

Chapter 13

Gender Consciousness in Computer–Mediated Discourse in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The main preoccupation of this paper is the examination of language used in computer-mediated discourse and the extent to which it mirrors the society and how far women are involved or still discriminated against in Nigerian social world. To achieve this purpose, Discourse Analysis and Hymes' Ethnography of s.p.e.a.k.i.n.g theory is adopted due to its adequate provision for various variables in communication. Corpus from "NaijaWorld" chat forum was used. From the analysis, it is realised that online language is used for many purposes. In addition, the norms of a chatroom and the Nigerian sociolinguistic variables converge to influence the participants. Some modifications to Nigerian social status-quo were discovered, that is, man-the-norm syndrome is being eroded in Nigerian social life with some recognition accorded the rights of women.

INTRODUCTION

Right from the creation period, woman has always been discriminated against. She is seen as an instrument of debasement. The view of the Bible, which was adopted by the Qur'an, has serious implication on peoples' perception of the sexes as human beings. God has created man from dust and woman from the ribs of man – dust from dust. Woman, if

presented in this manner, can be regarded as a mere appendage of man-the-superior sex. In both the Bible and the Qur'an, God Himself is often presented as a man as accentuated by Jesus Christ in "The Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who hath in Heaven..." In the Bible, the "original sin in the Garden of Eden was woman's. She tasted the forbidden fruit, tempted Adam and has been paying for it ever since" (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004: p. 92). This then is the more reason why womanhood must be debased and treated shabbily?

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-773-2.ch013

In a patriarchal society all over the world, the masculine sex's activities and traits are positively portrayed, while the feminine conducts and peculiarities are expressed in uncomplimentary negative expression. This indeed is obviously a proclamation of man-the-norm syndrome: where man's activities are superior and woman's acts inferior. This noncomplimentary attitude is the origin of the controversy on the language of public communication. One side of the divide stands for the change of sexism language to a gender conscious discourse. Feminist writers represent this school of thought and some of them rather recommend a total overhaul of current linguistic form (See Ayim & Goosns, 1993; Sakita, 1995 & Surin, 1995). Shepelak (1980) as cited by Michard & Violet (1991: p. 16) gives the real reasons for the resistance to change in sexist language as a perpetual "continuation of the socio-political control by men". This unwholesome attitude of man eventually led to the vigorous resistance of the feminine gender in the United Nations. The UN World Women's conferences:

It began with a year
It turned into a decade
It gave birth to a movement
It became a revolution. (*Preview 2000*, February 1999: p. 2).

In Nigeria, for instance, a woman is not expected to hold any very sensitive political position. The emergence of women of calibre like Efunsetan Aniwura, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Queen Amina (in history), Dora Akunyili, Okonjo Iweala and others (in the contemporary political terrain) is seen as an aberration. Against this background, this study is hinged. This chapter, therefore, attempts to examine the extent Nigerian social cultural variables influence the language use and involvement of female Nigerians in online discourse.

SOURCE OF DATA

Data for this study are transcripts of posts and threads retrieved from NaijaWorld virtual community discourse setting. From the archives of NaijaWorld, 'posts' were sorted according to their similarity of purpose and categorised under overlapping headings. The headings encompass many discourse situations. Some of the headings are:

1. News Flash
2. Relationship and Romance
3. Prayers and Prayer Requests,
4. All Nigeria
5. Poetry and Music
6. Da Joint
 1. Technology
 2. Religion and Beliefs
 3. Politics, Life, Society and Social Issues

From these various headings, we are going to randomly select News Flash, All Nigeria and Politics, Life, Society and Social Issues, which are considered as the heading that unify all Nigerians and those people who have interest in Nigerian affairs.

NaijaWorld is a nongovernmental online community formed over the internet to discuss issues affecting Nigeria in particular and mankind in general. As at September 12, 2007 when the data was downloaded, NaijaWorld members were 953. They produced 24,688 posts and threads.

Membership of *NaijaWorld* is open to all and sundry. Consequently, membership is drawn from both sexes and different ethnic groups. However, it is difficult to draw sex-line of individual members because they are not specifically stated. They were, however, deduced through their cybenyms and utterances. Although there is supposed to be anonymity in chatroom talk (Greenfield & Tynes, 2004), it is not maintained. One of the benefits provided to protect individual participants in chatroom talk, especially during registration is

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