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Language Affluence in Gender Dialectics: African Culture in Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

Virtually, all linguistic communities will aspire to undergo positive changes from one period of time to the other. This may be referred to as development which reflects on popular attitudes, social structures as well as national institutions. In fact, development entails cultural and linguistic change. Meanwhile, most African societies are traditionally oriented with adequate education to suit their purposes in all cultural aspects. Though on the issue of gender, African cultural societies in the majority apportion different rights to the two parties involved in gender. The female gender being accorded the lesser status in virtually all ramifications of developmental change, Language becomes paramount per excellence, when it serves as the tool through which the cultural beliefs and subsequently cultural change are disseminated in the society at large. In fact, language, culture and development are intricately woven. Language as a necessary means of communication and gender identification becomes of importance when it determines to a large extent the socio-cultural function of each of the individuals involved in the dialectics of gender.

Keywords: Gender, language, African culture, sustainable development, dialectics

1. Introduction

The representation of the female gender in societal issues has been a thing of concern over the years. Scholars like Olagookun (2014:76) hung on the postmodernists' idea contending that women subordination results from the cultural construction of who a man or woman is. He further stated that this ideology argue that the use of word and language affect one's psyche on the definition of men and women while pointing to the effectiveness of the capacity of language to shape thoughts and desires.

Language in itself is an invaluable cultural tool. It is used in virtually all ramifications of human endeavours. It is the yardstick with which to measure development or positive change in a cultural society. In the real sense of it, safe for physical appearance, language distinguishes in between the two parties involved in gender dialectics. This distinction may be seen in the societal roles ascribed to each of the individuals.

1.1. Language and the Society

In the words of Crystal (1987:3), language covers all human activities and interactions. This assertion is also in accordance with the views of Elliott et al (1963:84) that language is intimately connected with activities, desires, emotions, thoughts, and all the business of life, Mitchel (1975:65) is of the same opinion that language expresses thoughts and emotions, conveys information and influence behaviour in others. Sapir (1969:7) also opines that language is purely human and non-instinctive.

In fact, language and the society are closely woven together because the man as an entity cannot function without language. This is in accordance with the view of Benveniste (2013:1) who opines as follows:

(...) médiatrice entre l'homme et
l'homme, entre l'homme et le monde,
entre l'esprit et les choses, transmettant
l'information, communiquant l'espérance
(...) bref, organisant toute la vie des hommes.
(mediator between a man and the other,
between man and the society, between the
mind and the physical, transmitting information,
communicating experience, in short, organizing
the whole being of man)

From the opinion of Benveniste, language so to say is inseparable from the man and thereby the society. Afolayan (1979:15) aligns with this in observing that:

without language, man cannot function as the
social, cooperative and creative animals and
it is only with language accomplishment that
man rises above the lower animal and is

educable and indeed educated, governed and governing, and regulating, civilized and civilizing.

To this end, language becomes paramount in all linguistic societies in order to allow for any meaningful development.

1.2. Language, Culture and Development

Culture, development and language can be said to depend one on the other. Akorede (2012:3) opines that development means change. That every person wants a better life, better environment, better job, higher status, greater harmony, less friction, more peace, better welfare, and a greater degree of success. He continues by viewing that true development should therefore reflect positive changes in the community. Mabogunje (1986) cited by Akorede also opines that the essence of development is the changes that occur in the entire social system as it moves away from the condition of life widely seen and considered as unsatisfactory.

To this end, development and culture are intricately related if we consider the views of Taylor et al (1953:29), that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, morals, law, customs and any other abilities acquired by man.

Growth and the occurring changes in the cultural beliefs of the society form the basis of the language spoken by development, the purpose of development being the rise in the quality of life of the inhabitants. A positive change will actually give way to a continuous universally acceptable conditions that will in turn lead to a realization of potentials of human personality.

1.3. Language, Culture and African Values

Every linguistic race has a culture peculiar to their own society. In the words of Anu (2000:1-2), culture constitutes those conventional understanding and practices which establish a people as unique and distinct from others. Africa as a continent is distinct from other continents of the world through her divers' languages and hence various cultural beliefs but which are not however too heterogeneous. Africans had and still has the belief that educating the individual in the society especially from cradle is a task to be accomplished in all ramifications. Olowo (2009:354) making Nigeria as an example, opines that:

The objectives of the (...) traditional education were many and varied, but the ultimate goal was to produce an individual who was honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative and who could conform to the social order of the day.

