The Language of Intimidation on Womanhood and its Effects

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ABSTRACT

Language is the medium through which we conduct almost all relationships, public and private; it bears the precise imprint of our cultural attributes and values. When it comes to womanhood, the message is usually an intimidating one. Linguists have to this effect inferred that words referring to womanhood undergo the process of pejoration more often than those referring to man. This study, therefore, is an attempt to examine how this language is habitually reinforced to uphold intimidation and violence against womanhood. The study reveals that language of intimidation on womanhood is derived from culture and history and is an act of abuse, oppression, violence and criminality, and an instrument of social constraint against womanhood, thereby destroying or making nonsense of woman's education and mentality. A descriptive survey design was used and the theories of Translation Relevance and Social Constructionism were employed considering the theme of the work. Findings have it that the language of intimidation on womanhood is violent, injustice, destruction and derogatory on women. It also has it that language is denied women in order to control and prevent their resistance to man thereby suppressing the woman's individuality and making them not only inferior but less human with a view to making them susceptible to abuse. In line with the findings, the study recommends among others; frequent discussion on refining language to be bias-free, frequent focus on words findings, and making constant review on attitudinal examination and language assumption to chide betrayal.

Keywords: Language, Womanhood, Intimidation

Introduction

In every society, there is a mindset regarding attitudes, attributes, roles and position occupied by men and women. Despite the fact that language is central to the social field in interaction, in formulating and administering social policy, in carrying out research, in classroom and supervisory teaching, the profession as a whole has not reflected a great deal on features of language and language use. The issue raised around language and intimation therefore provides a crucial opportunity for thinking about language more explicitly.

From the onset, there have been incidents of marked devaluation of women in the society. Language is the medium through which we conduct almost all relationships, public and private; it bears the precise imprint of our cultural attributes. When it comes to woman, the message is often depressing because linguists have long observed that words undergo the process of pejoration more often than those referring to men. Language is used to generally render the woman's role and essence of living insignificant in the traditional African Society (Austen Peters 1994:33). She is considered inferior to her male counterpart.

Intimidating languages aim at the woman to fail, portrays her demeaned, abused, discriminates her and sends womanhood to second class objects. Language of intimidation is as devastating as psychological oppression and physical/sexual abuse. Its aim is to keep the woman within the society's norm of what a woman is supposed to look and act like. This is what Acholonu (1996:16), implies when she observed that the African man believe in his superiority which results in bloated ego that invariably tends to render him less appreciative of woman's worth outside childbirth and domestic chores.

This paper highlights language of intimidation on womanhood and adds to the voices already speaking that language of intimidation on womanhood is an act of violence and terrorism and has eroded woman of their self-esteem and creativity. So, many questions bothering on the features responsible for these acts of violence on womanhood, its effects and what should be done to give women a sense of value need to be answered.

Literature Review

Language

Language has been defined from different perspectives by several scholars because it is the entire essence of human existence. Language is a system of linguistic communication which subsumes a number of mutually intelligible varieties. It is a repository of a people's history and culture, and has many varieties which is regionally, occupationally or socially defined Haliday (1964), language is used in all human related transactions. It is actually a medium through which humans communicate and interact with each other by habitual symbols or other types or forms of semiotic signs.

Emenanjo (2006:1), defines language as any system employed in giving, transmitting, receiving, sharing, exchanging or hiding information. It can be made up of sounds, signals, signs, symbols, postures, gestures and even silence. It may be verbal or non-verbal. Simply put, language is essentially a community system.
It is to be noted that language is used to achieve a purpose. However, depending on how it is used, language could serve as venom which begets tension, conflict or anarchy of whatever sort. No wonder, Obunwo (2017:46), defines language generally as a system of words, signs, manners or moods used by humans to communicate their ideas and knowledge or thoughts, grief and intentions (good or bad). Language is used for diverse functions, depending on who and what the context is; or the disposition of who uses the language at a given time. Conversely, language possesses the capacity to serve as a double-edged sword and could equally diffuse tension, improve relationships and effect harmonious co-existence between Individuals and or groups of people in a given location, even in an academic setting.

