

Gender Bias among Tiv Language Speakers

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Abstract

Gender being a product of the society influences the use of language among the speakers of Tiv language, thereby propagating and maintaining discrimination or status quo bias against women in the Tiv land. Hence, the paper set out to examine the differences in language use among the speakers of Tiv language based on masculinity and femininity. Primary data were collected for the study through oral interviews and using the researchers' introspective knowledge of the language. The paper analysed the collected data by adopting the Baron's Decision Making Model which explains some rationale behind decisions taken without considering the role of emotions in the course of taking such decisions. The paper observed that Tiv language discriminates against women by employing sexist lexical categories, address terms based on paternal background, making derogatory linguistic expressions against women and condemning the use of taboo words among women but encouraging the use among men. Since the gender bias against women in Tiv land has been institutionalised by Tiv language, the paper recommends that the language should be used as a tool to reposition the notion of gender among its speakers.

Keywords: Gender, Language, Sex and Tiv

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I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the tool used by human beings to communicate or express thoughts, ideas and emotions. Furthermore, language refers to the set of rules shared by the individuals who are communicating, which allows them to exchange thoughts, ideas and emotions. Hence, it is not an overemphasis to say that language and society are inseparable because language is used in the society, the society comes into existence through language and language is used in carrying out various functions in the society. Gender which is categorised into masculine, feminine and neuter determines how language is used to some extent. Masculine denotes being a male, feminine denotes being a female and neuter denotes inanimate objects; which are neither male nor female. Historically, the concepts of 'sex' and 'gender' have been used interchangeably, but their uses are becoming increasingly distinct, and it is important to understand the differences between the two. 'Sex' refers to the biological differences between males and females, such as the genitalia and genetic differences. 'Gender' is more difficult to define, but it can be defined as the roles or qualities of a male or female in the society (Wahyuningsih, 2018).

A community may be accused of treating the feminine gender as inferior to the masculine one linguistically when certain words or utterances are exclusively used by men, for instance; words denoting power used by men in Tiv land are interpreted as a sign of bravery but when the same words are used by women, they are considered as a mark of arrogance. Hence, women are expected to be appealing in speech no matter the circumstances. However, this expectation is not always achieved especially among women in positions of authority. Whenever a man uses Tiv language in the manner of women by being appealing and euphemistic, members of the community may look down on him and may call him a woman whereas if a woman uses the language in the manner of men by being authoritative and open in public, she may be labeled an arrogant woman. Therefore, we could say that the Tiv community considers any woman that uses language in the manner of men to be contesting the traditionally established superiority of masculinity over femininity.

This variation in the use of language among men and women has been the driving force among other factors behind gender inequality in Tiv land and the society at large. Gender studies aim at addressing the problem of gender inequality which places men at the centre of affairs at the expense of women in the society. However, actualising the dream of gender equality is bedeviled by some problems caused by the utterances and

perceptions by both men and women in the society. In our modern African society, we do say that women are equal to men, however, this is a phantom because women are not treated equally as men in reality. Women are denied of freedom of speech by our cultures, for example; Tiv women do not make any contribution to decisions taken by the kinsmen no matter how aged they are since no woman is the head of a family nor made a traditional ruler in Tiv land. Hence this paper aims at examining gender bias and discrimination against females among Tiv language speakers.

The primary source of data collection was used for this paper by granting structured interviews to 30 native speakers of Tiv who are between the age of 40 and 60; and among the respondents were 15 males and 15 females respectively from Kwande, Gboko, Gwer-East Local Government areas of Benue State. Each of the respondents was asked four predetermined questions on Gender Bias among Tiv Language Speakers which required true or false as the response, and they answered respectively. The study could not cover the entire Tiv nation due to some constraints; however, the selected local government areas for the data collection represent the descendants of Ipusu and Ichongu (Sons of Tiv). The researchers also made use of their introspective knowledge of Tiv Language to collect data for the paper and adopted the Baron's (2008) Decision Making Model for analysing the data.

