*" and "Cohesion" by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The generality of Vygtosky's Theory of Social Constructivism asserts that the world is socially constructed and that "reality" is always perceived through a "social" lens. This theory forms one of the possibilities of language reform. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Construction of social meanings, therefore, involves intersubjectivity among individuals. Social meanings and knowledge are shaped and evolve through negotiation within the communicating groups. Any personal meanings shaped through these experiences are affected by the intersubjectivity of the community to which the people belong.

Inter-subjectivity not only provides the grounds for communication but also supports people to extend their understanding of new information and activities among the group members (Rogoff, 1990: Vygotsky, 1987). Knowledge is derived from interactions between people and their environment and resides within culture. When the members of the community are aware of their intersubjective meanings, it is easier for them to understand new information and activities that arise in the community.

Gredler identified four general perspectives that inform us on how we could facilitate language use within the framework of social constructivism. And these aspects are:

- **Cognitive Tools Perspective**

Cognitive tools perspective focused on the learning of cognitive skills and strategies. Students engage in those social learning activities that involve hands on project-based methods and utilization of discipline-based cognitive tools (Gredler, 1997, Prawat & Folder, 1994).

- **Idea-Based Social Constructivsm**

Idea-based social constructivism sets education's priority on important concepts in the various disciplines e.g. part-whole relations in Mathematics, Photosynthesis in Science, and Point of View in Literature, (Gredler, 1997, P.59, Prawat, 1995; Prawat & Foldon, 1994). These "big ideas" expand learner vision and become important foundations for learners thinking and on construction of social meaning (Gredler, 1997).

Pragmatic or Emergent Approach

Social constructivities with this perspective assert that the implementation of social constructivism in class should be emergent as the need arises (Gredler, 1997). Its proponents hold that knowledge, meaning and understanding of the world can be addressed in the classroom from both the view of the entire class (Cobb, 1995; Gredler, 1997).

- **Transactional or Situated Cognitive Perspectives**

This perspective focuses on the relationship between the people and their environment. Humans are a part of the constructed environment (including social relationship); the environment is in turn one of the characteristics that constitutes the individual (Bredo, 1994; Gredler, 1997). When a mind operates, its owner is interacting with the environment. Therefore, if the environment and social relationship among group members change, the tasks of each individual also change (Bredo, 1994; Gredler, 1997).

This present study in addition to the theory of social constructivism is also anchored on the theory of cohesion by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Cohesion in text is the use of some resources of language to tie parts of texts so that each text moves as a semantic entity. According to these linguistics, cohesive resources are of two types: Grammatical and Lexical. Grammatical ties include reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction, while Lexical ties are of two broad categories. Reiteration and collocation. In this framework, as in Halliday and Hasan (1976), Lexical cohesion is achieved by the use of items of open class. Lexical cohesion is the type of cohesion created in discourse by the choice of lexical items. It is the cohesive effect achieved by selecting lexical items that are quite related in some ways to others that have previously been used. The present study focuses on the interaction among lexical cohesion, coherence and sexism in some official documents used in Nigeria.

Reference, as one type of cohesion, deals with a kind of semantic relation whereby information needed for the interpretation of one item is found elsewhere in a text. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), reference is classified into personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference. As to personal reference, we often use pronouns such as *she, he, it, his, her* and *their* to refer to earlier items. Demonstrative such as *this, that, those* and *these* are also used for referential purposes. Comparative reference sets up a relation of contrast, involving a conception of likeness and unlikeness phenomenon. It is expressed through general comparison and particular comparison. General comparison refers to any particular features (such as *so, as, equal, similar, different, otherwise, likewise*), whereas particular comparison means comparison that is in respect of quantity or quality (such as *more, fewer, additional, better, equally, good*).