Womanhood

Womanhood, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is the state of being a woman; all the qualities typical of women; women considered as a group. A woman is an adult female human (sometimes a wife, mother, lady or girl). In the words of Prof. T.A.T. Wahua (2006); "the woman is created by God not as a second thought, but primarily as the mother in the home and society". She is the chalice of divine love and spiritual support, the educator/trainer to promote and pressure

those enduring socio-cultural values that must be transmitted from generation to generation. The woman is also a character builder.

Mary (2005), infers that women are important part of any community, and their contributions to the community are every important.

A detailed review of the status of women, issued by the United Nations in 2000, more that women and men live in different worlds that differ in access to education and work opportunities, and in health, personal security and human right.

Intimidation

This is the act of frightening, threatening or coercing someone – usually a weaker person into doing what they do not want to do. It involves using fear or pressure to influence behaviour, often through menaces, bullying or creating fearful atmosphere. It can be used as a tactic in disputes or in social settings to make someone feel discouraged by superior status.

Language of Intimidation

Language use is a product of the mindset. Such language could be expressed by words, writing or illustrated by art. Like we considered Emenanjo's (2006:1), definition of language, it can be made up of sounds, signals, signs, symbols, postures, gestures and even silence …. Considering artistic representations of women in our literature books, they are always painted smaller or inferior to their male counterparts, thus, operates under certain implicit assumptions that female is everywhere subsumed under the male. So many popular lyrics in diverse languages explain this better.

Arguing that civilization began with a women, (Wilson 1963:2) disagrees with all the affirmations and assertions subsuming women under men as he confirms thus: it is necessary for the society to discover ways to draw from women the capacity for culture …

Language of intimidation is as devastating as psychological oppression, physical and sexual abuse. Its aim is to keep the woman within the society's norm of what a woman is supposed to look and act like.

Language of Intimidation on Womanhood

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and right". These words are included in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is the theme and basis of all fundamental rights of each and every Democratic Constitution and Declaration (Jaspit 2006:44). However, this Doctrine of Universal Declaration of Human Right is not an outcome of recent happenings but a remedial innovation of long-term and ancient injustice perpetrated on the poor and helpless in the social structure (Ibid: 44). Hence, according to Mishra (2006:153), male violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon. He said that although not very woman has experienced it, and many expect not to. Fear of violence is an important factor in the lives of most women; fear of violence is a cause of women's lack of participation in activities in the homes and beyond. These acts sharpen the woman's attitude to life and her expectations.

Until recently, many were ignorant of the languages of intimidation which are very common on womanhood are acts of violence. Language of intimidation on womanhood is not hesitant, self-effacing, tentative, weak, polite and restrained.

Derived from culture and history, language of intimidation is habitualized to invalidate and keep a woman mute, especially when the women say whom they are, when they press their humanity and carefulness, when they tell what they know and when they say "No". Policing women language, pathologizing women or making nonsense of women education are some of the many ways women are expressed by the use of language.

There are so many examples of intimidating languages or practices on womanhood such as: "women are the property of their father/husband", "women are not permitted to wear clothing of their own choice or go to anywhere without permission from a man", "fathers decide who their daughters will marry and wives

must obey their husbands", "a woman cannot bail a victim in police detention", "women belong to the kitchen", "women are weaker vessels" etc.

Also, many negative and subsuming words are associated with women or are attributed to women; nagging, grating, shrill, prostitute, Otula (buttocks) hand bags etc. If a woman is swept off a ship into the water, the cry is "man overboard". If a hit and run driver kills a woman, the charge is "manslaughter". If she is injured on a job, the coverage is "workman's compensation".

These languages of intimidation make women less visible in social and cultural activities. The word "woman" sounds fluid and powerless to many people. Some people believe it is not spelt without "male". The word "woman", "female" themselves sound derogatory.

In Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart", a man that does not take any title is called an "Agbala" meaning an old woman. Okonkwo once chided himself for acting so sentimental and emotional on his way to kill Ikemefuna. He says: "when did you become a shivering old woman?" Okonkwo asked himself. "You are known in all nine villages for your valour. How can such a man who has killed five men in a battle fall to pieces because he added a boy to them? Okonkw, you have become a woman indeed".

Achebe was only mirroring the society, because it is actually praise worth to be called a man, because the person, irrespective of gender is being complimented. The opposite is the case when someone says, "you are a woman" irrespective of gender.

Factors Responsible for the Use of Intimidating Language on Womanhood

Discriminatory laws and practices, violence against women and gender stereotypes hinder greater progress towards gender equality (CEDAN, 2006:30).