II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations (2000) submit that the concept of gender was used in the 1970s to describe those characteristics of men and women which are socially determined, in contrast to those which are biologically determined. This assertion justifies why in nearly all societies, men and women, boys and girls, have a different status and play different roles. Men and women behave and dress differently, and have different attitudes, interests and different leisure activities. Ukande (2018) asserts that gender refers to the societal arrangement determining people's belief, values, relative power and influence based on the state of being male or female. He further states that gender is different from sex because it is an acquired identity while sex is a genetic identity. Schilling as cited in Wahyuningsih (2018) says that gender does not simply refer to a biological or physiological sex. Schilling highlights that gender denotes matters such as social and economic roles and relations, especially power relations. Obuasi (2019) defines a sexist language as that which has feminine and masculine referents showing sexism for exclusion.

The concept 'Tiv' refers to both the people and the language. Tiv is one of the minority ethnic groups that occupy part of the rolling Savannah region, popularly referred to as the Middle Belt of Nigeria (Yina, 2004). Malherbe and Abraham as cited in Dooga (2011) assert that Tiv belongs to the Bantu family of languages. According to National Population Commission (2006) as cited in Aderogba (2012), Benue has a total population of four million, two hundred and nineteen thousand, two hundred and forty- four (4,219,244). Out of the total population of Benue State, the National Bureau of Statistics (2012), submits that the Tiv people have a population of two million, nine hundred and forty-five thousand, nine hundred and forty-six (2,945,946). Damkor (2018) asserts that Tiv are people who today occupy more than half of the area and population of Benue State and are also indigenes of Nasarawa and Taraba states.

Empirical Review

Akhter (2004) posits that women always use a word with exaggerated significance, for example; a gorgeous dress, a romantic car, a lovely wife, an adorable bag, while men use plain words as in, a good dress, a good car, and a nice bag. Women use more interjections in speech than men do, for instance, my goodness! Oh God! , hurray! ,waoh! among others. He also submits that men use a lot of obscene words in public, for example, penis, prostitute, bullshit, testes et cetera unlike women. Going by the African culture, these words are supposed to be used more frequently by men than women. Women are not supposed to use the obscene words because they are meant to be discreet in their use of language, thereby denying them of freedom of speech.

Obuasi (2019) asserts that linguistic differences are found in the speeches of female and male especially in the aspect of pitch. Obuasi further asserts that a language is sexist when it supports, maintains and propagates social inequality through its vocabulary. Goendouzi (2005) submits that there is no gain in suggesting that some specific discourse features are natural markers of power or gender, and that there is no need either suggesting that gender is identified in adult studies of speech.

According to Obuasi (2019), a lot of languages in the world have the features of assigning masculinity and femininity to nouns which serve as objects and referents making them conspicuously sexist in nature. However, it will be hyperbolic to say that any of the world languages is completely sexist. He cites the following examples in English, French, German, Hausa and Igbo language: *woman-man* for English, *femme-home* for French. *Frau-mann* for German, *mata-miji* for Hausa, *nwanyi-nwoke* for Igbo; these forms all referring to the concept of *kwase and nomsoor* 'woman and man' in Tiv.

Anyanwu and Ugo - Ochulo(2017) state that Igbo society accommodates or encourages the use of discriminatory expressions against women, for example; *ihu-ukwu-kooku* 'fanta and coke' used in describing a

woman who bleaches her face but her legs are perceived to be dark-coloured like coke; *alike* 'lizard' used to describing a skinny igbo woman, *nkeiruka* 'the front is bigger' used in describing a woman who has very big breasts in the igbo land, *akpa akpu* 'a bag of cassava' used to portray that a woman is too fat in Igbo land, *nwanyi ubunu okuko* 'a woman's brain is like that of a fowl' portraying that the brain of women is just like that of a fowl, and thus she is perceived to be unintelligent unlike the male category. *Okwu nwaanyi* 'a woman's talk' depicting a woman's contribution in a discourse as senseless and therefore not needing any recognition.