This form of traditional education was practicable most especially in the pre-colonial and early neo-colonial days. With the advent of the western education, the indigenous African education was gradually fading off. This is why this scholar continued by saying that:

In spite of the reforms and series of curriculum conferences embarked upon; it is obvious that our educational system is yet to meet up with the African indigenous education which is based on the principle of functionalism.

In a more general analysis, he views that the mode of education in Nigeria and other developing nations before the interference of colonialism was based on social responsibility, job orientation, learning by doing, political participation, spiritual and moral values.

There is already a conflict in educational ideas for the African child. Obayan (1995) cited by Olowo has proposed that in the process of teaching and learning, all efforts should be geared towards shaping individual's potentials to serve societal needs. He opines that the shaping may take the following forms;

- Mastering the language and thought, the history, the norms of one's society.
- Mastering the specific knowledge and skill areas of one's cultural milieu.

Using the above areas of mastering for contributing from within, and in an active manner, to the regeneration of one's society.

From the aforementioned, this scholar has placed a great value on the African traditional form of education which definitely emanated from her cultural values. The place of language is highly demarcated because no society develops without making use of language. Though not all languages in Africa have decimalized written forms, in as much as it is adequate for the immediate needs of the environment. Even if the idea of word-borrowing may not be totally ruled out for phenomenon foreign to her own culture.

1.4. Language use in African Values and the Gender Issue

Gender as a concept necessarily entails in meaning, two unique and distinct elements from every point of view. It is eminent in all cultures of the world to demarcate between the masculine and the feminine in respect to animate entities from the Biblical account in the story of creation. On the other hand, some languages like French from the western world and Hausa language from Africa would even draw a line linguistically in between various speech acts with regards to gender. This in turn would affect the issue of number or plurality. Some of the examples are below:

	French Language	English Language
1.	Le garçon est intelligent	The boy is intelligent
2.	La fille est intelligente	The girl is intelligent
3.	Le garçon est beau	The boy is handsome
4.	La fille est belle	The girl is beautiful
5.	Je parle la langue française	I speak french Language

Table 1

In sentences serial numbers 1 and 2, the French language picks up the 'e' as the feminine adjectival marker. In sentence 5, 'français' became an adjective to 'langue' a feminine word, and thereby needs the 'e', adjectival marker. Meanwhile, sentences 3 and 4 denotes that French and English would agree on different adjectives for both sex to show 'beauty'. We want to note that adjectival markers in the Yoruba example would remain redundant. From the table, we may have the following interpretations as numbered.

- Ọmọkunrin naan gbọn
- Ọmọbinrin naan gbọn
- Ọmọkunrin naan rẹwa
- Ọmọbinrin naan rẹwa.
- Mo le sọ (n sọ) ede faranse.

Let us also draw some examples from the Hausa language.

	Hausa Language	English Language
1.	Yaron yana magana	The boy is talking
2.	Yarinyar tana magana	The girl is talking
3.	Mutum yana chikin gidan	A man is in the house
	Mace tana waje	A woman is outside

Table 2

The Hausa will demarcate between the masculine and the feminine forms of the auxiliary verb 'to be' for the male and the female genders.

We now want to look beyond the linguistic approach of gender to the cultural approach. Cultural values are of course peculiar to all linguistic societies. Igboin (2011:98) notes that:

Values may be ideas that propel man's daily actions.
In other words, they are the standard which members of the community adhere to in their personal and communal interaction towards the achievement of the goals. Values are universal, they can be material, spiritual, religious, moral, aesthetic, communal or individualistic.

This implies that values will intricately be connected to man's daily activities in all ramifications. It may turn out that he doesn't operate in the society outside values. In fact, it is part of his being. This also is a universal phenomenon. It is in the light of the above that we are set to discuss gender issues in the society. It takes specifically the male and the female. Predominantly in the Yoruba traditional culture of Nigeria, the general belief is that the male sex takes the more superior status in the society, thereby reducing the woman to a lower status. This ideology is expressed through various mechanisms as seen below.