- **Ellipsis and Substitution**

Another type of cohesive relation takes two different forms: substitution and ellipsis. There are three types of substitution –

nominal, verbal and clausal. In nominal substitution, the substitute items always function as head of a nominal group and can substitute only for an item which is itself head of a nominal group. The verbal substitute in English is "do". "Do" operates as the head of a verbal group, in the place where it is occupied by the lexical verb, and its position is always final in the group. One further type of substitution in which what is presupposed is not an element within the clause but an entire clause. The words used as substitutes are "so" and "not". Ellipses refers to "something left unsaid." (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 142). There is no implication that what is unsaid is not understood. On the contrary, "unsaid" implies "but understood nevertheless".

One of the aspects of reiteration and collocation is synonyms. This is the use of a word or phrase in a later sentence which has the same or similar meaning to a keyword in the first sentence. Anzaldua (1999) suggested that in societies in which people co-exist, (different genders, races, classes and so on), they become so entrenched in eachother's lives that it becomes difficult to differentiate between insiders or outsiders. Raising the notion of intersectionality, Anzaldua asks us to seriously consider the interconnectedness of people's life experiences. Intersectionality refers to the "overlapping" of social attributes such as *gender, race, class, ability, religion,* sexual orientation. This "structure" can be used to appreciate how systemic injustices and social inequalities occur on multifaceted levels.

These theories are related to this study because while social constructivism emphasizes on the knowledge derived from interactions between people and their environment which resides within culture, as well as the meanings, shaped through these experiences, the theory of cohesion examines how linguistic items of a text is used to tie or link parts of texts so that each text moves as a semantic entity. It also enables the reader and the writer to share an assumed world outside of the text. In other words, sexist language is a social construct, behaviour and attitude which resides within culture through written or verbal language. And this paper

basically is, concerned with identifying sexist languages in official documents.

4.0 Methodology

The qualitative approach was used for data collection. This includes reading of texts in the form of national dailies (newspapers), legal reports and the Nigerian constitution. These documents are: The Daily Sun, The Punch, The Vanguard, A Legal Report from Mbailinofu Customary Court and the Nigerian Constitution.

Data were collected randomly from official documents. Sexist words are extracted from these documents and these served as the data for the study.

5.0 Results and Data Analysis

Data were collected randomly from the selected newspapers, legal report and the Nigerian Constitution. Sexist words were extracted from these documents to answer the research questions formulated for the study. And these serve as the data for the study.

Excerpt 1

How do you intend to ensure that the government serves the people rather than just one **man**? (Daily Sun, Thursday, September 20, 2018, Page 42)

Reference which is a cohesive device has been employed in the excerpt above. The word 'man' is used to refer to all human beings and this is generic and consequently sexist. The speaker should have used a word that would embody all the people being referred. The right word to be used is 'person' and not 'man' as the male folk are represented with the word 'man'.

Again, what is obtained above could be likened to the use of the linguistic feature 'kinsmen' in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 2

Ekiti State Governor, Kayode Fayemi, declared before his **kinsmen** and visitors that he will review his predecessor, Ayodele

Fayose's government in the next 100 days (Daily Sun, Wednesday, October 17, 2018, Page 12).

The use of the lexical item **'kinsmen'** portrays all the referents as all male. In the legal report of the Anambra state high court, an article titled: 'To Die without A Will: What the Law (Probate) says About Property Disposal' has designated a female lawyer with the pronominal 'his' instead of 'her'-**His** Hon. Chinyere Ossy-Okoye (from legal Features and Points of Law, 83).

The above scenario points to the fact that women are hardly recognized. The Nigerian constitution also encourages sexism and inequality. The following excerpts of the fundamental rights buttress this point.

(i) Every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of **his life,** save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which **he** has been found guilty in Nigeria.

(ii) A person shall not be regarded as having been deprived of **his** life in contravention of this section, if **he** dies as a result of the use, to such extent and in such circumstances….

(iii) Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of **his** person, and accordingly…. (Nigerian Constitution-Fundamental Rights)

The following excerpts point to the fact that the Nigerian constitution contains so many sexiest lexical items.…by reason of **his** failure to comply with the order of a court or in order to secure the fulfillment of any obligation imposed upon **him** by law; for the purpose of bringing **him** before a court in execution of the order of a court or upon reasonable suspicion of **his** having committed a criminal offence; in the case of a person who ahs not attained the age of eighteen years for the purpose of **his** education or welfare….