Udemmadu (2019) states that the language used by men varies from the one used by women which confirms Paltridge (2002) view that there is women's language. Paltridge claims that there is women's language which is different from men's language, and this language is characterised by the use of overly political forms, the use of question tag, rising intonation in declaratives, the avoidance of expletive, a gender use of diminutive and euphemism, the use of more hedges and mitigating devices, some indirectness and the use of particular lexical items, for example; adorable, charming, sweet, I think et cetera. Karisson (2007) confirms Paltridge claim by saying women use intensifiers such as so, such; hedges such as I think, you know, I really; tag questions such as you didn't – did you? Minimal responses such as yeah, mhm, right, polite language such as please, formal language such as I cannot whereas men frequently use taboo words such as shit, God damn it ! and also, issue commands such as give me some paper, hand me the Sport Magazine by the sofa!

Udemmadu (2019) also states that men's language could be regarded as neutral language featuring lexical categories such as cool, great, terrific among others. He says that Igbo language discriminates against women due to the semantic implications of some expressions in the language. The Igbo proverbs demean women, for example ; *nkita nwaanyi zuru na-ata akwa* 'a dog trained by a woman eats eggs' *nwoke luchaa ogu nwaanyi enwere akuko* 'when a man finishes the battle, a women will tell the story' among other examples. These proverbs portray women as careless and redundant human beings respectively. Salihu (2014) submits that man's language in the Hausa society is different from that of women and the roles of men and women in the society are highly influenced and controlled by the Islamic religious background. This difference in gender is reflected through the personal name , for example; Muhammad 'male'- Aisha 'female'; professional title, e.g. kwaminisha 'male commissioner'- kwaminishiya 'female commissioner', sakatare 'male secretary'- sakatariya 'female secretary' among others.

Dong(2014) asserts that men usually speak eloquently in all kinds of competitive topics like football while women's topics are usually about family life, individuals and emotions. He further states that women always express their feelings in dialogues while men are inclined to hide their feelings.

Theoretical Review

The Variationist Theory by William Labov (1971) analyses the linguistic variation and change based on social context, (Agbedo, 2018). He asserts that individuals may be grouped into various social categories by virtue of frequency of occurrence of particular variable features in their speech as constrained by different social contexts. This implies that the way a language is spoken differs across individuals as well as across situations encountered by the same individual. This theory has been able to account for the variation in utterances irrespective of gender but could not take care of differences in speech between men and women.

The Speech Act Theory by J L Austin(1962) discusses meaning at the contextual level,(Agbedo, 2018). According to Austin, whenever one makes an utterance, one is performing three simultaneous acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Alagh (2018) states that locutionary act refers to the actual words uttered by the speaker; illocutionary act is concerned with the speaker's intention of making the utterance and perlocutionary act refers to the reaction of the hearer to what is said. This theory analyses a language from the perspective of mere production of utterance, the speaker's intention of making the utterance and the reaction of the hearer to what is said. However, it could not account for the difference in utterances based on gender.

Baron's (2008) Decision Making Model explains some rationale behind decisions taken without considering the role of emotions in the course of taking such decisions. Baron asserts that emotions result in status quo bias which sustains an eternal yesterday. Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) assert that status quo bias is a situation where people maintain view points and are totally opposed to any change. While Sherfin(2008) differs slightly from the Samuelson and Zeckhauser's view by asserting that status quo bias is a state where people permit minimal change. Baron (2008) claims that the descriptive, prescriptive and normative are the approaches in decision making. The descriptive approach mainly sustains the status quo bias since it deals with how people actually take decisions. The prescriptive approach holds that decisions are taken based on how people ought to think, that is to say, it involves rational thinking without any influence from societal values. The normative approach focuses on setting a standard for achieving decision making, and it provides the clue for understanding why there is gender inequality in the society. This theory accounts for the variation in utterances among men and women as occasioned by the society, hence it is suitable for the study.