2. Identification through Names

In the Yoruba traditional culture, names given to children at birth is seen as part and parcel of cultural beliefs. For the male children, supremacy is identified in the following names peculiar to them:

S.N	Names Attached to the Male Sex	Literal Meanings
1.	Adewale	His majesty with us
2.	Akinbowale	Here comes an hero
3.	Oluwarotimi	Presence of the Almighty God
4.	Olumide	Here comes my might
5.	Ọlamiẹkan	Additional glory
6.	Olugbemiga	Exalted by the Lord
7.	Ọlaleke	Riches at the peak
8.	Akinlolu	Here is a mighty one
9.	Akinwande	The mighty one is here with us
10.	Ọlabamiji	Riches from sunrise
11.	Ọlagbade	Royalty in riches
12.	Ajibade	Royalty
13.	Ọlagoke	Riches at its peak

S.N	Names Attached to the Male Sex	Literal Meanings
14	Ọlawole	Presence of riches
15	Adebayo	Royalty in happiness
16	Adeleke	The supreme in majesty
17	Afolabi	Born with silver spoon
18	Ọlajide	Presence of riches
19	Ọlakunle	An overflow of riches
20	Adebanjo	Majesty owned by us

Table 3

It is clearly seen from the above, that the male plays the predominant role, thereby believed to possess more honour than the female counterpart. Let's see some of the names particularly ascribed to the female.

S.N	Names Attached to the Female Sex	Literal Meanings
1.	Ọmọwunmi/Ọmọwumi	In love with children
2.	Ọmọlara	A child is a companion
3.	Ọmọdara	Good to have a child
4.	Ọmọlọla	A child equals to riches
5.	Ọlabisi	More riches
6.	Adenike	To be taken care of
7.	Foluwake/Foluke	To be protected by God
8.	Olufunke	Given by God to care for
9.	Olufunmilayo	God given happiness
10	Olukemi	Care of God
11	Olugbemisola	Plunged into riches by God
12	ọlajumoke	To take care of by all
13	Bolanle	Presence of riches
14	Titilayo	Happiness un end
15	Titilope	Praises un end
16	Ọmọtunde	Once again, the presence of a child
17	Kikelomo	A child needs much care
18	Ọlamiposi	Increase of riches
19	Atinuke	Cared for from the womb.
20	Folake	Adored with riches

Table 4

A clear distinction is observed in the few sampled names ascribed to both sexes. Not so much of royalty or majesty in the names of the female sex. However, the community allows some names for both sexes as seen below:

S.N	Names Attached to Male and Female	Literal Meanings
1.	Ọlayinka	Surrounded by riches
2.	Ọpeyemi	I am grateful
3.	Eniola	Worthy of honour
4.	Temitayo	I should rejoice
5.	Ifẹoluwa	As God desires
6.	Oludamilare	God vindicates me
7.	Iyanuoluwa	Miracle from God
8.	Ayobami	I am very much happy
9.	Olutoyin	God is worthy of praises
10	Olutosin	God is worthy of adoration
11	Olunifemi	Loved by God
12	Inioluwa	Heritage of God
13	Ayọoluwa	Joy of God
14	Adeola	Crown of honour
15	Ayomide	Here comes a delight
16	Olusola	Riches from God
17	Oluwaseun	Thanks be to God
18	Oluwaseyi	This done by God
19	Ọlaoluwa	Riches from God
20	Ayodeji	A second round of joy

Table 5

It is of course glaring, that even through the names for identification, a lot of superiority is noted from the male child. Names common to both sexes do not connote much of dignity. Let us at this juncture examine some pre-destined names called 'amuturunwa' that is, names brought from heaven. These are common in the follow types of birth:

- Twins: - Taiwo and Kehinde
- First subsequent birth: - Idowu
- Next birth - Alaba.
- Born with the cord round the neck: - male: Ojo Female: Aina
- Born without the menstrual circle: - Ilori.
- Born face downwards: - Ajayi.
- Born through legs instead of the head: - Ige.
- Born during a festive period: - Abiodun
- Born with locked hair: - Dada.
- Born on a holy day (precisely on a sunday): - Abosede.

A great number of these names are for the male and the female respectively. However, cultures from the Ondo and Ijebu dialects from the Yoruba language spoken in Nigeria will prefer 'Aina' for the two sexes probably for specific cultural beliefs. Meanwhile, unlike all the other dialects, Ondo will address both the male and the female as 'Abosede'. All others will discriminate between the two and address the male as 'Sunday' the English version, and 'Abosede' the Yoruba version for the female.

3. The Use of Proverbs

Language use through proverbs also clearly expressed the very low esteem the female sex is subjected to. In a more general term Ojoade (1985:523) opines that:

There is no part of the globe in which proverbs are as important as in the continent of Africa, indeed, the proverbs represent the quintessence of African life and thought. Proverbs are not just platitudes but sayings that carry authority. Proverbs constitute a manual of authority or an anthology of norms.