These factors create a mindset, in which women are everywhere under the man. This evidently leads to the use of intimidating language on women and subsequently makes man the central figure while making women peripheral and therefore, prone to exploitation. This is in line with Acholonu's assertion that:

The African man believes in his superiority which results in bloated ego that invariably tend to render him less appreciative of women's worth outside childbirth and domestic chores (Acholonu 1991:16).

The Effects of Intimidating Language on Womanhood

Development is a process in which one is led from underdevelopment to progress in terms of achieving desired goals. The traditional concept of womanhood in our culture is damaging due to the unfair treatment they receive.

It is important to note that language does not merely reflect the way we think, but it also shapes our thinking. If words and expressions that imply subordination of women to men are constantly used, that assumption of inferiority tends to become part of our mindset and of course a problem to all nation not only women.

The use of language of intimidation on womanhood is an act of terrorism. It has forced women to imbibe the mindset that they are subordinates to men. This has a lot of adverse effects on the women and the society at large.

In the lives of women, it suppresses a creative woman's ability or talent. It leads to marital destruction of a woman. It keeps the woman within the society's norm of what a man wants a woman to look and act like. It makes nonsense of woman's education. It creates fewer opportunities at home and in governance for women.

In Margaret Atwood's novel, The Handmaid's Tale (1985), the language of intimidation was seen to force women into a parallel life which then resent: isolation, forlorn and palimpsest. Language of intimidation in that novel drives women to live in a patriarchal society, and suppresses women's individually dehumanizing them in an effort to make their abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, etc) easier. It gives them a sense of fear and a reminder that they are under surveillance at any time. It causes them to censor their behaviour and their words even when nobody is watching or listening.

Statement of the Problem

This work is a spin-off from many questions bothering on the features responsible for the intimidating, oppressive, derogatory, demeaning and violent language on womanhood, its effects and what should be done to give women a sense of value. Hence the work investigates the essence of the appropriate language choice or womanhood to develop the woman and the nation at large.

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the nature of language of intimidation on womanhood.
- To investigate the perpetrators of this language use.
- To analyze how language of intimidation affects womanhood.

Theoretical Framework

In the work, three theories the Translation, Relevance and the Social Constructionism were adopted to unearth the ideology behind language of intimidation on womanhood that threatens the emotional, psychological, and physical and the general wellbeing of the woman.

Relevance Theory

The theory is proposed by Wilson and Sperber (1986) within the framework of Relevance: Communication and Cognition. Jobes (2007:781), states that the theory is concerned with the contextual and inferential aspects of language communication, namely, the relationship between how what is implied in language contributes to the meaning of what is explicitly said. Relevance theory has both psychological and empirical implications (Allott, 2013).

Translation Theory

The second theory is proposed by Gutt (1991), within the framework called Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context, the reason according to Gutt, being that human communication crucially creates an expectation of optimal relevance. That is, an expectation on the part of the listener in his attempt at paying attention to the speakers interpretation. Both theories prove that there is a link between how the human brain processes information and the usefulness of the

information being processed. It also point to the fact that language use can create relevance or disdain on the referents and by members of a speech community.

Social Constructionism Theory

The third theory is Social Constructionism. Power and hierarchy underlie this theory, it is a dynamic process which emphasizes the complexity of how knowledge is created in social interactions with others, negotiated, modified and shifted, especially as it affects gender issues.

Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Nwankwo (2013:62), descriptive survey is that which the researcher collects data from a large sample drawn from a given population and describes certain features of the sample as they are at the time of the study. Going by this design, five different conversations were collected, analyzed and instances of these language of oppression were identified and noted.

Date Presentation

Text 1 – (At an Academic Conference)

Chairman of the Occasion: Ladies and gentlemen, I like to welcome you to today's occasion on knowledge exploration.

Participant 1: Language is the entire existence of mankind.

Participant 2: Social study is the study of man and his environment.

Text 2 – (Hospital – Labour Ward)

New Mother: What sex do I have?

Nurse: Otula, you have Otula.

Hospital – (Emergency Ward)

Doctor: What happened to her?

Nurse: Manslaughter

Text 3 – (Market)

Customer (Woman): Oga, you meat is too expensive ooo.

Seller (Man): Shut up there, you born throway!