Theoretical Framework

This paper hinges on the Baron's (2008) Decision Making Model which explains some rationale behind decisions taken without considering the role of emotions in the course of taking such decisions. According to Baron (2008), emotions result in status quo bias which sustains an eternal yesterday. Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) assert that status quo bias is a situation where people maintain view points and are totally opposed to any change. While Sherfin(2008) differs slightly from the Samuelson and Zeckhauser's view by asserting that status quo bias is a state where people permit minimal change. Baron (2008) claims that the descriptive, prescriptive and normative are the approaches in decision making. The descriptive approach mainly sustains the status quo bias since it deals with how people actually take decisions. The worldview of an individual is culture-dependent and it determines to a great degree, the individual's perceptions and thinking. This situation is found in the Tiv nation since the Tiv worldview is hinged on perceptions that men are strong, superior, intelligent, special, unique, powerful and functional whereas women are rated as people without the aforementioned qualities right from birth and made to know and accept it.

The prescriptive approach holds that decisions are taken based on how people ought to think, that is to say, it involves rational thinking without any influence from societal values and demands. Thus, decisions are taken based on open-minded reasoning without reference to gender, sex or culture.

The normative approach focuses on setting a standard for achieving decision making, and it provides the clue for understanding why there is gender inequality in the society. This model is suitable for the paper since it takes care of worldview and gender bias which have had a great influence on the structure and use of Tiv language.

6. Data Presentation and Analysis

(i) Sexist Lexical Categories

Male	Female
Nomsoor 'man'	Kwase 'woman'
Orshoja 'soldier'	Kwaseshoja 'female soldier'
Ortwer 'doctor'	Kwasetwer 'female doctor'
Orya 'landlord'	kwaseya 'housewife'
Ornyagh 'rich man'	Kwasenyagh 'rich woman'
Icanor 'poor man'	Icanwase 'poor woman'
Orhemmen 'leader'	kwasehemmen 'female leader'

Analysis

The above data confirm Baron's (2008) claim that status quo bias sustains an eternal yesterday by portraying that nominal categories in Tiv reflect gender in order to differentiate males from females in terms of agentive nouns. The data show that any agentive noun referring to male features *or* while anyone referring to female features '*kwase*'. Going by the gender bias associated with agentive marker in Tiv, if a female soldier is addressed as 'orshoja', she feels happy for being rated as a strong, smart and competent soldier but if a male soldier is addressed as 'kwaseshoja', he feels bad for being underrated and rated as a weak soldier. This gender bias status quo is applicable to all the agentive nouns in Tiv, thus confirming the claim by Obuasi (2019) that a sexist language supports, maintains and propagates social inequality through its vocabulary.

(ii) Terms of Address based on Paternal Background

Male	Female
Damkor 'Son to Damkor'	Wan-Damkor 'Daughter to Damkor'
Bur 'Son to Bur'	Wan-Bur 'Daughter to Bur'
Koko 'Son to Koko'	Wan-Koko 'Daughter to Koko'
Akume 'Son to Akume'	Wan-Akume 'Daughter to Akume'
Iorbee 'Son to Iorbee'	Wan-Iorbee 'Daughter to Iorbee'
Igbe 'Son to Igbe'	Wan-Igbe 'Daughter to Igbe'
Achi 'Son to Achi'	Wan-Achi 'Daughter to Achi'

Analysis

Addressing a man (either married or single) by the same name as his father as a mark of honour such as Damkor referring to the father and the son respectively by members of the society, but not addressing a female child as such, rather addressing her as Wan-Damkor 'Damkor's child' when she gets married as a mark of honour by her in-laws and even others reflects the difference in address terms of Tiv based on gender as established by the culture of the people. Hence, this situation proves Baron's (2008) claim that the worldview of an individual is culture-dependent and it determines to a great degree, the individual's perception and thinking.

The analysis portrays that actualising the dream of gender equality is bedeviled by some problems caused by the utterances and perceptions in the society, and also attests to Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) assertion that status quo bias is a situation where people maintain view points and are totally opposed to change.