The use of proverbs in the African society may be said to supersede that of other linguistic societies. This may be traced to the fact that proverbs to the Africans regulate the norms and customs in the society. Some of these proverbs in a general sense will include the following:

S.N	Yoruba Proverbs	Interpretation
1.	Eniti a fe, ni amọ, a o mọ eniti o fẹ ni	Friend of many, friend of none.
2.	Adaniloru fi agbara kọ ni	Adversity make swise
3.	Bi a koba ri adan, a o fi adaba se ẹbọ	For lack of the ox one plows with the donkey
4.	Inu ikoko dudu ni ẹkọ funfun tii jade	On a small field good grass grows.
5.	Agbajọ ọwọ ni a fii sọya	It is good to have more than one anchor on the sheep
6.	A kii gbe okere mọ adun ọbẹ	One should not judge the tree by the bark.

Table 6

The proverbs above help to express specific functions in the society. Some may be used in times of admonition while others are used to express love. The following proverbs however connotes what the female sex is to the community

S.N	Proverbs	Literal Translation
1.	Ti ko ba ni idi, obinrin kii jẹ kumolu	A woman cannot be an hero, safe for some important reasons
2.	Obirin sọ iwa nu, o ni oun ko ri ile ọkọ gbe	An uncultured woman beliefs in ill luck for not having a stable home
3.	Bi obinrin ba ti gbọn ọgbọn agbọnju, penpe ni asọ ọkọ wọn n mọ	A woman is not supposed to outshine the husband in wisdom.
4.	Obinrinkobinrin kii jẹ ki ọmọ o joni.	An ill-mannered wife prevents a paternal resemblance of the child.
5.	Soki ni ọbẹ oge	A word is enough for the wise.
6.	Fonfo imu iyawo, o dara ju yara ofifo lo	Half of loaf is better than nothing, with regards to a wife.
7.	Iyawo mi ko sunwọn tori ọmọ ni mo se fẹ.	The woman who lacks discipline is only accepted for her fertility.

Table 7

The place of the woman in the society can be seen as being derogatory. Although there are some few proverbs that sing the woman's praise especially with regards to her fertility status, the well-being of her spouse and the society at large.

4. Wedding Customs and Some Terminologies

It is of course biblical that the woman should be married to the man. In many African traditions, the woman is 'sold off' to the man as 'a slave'. In this case she is seen as just a 'tool', a 'baby factory' and a 'messenger' in her matrimonial home. She dares not make herself to be heard. The masculinity is there. Faturoti (2012:151) rightly opines that:

Culturally, there exists certain pre conceptions which plague Yoruba women, limit them and ultimately determine their self-image. Up till today, some traditional expressions give credence to the fact that Yoruba women are not only sexually prejudiced but also submerged in the spirit of second class status.

He goes further by making some analysis which to him are disparaging remarks:

- Oḡbeni yẹn kan n sọrọ bi obinrinni (The fellow was just expressing himself like a woman would do).
- Okunrin naa n ronu bi obinrin. (The man's reasoning is not different from that of a woman).
- Ohun ti obinrin ba se to dara, o seesi ni. (whatever any woman does successfully is a mistake).
- Oḡwọn okunrin nii muni fi obinrin se balẹ.

(It is the dearth of men that will make people appoint a female as the head of a clan).

Oḡḡḡ to wa lori okunrin yẹn ko yaṭo si oḡḡḡ obinrin. (The worth of the man's brain is not more than that of a woman).

This is the worth of the female gender, not only in the Yoruba society, but in the African traditional society as a whole. The remarks readily go for the elites as well as for the less privileged women in schooling. Let's also consider the following:

Wo bi o se n wa mọto bi obinrin (see him driving like a woman).

Ejọ oḡa ẹ fun mi lona (mistaken for a man) (Fellow, could you please allow me passage?)

Ah! Obinrin tiẹ ni. (Oh : she is female).

In the family setting, where the man decides to give helping hand to the wife, the community makes the following comments:

O ti gbe yeri si idi okunrin yi (she had made the man to put on woman apparel (skirt)).

O ti mu ori ẹ mọ abẹ (she has turned him into another type of male).