The lexical items in bold type are sexiest words. Again, the use of such words equally signals reference which is a cohesive tool.

The repetition of such words reviewed also helped to ensure social cohesion of texts in the Nigerian constitution.

Aside, the use of generic terms, it seems that women hardly hold any important position in Nigeria. In fact, renowned positions are set aside for the male folk. Even when women are accorded that rare opportunity, certain terms are used to designate them especially in a derogatory manner. In fact, the use of such lexical items emphasizes the rare opportunity accorded to that person. The use of the word 'chairman' depicts the important and well respected position given to the commander of NNS Beecroft. Semantically, its use shows that: the post is joyfully held by a man; it is equally a well-respected position. The present researcher advises that the word 'chairperson' can be used in the context above in as much that post could be held by a woman tomorrow. When that happens, 'chairperson' will be used and not 'chairwoman'.

The constant use of the generic words above makes the language redundant and no room has been created for the female folk to occupy reputable positions in Nigeria. Almost strategic positions/posts are held by the male folk. Consider the excerpt:

Excerpt 3

Gunmen killed a police sergeant, Christian Nnamani, on Tuesday night at the popular Control Post Junction, opposite the Assumpta Catholic Cathedral in Owerri, the capital of Imo State (Daily Sun, Thursday, September 13, 2018, Page 7).

The word 'gunmen' is generic. It is possible that women also got involved in the crime, but because women's role in the society are deemed insignificant, they were excluded from the crime. Again, the newspaper headline captioned: **'Policeman, 4 others killed in Imo, Rivers, Anambra'** explicates the points mentioned above. The newspaper headline on page 19 depicts all persons in the use of the word 'man'. The lexical item 'man' is superimposed. The headline says:

Most floods are caused by **man**, not weather; deforestation, levee construction, erosion, and overgrazing all result in the loss of ecosystem Services-Paul Hawkenz (Daily Sun, Thursday, September 13, 2018, Page 19).

The use of the lexical item 'countrymen' shows that all the people in that country are male or alternatively, no woman exists in the speaker's country. It is evident that the speaker was not referring to the males only.…He intermittently pleaded with Nigerians to quickly rescue him from the mess, insisting that his family's survival now depends on the goodwill of his **countrymen.**

There are three pronouns used in the excerpt above and these are: he, him, and his. Pronoun is a cohesive device that has been used in the above to establish meaning. Without such a cohesive device, the sentence would have been boring, uninteresting and monotonous. Pronouns help in eliminate redundancy and monotony from spoken or written work. Although, the pronouns used are generic as they imply the presence of males, the use of such has helped to ensure coherence in the text.

The use of generic terms should be outrightly condemned and such terms do not encourage gender equity. In view of this, the United Kingdom commissioner to Nigeria, Paul Arkwright emphasized this view when he said:

It is important for men and boys especially, to recognize the role and power they have in making the world a fairer, more equitable place and therefore should speak up against unfair treatment based on girl gender (Daily Sun, Wednesday, October 17, 2018, Page 45).

Excerpt 4

The use of **'founding fathers'** in the excerpt below excludes the indispensable role of women in the society. The activities and concerted efforts of women are hardly recognized. The use of the grammatical unit explicates the fact that women have little or virtually nothing to offer in the society.

This sound vision was borne out of the governor's humble disposition, passion and uncommon zeal to build a peaceful, secure and prosperous Enugu State of the **founding fathers'** dreams (17). The expression was used in the discussion of the '**Equitable distribution of infrastructural projects in Enugu'** (Daily sun of Thursday, September 20, 2018).

Excerpt 5

In addition, the use of the personal pronouns he and him to refer to all gender is highly sexist. In analyzing the qualities of a good leader, the speaker has erroneously used such pronouns to refer to humanity. The excerpt reads:

One of the qualities of a good leader is to be a good team-leader. This feature catapults **him** to the top of the job **he** is seeking for. **He** has been a **man** that carries other executive members along (Daily sun of Thursday, September 20, 2018, page 16).