(iii) Use of Taboo or Abusive Words in Public

Male	Female
Tswar fitii 'tiny anus hole'	Gestures + fitii 'tiny hole'
Tswar feng 'large anus hole'	Gestures + feng
U kehe ijua 'you have a big penis'	U kehe liev ki ken nyer 'You have a big private organ'
U kehe kyugh 'you have a big vagina'	U kehe liev ki ken nyer 'You have a big private organ'
U ngu a ambi ken tswar 'You have faeces in your anus'	U ngu a ambi ken tyô 'You have faeces in your anus'
Aniwa tswar 'dog + small anus'	Aniwa + gestures 'small dog'
U huma tswar 'you have a smelly anus'	U huma tyô 'you have a smelly anus'

Analysis

Permitting the use of taboo words among male Tiv speakers in public but frowning at women when they use the same words in the public domain confirms Baron's (2008) claim that the descriptive approach of the Decision Making Model sustains the status quo bias by dealing with how people actually take decisions. The above data show that men use abusive or taboo words, particularly words associated with the human anatomy such as 'tswar', 'kyugh', et cetera without any iota of fear in public, while women, on the other hand, try to be decent in their use of Tiv language when talking and as such, employ euphemism and gestures to avoid mentioning the taboo words in public. The fact that women are denied of freedom of speech to some extent in Tiv land confirms Olojede (2009) claims that women are denied of their rights as citizens of Nigeria and are given devalued status in the society.

(iv) Discriminatory Linguistic Expressions against Women

Linguistic Expression	Contextual Meaning
Kwase lun shin kichin 'A woman stays in the kitchen'	This implies that a woman has nothing to contribute to a discussion that men are doing.
Kwase hemen ya ga 'A woman does not head a house'.	A woman is described as being inferior, and hence cannot be the head of any family irrespective of her age and roles.
Mba veren wankwase sha tse ga 'You do not leave your compound under the care of a daughter when dying'.	It implies that a female child is not relevant to her father.
Kasev mba cirin zwa ga 'Women do not close their mouth'	Women are described to be talkative so cannot keep any secret.
Kwagh kum kwase ga 'Nothing satisfies a woman'.	It portrays a woman as an insatiable human being.
Kwase ka bo iyô 'A woman is a bad snake'.	It portrays a woman as a dangerous human being or betrayer.
Kwase te hwande a nomsoor ga 'A woman does not bet with a man'	It portrays that a woman is inferior to man and should be submissive to him in all situations.

Analysis

The data above is analysed based on Baron's (2008) claim that the worldview of an individual is culture-dependent and it determines to a great degree, the individual's perception and thinking. The data show the discrimination against women; for example, *Kwase lun shin kichin* portrays that a woman is not intelligent neither sensible, *Kwase hemen ya ga* portrays that a woman is inferior and lacks the ability to pilot the affairs of any family, *Mba veren wan kwase sha tse ga* implies that a female child is not important to her father, *Kasev mba cirin zwa ga* describes women as gossips, *Kwagh kum kwase ga* describes a woman as an insatiable and materialistic human being, *Kwase ka bo iyô* portrays that a woman is dangerous and so, should not be trusted *Kwase te hwande a nomsoor ga* implies that a woman is inferior and should be submissive to man in all situations. These derogatory expressions among others reduce women to second-class human beings and promote men to first-class citizens, thereby submitting the women to dehumanisation in Tiv land.

III. CONCLUSION

Language is the pendulum on which human activities revolve. Hence removing language from the society, man will become useless and there will no longer be anything called society. The paper acknowledges the fact the worldview and perception of the people in the society influence the way they use language, and hence determine the structure of the language in use. Tiv language is sexist just as other African languages to the extent of discriminating against women. The findings of the study show that Tiv language propagates, promotes and maintains gender inequality to the detriment of women by describing women as gossips, inferior, materialistic, unintelligent, senseless and dangerous human beings. The study discovers that language is the tool for institutionalising gender inequality among Tiv speakers, therefore, recommends that same tool (language) should be used to solve the problem of gender inequality through reshaping the worldview and perception of Tiv speakers about gender and use of the language.

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