It may also be of importance to note that in the traditional custom, the 'new wife' is expected to address all the family members she meets on ground with titles like 'Anti (Aunty)' and 'broda (Brother)', both young and old. She may also address them with nicknames such as 'sisi ilewe' (young school lady), 'idi-ilẹkẹ' (one with beads around the waist), 'orente' (one with a smallish stature), 'ibadiaran' (one clothed round the waist with velvet), 'amọlẹṣẹ' (light complexioned around the legs), and the least goes on endlessly. Some of these women will take solace in a song like this:

Song	Musical Notes
Arifin ni le ọkọ o	m. d. d. d. d. m. r. r. r.
Arifin nile ọkọ o	r. r. r. d. m. r. r. r.
Bi o gun yan an	m. r. m. m. m.
Wọn a ni ko kunna	m. m. m. d. m. m.
Bi o se ọbẹ	s. r. r. r. d.
Wọn a ni ko dunyọ	m. m. m. d. r. d.
Wa pekukute ni anti	r. r. r. m. m. r. m. d. d. m.
Wa a pekukute ni burọdaa	s. f. m. f. f. m. m. d. d. r. d.
Arifin nile ọkọ, arifin nile ọkọ	m. d. d. d. m. r. r. r. r. r. d. m. r. r. r.

Table 8

Song	Literal Meaning
Arifin ni le ọkọ o	Derogatory cultural beliefs to the woman in matrimony
Arifin nile ọkọ o	Derogatory cultural beliefs to the woman in matrimony
Bi o gun yan an	When the yam is pounded
Wọn a ni ko kunna	It is not properly made
Bi o se ọbẹ	When the stew is made
Wọn a ni ko dunyọ	It is tasteless
Wa pe kukute ni anti	All female in-laws should have the mark of respect 'Aunty' preceeding their names no matter the age difference
Wa a pe kukute ni burọdaa	All male in-laws should have the mark of respect 'Brother' preceeding their names no matter the age difference
Arifin nile ọkọ, arifin nile ọkọ	Derogatory cultural beliefs to the woman in matrimony

Table 9

This derogatory status apportioned to the African woman has been a great concern to no few numbers of scholars. In fact, feminism as a movement had been on for decades. This is because the woman generally has been marginalized. Akorede (2011:11) observes that:

The first college of medicine was established in America in 1767 but, did not admit females until 1847, that is, eighty years after its establishment. This was because the college administration doubted the suitability of women as medical doctors.

From a general point of view, the woman especially the African woman may be said to be destined to her lower status in the society. However, history has recorded quite a number of African women who made it bold with their male counterparts. There is Funmilayo Ransome –Kuti and the likes. Though scholars like Kolawole (1997:43) cited by Akorede (2011:53) views that an Africa woman's mobilization and struggle is older than many scholars acknowledgement. Meanwhile, Akorede cited above, explains that the denial of women's oppression in the African environment makes the acceptance of feminism a difficult task. In fact she has this to say: 'Feminists are derogatorily regarded as people who see themselves as victims of an unjust social order. They are also accused of complaining about cultural practices which dehumanize women'.

It is thus an established fact that the African woman is and may remain under the masculine 'oppression' in its ramification as much as the African traditional society remains one.

5. Conclusion

We have made attempts to view what language is to the society. We have also considered the issue of development as a concept in the growth and cultural change of any given linguistic society especially the traditional African community. In gender dialectics the place of the woman has also been considered. What became of paramount importance however is the predominant role that language use plays in the status accorded to each of the two stakeholders supposed to be responsible for the sustainable development and the cultural upliftment in the traditional African society.

6. Recommendations for a Sustainable Development in the Society

The Society should see to it that both the male and female children have equal access to both informal and formal education.

Enrolment of girls in schools should not be optional as in some communities.

Policy making and taking of decisions should not be limited to only the male sex in the family setting, and in the society at large.

Women in the society should be adequately empowered by the society so as to render helping hands in the family. Women in rural areas should be empowered to be able to read and write.

The male alone cannot move the society to a sustainable development. Their female folk should be carried along through 'unjeopardised' language use.

Recommendations towards the general African/World view of the woman

The use of derogatory language used to address the woman should be put to stop by sensitizing the public through seminars, workshops and the use of the media.

- There should be a cultural review of specific names and functions ascribed only to the male.
- The woman should be seen as a helpmate to the man and not necessary 'servants' that are not to be heard.
- The African society should be made to realize that the woman can be of immense asset to the family if allowed to be seen and recognized especially in decision making.
- The world at large should made to realize through every means possible that the woman is not less human than the male.
- That the woman herself should have a re-think and 'crawl out of the shell' but not 'arrogantly' in order to allow for a peaceful society

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