The study revealed that sexual bias in English goes beyond grammatical marking. For instance, professions involving power and strength such as president and chairman are more likely to be associated to men, because these satisfactory jobs are traditionally viewed as ones qualified only by males. But when indicating females' position, professions, etc, these words are created by adding a bound morpheme or by combining them with a word referring to female, a compound form of combination of a female title such as woman, female, lady or madam and the professional term comes into use, for example, woman lawyer and madam chairman. On the other hand, professions involving patience, service or lower social status are more likely to be associated with woman, for example, nurse, dressmaker and secretary. If on special occasions a male is involved, then the compound form of a masculine title male or man and a professional term is used for example, newsman, policeman, businessman, fireman, salesman, fisherman, etc. It makes clear that men monopolize the high status professions. Women can only do service work or low social status

work. Take the compound word "callboy" and "call girl" for example. The former refers to the waiter in hotel or the person who calls the player ready to stage in theatre; the latter means the prostitute summoned by phone. These words have manifested the discrimination of language towards female from the angle of word matching.

Using compound forms to specify professions between men and women is somehow a reflection of the reality that women are exclusive from professions with higher social status and to some extent the form of language usage in turn reinforces such a social phenomenon

Excerpts 6

The Hon. the Chief Judge has left no stone unturned in his quest moving the judiciary of Anambra State to an enviable position or call it height if you wish. …his Lordship, the Chief judge has invested so much in staff welfare, in training and capacity building. It is on record that Anambra State is among the few sates that are very well represented at the National Judicial Institute (NJI) organized seminars and conferences.

The excerpt above reveals the use of the masculine gender to depict the Chief Judge who is a woman. The speaker continued to say that:

… he has beefed-up our staff strength to be able to deal with the challenges of the ever-increasing responsibilities of the judiciary as the third arm of government.

The chief judge (a woman) is also addressed as: 'His Honour N.D. Ezeani ESQ Chief Registrar (High Court). Sexism indeed abound in the judiciary arm of the Nigerian Government. The idea of addressing a woman reveals that women are relegated to the background (From the Judiciary of Anambra State Magazine:6). From the same magazine, it was discovered in the list of Hon. Judges of Anambra State High Court of Justice, that the women among them are addressed like the male counterpart which deviates from the norm. Examples of such feminine names are:

Hon. Doris Ezeani, Esq. Chief Registrar
Hon. Chinyere Ossy Okoye, Deputy Registrar

The minutes of the meeting of association of customary court members of Anambra State (ACCOMASS) held on Friday the 31st May, 2019 at Mbalinofu Customary court, Amawbia harbours a lot of sexist words. For example:

The meeting was called to order at 11. 15am by the interim **chairman** and said the opening prayers and short address by the former **chairman**….

Sexist words were also found in captions like: **Chairman's Post Election Speech** Consider the use of sexist words in the excerpts from the minutes of the meeting:

The **chairman** informed the members that our courts are grouped administratively under those zones according to geographical location of the courts.

According to the **chairman**, monthly meetings of the association are rotated among the zones and hosting simultaneously. …after the chairman's speech in this direction, **Hon** (Mrs) Okani ESq objected to the rotation arrangement. This contention was put to vote by the **chairman.** Those in favour of centralizing our monthly meetings carried the day. The **chairman** executive meetings be stood at gain prompt. …the chairman while further congratulating members and the elected executives agreed that their monthly executives gave an insight …. The **chairman** announced with regrets but with total submission to the will of God the sudden demise of Hon. Alex Amuzie member 1 sitting at Achina Customary Court and a native of Abatete. …The **chairman** urged the members to attend (traditional marriage) and similarly stated that the sum of #500 is paid by members for social functions of the association and sum of #20,000 is given to the host.