Text 4 – (Commercial Vehicle and Motor Park)

Agboro: See fine young girls, na soso waka waka, follow, follow all of una sabi.

Female Passenger: Will you stop that rubbish talk!
Agboro: Which rubbish talk? Abi no be ashawo you be?
Female Passenger: Are all these unwarranted and rubbish talk because I am a woman? I don't blame you, I blame that your useless mouth.
Agboro: See her.
Text 5 – (In Church)
The Pastor: Any man who sins shall die.
The Pastor: No man comes to my father except through me.
The Pastor: In the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: Amen o.

Analysis
The chats or discourses above contain different manners of language of oppression used on women at different times and occasions.

Words that are Derogatory, Demeaning, Subsuming, intimidative and Oppressive in the Discourse
Text 1 – (At a Conference)
- Intimidating words: 'gentleman'
- Subsuming: the entire existence of mankind, man and his environment

Text 2 – (Hospital – Labour Ward)
New Mother: Wow! What do I have?
Nurse: Otula, you have Otula.
(Hospital – Emergency Ward)
Doctor: What happened to her?
Nurse: Manslaughter
- Demeaning and derogatory discouraging words: Otula
- Subsuming words: manslaughter

Text 3 – (Market)
Female Customer: Oga, your meat is too expensive o.
Seller: Ova get away, you born thruway!
- Demeaning and derogatory discouraging word: born thruway

Text 4 – (Commercial Vehicle and Motor Park)

Agboro: See fine young girls o! na sos waka waka, follow, follow all of una sabi
Female Passenger: Will you stop that rubbish talk!
Agboro: Which rubbish talk? Abi no be ashawo you be?
Female Passenger: Are all these unwarranted and rubbish talk because I am a woman? I don't blame you, I blame that your useless mouth.
Agboro: See her, shaky shaky bombom.

- Demeaning and discouraging words; no soso waka waka, follow, follow all of una sabi? Abi no be ashawo you be? Shaky shaky bombom.

Text 5: (In Church)
The Pastor: Any man who sins shall die.
The Pastor: No man comes to my father expect through me.
The Pastor: In the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: Amen o.

- Subsuming words: man, the father, the son.

The data shows a high degree of language of intimidation womanhood. It shows how some of these derogatory words or phrases are the exclusively for woman, so are just reserved for them as their trademarks. In fact it portrays to a large extent that women are at the mercy of language users, who will choose to use the language on women with the intention of embarrassing them, making them cry or spiting them as the case may be.

In text 1, 'gentlemen' in the chairman's welcome address is questionable because it is a collective device used to achieve cohesion in discourse. Therefore should be symmetrical in meaning. In text 2, the words; man and mankind are used to render womanhood and its destiny invincible and irrelevant.

In text 4, we see where the female passenger feels sorry for her identity as a woman owing to the derogatory remarks of the motor park Agboro as she says, 'are you saying all this rubbish because I am a woman?

From the literature, it is very clear that language shapes the individual and molds the society. Thus, human chooses to use it the way he wishes as illustrated in this work.

In text 5, we see that even the liturgical terminologies are gender insensitive or biased. The words found in text 5 does not only relegate women to the background but also renders them non-existence.

Findings

This paper discovered that language of intimidation on womanhood is violent, injustice, destruction and a derogation on women. It has empowered the men to be unjust, violent and economically/socially dominant in the society.

By this, language is denied women in order to control them and to prevent their resistance to man – thereby suppressing the woman's individually and making them not only inferior but less human with a view to making them susceptible to abuse.

Language is used as a tool of intimidation, just as today's society is used by government to influence the mass media. Today, we see a society without equal communication.

Conclusion

Language is an extremely powerful factor in our culture and society and is arguably the main tool of intimidation on womanhood. Language of oppression strips the characters of self-expression and is used to support the oppressive hierarchy that pervades the society.

Recommendation

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Language should continue to be refined as it is a process that we begin to learn with as children and continue to refine as adults.
- Words or labels that encourage intimidation should be rejected entirely. We can create own power in creating alternatives. According to the second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, volume 20, there are over 171,000 word in English language.it wouldn't be a major inconvenience to retire a few.

- Frequent discussion on bias-free language in the context of writing should be encouraged by language scholars.
- Frequent search and focus on word findings (words that wouldn't offend) should be encouraged.
- A constant review on attitude examination and language assumption to check betrayals should be made.

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