Again, the language used in *State Proceedings* (CAP. 134) exclusively refers to the male gender as the only gender qualified to have the seat of the Governor. This discovery is exemplified below using the excerpts from the state law:

Excerpts 7

Notwithstanding the provisions of section 4 of the law, no action in tort shall be brought:

(a) Against the **Governor** of the state in **his** private capacity.
(b) Against the State by virtue of section4 of the law in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by any person while discharging or purporting to discharge any responsibilities of a judicial nature in **him** or any responsibilities which he has in connection with the execution of the judicial process.
(c) Against the state for tort committed of **his** duties unless such officer as been appointed directly or indirectly by the civil service commission of the state or receives **his** salary out of the consolidated fund of the state. (State Proceedings, 445)

The above excerpts show that women are excluded from matters of State Proceedings Law. The study reveals that governorship positions and other positions in the society are set aside for men only. This indeed has implication for gender equity and national development. The language used above excluded the female gender in matters of State Procedings Law.

Consider also the excerpts from the Nigerian constitution:

The Nigerian constitution in almost all its pages captured basically the roles of men as can be viewed from the following excerpts:

No person shall be qualified to apply for the grant of a certificate or naturalization, unless he satisfies the president that: (a) he is a person of full age and capacity; (b) he is a person of good character; (c) he has shown a clear intention of his desire to be domiciled in Nigeria; (d) he is, in the opinion of the Governor of the State where he is or he proposes to be resident, acceptable to the local community in which he is to live permanently …. (Chapter one; General Provisions, No. 33)

Every individual in Nigeria as is evident from the Nigerian constitution is considered male. The use of the underlined words above portrays the language of the Nigerian constitution as sexiest. Section 27 of the constitution is full of sexiest language:

He is a person who has made or is capable of making useful contribution to the advancement; progress and wellbeing of Nigeria; he has taken the oath of allegiance prescribed in the Seventh Schedule to this Constitution and he has, immediately preceding the date of his application ….

Another aspect of the law stipulates that:
Provided that nothing in this subsection shall prevent an action in tort being taken against any public officer in **his** own name for an alleged tort committed by **him** in the performance of **his** duties.

Public offices based on the- above injunctions are matters for men and not for the womenfolk. This could be attributed to the use of sexiest words in the afore-mentioned sentences. Sexist language exists in various forms. The forms are:

- singular masculine pronouns
- masculine use of genderless terms
- sexist suffixes
- unnecessary sex-marked qualifiers
- derogatory expressions
- gender-neutral language
- pseudo-masculine expressions

We shall now consider each of these in turns with emphasis on their occurrence in the newspapers, while also proffering alternatives to them. Singular Masculine Pronouns This is seen in the generic usage of singular masculine pronouns like he, his, him, etc. This could be avoided by using a gender neutral pronoun (also called the 'singular they') or better still, by pluralizing the noun referent, thus giving room for the use of a plural non-gender specific pronoun.

Excerpts 8
Fielding questions yesterday from **newsmen** after the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting presided over by President Muhammadu Buhari at the state House, Abuja, the minister noted

however, that the Federal Government had initiated reforms… (The Guardian, March 2021: 13).

The use of the word newsmen totally excluded the female ones even though they all participated in the questioning. This attitude does not promote gender equity and this has implications for the overall development of the nation. The above could also be seen on page 15 of the same newspaper:

CAN, through its **spokeman** Shina Ibiyemi, told the Guardian in Ilorin yesterday that some **armed men** in a branded Hilux van were spotted breaking the gates about 1. 00a.m yesterday.

The caption on page 17 of the Guardian newspaper is also not devoid of sexism: Fayemi pays condolence visit to family of deceased policewoman. The incessant use of the word 'chairman' is sexist and unacceptable.

…they suspended the resumed protest late on March 23 following intervention of the chairman. Calabar Branch chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Dr. Paul Ibiala, after his meeting with Governor Benedict Ayade on the matter…. (19)

The use of the word 'chairman' is sexiest in so far as it is also used to refer to female folk. The word 'chairperson' is preferable. Again, the cohesive tool 'his' which is pronominal is used to refer to the person and this enhances the cohesiveness of the text.

Violence toward women, including femicide, intimate partner violence (IPV), rape, and human trafficking, continues to impact women's health worldwide (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). Women across the world experience physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence often leading to long-term physical, mental and emotional health problems. Violence and abuse also make it difficult for women to pursue educational opportunities or to perform their jobs (Riger et al., 2000).

All of the passport renewal applicants spend months trying to renew expired passports. The only ones who get speedy attention are those that pay to the **middlemen** or directly to the…. (Daily Independent, Thursday March 25, 2019). Still on the above page, it

read that: *…Nigerian officials and their foreign partners who connive to make life unbearable for their **kinsmen** that they were employed to serve….*

The sexiest words 'middlemen' and 'kinsmen' used above are inappropriate in so far as the persons referred to involve both male and female.

6.0 Findings

Some official documents used in Nigeria are intertwined with sexiest words and expressions. Such documents have been largely male-dominated in terms of lexical choices, employment and re presentational patterns. It was Okunna who buttressed this fact when she opined that 'Nigerian women have been seen as marginalized as news subjects and in the paucity of images emanating from the media'.

The data collected in this study revealed the stoic representation of Nigerian women within narrow repertoires of images as wives and appendages to the men in the society. This was duly portrayed by the incessant use of the sexiest word 'chairman' which was predominantly used to showcase the role of men. The word 'chairman' received the most wide coverage in the official documents. Arguably, this seems to suggest that the male folks take care of the important and serious affairs of the state.

Words like chairman, newsman, policemen, manhood, mankind are sexiest. It was found out that the one that was predominantly used is 'chairman' which refers to both men and women. The sexiest words used in official documents portray women as being excluded and marginalized in the Nigerian society. Even some of the pictures painted of the women by the media still leaves women at the margin and this is worrisome. The women are viewed as mere appendages that seem to perform the typecast role of looking after children.

It was discovered that although words such as pronouns and reference used in some official documents are sexist, they however, serve as cohesive tools to the text where they are used.

Such words have helped to provide coherence in the texts. From the study conducted, we can succinctly say that sexist language exists in various forms such as: singular masculine pronouns, masculine use of genderless terms, sexist suffixes, unnecessary sex-marked qualifiers, derogatory expressions, gender-neutral language, and pseudo-masculine expressions, However, such linguistic forms have the negative effects of making women disappear in mental representations. Although the use of gender-fair linguistic expressions can effectively prevent these negative consequences and promote gender equality.

The present research calls for gender equity and optimum representation of the Nigerian women. Female journalists are encouraged to ensure that non-sexiest words and expressions are used in official documents especially, the Nigerian print media, gazettes, magazines and the Nigerian constitution. It was Aboyomi who opined that 'women journalists have been blamed for failing to use the limited resources at their disposal to change their status quo and image (49).

7.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that non-sexist words should be encouraged in official writings. The role of women should not be disregarded and this will help to boost their image in the society and at the same time enhance equity. Policy makers, journalists, politicians and users of the English language generally should be duly informed of the need to use non-sexist words in their official correspondences. A close look at some cultural gender ideologies in Nigeria may reveal the relationship they share with the representational pattern of women in some official documents in Nigeria. To this end, it is also recommended that the federal government of Nigeria should call for a review of the Nigerian constitution so as to capture the needs of the present society. Again, there is need to have legal regulations for controlling sexist language in Nigeria. Furthermore, government policies can also help in putting an end to the use of sexist words. The government

should enact laws that are in favour of the female gender and such should be entrenched in the Nigerian constitution. Finally, the present researcher recommends that further studies could be done in the area of how women marginalize their fellow women in the Nigerian society.

8.0 Conclusion

Language users need to be familiar with gender-neutral or gender-sensitive language expressions as they are inclusive of both men and women in general. However, when the sex of the person is informative or necessary, it is not sexist, as examples provided earlier serve to illustrate. Being gender-sensitive is part of verbal hygiene. It is not an exclusively man's world we live in now. Women rub shoulders with men in almost every occupation men perform, therefore gender awareness in language use has become necessary. This study has contributed to the study of gender and has involved a conscious examination of sexiest words and expressions that relegate the female gender.

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